

Religiosity, parties and election: Islamization and democratization in post-Soeharto Indonesia

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Abstract

The political development in Indonesian during the first decade of reform era witnesses a resurgence of Muslim politics, which had been facing a political impasse during the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast to current political development in the Arab World, the resurgence of Muslim politics in Indonesia has been marching hand in hand with democratization. The blossoming of tens of Islamic political parties by no means that they speak with a single voice. Rather, political Islam is now represented by parties with more diverse platforms. Those parties are not only varied in their commitment to an Islamist agenda but also strongly divided on this agenda. Yet, they all welcome and uphold "Muslim" aspirations. As far as their performance in the 1999 and the 2004 elections is concerned, there was a significant decline for Muslim politics compared to the first democratic election of 1955. The results reflected the minority appeal of Islamism, regardless of both the fact that the majority of the Indonesians are Muslims and the fact that there has been increasing Islamic revivalism within Indonesian society.

Perkembangan politik di Indonesia selama dasawarsa pertama Era Reformasi memperlihatkan sebuah kebangkitan politik Islam, yang selama tahun 1970-an dan 1980-an mengalami politik jalan buntu. Berbeda dengan perkembangan politik belakangan ini di dunia Arab, kebangkitan politik Muslim di Indonesia dapat berjalan beriringan dengan proses demokratisasi. Menjamurnya puluhan partai politik Islam bukan berarti bahwa mereka berbicara dengan bahasa tunggal. Sebaliknya, politik Islam saat ini terwakili oleh partai-partai dengan platform yang lebih beragam. Partai-partai tersebut bukan hanya berbeda komitmen terhadap agenda-agenda Islamis, tetapi juga terpecah dalam agenda tersebut. Meskipun, mereka seluruhnya menerima dan menegakkan aspirasi-aspirasi kaum Muslim. Mengenai penampilan partai-partai Islam tersebut dalam Pemilu 1999 dan 2004, terdapat penurunan tajam bagi politik Muslim dibanding pada pemilu demokratis pertama tahun 1955. Hasil-hasil tersebut mencerminkan kecilnya daya tarik Islamisme, terlepas dari kenyataan mayoritas penduduk Indonesia adalah umat Islam dan kenyataan bahwa terdapat kebangkitan Islam dalam masyarakat Indonesia belakangan ini.

Keywords: *Democracy; Islamic revivalism; Political party; Election; Radicalism*

Introduction

The debate about the compatibility between Islam and democracy has been perhaps the most passionate at the theoretical level-and probably the least important. It is well-known that Muslims have generated a wide range of responses to the discourses of democracy. Indeed, normatively, Muslims have taken up a full range of positions on the compatibility or incompatibility of the relationship between Islam and democracy.

As discussion continued, two broadly opposed positions emerged, one pessimistic and the other cautiously optimistic. In the former camp, some scholars examine the Koran, Islamic law and tradition to textually "demonstrate" that Islam is not compatible with democracy. Ironically, their views are bolstered by radical Islamists who similarly argue the incompatibility of these two concepts. They, noting what appear to

be an especially high incidence of authoritarianism in the Islamic world, have held that Islam may be incompatible with open government.¹

Others, however, have argued that Islam is not necessarily anti-theoretical to democratization.² Intellectually, many scholars have argued that no single Islamic teaching is incompatible with democratic values. While factually, many political scientists and journalists sometimes misleadingly equate Islam with Arab culture, leaving the false impression there are no Muslims living under democratic regimes. Moreover, contrary to the recent development in many parts of the Muslim world, Indonesian Islam has proven itself capable of mobilization as a public discourse without stifling but rather contributing to democratic pluralism.

Political development in Indonesia during the years of democratic reform, offers an even more striking indication of Muslim interest in democracy and civic pluralism. Although often overlooked in discussions of Muslim societies, Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. In the final years of the Soeharto dictatorship (1996-98), a powerful movement for a democratic Muslim politics took shape. In alliance with secular Muslims and non-Muslims, the movement succeeded in May 1998 in toppling the long ruling Soeharto. No less remarkable, Muslims participants in the democracy campaign dedicated themselves to devising religious arguments in support of pluralism, democracy, women's right, and civil society.³

¹Adrian Karatnycky, "Muslim Countries and the Democracy Gap", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, Number 1 (January 2002), 99-112; John Waterbury, "Democracy without Democrats?", in Ghassan Salamé, (ed.), *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1994; M. Steven Fish, "Islam and Authoritarianism", *World Politics*, Volume 55 (October 2002), 4-37.

²John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; Robert W. Hefner, *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005.

³Douglas E. Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995; Greg Barton, "The Origin of Islamic Liberalism in

Unfortunately, this glaring process was soon blurred by a rash of sectarian violence. From 1999 to 2002, battles between Christians and Muslims in the eastern province of Maluku took some eight thousand lives.⁴ During roughly the same period, the central highlands on the nearby island of Sulawesi saw bloody skirmishes between Muslim and Christian gangs, causing a thousand deaths.⁵ Equally alarming, in the months following Soeharto's fall, radical Islamists sprang up in cities and towns across Indonesia.

The phenomenon initially makes many people worry, whether Indonesia's attempt to combine democracy with Islamic practice will succeed in making it the third largest democracy in the world, or fail, turning it into a source of regional concern as religious extremism prevails over moderation. Recent development in Egypt indicates how Islamist parties are making use of political transition from an authoritarian regime to stifle democracy and civic pluralism.

Are there grounds for hope in Indonesia? Do we, Indonesian Muslims, possess sufficient cultural resources and social capital to foster the democratization process? Should we be pessimistic or optimistic about our foreseeable future? Or more specifically, should we be concerned about the prospect of democracy in Indonesia? This paper is purported to answer those puzzles.

The resurgence of Muslim politics

The resurgence of Muslim politics in Indonesia can be traced to the policies toward Islam pursued by both the Sukarno and Soeharto re-

Indonesia and Its Contribution to Democratization", in Michele Schmiegelow (ed.), *Democracy in Asia*, New York: St Martins Press, 1997; Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslim and Democratization in Indonesia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

⁴Gerry van Klinken, "The Maluku War: Bringing Society Back In", *Indonesia*, Number 71 (April 2001), 1-26.

gime. Both regimes regarded Islamic political parties as potential power contenders capable of undermining the nationalist basis of the state. Primarily because of this, both regimes worked to domesticate the Islamic parties.⁶ As a result, not only did the Muslim leaders fail to make Islam the state ideology and religion in 1945 (on the eve of Indonesia's independence) and in the late 1950s (during the Constituent Assembly deliberations over Indonesia's constitution), but they also found themselves repeatedly labeled "minorities" or "outsiders".⁷ Most distressing, political Islam has frequently been a target of distrust, suspected of being opposed to the state ideology Pancasila.

The retreat of political Islam during this period, however, provided a momentum for the rejuvenation of cultural Islam.⁸ Their retreat from political arena and the rise of new Muslim intellectualism since 1970s led them to pay more attention on cultural movements, such as education, societal empowerment, community service, intellectual discourse, and religious studies. These cultural movements eventually not only capable of abating political hostility between Islam and the regime, but they also made the regime to adopt a more accommodative attitude toward Islam and Muslims.

⁵Lorraine V. Aragon, "Communal Violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi: Where People Eat Fish and Fish Eat People", *Indonesia*, Number 72 (October 2001), 44-79.

⁶Bahtiar Effendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2003, 2.

⁷Ruth McVey, "Faith as the Outsiders: Islam in Indonesian Politics", in James P. Piscatori (ed.), *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; W.F. Wertheim, "Indonesian Moslems under Sukarno and Suharto: Majority with Minority Mentality", in *Studies on Indonesian Islam*, Townsville: Occasional Paper no. 19, CSEAS, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1986.

⁸Donald K. Emmerson, "Islam in Modern Indonesia: Political Impasse, Cultural Opportunity", in Philip H. Stoddard et al. (eds.), *Change and the Muslim World*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981.

Despite this rejuvenation and political accommodation, however, there was not all one-way traffic. A small number of radical Islamic group keep on voicing their criticism toward Soeharto's policies on Muslim community. However, it is clear that for much of the New Order period, far from sparking an Islamic political resurgent, Soeharto's heavy restrictions on Islamic political organization successfully prevented a political resurgence of Islam.⁹ The military's intelligence services kept Muslim organizational activities under close surveillance and the military repressed any signs of Islamic militancy, whose prominent example was the shot of hundreds of Muslim demonstrators in Jakarta's port of TanjungPriok, in 1984.

Since early 1985 a large number of Muslim activists had been tried, convicted and sentenced to heavy terms of imprisonment for their religious activities, which in many cases have been critical of the government and its policies. Others have been held responsible for a series of bombing incidents and arson attacks in business centers, incidents that have never been properly investigated by the state.¹⁰ Their trials have subsequently been used to portray Muslim critics and opponents of the regime as subversives and terrorists. The strength of political system, however, disguised a profound disgruntlement among Muslim groups. There were occasional signs that they were waiting for an opportunity to reemerge but the New Order machinery appeared sufficiently stable to minimize the importance of this discontent.

This apparent stability in relation between Islamic groups and the state was to change early in the 1990s. After two decades of denying

⁹Donald J.Porter, *Managing Politics and Islam in Indonesia*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002, 2.

¹⁰Liem Soei Liong, "Indonesian Muslims and the State: Accommodation or Revolt", *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 10, Number 2 (April 1988), 869.

Islamic interests, Soeharto began to integrate Islamic organizations into the New Order's institutions. He gradually side-lined the secular Javanese Muslim and Christians who had long formed the core of the regime's power base, thereby allowing a renewed sense of confidence among Muslims. Muslim leaders thereafter enjoyed a strong position during roughly the last five years of the New Order regime.

Despite this accommodative relation, however, some Muslim leaders kept their distance away from the regime's cooptation. Within this group were Muslim intellectuals, NGO activists, as well as leaders of Islamic mass-based organizations. Among their demands were the political succession and the necessary of democratization and political reform. In the eve of the Soeharto's resignation, they were at the forefront of the student demonstrations calling openly for Soeharto to resign.¹¹ They were not unwillingly side-by-side with other leaders building a broad-base coalition and declaring their common support for the struggle for change.

After Soeharto leaving his throne in May 1998, there was increased sense of confidence among Muslim community, partly because they were well-prepared to be in the center of political arena, and partly because they were supported by fairly solid constituency amid political and economic uncertainties. Therefore, there is strong evidence to indicate that political Islam, which has been gaining momentum of Soeharto's resignation, would continue to exert itself in the transition era.

Religious revivalism

One of the most glaring unintended consequences of the strict control on Islamic political organizations and ideology during the Sukarno and

¹¹Pramono U. Tanthowi, *Kebangkitan Politik Kaum Santri: Islam dan Demokratisasi di Indonesia Tahun 1990-2000*, Jakarta: PSAP, 2005, Chapter IV.

Soeharto regimes has been the acceleration of Islamization within Indonesian society. This has not greatly changed the proportion of Muslims to non-Muslims but it has significantly increased the number of pious or "santri" Muslims compared to unobservant ones,¹² a process so-called "religious revivalism". Far more Indonesians since 1990s have been regarding Islam as a central part of their life. This can be measured in the popularity of "Islamic dress", increased mosque and religious school attendance, greater numbers undertaking the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and growing sales of Islamic literature. Islamic revivalism is also discernible in marketing, with increasing commercial advertising making use of Islamic symbols and motifs to appeal to a Muslim audience. On another plane, beside some of the existing Islamic banks opened since the early 1990s, there are also some banks converted to Islamic banks as well as banks that opened a special division using sharia rules about non-payment of interest. Recent years have also witnessed a considerable increase in media discussion of Islamic perspectives on key social and political themes.

Islamic revivalism has not only made its mark on orthodox thinking. Sufism or Islamic mysticism has also been undergoing a revival. Courses on Sufism have been developed and offered by some Islamic foundations. The courses have attracted large numbers, especially drawing executives and professionals who can pay fees charged.¹³ The courses in question discourage what is portrayed as "negative Sufism", such as mystical approach which emphasizes withdrawal, hunger, deprivation, and asceticism. In contrast, the courses encourage

¹²Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, "Between the Global and the Local: Islamism, the Middle East, and Indonesia", *Analysis Paper*, Number 9 (October 2005), The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, 2.

¹³Julia DayHowell, "Sufism and Indonesian Islamic Revival", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 60, Number 3 (August 2001), 701-729.

“positive Sufism” such as engaging with the world and prioritizing intellectual pursuits.

All these phenomena have their root in Soeharto’s policy to heavily control Islamic political organizations, and his support the so-called “cultural Islam”. Soeharto’s approach was similar to that of Snouck Hurgronje, the most prominent Islamic advisor of the Dutch Colonial Government, who advised the Dutch to allow “Islam as cultural phenomenon” to express itself more freely at the expense of political Islam that must be suppressed by all necessary means.

In the one hand, in 1970s Soeharto set in train a program of campus “normalization” aimed at depoliticizing campus life through restrictions on student governments, after he was shocked by a large student rallies protesting corruptions within Soeharto’s inner circle and huge influx of foreign capitals.¹⁴ The policy of campus normalization forced student activities underground as students joined a proliferating number of unmediated Islamic organizational cells and study groups. Mosques, both on and off campus, become a new focus of religious-political activities and discussion groups and helped fuel an Islamic awakening.¹⁵ Although the campus normalization coincided with the Islamic revolution in Iran, which to some extent influenced some of the intellectual and ideological trend in Indonesia, the surge of Islamic activities on campus in the 1980s and 1990s appears to have been, at least partly, a product of New Order policy.

In the other process, we have to pay attention on the regime’s support in a number of cultural-Islamic programs, usually under

¹⁴EdwardAspinall, “Students and the Military: Regime Friction and Civilian Dissent in the Late Suharto Period”, *Indonesia*, Number 59 (1995).

¹⁵Elizabeth F.Collins, “Islam is the Solution: Dakwah and Democracy in Indonesia”, accessed from www.classics.ohiou.edu/faculty/collins/islamsolution.pdf, April 27, 2007.

auspices of its enormous Ministry of Religion.¹⁶ The most surprising program was the Ministry's efforts to expand the institutional resources for Islamic education and *dakwah* (religious predication). One important feature of this effort was the enormous expansion in State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN, now UIN), which began in 1960s and which, during the 1970s and 1980s, produced large numbers of graduates trained in Islamic, theology, law, arts, and pedagogy. As in the Middle East, mass education of this sort contributed significantly to the Islamic renewal. This effort in higher education was accompanied by an equally impressive program of infrastructural development sponsored by the Ministry, focusing on the construction of mosques, prayer halls, and Islamic schools.

The educational expansion was the key ingredient in the development of a new Muslim middle class culture. During New Order, this class became the trendsetter for religious and cultural development in society as a whole. Unlike the Muslim middle class of the 1950s, this new middle class was based overwhelmingly in government service and professions, fields in which too-explicit opposition to the conservative nationalism of the ruling elite was dangerous. Understanding the political risks of dissident traditions of secular and socialist nationalism, many in the new middle class turned quietly to Islam as a new anchor for their public identity.¹⁷

The convergence of these two processes led to the shift in the religious landscape, as increasing numbers of so-called "statistical" or

¹⁶Robert W. Hefner, "Islamization and Democratization in Indonesia", in Robert W. Hefner and Patricia Horvatic (eds.), *Islam in the Era of Nation-States: Politics of Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, 86.

¹⁷Robert W. Hefner, "Globalization, Governance, and the Crisis of Indonesian Islam", paper delivered in the Conference on Globalization, State Capacity, and Muslim Self Determination, University of California Santa Cruz, March 7-9, 2002, 5-6.

nominal Muslims have sought to deepen their faith and adhere more closely to the prescriptions of Islam. There has been a steady rise in Muslim consciousness and ritual formalism, in the urban middle class and in Indonesian Muslim society as a whole. Therefore, during 1990s Islamic revivalism affected all levels of Indonesian society. As Adam Schwarz observed, "No longer is Islam seen as the opiate of the uneducated and economically deprived."¹⁸ This process of growing pietism is often referred to as *santri-nization* and it shows little sign of slowing. Interestingly, there is little evidence in Indonesia that increasing pietism has led to a surge in popularity of Islamic parties.

Islamic political parties

One of the phenomena colouring the Indonesian transition-or so-called the Reform era- was the mushrooming of Islamic or Muslim-based parties. Their emergences were largely helped by the political freedom proclaimed by President Habibie in August 1998, which gave impetus to the birth of new political parties in general. The lifting of the ban on Islam as the foundation for a political party meant the green light for Islamic or Muslim-based parties. The emergence of Islamic parties is without doubt a distinctive feature of political reform. The question was, did they support the democratization, or did they lead to a revival of sectarianism?

Among 141 new political parties early in the *Reformasi* era, 42 were Islamic, defined here as parties that either explicitly claim Islam as their ideology or draw support mostly from Islamic organizations. This total later declined, since only 20 Islamic parties qualified to compete in the 1999 election.¹⁹ Among them, there are five such Muslim parties play-

¹⁸Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesian in the 1990s*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994, 174.

¹⁹Anies Rasyid Baswedan, "Political Islam in Indonesia: Present and Future Trajectories", *Asian Survey*, Volume 44, Number 5 (2004), 672.

ing unimportant role in national politics in the Reform era: (1) The United Development Party (PPP), a Muslim party of Soeharto period; (2), The Crescent and Star Party (PBB), a new party claiming to be the heir to the largest Islamic party of the 1950s, Masyumi; (3), The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), a new party inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt; (4), The National Awakening Party (PKB), a new party closely affiliated to the largest traditional Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU); and (5), The National Mandate Party (PAN), a new party loosely associated with the largest modernist Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah.

Interestingly, these Islamic parties have not been speaking with a single voice. Rather, they have been intrinsically diverse. These Muslim parties constitute a remarkable phenomenon in the Muslim world, where most Muslim political parties are strongly ideological and are not committed to open political dialogue with others. Significantly, even there is no unity on what Islam's role in politics should be epitomized by the existence of tens parties rather than one that is representing all Muslims. Equally important, they differ among themselves about important matters such as the mentioning of sharia in the constitution.

In fact, only the PPP and PBB proposed inserting a clause demanding the application of sharia law for Muslims, a demand taken as the revival of the so-called Jakarta Charter, which was once a part of the draft constitution at the beginning of the Republic. When it came to an actual debate in the Assembly, however, their proposal did not survive a session in a committee meeting and was soon overwhelmed by opposition coming from in and outside the Assembly.²⁰ Not only the

²⁰Azyumardi Azra, "The Megawati Presidency: Challenge of Political Islam", in Hadi Soesastro et. al. (eds), *Governance in Indonesia: Challenges Facing the Megawati Presidency*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2003, 65.

secular Golkar and PDI-P, but the PKB and PAN also rejected firmly the move to revive the Islamic state controversy in the Assembly. They took the stand that the national consensus of Pancasila, the five principles of Faith in One Supreme God, Humanism, National-ism, Democracy, and Social Justice, should be continued as the state foundation. Thus, alongside all the significant amendments in the constitution mentioned above, its preamble containing Pancasila and Article 29 guaranteeing the freedom of religious belief and practice were both left intact throughout the debates on the constitutional amendment?

Despite their differences, interestingly, however there was a new development within Islamic political parties. The emergence of the new Muslim middle class –who was less associated with Islamic tradition during the New Order era– was stimulating the emergence of a new paradigm of Islam adopted by some Islamic parties, which gave emphasis to the substantive aspects of Islam rather than its legal and formal ones.²¹ Unlike the characteristic of Islamic parties in the 1950s and 1960s in which they attempted to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, the new paradigm drew much more attention to the substantive aspects of Islam and the new Islamic generation was interested in establishing inclusive and pluralist political parties.

In light of these developments, any analysis of Indonesian politics should not overlook those dynamics, nor should one assume that political Islam has been static and united in focusing on the state ideology. Instead, in the early years of post-Soeharto era, an interesting spectrum of political Islam has appeared in Indonesia. Political Islam has been represented by parties with more diverse platforms.²²

²¹Jamhari, "Islamic Political Parties: Threat or Prospects?", in Geoff Forrester (ed.), *Post-Suharto Indonesia: Renewal or Chaos?*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1999, 184.

²²Peter G. Riddell, "The Diverse Voices of Political Islam in Post-Suharto Indonesia", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation*, Volume 13, Number 1 (2002), 65-84.

It comprised parties that still support formalization of the relationship between the state and Islam and also those that supported a non-religious-based state but welcomed the incorporation of Islamic values and "Muslim" aspirations into government policy.

To be sure, the five Islam-friendly parties represented the transformation of political Islam in Indonesia since 1970s. Those parties were not only varied in their commitment to an Islamist agenda but also strongly divided on this agenda. Yet, they all welcomed and upheld Muslims' aspirations. Among those five Islam-friendly parties, three (the PBB, PPP, and PKS) clearly adhered to Islam as their ideology. The PPP, PBB, and PKS pursued platforms somewhat similar to those of Islamic parties in the 1950s. The three parties were Islamist and fitted what most scholars commonly understand as Islamic parties.

The PKB and PAN derive support from Islamic organizations while appearing pluralistic. The PKB formally espoused the ideology of Pancasila but actually served as the political arm of the NU. The PAN was similar to the PKB in promoting a pluralistic ideology. Although the PAN has been loosely associated with Muhammadiyah through its leader, Amien Rais, and through many local Muhammadiyah officials who served as PAN functionaries, it has maintained its pluralism by accommodating non-Muhammadiyah and non-Muslim officials.

The PKB was presented as a party sensitive to the interests of all Indonesians. Hence the party used the word 'nation' and not, for instance, 'ummat' (Islamic community). The party aimed, in fashionable political jargon, at being an inclusive party, not an exclusive one. It was presented as a nationalist party, not an Islamic one. Meanwhile, Amien Rais took great pains to stress that PAN was a nationalistic organization, and did not cater exclusively to Muhammadiyah or Masyumi circles. An able scholar whose interest is mostly on Indone-

sian Islam and particularly NU testifies that, the PAN's platform "showed greater sophistication and understanding than found in any other party. The party's directions were unambiguously reformist and democratic. It opposed sectarianism and championed the development of a modern secular state that was home to all people, groups, and faiths."²³

One could see that the PAN and PKB were Islam-inclusive parties, as their platforms did not explicitly focus on pursuing an Islamic agenda. What was unique in the PAN and PKB was that they welcomed "Muslim" political aspirations, but they all opposed the formal adoption of sharia in the Constitution. On the basis of this argument, it was unlikely that mushrooming of Islamic parties in the Reform era would lead to the emergence of sectarian politics.

Elections

In June 1999, under the Habibie Presidency, Indonesia held its democratic election. In the election, seven parties won significant percentages of the vote. Five of the seven were Islamic or Muslim-based: the PPP, with 10.7 %; the PKB, with 12.6 %; the PAN, with 7.1 %; the PBB, with 1.8 %; and the Justice Party (PK), with just 1.3 %. The most successful parties were Megawati's secular Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), with 33.7 % of the vote and Golkar, the secular party of former president Soeharto, with 22.4 %.

Out of twenty Islamic parties participated in the election, only ten parties gained one seat or more in the parliament. Put together, they could only win 37 per cent of the votes (172 seats), including PKB and PAN, which were reluctant to be identified as Islamic parties. Without

²³Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President, A View from the Inside*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2002, 253.

²⁴BahtiarEffendy, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2003, 214.

these last two parties, they gained only 17,8 percent of the votes (87 seats).²⁴

Meanwhile, in the 2004 election, out of 24 parties ran for legislative seats, there were 7 Islamic parties participating in the second democratic election during Reform era. Out of the 24 participants, only seven parties emerged as meaningful vote getters. Leading the field was Golkar with 21.6 % of the vote, followed closely by the PDI-P with 18.5 %. The PKB ran a distant third with 10.6 %, while the Islamic PPP tallied 8.5 %, the new Democrat Party took 7.5 %, a freshly renamed Islamist formation called the PKS took 7.3 %, and the PAN took seventh place with a 6.4 % showing.²⁵

The results of the 1999 and the 2004 elections were the significant decline for Muslim politics compared to the first democratic election of 1955, when the Islamic parties together won 43.9 % of the total national votes. However, the results once again reflected the minority appeal of Islamism, regardless of both the fact that the majority of the Indonesians are Muslims and the fact that there has been increasing Islamic revivalism within Indonesian society. Moreover, the achievements of the pluralistic Islamic PKB and PAN in both elections, which together received more votes compared to the explicit Islamic PPP, PKS, and PBB, also indicated the other interesting development within Muslim society. Analyzing the figures on the basis of the division, it was clear that the greater portion of the votes was awarded to the pluralistic Islamic parties rather than to the formalistic Islamic parties.

Given the results of those elections, some observers argue that they were an important indicator of the political moderation of Indone-

²⁵Muhammad Qodari, "Indonesia's Quest for Accountable Governance", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, Number 2 (April 2005),78.

sian Muslim.²⁶ Another observer says that those results also strongly suggested that very few Indonesians were attracted to Islamism, much less radicalism.²⁷ The other observer points out that the presence of those two Muslim-based but non-communal political parties seemed to provide eloquent evidence of Islam and democracy being indeed compatible. They acted an effective block on the Muslim side against the growth of any tendency leading to religious communalism.²⁸

Furthermore, the minority appeal of Islamic parties once again confirmed that most Indonesian Muslims were leaning toward what so-called "substantive Islam" rather than "formalistic Islam". Although there was a continued tendency among Muslims to undergo some kind of Islamic revivalism or *santri-nization*, this had more to do with ritualistic and cultural Islam rather than with political Islam. The tendency among Muslims to become more devout did not necessarily translate into a more Islamic political orientation. To put it simply, for many Indonesian Muslims, Islamic belief or ritual was one thing and political behavior was another.

Islamic radicalism

If the generally tolerant and pluralist orientation of Indonesian Muslim was (and is) solely due to cultural conditioning or national character, whatever that means, it would in itself be ground for confidence that Islamism of a more radical form is unlikely to escalate in Indonesia. As it happens, there are related structural factors that make concrete the

²⁶SaifulMujani and R. William Liddle, "Politics, Islam, and Public Opinion", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 15, Number 1 (January 2004), 112.

²⁷Greg Barton, "Islamism and Indonesia: Islam and Contest for Power after Suharto", *The Review*, (September 2002), accessed from <http://www.aijac.org.au/review/2002/279/islam-indon.html>, April 28, 2007.

²⁸Mitsuo Nakamura, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Observations on the 2004 General and Presidential Elections*, Occasional Publication 6, ILSP, Harvard Law School, 21/2005, 27.

vague but nevertheless significant notion of cultural orientation.²⁹ One is that the overwhelming majority of pious Muslims in Indonesia are affiliated either with the NU or Muhammadiyah. It is from these organizations from where both the PKB and PAN draw their primary supporters. This is highly significant as both of these organizations are essentially moderate in character.

Is there any reason, then, to be anxious about the potential for radical Islamism to negatively influence political development or for communal violence to break out on a broader scale across the troubled archipelago? The short answer is yes. This is not to say that radical Islamism is about to enjoy a sudden spurt of popularity in Indonesia, but rather to acknowledge other factors enabling the escalation of the radicalism.

It is true that such kind of Islamic radicalism is spreading in Indonesia, which is imported from Middle East by graduates of Middle Eastern Universities and former Mujahidin fighters during the the Cold War era. However, it would be a gross simplification to state that the seeds of such philosophies had found fertile soil in Indonesia. The political, religious, and social realities prevalent in Indonesia, as I have explained above, provide limited scope for Middle Eastern radicalism to take roots. Therefore, we have to take a look at some external factors that make possible its spreading.

Firstly, the weak state of Indonesia since the fall of the Soeharto contributes a primary source of Islamic radicalization. The nationwide breakdown of law and order, according to Donald Weatherbee, a veteran Indonesianist, is the major indicator of the state decay's symp-

²⁹Greg Barton, "The Prospect for Islam", in Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith (eds.), *Indonesia Today: Challenges of History*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2001, 251.

toms.³⁰ To be fair, the successive post-Soeharto governments did not inherit institutional capabilities that could replace the military as guarantors of political and social stability. Glaringly absent from Indonesia is a societal commitment to the rule of law. With the lifting of both normative and real constraints, groups and individuals have felt free, and even entitled, to challenge the authority of government-acting outside of the prescribed constitutional and statutory order.

In addition, most observers also point to the incapacity of Indonesian security apparatus, both the Armed Forces (TNI) and police, to deal effectively with the security disturbances.³¹ It is sometimes claimed that the Indonesian government is too worried about the political strength of radical Islam to take action against Muslim terrorists but in fact several high-profile trials of Muslims have resulted in convictions and long jail sentences, although not all culprits have been caught. It is nevertheless true that the Indonesian security forces have failed to take firm and consistent action against groups that have been involved in violence, both Muslim and non-Muslim, but this relates to the general weakness of the Indonesian state more than the alleged dependence of the government on radical Islamic support.³²

Secondly, socio-economic inequalities will fuel and even exacerbate religious conflict. Religious conflict is mainly the violence expression of grievances that use religion as a basis of group identity. The riots in Indonesia, according to Jacques Bertrand, were responses to socio-

³⁰Donald E. Weatherbee, "Indonesia: Political Drift and State Decay", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Volume IX, Number 1 (Spring 2002), 25.

³¹Marcus Mietzner, "Politics of Engagement: The Indonesian Armed Forces, Islamic Extremism, and the "War on Terror", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Volume IX, Number 1 (Spring 2002), 71.

³²Harold Crouch, "Key Determinants of Indonesia's Political Future" *ISEAS Document Delivery Service*, Number 27, Singapore: ISEAS, August 2002, 4.

economic inequalities, economic displacement by migrants, declining political legitimacy, and perceived threats to group identity.³³ Only in some cases did the riots involve more direct grievances over rights to religious practice.

The economic crisis that ravaged Indonesia in 1997-1998 was responsible for the devastation of Indonesian markets, firms, jobs, and incomes, since the crisis hit all classes of society. The impact of the crisis, however, was greatest on the most vulnerable, those living below the poverty level or close to it.³⁴ The percentage of poor households went from 11 % in 1996 to 20 % in 1999, meaning that an additional 19 to 20 million people fell into poverty. Unemployment was perhaps the principle social cost of the crisis.

It is important to keep this human dimension in mind when we observe that Indonesia will have sustained very substantial losses in its wealth and forgone income by the time the economy gets back to pre-crisis levels. The loss of social solidarity that this condition implies for the future of class relations, interethnic relations, and inter-religious tolerance can only be imagined. Unfortunately, this severe socio-economic crisis is unlikely being solved by the series of post-Soeharto governments in sight. Indeed, all post-Soeharto governments promise much to deliver prosperity for Indonesian citizens nevertheless they only deliver a little.

Thirdly, international factors significantly contribute to the escalation of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia. In an Indonesia no longer immunized from global Islamic discourse by the once all-pervasive Soeharto-era state security apparatus, transnational Islamic issues resonate in

³³Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 109.

³⁴John Bresnan, "Economic Recovery and Reform", in John Bresnan (ed.), *Indonesia: The Great Transition*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005, 195.

the country through the media coverage and an uncontrollable internet; feel a sense of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, or collectively with other Muslims experience a sense of outrage at the sight of civilian war casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁵ It is true that majority of Indonesian Muslims neither approved of Taliban interpretations of Islam nor had any liking for Saddam's regime. Most Indonesians also condemned the September 11 attacks.³⁶ However, the unjustified US military aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq were seen by many Muslims both as attacks on Islam and were motivated by material interests. The US military unilateralist actions were also seen as the evidence of the Huntington's theory of "a clash of civilizations." Despite assurances to the contrary from the US that Islam was not the target, most Muslims were not persuaded.

The Bali bombing of October 12, 2002, however, may have proved a blessing in disguise for Indonesia in dealing with Islamic radicalism. With the government under intense pressure to prove Indonesia's commitment to combating terrorism, President Megawati demonstrated decisive leadership by introducing anti-terrorism regulations, which provided a legal umbrella for counter-terrorist activities. International cooperation was welcomed to investigate the bombings and two presidential decrees were hastily drawn up to improve intelligence coordination. The state's rapid actions made hard-liner groups, in the wake of the bombings, were under closer scrutiny of the security apparatus.

In dealing with the growing Islamic radicalism in Indonesia, it is necessary for the Indonesian government to understand that this issue

³⁵Leonard C. Sebastian, "Indonesian State Response to September 11, the Bali Bombings and the War in Iraq: Sowing the Seeds for an Accommodationist Islamic Framework?", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 16, Number 3 (October 2003), 431.

³⁶Anthony L. Smith, "What the Recent Terror Attacks Mean for Indonesia", *ISEAS Document Delivery Service*, Number 14, Singapore: ISEAS, November 2001.

was partly due to the socioeconomic crisis and the instability that it brings, added to the absence of state authority in dealing with militants, particularly those with the tendency to break the law, and partly fueled by international factors. Therefore, the future ability of Indonesia to continue on the path of economic recovery as well as political reform will affect the future of Islamic radicalism. Likewise, the government's decisiveness and consistency in the one hand to pay attention on international Islamic issues in placating Islamic concerns, and to move against domestic militants on the other, will determine Indonesia's success in dealing with radical movements, which to some extent have stained the moderate impression of Indonesian Muslims.

Closing remarks

Indonesia has been clearly in the throes of a transition to a more modern, mature, and democratic society. Unfortunately, the journey from the birth of a nation to its maturity has not been risk-free. In this regard, one of the most alarming risks was the unmanaged resurgence of political Islam in which it called for greater representation in political arena while undemocratically pushing aside other political groups. The development of political Islam during the transition era proved that the compatibility of Islam and democracy is no longer a theoretical matter but a practical challenge in contemporary Indonesia. This movement has faced the difficult task of effectively combining and coordinating the demand for both Islamic authenticity and popular democratic participation. The danger of becoming part of the establishment in the name of Islamization and then forced to compromise on democratic principles, such as the guarantee of non-Muslim minority rights, has always been present.

However, the Muslims' experience during this difficult transition revealed that Islamization and democratization have marched hand in

hand for many years. If Indonesia succeeds in maintaining and enhancing the quality of what Vali Nasr calls "Muslim democracy",³⁷ it will become the world's third-largest democracy and the largest democracy in the Muslim world, making it an important beacon of hope in the Islamic community. In this regard, I am undoubtedly optimistic about the future development of parallelism between Islamization and democratization in Indonesia.

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³⁷Vali Nasr, "The Rise of Muslim Democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, Number 2 (April 2005).

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