



INDONESIA

Quick Facts

Population: 275,122,131 (July 2021 est.)

Area: 1,904,569 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Javanese 40.1%, Sundanese 15.5%, Malay 3.7%, Batak 3.6%, Madurese 3%, Betawi 2.9%, Minangkabau 2.7%, Buginese 2.7%, Bantenese 2%, Banjarese 1.7%, Balinese 1.7%, Acehnese 1.4%, Dayak 1.4%, Sasak 1.3%, Chinese 1.2%, other 15% (2010 est.)

Government Type: Presidential Republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$1.119 trillion (2019 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated March 2021)

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia boasts the world's largest Muslim population and is the planet's largest Muslim-majority democracy. Indonesia is not, however, a Muslim state per se. Rather, it can best be classified as a secular democracy with significant Islamic influences. It is guided by a state philosophy known as the Pancasila, or five principles (faith, humanity, national unity, citizenship and social equality). Indonesia is also one of the world's most pluralistic societies in terms of its population's ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious affiliations. Much of this diversity is attributable to the country's diffuse geography; the Indonesian archipelago consists of more than 17,800 islands and islets.

While the virulent brand of Islamist activism epitomized by both jihadi and paramilitary groups is undoubtedly a feature of the country's modern social-political terrain, it represents only a small fraction of the wider Muslim community resident in the Southeast Asian nation. Although religious conservatism does figure prominently in national politics and culture, this has not translated into significant support for Islamist agendas among Indonesian citizens. Indeed, just one of Indonesia's thirty-four provinces, Aceh, has formally enshrined sharia law. Nevertheless, there are concerns that other provinces could eventually follow suit if Islamic conservatism continues to spread, and because the Indonesian government has of late delegated more and more power to provinces and districts to adopt their own laws.¹

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Since the nation's founding in 1945, the legal status of Islam has divided the nation. Issues such as incorporating *sharia* into the Indonesian Constitution and the establishment of an Islamic state are still hotly contested, but some Islamic political parties have attempted to adopt a more inclusive agenda. These groups promote a pluralistic ideology and focus on universal Islamic values. Yet, while many are pluralist and accommodating, some do adopt rigid, uncompromising positions.

Partai Keadilan Sejahtera – PKS (“Prosperous Justice Party”)

The PKS was originally founded in 1998 as “Lembaga Da’wah Kampus” (LDK), or “University Students’ Body for Islamic Predication”² at a time when Indonesia’s political climate accommodated Islam and sought to educate the public on its moral principles.³ It is the most organized of the Indonesian Islamist parties, with some 25, 000 core cadres and 400,000 carefully selected and well-trained supporting cadres.⁴ It has cultivated an image of collective decision-making and power-sharing, wherein no individual leader stands out. Additionally, the PKS has, in the past, successfully contained its internal differences and prevented public schisms. The party is popular with the modernist Islamic constituency, especially among students and educated middle-class Muslims. The PKS has moderated its Islamic ideology in order to appeal to non-Islamic elites and to stitch together a widely representative ruling coalition. The PKS, generally speaking, represents its members’ political aspirations, provides *tarbiyah* (educational) activities under the moral guidance of a teacher, and provides public services. For example, the PKS set up a *Pos Keadilan* (Justice Post) from which its members could assist communities affected by ethnic/religious conflicts or natural disasters. In December 1999, a year after the party’s official founding, its social services were institutionalized into the Pos Keadilan Peduli Umat (Justice Post Concerning Muslim Society), and expanded to include assistance to farmers selling their under-priced crops.⁵

In Indonesia’s 2004 and 2009 elections, the PKS secured 45 and 56 seats out of 550 in the country’s parliament, respectively. The PKS captured 24 percent of the vote in Jakarta and its voter base extended to both the urban elite and poor migrants residing in the slums. Its success was due, in part, to a political agenda that emphasized the broadly popular theme of “clean and caring government” in opposition to incumbent Islamist and secularist parties, perceived by voters to be corrupt and elitist.⁶ The party’s most deft political move has been to adopt the secular state ideology of *Pancasila*,⁷ which prioritizes democratic deliberations as well as *bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity).⁸ From the PKS’s perspective, democracy is a means to, in the long term, establish a Islam-inspired political ideology. In the 2019 elections, the PKS garnered 8.21 percent of votes cast⁹ and won 50 seats in the House of Representatives.¹⁰

The *tarbiyah* movement and activism on college campuses are essential for the PKS’s success.¹¹ The PKS engages members through hundreds of regular gatherings that are not only attended by the upper echelons of the party but also by ordinary people. Often, these meetings focus on religion and religious understanding; they are catalysts for member interaction, party discipline, and recruitment. This level of regular contact gives the PKS easy, meaningful access to thousands of its followers and helps it to mobilize members during elections.

However, the PKS’s image as a party free of corruption has been undermined in recent years by a number of controversies. Muhammad Misbakhun, a PKS lawmaker, was imprisoned for fraud in 2010,¹² while another, Arifinto, was arrested for watching pornography during a parliamentary session in 2011.¹³ In addition to these internal crises, the PKS lost influence in the ruling coalition in 2011 when then-President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono replaced the party’s research and technology minister, Suharno Surapranata, with environment minister Gusti Muhammad Hatta as part of a cabinet reshuffle. The move was purportedly a response to the Islamist party’s departure from coalition positions on policy issues.

Despite these controversies, however, the party suffered only a one percent dip in support in the April 2014 parliamentary elections. Analysts have argued that strong campaigning, particularly by secretary-general Anis Matta, and efficient party machinery helped. In its 2019 election bid, the PKS promised to pass a bill that would protect Muslim clerics, religious figures, and symbols in lieu of what it portrayed as persecution of the *Ulema*.¹⁴ The party gained 12 seats between 2014 and 2019.¹⁵

Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa – PKB (“National Awakening Party”)

The PKB was established to contest the June 1999 parliamentary elections. Its membership overlaps considerably with that of the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), which is currently the largest Islamist group in the

world. The PKB is the most politically successful of Indonesia's Islamic parties, and commands roughly nine-and-a-half percent of the national vote as of the country's 2019 elections. The PKB is led now by Muhaimin Iskandar, whose term as chairman runs until 2024.¹⁶ Notably, the NU believes that Muslims should be allowed to vote for non-Muslim political and administrative leaders¹⁷ – something which has contributed to the PKB's success. The PKB also reflects the NU's thinking on the interplay between religion and politics; in 2015, the NU led a messaging campaign designed to counter the Islamic State terrorist group with tolerance and compassion.¹⁸

Partai Persatuan Pembangunan – PPP (“United Development Party”)

The PPP emerged from a merger of four Islamic parties in 1973: the NU, the Indonesian Islamic Party, the United Islamic Party of Indonesia, and the Muslim Teachers' Party. From 1973 to 1998, the PPP was politically neutered, but nonetheless played an important role in helping to ensure that the country's military did not dominate the National Legislature. While the PPP has endured the post-Suharto political landscape as a result of support from modernist and traditionalist Islamic leaders,¹⁹ the party's share of votes declined drastically between 1999 and 2019. In the 1999 elections, the PPP had enjoyed more than 10 percent of all votes²⁰; in 2019, the PPP's voter share stood at less than half that figure, 4.6 percent.²¹ The PPP officially states that its ideological basis rests in Islam, and that religion has a vital role to play in the life of a nation. The PKS does not focus on the formal adoption of *sharia*, instead committing to *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution.

Partai Bulan Bintang – PBB (“Crescent Star Party”)

The PBB, which claims to be the descendant of Masyumi, the largest Islamic party of the 1950s, was founded in July 1998. Masyumi was banned in the 1960s and its leaders were jailed. After they were released, former Masyumi leaders established the *Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia* (DDII), a modernist Islamic organization with close relations with other similar bodies.²² The PBB was eventually formed from a collective of those groups.

The PBB espouses a classic Islamist political agenda. Both the PBB and PPP advocated for *sharia* during the 2002 annual session of the People's Consultative Assembly. In July 2017, when Indonesian President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo forcibly disbanded the Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) under a Presidential decree, PBB chairman Yusril Ihza Mahendra invited the former HTI members to join his party.²³ The PBB's influence, however, is limited; since the 2004 elections, it has never polled above 2.5 percent.

Front Pembela Islam – FPI (“Front of the Defenders of Islam”)

The FPI was founded by Muhammad Rizieq Syihab, a young man of Hadrami descent born into a family of *sayyids* (reputed descendants of the Prophet Muhammad).²⁴ Sometimes mistakenly characterized as a Salafi group, the FPI is actually Sufi in orientation. Before establishing the FPI, Syihab was a prominent religious preacher and a teacher at an Islamic school in Central Jakarta.²⁵ *Laskar Pembela Islam* (LPI), the paramilitary division of the FPI, was a loosely organized entity with an open membership.²⁶ The majority of its members were from mosque youth associations and a number of Islamic schools (*madrassas*) in Jakarta. Other members were simply unemployed youths, some of whom were *preman* (thug) group members motivated by money. The FPI routinely targets nightclubs and bars that violate their interpretation of Islamic code as well as the Ahmadiya minority sect.²⁷ Members who were indoctrinated by Syihab were taught that they should “live nobly, or better, die in holy war as a martyr.”²⁸ The LPI eventually succeeded in expanding its network to cities outside Jakarta. It claims 68 provincial and district branches and tens of thousands of sympathizers.²⁹

The LPI first made its presence felt on the national stage in a mass demonstration on August 17, 1998, where it denounced Megawati Soekarnoputri's presidential candidacy. It became “the most active

group in conducting what it called *razia maksiat* (raids on vice).³⁰ Moreover, the group demanded that the government repeal the “sole foundation” policy, which required all political and social organizations to accept *Pancasila*.³¹ The group supported the Jakarta Charter, which would have given Islamic law constitutional status. On one occasion, the group reportedly ransacked the offices of the National Human Rights Commission, which it felt “had not been objective in its investigation of the Tanjung Priok massacre (where the army had shot hundreds of Muslim demonstrators).”³² The FPI also threatened Americans in Indonesia in response to U.S. attacks on the Taliban in Afghanistan.³³

In late 2016, the FPI was at the forefront of protests against gubernatorial candidate Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, who had allegedly broken laws against blasphemy. The first rally was attended by between 150,000 and 250,000 people, while the second was much larger, with attendance estimated at 500,000 to 750,000.³⁴ The successful mobilization against Ahok contributed to his eventual defeat as well as his subsequent conviction in May 2017. Syihab currently resides in Saudi Arabia (where he fled to escape imprisonment) and alleges that the Joko Widodo administration conspires with the Saudis to prevent him from returning home.³⁵

The FPI has recently landed in legal trouble for questioning *Pancasila*. The Indonesian government has demanded that, in order to procure its organizational permit, it must remove words like ‘Caliphate’ and ‘Islamic State’ from its organizational principles. The group has been told it must also clearly specify its loyalty to *Pancasila*.³⁶

Laskar Jihad – LJ (“Holy War Force”)

LJ first captured the attention of the public in early 2000. It mobilized in response to purported Christian violence against Muslims in the Moluccas, an archipelago within Indonesia, as well as the apparent inability of the Indonesian central government to protect local Muslims. LJ was a paramilitary group established by Ja’far Umar Thalib and leading Salafi personalities such as Muhammad Umar As-Sewed, Ayip Syafruddin, and Ma’ruf Bahrun.

LJ was originally, for the most part, apolitical and quietist, though it was influenced by puritanical Wahhabi Salafism.³⁷ Many of its members were educated, were at some point part of campus Islamic student movements, were in contact with *Darul Islam*, an Islamist militant group. They were influenced by Thalib, who spent years studying in conservative and radical circles in Saudi Arabia and Yemen after which he was dispatched to Afghanistan to take part in *jihad*.³⁸ From 1994 to 1999, the cadres of LJ contented themselves with teaching and preaching Wahhabi Islam and operated within the transnational Salafi *dawa* movement.³⁹ However, it was the conflict in the Molucca Islands that propelled them into radical activism and violence. In fact, Thalib portrayed the Moluccas conflict as one instigated by Zionists and Christians.⁴⁰ Shortly after the conflict began, the group established a training camp in West Java and was dispatching thousands of its members – both as relief workers as well as fighters – to the Moluccas.⁴¹

LJ was militaristic in structure, with “one brigade divided into battalions, companies, platoons, teams and one intelligence section.”⁴² The group adopted the image of two crossed sabres under their creed (“La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasul Allah,” or “there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger”) as its symbol.⁴³

LJ dismissed manmade laws in favor of its own interpretation of *sharia*. It rejected democracy and popular sovereignty, maintaining that they fundamentally contradict Islam. The group condemned Megawati Sukarnoputri’s presidency on the grounds that she was a woman. While active, LJ repeatedly instigated violent street riots in the pursuit of *sharia*. Other acts of violence included attacks on cafes, brothels, gambling dens, and other places they considered representations of vice.

In the aftermath of the Bali bombings of October 2002, public opinion swung decidedly away from these local paramilitary groups as Indonesian Muslims expressed outrage at the targeting of co-religionists. At the same time, their patrons from security services withdrew support and endorsements because of the

international attention. Both the FPI and LJ were quickly disbanded.

Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia–MMI (“Jihad Fighter Group of Indonesia”)

The MMI “places a different emphasis on *sharia* discourse than does LJ and FPI, associating it with the Jakarta Charter and the historical struggle of the Darul Islam movement.”⁴⁴ It appears to be a front for various groups that have some relation to Darul Islam. The group’s key organizer is Irfan S. Awwas and its chief religious authority is Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. Ba’asyir is accused of having ties to al-Qaeda.

MMI is arguably one of the oldest militant organizations active in Indonesia’s post-New Order era. According to observers:

...it is a loose alliance of a dozen minor Muslim paramilitary organizations that had been scattered among cities such as Solo, Yogyakarta, Kebumen, Purwokerto, Tasikmalaya and Makassar. Notable member groups are Laskar Santri (Muslim Student Paramilitary Force), Laskar Jundullah (God’s Army Paramilitary Force), Kompi Badar (Badr Company), Brigade Taliban (Taliban Brigade), Corps Hizbullah Divisi Sunan Bonang (God’s Party Corps of the Sunan Bonang Division), Front Pembela Islam Surakarta (Front of the Defenders of Islam of Surakarta/FPIS) and Pasukan Komando Mujahidin (Holy Warrior Command Force).⁴⁵

MMI members lobby for the incorporation of *sharia* into the country’s constitution, particularly at the local and regional level, in former Darul Islam strongholds. One of the MMI’s main objectives is to establish an Islamic *khilafah* (caliphate). The MMI has actively called for *jihad*, particularly in the Moluccas and other troubled spots. In contrast to the large-scale mobilization of LJ, however, MMI has preferred to operate in small, well-trained, well-armed units. On June 12, 2017, the U.S. Department of State formally designated MMI a terrorist organization under Executive Order 13224.⁴⁶ MMI’s paramilitary wing is the Laskar Mujahidin Indonesia (LMI). Its propaganda magazine, *Risalah Mujahidin*, lobbies Indonesian political officials to impose *sharia*. It has connections to Jemaah Islamiya’s Muhammad Iqbal Abdurrahman. Muhammad Jibril Abdul Rahman, Abdurrahman’s son, was arrested on charges of raising funds for the JJ and the MMI. He was sentenced to five years in prison on June 29, 2010 for his role in the July 17, 2009 Jakarta terrorist attacks, in which seven people died.⁴⁷

Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT, or “Party of Liberation”)

It is unclear when HuT came to Indonesia, but some scholars trace the organization’s presence as far back as the 1970s when suspected group members emigrated to Southeast Asia and established the group through social and familial networks. Before the fall of Suharto’s regime, Hizb-ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) remained underground, moving from one mosque to another and avoiding any public coverage or evidence that might reveal its existence and activities. During the subsequent era of *reformasi* (political reform), however, the group made its appearance through several public rallies and called for the establishment of a *sharia*-based caliphate. But, for fear of prosecution, HTI has never revealed the identity of the leader of its Indonesian branch. Its public representative, Ismail Yusanto, claims that he is just the group’s spokesperson.

At present, the HTI is arguably one of the fastest growing Islamic movements in Indonesia, and exhibits a particularly strong presence on Indonesian Islamic universities. HTI advocates for *sharia* law, viewing Islam as a political system and way of life.⁴⁸ Like the MMI, its most important objective is to establish an Islamic *khilafah*.⁴⁹ The group lobbies for one global government for all Muslims. Therefore, it is not surprising that this group rejects the idea of nationalism or the nation-state. Unofficial estimates place its membership at one million⁵⁰ and the organization has been drawing new members established Islamic organizations. On July 10, 2017, President Joko Widodo signed a proposed amendment to the 2013 Law on Mass Organisations which would allow the state to ban any social or political group that did not pledge allegiance to the state ideology of *Pancasila*. HTI was outlawed under this decree and, in May

2018, state administrative courts rejected attempts to overturn the executive action.⁵¹

HTI successfully spread its ideas by focusing on discussions with the *ummah* on how to internalize Islamic teachings in daily life. Its strength is its ability to establish presence not only in Jakarta but also in distant provinces where basic needs go unfulfilled. HTI's ability to stay away from violence and instead utilize legal means to question its 2017 permit revocation has made the group more effective.

Darul Islam and Jemaah Islamiyah al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah (JI)

The Darul Islam movement led by S. M. Kartosoewirjo first emerged in the mid-1940s in West Java as part of the broader armed anti-colonial movement against the Dutch reoccupation after the Second World War. Kartosoewirjo declared the formation of an Indonesian Islamic State, Negara Islam Indonesia (NII), based on *sharia* in 1949. While the group closed its doors in 1962, its influence over armed movements on Indonesia's political periphery has proven to be long-lasting.⁵²

JI was founded in 1993 by two former Darul Islam leaders, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. JI saw itself as the heir of Darul Islam, despite its militant methods, including the deliberate targeting of civilians. Many prominent members of JI were veterans of the *jihad* against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the 1980s and had been recruited through Darul Islam channels.⁵³

The Bali bombings of October 2002, however, sparked an internal debate over the issue of killing of Muslims and whether the organization should focus its immediate attention on proselytization rather than bombings in order to advance its goals. This schism eventually forced a split within JI; a hardline faction led by two key Malaysian leaders—Noordin Top and Azahari Husin—broke away from the main organization and continued a reign of terror with attacks on embassies and hotels between 2003-2009.

JI has assumed a lower profile in recent years, in part because of the success of the Indonesian government's counter-terrorism operations, but also because of internal differences over how the group should engage in *jihad*—specifically, whether it should localize its activities to Indonesia or carry them out on a global scale. However, this shift should not be mistaken for inactivity. JI remains particularly active in Indonesian prisons, where incarcerated activists and militants enjoy easy excess to other prisoners because of the inadequacies of the under-resourced prison system.⁵⁴

In a significant breakthrough, Indonesia arrested alleged JI chief Para Wijayanto and his wife in a Jakarta hotel in July 2019. Wijayanto had received military training in a camp in the Southern Philippines and had been instrumental in getting new JI recruits, sending some to train with the Islamic State in Syria.⁵⁵ In the same timeframe, 81-year-old Abu Bakr Bashir, the alleged mastermind behind the JI Bali bombings, was due for release from prison on account of his ill-health. However, in January 2019, President Joko Widodo stipulated that Bashir must publicly endorse *Pancasila* and the Indonesian state, as well as renounce radicalism.⁵⁶ Widodo initially granted Bashir early release on humanitarian grounds,⁵⁷ but rescinded the decision after it was met with objections from Australia and from the families of domestic terror victims.⁵⁸

The Islamic State (IS)

Islamic *jihadi* extremism has found new expression in Indonesia in recent years through the growing appeal of the Islamic State. Since 2014, videos of Indonesians engaging in armed conflict in support of ISIS and other *jihadi* groups in Iraq and Syria have surfaced. Indonesia also became the target of the first ISIS-inspired attack in Southeast Asia when self-proclaimed followers of the group carried out coordinated several attacks across Jakarta in January 2016.⁵⁹ As of mid-2017, an estimated 500-700 Indonesians had made their way to Middle Eastern conflict zones.⁶⁰ Notably, a significant percentage of these people are believed to be women and children.⁶¹ Indonesians form a large contingent of Katibah Nusantara, a Southeast Asian wing of ISIS.

The growing influence of ISIS, in turn, caused a split in the Indonesian *jihadi* community. Pro-ISIS elements include followers of the late Poso-based *jihadi* leader, Abu Wardah Santoso, as well as

Aman Abdurrahman, who is currently incarcerated but has translated ISIS material into Indonesian for mass consumption while behind bars. Others, however, have also claimed the mantle of leadership for “ISIS Indonesia,” including Bahrum Naim, the alleged mastermind behind a foiled 2016 terror plot on Singapore’s Marina Bay Sands. Naim, a trained engineer, is known to have been instrumental in drawing Malaysian recruits to ISIS.⁶² Naim was killed in a U.S. drone strike as he was riding a motorcycle in Ash Shafa, Syria.

A comparatively recent wave of violence triggered fresh concerns for the growing threat posed by pro-ISIS groups and individuals in Indonesia. On May 8, 2018, pro-ISIS detainees at a Jakarta detention center staged a riot in which five police officers were killed. Five days later, several members of one family launched coordinated attacks on three churches in Surabaya.⁶³ Troublingly, children – including one girl as young as nine – participated in the attack. That same evening, a mother and son were killed when their husband/father accidentally detonated an explosive device. A day later, another family attempted to bomb the police headquarters in Surabaya. The only survivor from that family was an eight-year-old girl. All three families were acquainted with each other and had studied under the same religious teacher who was deported from Turkey back to Indonesia for attempting to join the Islamic State.⁶⁴

Another major problem is the issue of ISIS returnees. Indonesian counter-terrorism officials stated in 2019 that Indonesia would allow Indonesian ISIS members to return home on condition that they renounce radicalism.⁶⁵ In January 2020, however, Indonesia reversed this policy and will now no longer take back the 600 or more Indonesian ISIS members and their families.⁶⁶ The role of women in these activities is being scrutinized, as they are believed to have played a major role in radicalization.⁶⁷ Several Indonesian ISIS members are currently in Kurdish jails or in refugee camps.⁶⁸ ISIS returnees could be viewed as a security threat after eight ISIS-linked terrorists were arrested in a foiled bid to stage a series of bombings during the announcement of the April 2019 election results. The eight arrested are affiliated with to Jamaah Anshar Daulah, which had pledged allegiance to ISIS.⁶⁹

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

During the global Islamic resurgence of the 1960s and 1970s, numerous Indonesian students made their way to the great Islamic learning centers of the Arab world. Locally, an Islamic *dawa* (proselytization) movement began in Bandung around the campus-based Salman mosque and soon spread across the country to other educational institutions. This movement was organized around study groups modeled after the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The related *tarbiyah* movement began in the early 1980s at various university campuses.⁷⁰ The legacy of this process remains evident today in the increased social activism of the country’s various Muslim communities. One of the lasting impacts of the *tarbiyah* movement was to involve itself in the institution of marriages, aiming to ensure that families and any children born within them would be guided by its tenets and perspective. Followers of this movement believe that Islam is a total way of life and the utilization of *usrah* (groups) for the spread of their ideology is key.⁷¹

A driving force behind the *dawa* movement was the suppression of Islamist intellectuals. The Suharto administration placed substantial restrictions on the political aspirations of popular, socially active Muslim groups, like the NU and Muhammadiyah, to the point that they were effectively de-politicized. More conservative Muslims were also concerned about the increasing assertiveness of what was thought to be “liberal” Islamic ideas in Indonesian society:

“the general mass media, as another manifestation of the public sphere, tended to serve as the state ideological apparatus in championing modernization. The media was thus preconditioned to be sympathetic to the renewal movement. Realizing that the public sphere was hostile to their ideo-political aspirations, the Islamist intellectuals created a

subtle and fluid social movement, which was relatively impervious to state control, as a new foundation for constructing collective solidarity and identity.”⁷²

The works of early prominent Brotherhood members focused on closed groups, networking, piety, and, ultimately, the establishment of an Islamic state based on *sharia*. However, it was not until the late 1970s that these ideas and organizational techniques began to win a sizeable following. Indonesian Islamist leaders learned these ideas mainly through Indonesian translations of books written by Ikhwan activists. Critically, Hasan al-Banna’s ideas of beginning the Islamization process by focusing on the family and removing non-Islamic influences from national society had a deep impact.

Meanwhile, an influx of financial support from Saudi Arabia beginning in the mid-1970s created an alternative strain of Salafism.⁷³ The College of Islamic and Arabic (more commonly known by its Indonesian acronym, LIPIA), formed in 1980, popularized this form. The curriculum in LIPIA hews closely to Saudi versions of Salafist theology and ideology, with an emphasis on the teachings of Ibn Abdul Wahab, Ibn Taymiyyah, and the Hanbali school of classical Islamic jurisprudence. LIPIA has strong institutional links to the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh and is strictly monitored by the Saudi embassy in Jakarta. Its management has Saudi nationals in key positions. Alumni include Aman Abdurrahman, Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) leader Rizieq Syihab, and PKS leader Anis Matta, among other notables. Several leading Indonesian politicians have pursued higher Islamic education funded by Saudi money in the Islamic University of Madinah.⁷⁴ Saudi funding for Indonesian boarding schools has also increased in the last decade or so, enabling Indonesian students to study at, for instance, the Maududi Institute in Lahore, Pakistan.⁷⁵

It was Indonesia’s fifth Prime Minister, Mohammad Natsir, and his organization, the DDII, that was chiefly responsible for encouraging Islamic student activism in Indonesian universities.⁷⁶ While it is difficult to establish the extent of Natsir’s relationship with *Ikhwan* and *Jamaat* leaders, it is clear that he helped facilitate the travel of Indonesian students to *Ikhwan* and *Jamaat*-dominated universities in the Middle East and Pakistan. He was also responsible for introducing the *Ikhwan*’s religio-political ideas and methods of organization to Muslim students on various campuses. It was these students who established the Lembaga Dakwah Kampus (LDK, or Campus Proselytizing Network) and the Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia, (KAMMI, or “Indonesian Muslim Undergraduate Action Association”). With the collapse of the New Order regime, KAMMI activists formed what would become the PKS. The PKS maintains strong links with the broader transnational Salafi network.

Wahhabi ideology has made inroads into Indonesia since the 1960s via the building of mosques, paying preachers, and sending missionaries, as well as subsidizing generous scholarships and building a tuition-free university system. The followers of Wahhabism believe that Muslim society must first be Islamized through a gradual evolutionary process that includes *tarbiyah* and *tasfiyyah* (purification) before *sharia* can be fully implemented. They are fervently committed to *dawa* activities, such as participating in the creation of *halaqah* (Islamic study groups) and *daurah* (Islamic courses).

Following the Wahhabi tradition, the *tarbiyah* movement has organized Islamic teachings in schools and universities, the study of jurisprudence for women, tutorial study, and the translation of Islamic books. They study Islam intensively, proselytize, train proselytization coaches, and host intensive events focused on Islamization. In this fashion, the movement seeks to influence Indonesian youth by demonstrating growing piety in society.

The Saudi government has influenced Indonesian politics in a number of ways. It provides Indonesia’s neighbours, such as Malaysia, with financial commitments like investing in Malaysia’s oil and gas company, Petronas. This creates competition for Indonesia within its regional sphere. Further, its aforementioned funding for religious universities and scholarships for Indonesian students to study in Saudi Arabia has only become more generous over time.⁷⁷

Alternative patterns of thinking were also emerging within the Indonesian Muslim community. During

the late 1970s and early 1980, people—particularly younger intellectuals—sought to recalibrate Islam’s role in Indonesian society. This phenomenon, initially called *gerakan pembaruan* (the “reform movement”) and more recently, *Islam kultural* (“cultural Islam”), consciously rejected the aspirations of Islamist parties and sought to redefine Indonesian Islam as apolitical and cultural. Among the chief proponents of this movement were former president Abdurrahman Wahid and the late Nurcholish Madjid.⁷⁸

Cultural Islam has been critical of political Islam (or Islamist activism) in several ways. The success experienced by Islamist parties is limited, and they have not been able to unite Muslims politically or garner a majority of votes in general elections; they also have not succeeded in getting Islamic laws implemented. Many proponents of cultural Islam repudiate the concept of an Islamic state, arguing that the Quran contains no prescription for the structure of the state. Instead, they support *Pancasila*, asserting that it is consistent with Islamic principles. They dispute the sentiment that Muslims should only support Islamic parties, arguing that pluralist, “deconfessionalized,” parties were not less virtuous.⁷⁹ A 2013 Pew Research survey on Muslim belief in *sharia* revealed that, while 72 percent of polled Indonesians believed that *sharia* should be the law of the land, they wanted it limited to property and domestic disputes and were deeply divided on if it should apply to non-Muslims.⁸⁰

The democratization of Indonesia was critical to expanding the space for Islamic discourse and activism. Along with the proliferation of faith-based political parties, Islamic civil society groups also emerged (including the aforementioned radical organizations). This included Muslim groups whose interpretations of Islamic scripture were deemed unorthodox by the mainstream. One such movement was the Liberal Islam Network, a movement that shunned received wisdom and encouraged critical thinking. Formed in early 2001, it has come under heavy criticism from fundamentalist quarters in the Indonesian Muslim intellectual community. At the same time, the movement has an uneasy relationship with more moderate organizations such as the NU.⁸¹

Instances of hostility and even violence perpetrated by more extremist Muslim groups against fringe organizations are also concerning. For example, on January 28, 2011, members of the FPI attacked an *Ahmadiyah* mosque in Makassar and forced the congregation to evacuate the premises before destroying their property.⁸² Since then, attacks on *Ahmadiyah* places of worship and members by Muslim vigilante groups, such as FPI, have become more frequent. The last two presidential administrations have often proved unable or unwilling to stifle the violence; in 2017, the *Ahmadiyah* community in Manislor district protested against a local administrative rule that effectively required them to renounce their faith to get identification cards (the *Ahmadiyah* Islamic sect is not recognized as a religion according to Indonesia’s 1965 blasphemy laws,⁸³ and the national ID form requires one to state their religion). These cards are required to register marriages or to be treated at local hospitals.

It was in this climate that, at its annual convention in August 2015, the NU formally introduced the concept of “Islam Nusantara” or “Islam of the archipelago” into the discourse of Indonesian Islamic thought and practice. Islam Nusantara is predicated on the promotion of peace, moderation, and tolerance. Despite the ambiguity surrounding the concept, ambitious Indonesian leaders such as Said Aqil Siradj have suggested that Islam Nusantara could potentially take on a transnational character and be embraced and practiced by Muslims globally.

Islam Nusantara is itself not without controversy, however. Not only are the expansionist aspirations of its progenitors far too ambitious, the legitimacy of the concept itself remains debated within Indonesian circles, including among NU leaders themselves. Conservative critics of Islam Nusantara have dismissed it as *bida’a* (innovation), which is forbidden in Islam. Others have criticized it as the contamination of “pure” Islam by Indonesia’s dominant Javanese culture.

However, while most observers consider the NU and Muhammadiyah to be the guardians of Islamic moderation in Indonesia, there are signs that these organizations are themselves coming under the influence of growing Islamic conservatism. Conservative clerics and activists took over the leadership of

both organizations in 2005, forcing out progressive and moderate activists from positions of leadership. Even though moderates have since regained senior leadership posts in both movements, serious questions their future trajectories still abound. Tens of thousands of NU and Muhammadiyah activists joined the Defending Islam rallies in 2017, openly defying the senior leadership of both organizations, who urged them not to participate. Reports of young Muhammadiyah and NU members joining Islamist and Salafist groups are also frequently reported. Newly formed groups such as the ‘True Path NU’ (*NU Garis Lurus*), which was founded by young NU clerics who recently graduated from advanced Islamic studies programs in the Middle East, seek to remove any influence of ‘liberal’ and ‘pluralist’ teachings from the organization.⁸⁴

Indonesia’s reputation for religious tolerance suffered a notable blow in 2016. Radical groups staged two massive rallies calling for the conviction of Jakarta’s incumbent governor, Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, for blasphemy against the Quran. Under pressure from this Muslim social movement, the Indonesian government made the decision to distance itself from “Ahok” and limited its intervention to calls for restraint.⁸⁵ “Ahok” was subsequently defeated in the election’s second round by his political challenger, Anies Baswedan, a former education minister known to be a liberal but who nevertheless seized the opportunity to utilize these conservative Islamic forces. “Ahok” was later convicted of the crime of blasphemy and sentenced to two years imprisonment.⁸⁶ The Chairman of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), Charles Santiago, remarked at the time that, “Indonesia was thought to be a regional leader in terms of democracy and openness. This decision places that position in jeopardy and raises concerns about Indonesia’s future as an open, tolerant, diverse society.”⁸⁷

The episode involving “Ahok” suggests that religious identity politics can be successful in Indonesia. In the 2019 general elections, Islam played a major role in deciding the winners. Incumbent president Jokowi won another term, not only because he boosted Indonesia’s economy but also because he simultaneously developed closer relations with Muslim clerics.⁸⁸ Both instances suggest that there are segments of the Indonesian Muslim population for whom religious identity (in particular more conservative expressions of it) is playing an increasingly important role.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Indonesia’s political and constitutional history reveals that divisive debates surround the formal role of Islam in the state and *sharia’s* position in the constitution. Much of this debate focused on the Jakarta Charter, an agreement struck between Muslim and nationalist leaders on June 22, 1945 as part of the preparations for Indonesia’s independence. The most controversial part of the charter was a seven-word clause: “with the obligation for adherents of Islam to practice Islamic law” (*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syari’at Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya*). Further, Islamic leaders succeeded in having a stipulation inserted into the draft constitution that mandated the president be a Muslim. However, both this mandate and the seven-word clause were dropped from the constitution two months after the initial agreement.

The domestic resurgence of politically moderate Islam put greater pressure on the government. Suharto extended greater aid to the country’s Muslim community in the late 1980s, increasing state subsidies for mosque building, Islamic education, Muslim television programming, the celebration of religious holidays, and preferential treatment for Muslim entrepreneurs in state contracts. He lifted a ban on the veil in state schools and imposed tighter restrictions on the activities of Christian missionaries. The president even went as far as to sponsor an Islamic faction in the armed forces, previously a bastion of conservative secular nationalism.⁸⁹ Perhaps most prominent among the slew of legislative and institutional concessions was “the expansion of the authority of religious courts in 1989, the establishment of the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals association (ICMI) in 1990, lifting of the ban on female state school students wearing hijabs in 1991, the upgrading of government involvement in alms collection and distribution, the founding of an

Islamic bank (BMI) in 1992, and the abolition of the state lottery (SDSB) in 1993.⁹⁰

The end of Suharto's rule did not spell the end of efforts to exploit religious tensions for political advantage. After May 1998, in the wake of post-Suharto democratization, several politicians appealed to ethno-religious sentiments in order to enhance their credentials. The tactic had an especially bloody consequence in Maluku, Central Kalimantan, and Sulawesi, upsetting a delicate demographic balance between Christians and Muslims with the rise of sectarian paramilitaries and bloody campaigns of ethnic cleansing.

Sharia implementation appears to be gaining some traction at the regional level. In the north Sumatran province of Aceh, *sharia* was promulgated under special autonomy laws in early 2002. Yet there is intense debate within the local Islamic community over the scope of the laws and the details of their implementation. The *sharia* issue has also attracted strong support from Muslim groups in South Sulawesi, West Sumatra and Banten, but is still far short of receiving majority support. In a number of districts in West Java, *sharia* has been implemented in a *de facto* fashion by local Muslim groups, often in concert with district government officials and Ulama.⁹¹

At least in the case of Aceh, it bears noting that the prevalence *sharia*-inspired laws and by-laws reflects a compromise between the Indonesian government and the separatist Free Aceh Movement, whereby *sharia* law was introduced as part of a deal to appease the latter.⁹² However, there has been very little evidence to suggest that the Indonesian government intends to slow down – let alone stop – this gradual *sharia*-ization, despite multiple critics pointing out that it runs counter to the nation's secular constitution. There are also reports that radical Muslim elements have infiltrated Indonesia's bureaucracy and military and will bring pressure upon Jokowi to adopt more strict Islamic principles as part of its state philosophy in the future.⁹³

Notably, recent months have seen a significant uptick in counterterrorism activity, as the Jokowi administration has attempted to counter increased extremist propaganda and activity against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic. In the summer and early fall of 2020, Indonesian police arrested at least 72 suspected terrorists linked to a variety of groups, including *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD), and East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT), in a series of counterterrorism operations.⁹⁴ Subsequently, on December 10, 2020, Indonesian authorities arrested Aris Sumarsono (also known as Zulkarnaen), the purported leader of the al-Qaeda linked *Jemaah Islamiyah*. Zulkarnaen is suspected of being involved in fabricating bombs used in attacks which killed over 200 people in 2002 and 2003.⁹⁵

Thereafter, in late December 2020, Indonesia's government announced that it had dissolved the group Islamic Defender's Front (FPI), 29 of whose members had previously been convicted for committing acts of terror.⁹⁶ The group, however, does not appear to be finished; hours after the ban, the group's chairman announced the creation of a new mass Islamic organization called Front Persatuan Islam, which also goes by the FPI acronym.⁹⁷ The impact of this new organization, or its readiness to resort to violence, will become clear over time.

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