

The Future of Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: An Insight from Outsider

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Abstract—Islam and democracy do not go along well due to Islam's principle does not support secular state. In the past Indonesia did not have this problem at least during the New Order era. However, the rise of Islamism after the end of Suharto regime leads to the anxiety of the turn of conservative Islam. Even though Islam has more influence in the society many signs express democracy in Indonesia still developed in the right track.

Keywords—Islam, Democracy, Indonesia, Outsider

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is located and the largest country in Southeast Asia. It also the largest Muslim majority country in the world with a population of around 240 million. It is the fourth largest country in the world after the People's Republic of China, the United States and the Republic of India.

Indonesia is one of the ASEAN countries that is currently (2019) recognized as one of the strongest democratic country especially in Southeast Asia region where many countries still ruled by dictatorship or semi-dictatorship. Indonesia had been under a period of long-standing rule of authoritarian regime. Indonesia declared its independence in 1945 and had to fight for independence with the Netherlands for four years until its independence was recognized by the Netherlands in 1949. Since gaining independence the nationalists and Indonesian leaders have adopted a democratic regime headed by president. During the first president, Sukarno, period Indonesia had its first elections in 1955, but with various problems of the newly born nation such as political problems caused by various differences of political ideology, separatist movement, and economic problems etc. As a result, the democratic government was interrupted when President Sukarno adopted Guided Democracy, which ended the parliamentary democracy that was run since 1955. When political conflicts reached its peak in 1965, a coup attempt was made on September 30, 1965. The incident ended with peace keeping by the forces led by Lieutenant General Suharto. (rank at that time)

The new order era of President Suharto officially began in 1967, when Sukarno signed the document transferring the power of administration to Suharto. Indonesia entered a state of authoritarian regime, with the military as the main key of political control together with legislative regulation and other social methods. Throughout the era of Suharto, despite there had been regular elections and opposed by students and citizens but Suharto was able to secure his position. Until the currency crisis and the Asian economic crisis of 1997, starting from Thailand and affecting Indonesia causing the economic crisis and spread into a political crisis. The crisis led to

widespread protests to Suharto regime, resulting in a riot that finally Suharto had to resign from his position and let Habibie, the Vice President came up as president.

After that, Indonesia entered the reform era. There are reforms in all sectors. Whether political, economic and social, constitutional amendments, military reform, decentralization which leads to the local legislation on the allocation of local resources, and law on the establishment of independent organizations, etc. Indonesia held and election in 1999, which is considered the first democratic elections after the New Order. After the 1999 elections, Indonesia held presidential and general elections in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019, which the direct presidential and vice-presidential elections are considered as one of a major political change in the *reformasi* era.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

Majority of Muslim in Indonesia is Sunni Islam. However, there are other branches of Islam in society, for example, Shia, Sufi, and other kinds. The famous category of Muslim in Indonesia by Clifford Geertz that divided Muslims in Indonesia into two groups between *santri* (orthodox) and *abangan* (mixture Islamic believe with tradition one).¹

The relationship between Islam and politics is always one of the most important issues in contemporary Indonesian politics. Tension between Islam and the Indonesian nation-state exists in regions throughout the archipelago. These tensions have a long history in Indonesia, dating back to before the country gained its independence. Initially, the Dutch had attempted to reduce the role and influence of Islam due to their view that Islam posed a threat to its authority.

Demands by Muslim groups for the implementation of *shariah* law have existed in Indonesian history since before independence. In fact, the question of the status of Islamic law in the new Indonesia had already

¹ See Geertz, Clifford. *The Religion of Java*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

emerged before the declaration of independence. Tensions between the supporters of Islamic law, such as the members of Islamic political parties and their followers, and Indonesian nationalists, came to a head in June 1945 when the Committee to Investigate Preparations for Independence (*Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan*, or BPUPK), with Japanese support, prepared a draft of the constitution. From the beginning, the leading secular nationalist figure, Mohammad Hatta (1902-1980), and the renowned Dutch-trained legal scholar, Supomo, set themselves sharply against the notion of an Islamic state.

However, the New Order military regime suppressed and controlled Muslim political movements. As a result, discussion of the application of *shariah* law in Indonesia during the Suharto era was impossible. Islam during the New Order regime was called 'moderate Indonesia Islam'.

After the end of the New Order era, Indonesian people gained the freedom to express their opinions, including on religious issues.² Hatta's view was that the Qur'an was the basis of religion, and so should not be the source of national law.³ Supomo argued that if Indonesia became an Islamic state, the people who adhered to religions other than Islam would find it difficult to unite themselves with the state.⁴

To seek a solution to the increasing tension between the nationalists and Islamic supporters, on 22 June 1945 on Sukarno's initiative – outside the authority of the BPUPK but with the support from some of BPUPK's members – a small working committee of nine members was set up, known as the *Panitia Sembilan*. The nine were Sukarno, Hatta, Yamin, Maramis, Subarjo, Wahid Hasyim, Kahar Muzakir, Agus Salim and Abikusno Cokrosuyoso. The first five represented the nationalist camp, while the remainder represented the Islamic groups (Abikusno and Agus Salim were from Sarekat Islam; Kahar Muzakir from Muhammadiyah, and Wahid Hasyim from Nahdlatul Ulama). They held a meeting to draft the preamble to the Constitution which became known as the "Jakarta Charter". This draft contained seven controversial words, *dengan kewajiban menjalankan syari'at Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya* ("with the obligation for its adherents to carry out Islamic law"). This phrase appeared in Article 29 of the preamble on the insistence of Kahar Muzakir and Wahid Hasyim from their standpoint as the representatives of Islamic supporters. The words ostensibly showed the intention of the drafters that in the new Indonesian state all Muslims would be obliged to follow Islamic law under the proposed new charter.⁵ It represented a compromise between the nationalist wing and the Islamic supporters,

including members of the Masyumi party, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama, who were demanding the establishment of an Islamic state (*Negara Islam*).⁶ These seven words became the subject of intense debate on both the nationalist and the Islamic sides. The phrase was later deleted by the Committee for the Preparation of Indonesian Independence (*Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia*, PPKI)⁷ on 18 August 1945 due to the domination of the committee by nationalists, especially Hatta.

After coming to power the New Order regime moved to enforce strict control over Islamic political organisations and ideology. This policy was part of the regime's broader aim of de-politicizing Indonesian society and dissolving the political parties. The military's intelligence services kept Muslim organizational activities under close surveillance and the military repressed any signs of Islamic militancy.⁸ In 1975 the central government established the Council of Indonesian Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), or MUI, as part of its goal of controlling the activities of *ulama* throughout the nation.

Although the New Order's heavy restrictions on Islamic political organizations successfully prevented a resurgence of political movements based on Islam, there were protests and dissent from Islamic groups. However, this did not lead to a rise of political activism among Islamic groups in Indonesia at that time. Rather, one significant response of Islamic groups to the control of the New Order regime was to throw their energies into the development of Islamic education and its institutions. Islamic education in Indonesia has long displayed some of the characteristics that have been identified with social movements.⁹

A shift in the relationship between the Indonesian state and Muslim organizations occurred during the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The tight control the government had exercised over Islamic groups was slightly eased as Islam gained increasing influence in Indonesian society. The New Order regime changed its policy and strategies toward Islamic organizations in order to co-opt the Muslim middle classes as a new base of support. For example, the government established the

² Elson, "Another Look at the Jakarta Charter Controversy 1945," 110.

³ Daniel S. Lev, *Islamic Courts in Indonesia: A Study in the Political Bases of Legal Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 40.

⁴ Elson, "Another Look at the Jakarta Charter Controversy 1945," 111.

⁵ Simon Butt, and Tim Lindsey, *The Constitution of Indonesia: a Contextual Analysis* (Oxford, Portland, Or.: Hart Publishing, 2012), 228.

⁶ Adnan Buyung Nasution, *The Aspiration for Constitutional Government in Indonesia: A Socio-Legal Study of the Indonesian Konstituante 1956-1959* (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1992), 10, and see Ahmad Suhelmi, *Polemik Negara Islam: Soekarno vs Natsir* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 2012).

⁷ This committee was set up on 7 August 1945 with Japanese support to transfer sovereignty to Indonesia after the declaration of Indonesian independence. It comprised twenty-seven members representing regional and ethno-religious interests. See Elson, "Another Look at the Jakarta Charter Controversy 1945," 119-20.

⁸ Donald J. Porter, *Managing Politics and Islam in Indonesia* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 2.

⁹ See Robert W. Hefner, "Islamic Schools, Social Movements, and Democracy in Indonesia," in Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *Making Modern Muslims: the Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 55-105. For a discussion about the struggle of Islamic higher institutions see Azyumadi Azra, "From IAIN to UIN: Islamic Studies in Indonesia," in Kamaruzzaman Buatamam-Ahmad and Patrick Jory (eds.), *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Yayasan Ilmuwan, 2011), 43-55.

Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*) or ICMI in 1990. It began to pay more attention to Islamic law and Islamic rituals. In 1991 Suharto issued a presidential instruction regarding the establishment of a new Islamic Legal Code, the Compilation of Islamic Laws (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam*).

III. THE FUTURE OF ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA

The end of the New Order era following the resignation of President Suharto on 21 May 1998, after more than three decades of authoritarian military rule, brought changes to all aspects of Indonesia, including relations between Jakarta and Aceh. Suharto's vice president, B. J. Habibie, replaced Suharto as President and Indonesia entered the *Reformasi* era. Even though the new cabinet comprised people who had held high office during the rule of President Suharto, Habibie's government initiated a program of rapid political liberalization and reform, leading to Indonesian's first democratic general elections since 1955 in June 1999.¹⁰ Although the Habibie government did not last long, many reforms were carried out, including constitutional reform, decentralization, and the Referendum on Independence for East Timor.

Since the 2000s Islamic movements in numerous Middle Eastern, European, South and Southeast Asian countries have called for the strict use of Islamic law. These calls can be traced back to the 1970s when political Islam gained substantial support in many countries in the Middle East and indeed, has expanded to Muslim countries in other regions around the world. Political Islam, also known as "Islamism", utilizes certain Muslim doctrines, beliefs and values as the foundation of a political structure that supporters of that ideology have called the Islamic state. Islamism is also defined as an "Islamic activism" the active assertion and promotion of beliefs, prescriptions, laws, or policies that are held to be Islamic in character. In Indonesia also has what is referred as the conservative turn.¹¹ One of the most significant issues in Islamic studies in recent decades is the rise of religious conservatism. Calls for the application of Islamic law by Muslim communities in many countries reflect this trend, including in Indonesia.

The end of the New Order government opened up an opportunity for the Islamic groups and organizations to raise the issue of Islam including *shariah* law after the long period of silence during the tight control of the New Order regime.

Democratization in Indonesia also has opened up an opportunity and provided space for Islam to voice their followers' desire. The strong and active demonstrations of Islamic groups and organizations can be happened under

the condition that democratic society exists, operates and allows to.

IV. REFERENCES

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¹¹ See Martin van Bruinessen (eds.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesia Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).