

Conservative Islamic factions vs. secular nationalists: toward a civil contestation in democratic Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper describes how Indonesia's presidents have dealt with Islamist and secular nationalist political contestation since the preparation of Indonesian independence and how the current president compares. Soekarno's initial reliance on civil discourse ended in his autocratic decree that banned the Indonesia's most powerful Islamic party (*Masyumi*). Soeharto's initial iron-fist approach ended up meeting some Islamic demands. B.J. Habibie helped transformed Indonesia through a democratic election in 1999, but the leader of the winning party, Megawati was defeated in the parliament that elected a pluralist Muslim cleric, Gus Dur. Gus Dur's administration, ended by the central axis, suggests that liberal democratic processes cannot be applied in an increasingly conservative Muslim majority country. Megawati lost, partly because she is a female president unpopular among the Islamists, while SBY was sympathetic toward the Islamist's demands, enhancing the "conservative turn." Jokowi has used discursive and legal approaches to promote Pancasila in challenging the hardline Islamic demands, enabling him to ban HTI and FPI and to implement the speech freedom-limiting laws, leading to criticisms and the decline in the 2020 Indonesia's Democracy Index. Jokowi's expansion of these laws to maintain unity and stability may be deemed an "authoritarian turn," but I argue that it may be more appropriately called "the Pancasila turn." In framing and analyzing Jokowi's laws as a Pancasila turn, I am arguing in this paper that this lays the foundation for a more equal, civil, and democratic contestation.

Keywords: Islamists; nationalists; Pancasila; political contestation; democracy

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Introduction

The most significant challenge for Indonesia as a multifaceted and diverse nation has been how to create unity for achieving sustainable peace and democracy. One of the most critical obstacles for this goal is the continuing conflicts between conservative Islamic movements and those of secular nationalists, demonstrated in the discursive political contestation throughout the history of Indonesia (Ricklefs 2012) This can be traced back to at least prior to the Indonesian declaration of Independence in 1945, becoming more salient in the first decades that followed, and swamping the Indonesian socio-political negotiation of power and influence until this day. This paper will look at the debates, tensions, and conflicts between the two factions that filled all periods of the seven presidencies. Each administration has had its own strategies in dealing with the conflicts and issues on what should be the best role of Islam on the Indonesian socio-political stage, with some using more authoritarian approaches than others. In addition, this paper will also focus on discussing the approaches of the current president, Jokowi, and how his policies compare with those of the other presidents. Additionally, it will attempt to answer the question of whether Jokowi's administration



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has been part of the authoritarian turn and whether the Indonesian competing factions can employ civil discursive contestation in modern democracy. For this purpose, this paper will rely on literature reviews and other publications that described the contestations and how each administration's policies impact the future of this Muslim majority democracy.

Islamic movement in the Soekarno's era

Despite the Indonesian Youth Pledge in 1928 by young Indonesian nationalists of different ethnic, religious, and geographical backgrounds, declaring principles of one nation, one homeland and one language, there were underpinnings of potential conflicts. Between 1920s and 1930s, leaders of nationalist organizations, from both Islamic and non-religious organizations put substantial efforts to assemble the most workable foundation for uniting these diverse people and archipelago into a primary nationalist movement. However, the major dividing issue was whether Islam could provide the uniting basis for these diverse communities or whether the new independent Indonesia should be religiously neutral. Religiously neutral Indonesia would allow *abangan* (nominal, syncretic, non-devout Muslims), minorities of local beliefs, and other non-Muslims (Geertz 1976) to have equal rights and participation in the new democracy.

The discursive contestation of the two sides that began in the late 1920s were prominently represented by Soekarno on the secular nationalist side and Mohammad Natsir, who later became the head of the *Masyumi*, on the conservative Islamic side. *Masyumi* stands for *Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia* (Indonesian Muslim Associations Council) was the major Islamic political party. In an influential 1925 essay, "Nationalism, Islam and Marxism," (see; <https://kolomsejarah.wordpress.com/>) Soekarno emphasized Nationalism as the foundation for unity among diverse views of Indonesian political factions, minimizing the Islamists' aspiration for stronger role of Islam in Indonesian politics. In response, Mohammad Natsir challenged Soekarno's ideas of Islam's political role in the Independent Indonesia, writing objections against the growing criticisms of Islamic teachings, augmenting a serious discursive contestation between a nationalism versus Islamism as the basis for the struggle for independence (Kahin 2012a). Although many nationalist leaders reacted angrily to Natsir's articles and accused him of trying to split the unity of the independence movement, the contestation was mainly mostly civil discursive (writing and speeches). Soekarno continued to highlight that the Islamic movements' struggle is partisan, because it only fought for the welfare and wellbeing of Muslims, using faith-based arguments for more dominant Islamic roles (Kahin 2012b).

This contestation reached its peak in the debates during the preparation for Indonesian independence among members and participants of the constitution preparatory committee (BPUPKI). BPUPKI stands for *Badan Penyelidik Usaha-usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan* or the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence which was first established in March 1945 by the Japanese colonial government. The debates centered around the formation of the Pancasila's five principles with its well-known dispute on the first principle "Believing in One God" to include sharia law for the Muslims. The nationalists won the contestation due to moderate Muslim leaders' willingness to accommodate the concerns of Christians from Eastern Indonesia about this partisan national ideology. Although not easily and contentedly, all participants agreed with the urgent need to have an inclusive, comprehensive, and modern constitution (Maarif 2006).

This contestation between the two factions, represented by Soekarno vs. Natsir, continued as a mostly civil discourse and debate (Suhelmi 2012). Then, in the first Indonesian democratic 1955 election, *Masyumi* came out as the second winner gaining 57 seats in the 232-seat parliament. This led to more intense debates and the Islamists' and Nationalists' failure to reach an agreement to form an acceptable modern constitution. Although the NU congress in 1952 decided to split from *Masyumi* and become an independent political party, *Masyumi's* fight for an increased role of Islam in the Indonesian constitution continued in the Constituent Assembly debates leading to a deadlock and a presidential decree in 1959. This decree, ruling the return to the original 1945 constitution, was an

authoritarian move by Soekarno to concentrate power in his hands vis-a-vis the parliament, thus, ending the era of liberal democracy that welcomed civil debates (Maarif 2006).

Previously, in November 1957, senior *Masyumi* leaders, including Mohammad Natsir, joined the separatist Islamist rebels in Padang, West Sumatra, which *Masyumi* declined to denounce. In 1960, the more authoritarian President Soekarno passed a law that allowed him to dissolve any party with principles contradictory to the state ideology. Based on this, Soekarno banned *Masyumi* and imprisoned its leaders, including Muhammad Natsir, in 1962. This marked a setback for Islamic movements in Indonesia and raised the question as to whether an Indonesian president had to use an authoritarian approach in dealing with hardline Islamic movements. Soekarno considered liberal democracy as divisive and ineffective; he believed in traditional consensus as the best way to resolve the country's challenging issues of unity. However, his efforts to reconcile the three often conflicting political groups affiliated to nationalism, religion, and communism (NASAKOM) failed, leading to his fall in 1967 (Borgias 2012).

Islam during the Soeharto's era: from the extreme right to an ally

The fall of Soekarno, after a tragic and bloody coup, led General Soeharto to power who ruled Indonesia under the banner of "Pancasila" democracy as a continuation of Soekarno's guided democracy. He established his dictatorship with a strong military support which helped him in dealing with his potential opponents, mostly from the Islamic movements.

Soeharto's regime policies toward Islamic movements in Indonesia can be divided into two periods. The first period, from 1967 to the mid-1980s, was characterized by the government's suppressive stands against various Islamic groups by rejecting their demands (Crouch 1981). Promoted as the "extreme right" and government's common enemies, the Islamic factions were suppressed by Soeharto's policies of discriminations, arrests, and even prosecutions against Muslim political activists (Liddle 1996). Leaders associated with suspected Islamic militants were excluded from governmental and political activities. Routinely denying Muslim demands for programs and policies that could support Islamic values and interests, Soeharto successfully subverted any desire for an Islamic political party representative in the Parliament. Islamist movements were reduced to mere intellectual, spiritual, and cultural undertakings, as demonstrated in the Nurcholis Madjid's influential ideals of "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No," suggesting his acceptance of a separation between Islam and politics (Barton 1997). This proves that authoritarian approaches against Islamic groups resulted in moderate, non-political Islam in Indonesia, and the Islamists' setback created the well-known majority Muslims with smiling faces (van Bruinessen 2013).

This major setback in Islamic movements in Indonesia turned out to be temporary. Gradual changes took place in the second part of Soeharto's presidency. He began to tolerate Islamic discourses and met some of their small demands, such as the removal of a rule that forbade students from wearing Islamic veils, the establishment of Islamic courts and codes of Islamic family law, and the establishments of Islamic banks. In addition, to show his devotion to the Islamic faith, President Suharto and his family completed a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1990 (Liddle 1996).

Soeharto's affable attitude toward Islamic politics then took a significant shift during the establishment of ICMI in 1990, as part of his political scheme to strengthen control over the powerful armed forces. Liddle (1996) described this as the "Islamic turn," i.e. a significant change in Suharto's political strategies after years of repressing Islamic movements. This "Islamic turn" was the most striking shift of Soeharto's political scheme that became an important beginning of the growth of conservative Islamic movements in modern Indonesia, tarnishing the image of Indonesia's smiling-Muslims. This shift has led to the dominance of Islamically dominated socio-religious and political discourses that have changed the socio-political and cultural landscape of Indonesia in the following decades. This revival was mostly due to ICMI as an important venue and impetus for the Islamization of the *abangan* (Hefner 2011; Nashir 2018) that continues to expand Islamist movements in

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Indonesia. Ironically, the Islamic movements that Soeharto supported were partly responsible for his fall in 1998. See, e.g. Amin Rais' role in the fall of Soeharto's fall in: <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/ami-en-rai-s-cerita-saat-dia-tumbangkan-soeharto-20-tahun-lalu.html>.

The Islamic movements during the reform era: Habibie, Gus Dur, and Megawati

Between 1998 and 2004, Indonesia went through a critical transitional period from Soeharto's authoritarian government to a more democratic modern Indonesia, involving three presidents: B.J. Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid (known as Gus Dur), and Megawati Soekarno Putri. Habibie has been praised for his confidence in discontinuing Soeharto's authoritarian system for a more democratic route. Habibie's policies gained support from some military leaders and Islamic factions as well as Amin Rais (a prominent reform movement leader) during this transitional period to democracy through a multiparty election.

Surprisingly, the winners of this 1999 legislative election were the secular nationalist parties of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) 33.74% and the Working Group party (Golkar) 22.44%. The Islamic parties that gained modest votes were mostly moderate, including the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, PKB), United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP), and National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional*, PAN), gaining 13%, 11%, and 7% respectively, while more conservative Islamic parties gained 2% or less each. See the election result publication of the 1999 election in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1999_Indonesian_legislative_election. This shows that, despite the dominance of Islamic discourses in the reform era, the majority of Indonesian Muslims at that time still trusted the religiously neutral government.

As the leader of the party that won the election, Megawati should have been elected as president. However, the Islamic discourses coming from the reform era were strong enough to resist the idea of having a woman president coming from the non-Islamic party. In addition, Megawati was unenthusiastic to reach out to Islamic party leaders for coalition government. Meanwhile, the other party leaders created "*poros tengah*" (Central Axis) which is a coalition of mostly Islamic parties that supported Gus Dur. The coalition thrived in campaigning for Gus Dur against Megawati and succeeded in the Assembly election of KH Abdurrahman Wahid as the 4th Indonesian president, see <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPcap/1999-10/21/049r-102199-idx.html>.

Gus Dur was a respected leader of the moderate Muslim group Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) with over 40 million members. Indonesian minorities have been grateful for his legacy of promoting minorities' right, including those of non-Muslims and ethnic Chinese, which disappointed conservative Muslims. He was a liberal-minded president who boosted the power of civilians by officially ending the *dwifungsi* (the military dual function), alienating some of his military supporters. However, these disappointed and alienated factions later successfully ousted Gus Dur through relentless demonstrations, mostly due to chaotic political negotiations and violent conflicts. This included the military taking indirect parts in the violent Christians vs. Muslims conflicts in Maluku leading to hardline Islamic groups to send their militants, which enhanced the impetus of Islamic militancy until this day. For more discussion see: <https://www.dw.com/en/ex-president-gus-durs-vision-for-democratic-islam-in-indonesia/a-40394288>.

Gus Dur attempted to consolidate secularists-Islamist's tension, discounting the decades-old demands of Islamic conservatives for a more prominent role of Islam echoed during the Soekarno era. He emphasized the adaption of democracy in line with the Islamic convention of the Islam-State relationship, by epitomizing conservative Islamic interests in ideological Islam, while at the same time construing Pancasila that acknowledges the religion-state separation. In the end, the Islamists consistently resisted any attempt to coalesce modern Democratic principles to the Islamic belief system.

Using political approaches that enable Muslims' active political participation, Gus Dur failed to ensure Muslims embracing the universal values such as democracy, toleration, justice, freedom, and equality for the sake of unity and cooperation with other religious and minority groups, because this placed him on the secularist side, against the Islamic groups' demands. See more discussion on challenges of Wahid's presidency in: <https://jakartaglobe.id/opinion/johannes-nugroho-gus-dur-failure-president/>. Governing in a difficult reformed era, with many demands from political factions, it was difficult for Gus Dur to manage Indonesia relying on democratic processes, including pressure from Aceh for independence that was dealt with by giving it the right to implement sharia law. Ironically, the conservative Islamic political factions were the most unwavering in overthrowing the only Muslim cleric president of Indonesia because Gus Dur could not meet their demands, see: <https://jakartaglobe.id/opinion/johannes-nugroho-gus-dur-failure-president/>. When Gus Dur received strong challenges from the Central Axis, including the military for advocating civil supremacy, he realized that liberal democracy could not unite Indonesia and issued a decree disbanding the parliaments, which was ignored, leading to his fall.

Removed from his presidency in July 2001, Gus Dur was replaced by his vice president Megawati Soekarno Putri. Although not favored by Islamists, Amin Rais and other leaders agreed to let Megawati finish Gus Dur's five-year term. As the only female Indonesian president, Megawati, with her passive governing style, returned Indonesia to a relative calm after Wahid political chaos. However, she did not have creative ideas of political and economic leadership that could resolve various challenges including separatist rebellions, conservative Islamic pressure, corruption, and a declining economy. Uncertain about continuing Wahid's reform policy of decentralization, she gave the military a new opportunity to deal with sectarian conflicts as well as separatist movements, often ignoring concerns about human-rights abuses. For more discussion see: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1012936023455826880>. Again, this raises the question of whether political stability requires a non-democratic or an authoritarian approach. Her presidency was also filled with discursive controversies about her being a female president, resonating the old debates of secular nationalism versus Islamism. Her bid for a second term failed mostly due to her weaknesses above and to the increasingly dominant discourses of Islamic doctrines and MUI edicts that forbid woman from becoming president, see a discussion in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUg2b1jWakw> and also in <https://www.readcube.com/articles/10.16997%2Fwpcc.29>.

The SBY era of enhancing the “conservative turn”

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) seemed to realize the increasing political power of conservative Islamic movements during his ten-year presidency (2004–2014). Thus, to create stability and gain their supports, his government allowed more Islamic discourses in Indonesian politics and the public sphere, enhancing a more intolerant form of Islam to expand its influence.²

SBY's policies encouraged the growth of hardline Islamic movements' socio-political roles, and the most notable one was endorsing the MUI (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or Indonesian Council of Ulama) authority in issuing edicts, independent of the government policies, that are intolerant against minority groups. This led to the increase of Islamic discourses' socio-political power and influence of Islamic discourse in Indonesian civil debates and the public sphere (Ricklefs 2012). Although this government-funded and supported MUI issued controversial and non-binding edicts, Indonesian Muslims tend to follow it until today. These include those that enhance discourses of exclusivism, purification, as well as the halal certification that has shaped the Indonesian cultural, political, economic and social landscape (Menchik 2016). During MUI National Congress in 2005 SBY promised that he would expand MUI's authority, followed by MUI issuing controversial and intolerant edicts expanding Islamic exclusive conservatism in Indonesia, including the 2006 regulation on restricting houses of worships and anti-Ahmadiyah sect decree. For more discussion, see an essay on this at: <https://www.hudson.org/research/14367-conflicts-in-indonesian-islam#footnote4>.

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Other hardline groups supporting MUI also gained momentum during SBY's administration, including FPI (*Front Pembela Islam* or Islamic Defender Front), FUI (*Forum Umat Islam* or Islamic Society Forum), GNPf-MUI (*Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or National Movement to Safeguard the Indonesian Ulema Councils' Fatwa) and HTI, known for their hatred-loaded confrontational speeches, further expanding the power of Islamic discourses. The power MUI under SBY enhanced the expansion of Islamic discourse: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/iseas-perspective-2020-3-indonesias-mui-today-truly-moderate-or-merely-pragmatic-by-syafiq-hasyim/>. These organizations' demands mostly echoed those of Soekarno era Islamists, ranging from the implementation of sharia law to the implementation of an Islamic State. This discourse, dominating SBY's presidency coupled with the marginalization and intimidation of minority religious groups and sects provided these Islamic groups to expand their influences in various institutions, including education and state-owned enterprises. This built on the "Islamic turn" (Liddle 1996) and created a "the conservative turn" (van Bruinessen 2013) resulting in a period that diminished moderate Islamic voices and images of the smiling faces of Indonesian Muslims.

Jokowi's era of the "Pancasila turn"

One of the first important discourses Jokowi advocated after his election as the sixth Indonesian president was manifested in his motto: "*saya Indonesia, saya Pancasila*" (I am Indonesia, I am Pancasila). This was aimed at showing his conviction in the Indonesian basic ideology and constitutions as well as his pluralist and secular nationalist credentials. Since taking office in 2014, he has been critical of more restrictive forms of Islam and stressed the importance of religious toleration, warning that the MUI cannot influence government policies.

Jokowi's challenge is that religious intolerance and intimidation that thrived during SBY's era have provided the Islamic hardliner's opportunities to build a strong socio-communicative infrastructure for their discourses in many Indonesian governmental, mass, and private institutions as well as at the grassroots levels. Their campaigns outwitted and outpaced those of the moderate NU and Muhammadiyah. For example, a hardline Islamic State supporter and promoter, Hizbut Tahir Indonesia (HTI) had successfully recruited university students, government workers, and other educated middle class to become HTI members and sympathizers. In addition, the hardline Islamic discourses have dominated the Indonesian public sphere through various national communication venues, including radio, television, other publications, and various social media. Therefore, Jokowi could not ignore or underestimate their political power and influence.

In this era of Indonesian Islamic hardline conservatism, increasing tension between the secular nationalists and Islamists took a center stage during the Jakarta governor election debates involving the incumbent candidate with a double-minority identity (a Christian and Chinese), Basuk Tjahja Purnama, known as Ahok. With his argumentative style, he commented on the use of a Quranic verse to forbid him from becoming governor, which led to an accusation and conviction of blasphemy against Islam. Succeeding in disseminating discourses rejecting non-Muslim as a leader of Muslim majority community, the ultra-conservative Islamic groups conducted massive protests (2016 to 2017), led by the Islamic Defender Front (FPI), the Islamic Ummah Forum (FUI), and HTI. The rallies, called Aksi Bela Islam (Action in Defense of Islam), put strong political pressure on the blasphemy prosecution of the Jakarta Governor, who later was convicted and imprisoned for two years. The massive protests reached their peak on November 4, 2016, not only creating a historical momentum for showing and promoting the power of hardline Islamic factions but also alerting Jokowi's administration of conservative Islamic groups as serious political opponents. For more discussion, see, e.g. <https://www.hudson.org/research/14367-conflicts-in-indonesian-islam#footNote5>.

Very concerned about this potential risk, Jokowi took several measures, such as controlling the power of the Islamic anti-government discourses, including those of FPI chairman, Rizieq Shihab, who gained an enhanced prominence among the conservative Muslims and claimed to be the grand Imam of Indonesian Muslims. In addition, on July 10, 2017, Jokowi signed an amendment to the 2013 Law to combat radical groups, making those that do not support the state ideology of Pancasila illegal. See the Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 17 Tahun 2013 *Tentang Organisasi Kemasyarakatan* or Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 17, 2013, Concerning Mass Organizations (July 22, 2013). After approval from the parliaments and the Constitutional Court, the global caliphate-seeking HTI was officially banned on July 18, 2017. This international-caliphate-seeking Hizbut Tahrir has also been banned a number of countries including in most Arab countries as well as in China, Egypt, Germany, Russia, and Turkey (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hizb_ut-Tahrir). Although it was constitutional, following the lawful procedure, some considered this law counter to human rights and democratic freedom, creating more resentful, Islamists, political enemies for Jokowi's administration.

While tension, conflicts, and discursive contestation between Islamic factions and secular nationalists continued, Jokowi had to seriously strategize how to win his second term in the 2019 presidential election. Burdened by the pressure from Islamist supporters, Jokowi picked a prominent cleric, head of MUI, and conservative Muslim cleric, Ma'ruf Amin, as his running mate. This proved that Jokowi recognized that the political power of Islamic factions and their influential Islamic discourses could erode his chance of winning the re-election. This move worried observers that Jokowi himself would become less moderate and pluralist as he was having to conform to the Islamists' demands and could be influenced by Ma'ruf Amin's more conservative Islamic agenda (<https://theaseanpost.com/article/why-did-jokowi-pick-cleric-maruf-amin>).

After the election, followed by violent protests, Jokowi appeared to feel that he had no burden of having to conform to the Islamic factions' demands. Thus, he continued with measures of restricting hardline Islamic movements, the most important of which was Jokowi's move to ban FPI, following Rizieq Shihab's return from his self-exile in Saudi Arabia. This step, while applauded by moderate Islamic groups and nationalists, raised observers' concerns about the state of Indonesia's democracy. They consider Jokowi's policies parts of "the authoritarian turn" (Power, 2018). However, because surveys suggest that more Indonesians support these measures in cracking down hardline Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Jokowi's bold move should be called "the Pancasila turn". See reports on Surveys. e.g. <https://www.wartaekonomi.co.id/read335638/survei-mayoritas-publik-setuju-pembubar-an-fpi>.

Jokowi's fights against hardline Islamists: toward civil and equal discursive contestation

Jokowi's efforts in uniting Indonesia relies on the discourse of Pancasila as the foundation for fighting against hardline Islamic factions. While such discourse is not new, Jokowi succeeded in promoting "Pancasila" and "NKRI" to be the popular politically-correct terms, comprising the national principle of unity in diversity as well as tolerance and pluralism. The two terms have become the popular footing for the arguments of the religiously neutral nationalists and moderate Muslims, but today even Islamic hardliners frequently cite these two terms to show their compliance to the constitution. See for example, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/11/29/07435231/menteri-agama-fpi-berkomitmen-setia-nkri-dan-pancasila?page=all>.

Despite this success, Jokowi's policies have been criticized as anti-democratic not only for banning two most important hardline Islamic organizations, HTI and FPI, but also for his systematic repressive campaigns of anti-Islamist rules against academics, public workers and educators deemed to be active Islamist groups members, leading to blacklisting, firings, and even arrests. The critics consider this undermining and eroding democratic as well as human right principles, (see: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/09/27/jokowis-repressive-pluralism/>) despite many moderate Muslims

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including NU considering these hardline privilege-seeking Muslims as conflict-ridden, damaging the image of a smiling, peaceful, and tolerant Islam in Indonesia.

Jokowi's policies are a continuation of the de-radicalization campaign started in 2002, due to surveys and studies showing an increasing trend of Islamic conservatism that leads to radicalization. Martin van Bruinessen's (2013) description of the 'Conservative Turn' reveals how much Indonesia has changed toward a more conservative Islamic society with the growth of hardline Islamic groups. Ricklefs (2012) suggested his pessimism about stopping this wave of conservative Islamism, stating that:

“The Islamist agenda now is about influencing, infiltrating, and taking over state, semi-state, and civil society organizations, in which they are having considerable success. Meanwhile, Dakwahism continues powerfully at grassroots level” (p. 499).

Surveys confirm the increasing support of civil servants, students and educators for the power and influence of conservative hardliners. 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 (<https://www.prayingforindonesia.com/recent-posts/survey-reveals-increase-tolerance-among-indonesian-students/>).

Jokowi's shift from SBY policies in the fighting against Islamists' agenda constitutes a bold change in an effort to slow down Islamic radicalization, consequently reaping criticisms and opposition. However, his revival of the Pancasila discourse that was imperceptible during SBY earned him supports not only from secular nationalists but also from moderate Islamic groups that have been uncomfortable with the anti-Pancasila rhetoric of the hardliners. Returning Pancasila's important role in the Indonesian public sphere, Jokowi implemented the anti-defamation law protecting not only religions, but also the government, the constitutions and Pancasila. See: Sukmawati Soekarno Putri's lawsuit against hardliner Habib Rizieq Shihab, head of Islamic Defender Front (FPI), who allegedly insulted Pancasila.

Jokowi's bold moves is different from Soekarno's decision to ban *Masyumi* and Soeharto's harsh policies cracking down on Islamic movements. Although the three-presidents relied on the constitution and Pancasila as the justification, Soekarno used his authoritarian presidential decree to create laws to ban *Masyumi*, disregarding the democratically elected parliament. Soeharto used the military to wipe out what he considered the “extreme right,” silencing any critics. Jokowi, on the other hand, banned HTI following constitutional and legal procedure that were debated and passed with 70% of parliamentary support and subsequently won the challenge in the Constitutional Court. For more discussion, see: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/02/15/supreme-court-upholds-disbandment-of-hizbut-tahrir-indonesia.html>.

The supporters of banning HTI contented that, while HTI's non-violent campaigns for a caliphate is a guaranteed freedom of expression, it advocates sectarian and anti-democratic ideals including the absolute implementation of Islamic laws. HTI's democratic participation may provide alternative views, but global caliphate ideals are in contradiction with the Indonesian constitutions and democracy. In addition, the Indonesian Muslim majority typically could not easily argue against any caliphate claims based on Quranic or Islamic teachings. Consequently, discursive political contestation involving global caliphate Islamist ideology cannot take place in a level playing field, because anyone can easily argue against human-made secular principles such as Pancasila but must refrain from criticizing arguments based on divine truth or holy texts that are considered infallible.

This is similar to the preaching of the thuggish FPI known for their argumentative hate speeches that intimidate the democratic participation of the non-Muslim minority groups. Jokowi's strategies may be deemed undemocratic, but the majority of the Indonesian people supported Jokowi's move to ban FPI. See for example a survey by SMRC in November 2020 showed that 57 of the Indonesian have unfavorable view of FPI while 43 % of them view FPI favorably in <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20201126164707-20-574962/survei-smrc-hanya-43-persen-warga-yang-suka-rizieq-shihab>.

While Soekarno's and Soeharto's policies against Islamists eliminated equal democratic participation, Jokowi's Banning HTI as well as FPI in newly democratic Indonesia can provide protection to the increasingly non-participative, marginalized, non-Muslim minority as well as those who embrace local values and faith. Based on Crawly's (2006) suggestions, eliminating faith-based, infallible discourse in a plural public sphere can pave the way for a more participative democratic reasoning engaging in more civil discourse.

Jokowi's policies are also different from those of Gus Dur. While Jokowi has governed after democratic infrastructure and the political landscape have been established, Gus Dur led Indonesia in a critical transitional period from authoritarian to modern democracy. Learning from Gus Dur's, Jokowi could not obstinately insist on his secular nationalist agenda; he must negotiate with the Islamists and other opponents. However, unlike Gus Dur's consistent fight to establish a modern liberal democracy, Jokowi's policies contained measures that can be deemed un-democratic. Gus Dur was not successful in realizing his desire to dissolve FPI, partly because of his conviction in a democratic process. See Gus Dur's unrealized desire to ban FPI. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20201230194303-20-588056/mimpi-gus-dur-bubarkan-fpi-berbalas-perlawanan-rizieq-shihab>.

Jokowi's decision to ban FPI reaped criticism from human right and speech freedom activists, because it restricts participative, creative, and liberal democratic discursive contestation (<https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy/indonesias-return-to-an-authoritarian-developmental-state-4734/>).

However, not taking firm action could also lead to frenzied political challenges similar to what Gus Dur faced. Once the verbally aggressive Islamic hardliners stop using sectarian hate speech to intimidate marginalized groups, there is a hope for more civil discursive contestation and a more level-playing fields where diverse groups can equally participate in more religiously-neutral and substantive debates (Habermas 1989; Dhal 1989).

Jokowi's high interest in political stability for stronger economic development and in preventing any potential upheaval due to political oppositions coming from uncontrollable social media has led him to create and/or strengthen the implementation of hate speech, blasphemy, ITE (<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/are-indonesia-s-rubber-laws-limiting-freedom-speech>) and other anti-defamation laws. This resulted not only in the usual criticism (e.g. by Power 2018) that declining quality and endurance of democracy due to less freedom of speech and civil liberty lead to the decline in the 2020 Indonesia's Democracy Index. See, for more discussion: <https://voi.id/en/bernas/34885/in-the-era-of-president-jokowi-democratic-resilience-weakened>.

Historically, Indonesia has never been successful in creating plural and tolerant Muslim majority nation with smiling-faces by relying only on liberal democracy as shown during the Soekarno, Soeharto, and Gus Dur' era. A young democracy like Indonesia, with a majority Muslims population that are increasingly becoming very conservative, Jokowi's less-democratic policies might save Indonesia from serious turmoil in the long run. Democracy of a majority Muslim nation must be unique, different from that of Western countries where there is a clear separation between state and religion. While there is still disagreement between the compatibility of Islam and democracy, Indonesia is still a world example of democracy that struggles with the dominance of faith-based religious discourse that impede civil discourse.

A democracy going through an "Islamic turn" (Liddle 1996) and "conservative turn" (van Bruinessen 2013) has posed Jokowi with tremendous challenges in his efforts to implement the "unity in diversity" dictum of Pancasila. The majority of Indonesian Muslims who have long believe in

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arguments based on divine truth can easily criticize Pancasila, the constitution, and the laws, but all Indonesians are refrained from criticizing anything related to Islam. Jokowi's "Pancasila turn," with the implementation of blasphemy and anti-defamation laws, might help create a more level-playing field for civil discursive contestation that is more equally participated by the diverse Indonesian people.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the most significant challenge for Indonesia has always been how to unite this religiously and ethnically diverse nation in a peaceful and prosperous democracy. It has described how each of the seven presidents compare in dealing with the partisan demands for more prominent roles of Islamic principles in the Indonesian state and political life that have been dominating the Islamic vs. secular nationalist political contestation.

The discussion shows that in order to end arduous debates and create political stability in this multifaceted diverse community, Indonesia must implement the principles of tolerance as well as unity in diversity as comprised in Pancasila. For Soekarno, this was accomplished by issuing an autocratic decree, banning *Masyumi* and governing under a guided democracy, while Soeharto continued the Pancasila guided democracy with iron-fists and military approach to crack down on Islamists. Any effort that conforms to the Islamists' demands could lead to Islamic discursive and political hegemony, such as the last decade of Soeharto's government, when meeting some Islamic demands created the "Islamic turn" and SBY's ten-year term filled with sympathy for conservative Islamic campaigns and demands that enhanced the "conservative turn." On the other hand, Gus Dur, who attempted to rely on open-minded democratic process failed to convince Islamic factions to embrace the humanistic and universal modern values of democracy.

This history suggests that the more authoritarian approaches were needed and effective in dealing with the infamous Islamists' demands for prominent roles of Islam in Indonesian politics and public life, while true democratic freedom and conforming to Islamic demands could lead to uncivil contestation. In a newly democratic Indonesia, Jokowi could not implement such approaches; instead, he uses discursive and legal procedures. Discursively, Jokowi is successful in promoting Pancasila with its plural and tolerant principles and in pitting it against hardline Islamists that go against this national ideological foundation. Then Jokowi created laws and regulations that enabled him to ban two important organizations of Islamic hardliners, HTI and FPI. Although through legal procedures and were applauded by moderate Muslims, it created notorious debates. This is especially true for Jokowi's expansion of the implementation of the hate speech, blasphemy, ITE (<https://www.lowyintitute.org/the-interpretation-of-indonesia-s-rubber-laws-limiting-freedom-speech>) and other anti-defamation laws that resulted in widespread criticisms and the decline in the 2020 Indonesia's Democracy Index. While critics labeled Jokowi's move as an "authoritarian turn," it is significantly different from the authoritative approaches of Soekarno and Soeharto. Instead, this should be labelled "the Pancasila turn," because of Jokowi's reliance legal procedure that allows debates and on Pancasila discourses in dealing with powerful Islamic factions to create unity and stability as well as to implement tolerance and civil contestation needed for a plural democratic Indonesia.

Acknowledgements

This paper contains basic overview of the political and discursive contestation between Indonesian Islamists and Nationalists from 1920s to the present based on reviews of literatures as well as other media publications. A more in-depth discussion will require more data presentation and detailed analysis.

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