Negotiating Islam, Democracy and Pluralism: Islamic Politics and the State in Post-Reform Indonesia

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Abstract

The question of how democratic states navigate religious aspirations remains central in Muslim-majority societies. In Indonesia, this relationship has followed a nonlinear trajectory shaped by political alliances, institutional asymmetries, and ideological transformations. This article explores how successive governments—from Habibie to Joko Widodo—have managed the complex intersection of Islam, democracy, and pluralism. Using a qualitative comparative approach, it identifies shifts in state strategies toward Islamic political expression, ranging from symbolic inclusion to legal restriction and bureaucratic regulation. The concept of *contested accommodation* is proposed to explain how Islamic norms have been selectively engaged, redirected, or constrained through evolving institutional mechanisms. While some administrations prioritized inclusive pluralism, others aligned with conservative religious agendas. Populist religiosity, transnational influences, and media amplification further shaped the policy landscape. The findings suggest that Islamic political expression in Indonesia is neither fully absorbed nor rejected, but continually renegotiated. Pluralism, in this context, is sustained not through ideological consensus but through ongoing recalibration within democratic institutions.

Keywords: Islamic Politics, Democracy, Pluralism, Post-Reform Indonesia, Contested Accommodation

I. Introduction

The fall of Suharto in 1998 marked the end of more than three decades of centralized authoritarian rule in Indonesia and initiated a period of political uncertainty. In the ensuing vacuum, reformist elites, civil society groups, and regional actors vied to shape the institutional contours of the emerging democracy. Early reforms—particularly decentralization and electoral restructuring—opened space for civic participation, but

their implementation produced uneven outcomes.[1] While some regions embraced meaningful reform, others reverted to entrenched patronage networks under new institutional arrangements. than than consolidating democratic norms, the early Reformasi period exposed persistent asymmetries of power across subnational governance.[2]

The resurgence of Islamic political expression was among the most significant changes during this period. Groups marginalized under the New Order began to reassert themselves through party formation, grassroots activism, and digital outreach.[3] This revival brought both democratic engagement and normative contestation. While some actors operated within pluralist frameworks, others advanced moral agendas that challenged constitutional protections. In Muslim-majority areas, local governments enacted sharia-influenced bylaws, sparking renewed debate over the boundaries of religious authority in a secular constitutional state.[4]

Islamic discourse gradually expanded its influence into lawmaking, bureaucratic practice, and national identity narratives.[5] Moderate organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah played a role in promoting inclusive frameworks like *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan*, yet these efforts often encountered resistance.[6] Within the state, religious language was sometimes appropriated to consolidate political legitimacy. In this context, pluralism was no longer treated as a foundational value but became a site of ideological struggle in an evolving public sphere.[7]

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[1] Hans Antlöv, Anna Wetterberg, and Leni Dharmawan, "Village Governance, Community Life, and the 2014 Village Law in Indonesia," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 161–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2015.1129047.

[2] Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati, eds., *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots* (NUS Press Pte Ltd, 2018), 1–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1xxzz2; Eve Warburton and Edward Aspinall, "Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression: Structure, Agency and Popular Opinion," *Contemporary Southeast Asia,* 41, no. 2 (2019): 255–85, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26798854.

[3] Alexander R. Arifianto, "The State of Political Islam in Indonesia: The Historical Antecedent and Future Prospects," *Asia Policy* 15, no. 4 (October 2020): 111–32, https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2020.0059; Zuly Qodir, "Post-Islamism And Reform Islamic Law: The Challenges And Future Of Political Islam In Indonesia," *Ahkam* 23, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v23i2.31484.

[4] Robin Bush, ed., "10. Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia: Anomaly or Symptom?," in *Expressing Islam* (ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 174–91, https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-014.

[5] Arifianto, "The State of Political Islam in Indonesia."

[6] Alexander R. Arifianto, "Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology: The Responses by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Towards Islamism in Indonesia," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Political Norms in Southeast Asia*, ed. Gabriel Facal, Elsa Lafaye De Micheaux, and Astrid Norén-Nilsson (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), 337–55, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-9655-1_20.

[7] Arifianto. see also Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 112–19.

While these developments have reshaped state–Islam dynamics, academic studies have yet to fully capture their regime-level implications. Much of the literature on Islamic politics in post-authoritarian Indonesia remains focused on isolated cases or single administrations, leaving broader patterns underexplored. To explore these dynamics, this study traces how five presidents—from Habibie to Widodo—have approached Islamic political expression through varying institutional and discursive strategies. It draws on the concept of *contested accommodation* to describe how Islamic norms are selectively negotiated, redirected, or constrained. This framework offers a lens to understand how democratic institutions mediate between pluralist commitments and majoritarian religious pressures.

The concept captures the shifting and often ambiguous ways in which Islamic aspirations have been managed within state structures. The relationship is not best understood as a binary of inclusion or exclusion, but as a process of ongoing negotiation shaped by regime-specific strategies, institutional constraints, and political pressures. By tracing the evolution of state–Islam engagement across successive administrations, the article contributes to broader debates on pluralism, democratic legitimacy, and the role of religion in governance within post-authoritarian Muslim-majority societies.

II. The Habibie Era: Democratic Reform and the Reconfiguration of Islamic Identity

Suharto's resignation in 1998 occurred during a moment of institutional fragility, economic crisis, and social unrest. In this unsettled landscape, B. J. Habibie, long identified with the New Order technocracy, assumed national leadership amid broad legitimacy challenges.[8] Although widely seen as a transitional figure, Habibie initiated key reforms that would shape Indonesia's post-authoritarian trajectory. These included easing political restrictions, restoring civil liberties, freeing political prisoners, and liberalizing the press—steps that opened space for public debate and civic engagement.[9]

One of Habibie's most consequential institutional reforms was the institutional separation of the military (TNI) from the national police (Polri), reinforcing civilian authority over domestic security.[10] Concurrently, he repositioned Islam's role in public policy by leveraging his longstanding affiliation with the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI). This connection signaled not only ideological affinity but also a political strategy to channel Islamic aspirations into the reform agenda. Initiatives

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[8] R. William Liddle, "B. J. Habibie and the Transformation of Indonesian Politics," *Indonesia* 112, no. 1 (October 2021): 31–76, https://doi.org/10.1353/ind.2021.0006.

[9] Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, *Problems of Democratization in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions and Society.* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 17–20.

[10] Marcus Mietzner, "Military Politics, Islam and the State in Indonesia: From Turbulent Transition to Democratic Consolidation," *ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute*, 2008.

such as the support for Bank Muamalat and the expansion of *Baitul Mal wa Tamwil* (BMT) institutions illustrated his attempt to institutionalize Islamic economic values within the broader framework of democratization.[11]

These reform initiatives, however, exposed unresolved tensions over identity politics. As political space widened, Islamic groups aligned with Habibie began clashing rhetorically with nationalist–secular supporters of Megawati Soekarnoputri. This rivalry revealed the fragility of Indonesia's newly liberalized democracy and demonstrated how quickly religious identity could be politicized. At the structural level, the enactment of Law No. 22 of 1999 on regional autonomy enabled local governments to adopt sharia-based regulations. While decentralization was widely viewed as a democratizing breakthrough, it also raised concerns about minority rights and the erosion of pluralism at the subnational level.[12]

Jean-Paul Faguet's theory of decentralization offers useful insight into these outcomes. While local autonomy can enhance responsiveness, Faguet cautions that it may reinforce majority dominance and deepen social fragmentation without institutional safeguards.[13] In Indonesia, this risk materialized as local governments enacted morality-based bylaws under the guise of cultural expression. Although framed as democratic empowerment, many such initiatives clashed with national civil rights and pluralism commitments. For Faguet, meaningful decentralization requires equilibrium—balancing local responsiveness with central oversight to prevent exclusionary outcomes.

Habibie's administration also introduced reforms in religious economic policy. Law No. 38 of 1999 on Zakat Management incorporated Islamic charitable obligations into national poverty reduction programs, giving institutional weight to religious ethics.[14] R

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[11] Ilham Muhamad Nurjaman, Samsudin Samsudin, and Sulasman Sulasman, "Peran ICMI Masa Kepemimpinan BJ Habibie (1990-2000) Dalam Pembangunan Nasional," *Hanifiya: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 5, no. 1 (April 27, 2022): 59–70, https://doi.org/10.15575/hanifiya.v5i1.15925; Riki Rahman and Faisal S Hazis, "ICMI and Its Roles in the Development of the Middle Class Muslim Communities in Indonesia in the New Order Era," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 56, no. 2 (May 26, 2019): 341–66, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2018.562.341-366; Imron Rosidi, "The ICMI (Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals) and Its Political Tendency during the Indonesian New Order," *Jurnal Ilmiah Universitas Batanghari Jambi* 22, no. 3 (October 31, 2022): 1918, https://doi.org/10.33087/jiubj.v22i3.2333.

[12] Abdul Haris Fatgehipon, "The Relationship Amongst Soeharto, Military, and Muslim in the End of the New Order Regime," *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* 26, no. 1 (February 20, 2016): 1, https://doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v26i1.5141; Greg Fealy and Sally White, eds., "10. Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia: Anomaly or Symptom?," in *Expressing Islam* (ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 174–91, https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-014.

[13] Jean-Paul Faguet, "Decentralization and Governance," *World Development* 53 (January 2014): 2–13, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2013.01.002.

[14] Ali Murtadho Emzaed, Kamsi Kamsi, and Ali Akhbar Abaib Mas Rabbani Lubis, "A Politics of Recognition: The Legislation of Zakat Law in a Transition of New Order and Reform Era," *Ulumuna* 24, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 320–47, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v24i2.404.

This move did not contradict democratic ideals but instead positioned zakat as part of an inclusive development strategy. It reflected an effort to align Islamic values with state-led welfare initiatives and demonstrated how religion could be integrated into governance without undermining pluralist commitments.

Public responses to zakat reforms and the expansion of Islamic financial institutions such as Bank Muamalat suggest broad acceptance—especially when Islamic norms are framed around social welfare. However, proposals rooted in punitive legalism, like *qisas* (retaliatory punishments), failed to gain traction. This contrast highlights a pattern of selective accommodation: Islamic expressions that align with pluralist and rights-based values tend to be supported, while legalistic formulations perceived as incompatible with democratic norms are sidelined.[15]

As Olivier Roy articulated, the concept of post-Islamism helps explain this tendency. Rather than pursuing formal Islamic law, post-Islamist actors emphasize ethical and symbolic expressions of faith within democratic frameworks.[16] In the Indonesian context, Menchik's idea of "productive intolerance" offers a complementary view, suggesting that the state manages pluralism by selectively filtering religious norms according to constitutional and social constraints.[17] From this perspective, zakat policy was not simply accommodation, but a strategic alignment of religious expression with state-led democratic governance.

Habibie's transitional presidency created new opportunities for religious expression within Indonesia's emerging democracy. Initiatives such as press liberalization, decentralization, and support for Islamic economic institutions reflected a growing receptiveness to Islamic aspirations.[18] Yet, the expansion of civic space did not resolve deeper ideological divides. As religion became more central to political identity, tensions emerged between democratic inclusion and rising polarization. Within this unsettled landscape, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) became the President of Indonesia, offering a distinct approach to state–religion relations—grounded in ethical pluralism, cultural inclusion, and his long-standing commitment to Islamic moderation and civic coexistence.

III. The Gus Dur Era: Pluralist Reform and the Struggle Against Conservative Hegemony

Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency began at a time when Indonesia was still navigating the aftermath of authoritarian collapse and grappling with the uncertainties of democratic

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[15] Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*.

[16] Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 2004).

[17] Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*.

[18] Made Supriatma, "B.J. Habibie: Presiden Peralihan, Peletak Dasar Demokrasi Indonesia," *Tirto.Id* (blog), 2019, https://tirto.id/bj-habibie-presiden-peralihan-peletak-dasar-demokrasi-indonesia-ehVD.

transition. Often known by his popular name, Gus Dur brought a reputation shaped by decades of religious scholarship, cultural pluralism, and civic activism. His election as President in 1999, mediated through intense political bargaining in the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat: MPR), reflected the fragmented power dynamics that characterized the early reform era.[19] Wahid challenged dominant narratives of religious identity by articulating a model of political Islam grounded in ethical responsibility, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive citizenship.[20] Although his time in office was brief, it marked a significant departure from prior tendencies toward religious majoritarianism. This pluralist stance, however, placed him at odds with entrenched interests that regarded his reforms as disruptive to prevailing structures of moral and political authority.[21]

Wahid's pluralist orientation found expression in a series of policies that sought to restore civil dignity to communities long excluded from formal recognition. Among the most consequential were the state's renewed acknowledgment of Confucianism and the reintroduction of cultural and religious rights for Chinese Indonesians, including public celebrations of Chinese New Year (*Imlek*). While these initiatives may have appeared procedural, they carried symbolic significance by challenging deeply embedded patterns of exclusion inherited from the New Order.[22] Rather than elevating Islam as a singular national identity, Wahid envisioned a form of civic nationalism in which religious and ethnic diversity were treated as integral to the Indonesian project. His administration began to reposition the state—not as an arbiter of moral orthodoxy, but as a guarantor of equal citizenship under a pluralist democratic order. Yet, these moves were not

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[19] Wahid's ascent to the presidency in October 1999 resulted from intricate parliamentary maneuvering, not from a direct electoral mandate. His rise reflected the tactical leverage of the so-called Central Axis (poros tengah), a bloc of Islamic-oriented parties—including PAN, PPP, and PBB—that mobilized against Megawati Soekarnoputri's candidacy in an effort to reclaim relevance after poor electoral performance. Remarkably, Wahid's National Awakening Party (PKB), with just 51 seats, secured 373 votes—an outcome that revealed both the fluidity of elite alliances and the continued capacity of Islamic political networks to influence institutional transitions in early Reformasi. For further details, see: Marcus Mietzner et al., "The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 42, no. 1 (2020): 58–84, https://doi.org/10.1355/cs42-1c; Tri Ratnawati, "Crouch, Harold. (2010). Political Reform in Indonesia after Soeharto," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (December 5, 2018): 131–42, https://doi.org/10.14203/jissh.v3i1.49.

[20] Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual *Ulama:* The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-modernist Thought," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (October 1997): 323–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596419708721130.

[21] Saefur Rochmat, "Abdurrahman Wahid on the Public Role of Islam and Theory of Secularization," *Asian Social Science* 13, no. 11 (October 30, 2017): 170, https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v13n11p170.

[22] Nicholas J. Long, "'Straightening What's Crooked'? Recognition as Moral Disruption in Indonesia's Confucianist Revival," *Anthropological Forum* 29, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 335–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2019.1664984.

universally embraced. For many conservative actors, Wahid's reforms disrupted what they viewed as the moral coherence of the national polity, provoking renewed debates over the proper role of religion, identity, and state authority in post-authoritarian Indonesia.[23]

Nevertheless, the reformist ambition embodied in these policies sparked contention, particularly among conservative actors who felt increasingly marginalized in public discourse. Although Arifianto does not directly address these specific reforms, his analysis of post-reform Islamism underscores how some conservative Islamic actors began asserting greater authority in public discourse. Their discomfort with pluralist policies reflected a broader ideological contention over the role of religion in defining Indonesian national identity. Within this tension, Wahid's inclusive agenda emerged not only as an institutional shift, but also as a challenge to dominant narratives about who belongs in the nation's moral order.[24]

Wahid's reformist orientation extended beyond religious inclusion to matters of political ideology. Among his most controversial initiatives was the revocation of the long-standing ban on communism through Presidential Decree No. 1 of 2000, accompanied by his attempt to nullify TAP MPRS No. XXV/1966.[25] By doing so, he sought to remove the legal and symbolic barriers that had long equated communism with treason, and instead promote a more open space for ideological reconciliation—something he saw as essential to the health of a democratic society.[26] While framed as an act of democratic deepening, the initiative provoked fierce opposition from conservative and military-aligned actors. For many, particularly those shaped by the political traumas of the 1965–66 anti-communist purges, communism remained not just a political ideology but a moral anathema.[27] The backlash reflected enduring fault lines within Indonesian political culture, where reconciliation and pluralism often collide with deeply embedded narratives of existential threat.

The ideological resistance to Wahid's pluralist initiatives—particularly his attempt to revoke the 1966 anti-communist decree—can be productively examined through Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as interpreted by scholars such as Kate Crehan

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[23] Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002); Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual <i>Ulama."

[24] Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*.

[25] Ratnawati, "Crouch, Harold. (2010). Political Reform in Indonesia after Soeharto"; Ahmad Suhelmi, "Communism Debated Again: The Muslim Response to the Idea of Revoking the 1966 Anti-Communism in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 13, no. 1 (2006), https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v13i1.574.

[26] Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*.

[27] Suhelmi, "Communism Debated Again," 2006.

and Marcus Green.[28] Rather than expressing mere policy disagreement, the opposition reflected a broader struggle over who could legitimately define the moral and political order of post-authoritarian Indonesia. Wahid's efforts to normalize ideological plurality—especially in relation to stigmatized identities like communism—challenged deeply entrenched conservative narratives rooted in Islamic orthodoxy and the legacy of the 1965 anti-communist violence.

In response, conservative and military-aligned actors mobilized counter-hegemonic discourses portraying Wahid's reforms as a threat to the moral fabric of the nation. These narratives did not rely solely on institutional mechanisms but were circulated through symbolic politics, invoking fear of national disintegration and moral decay. From a Gramscian standpoint, this episode exemplifies how hegemonic contestation operates not only through coercive power or formal authority but also through the production and diffusion of socially resonant narratives competing for moral legitimacy in the public sphere.[29]

While Wahid's administration introduced a pluralist vision that emphasized minority rights and ideological openness, the subsequent leadership under Megawati Soekarnoputri adopted a more restrained and pragmatic approach. Her tenure as a President marked a shift from normative inclusion to administrative stability, laying the groundwork for a different mode of negotiating religious and political tensions in post-reform Indonesia.

IV. The Megawati Era: Sharia Institutionalization and the Rise of Regional Moral Governance

The presidency of Megawati Soekarnoputri (2001–2004) unfolded during a phase of institutional stabilization in the early post-authoritarian period. One of the key legal developments under her leadership was the issuance of Law No. 18 of 2001, which granted special autonomy to the province of Aceh. This legal arrangement not only acknowledged the province's unique sociopolitical context but also enabled the institutionalization of Islamic law through regional legislation (*qanun*). As Feener notes, this legal transformation was driven not only by the logic of conflict resolution, but also by Islamic intellectuals and bureaucrats who saw *shari'a* codification as part of a long-term project of moral reform and social engineering. These developments clarified the

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28 Kate Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) esp. chapters 2 and 4; Marcus E Green, "Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*," *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 4 (December 2011): 387–404, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.641913.

29 For empirical analysis of opposition to Wahid's revocation attempt of the 1966 decree, Ahmad Suhelmi, "Communism Debated Again: The Muslim Response to the Idea of Revoking the 1966 Anti-Communism in Post-Soeharto Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 1970), https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v13i1.574.

unresolved tension between regional autonomy and constitutional commitments to pluralism.[30]

Aceh's legal transformation soon became a reference point for other Muslim-majority regions seeking to formalize Islamic norms through local governance. In the years following its special status, numerous regional governments began drafting and enforcing *sharia*-inspired regulations, many of which targeted personal conduct, gender norms, and moral behavior. These initiatives, often justified under the banner of local identity and cultural authenticity, reflected religious motivations and political calculations— particularly among local elites seeking to mobilize conservative constituencies in competitive electoral environments.[31]

Examples from several districts, such as Padang and Bulukumba, illustrate how these regulations translated into concrete policies: requiring female students to wear the hijab or mandating Qur'anic literacy for civil marriage registration.[32] While framed as expressions of piety or tradition, such regulations have raised concerns regarding the erosion of civil rights and the rise of moral authoritarianism at the subnational level. This moral turn in local governance reveals a deeper legal tension between localized Islamic normativity and Indonesia's constitutional commitment to pluralism. As Menchik explains through the notion of "productive intolerance," the state often incorporates exclusionary religious norms into its democratic structures, enabling majority-driven morality to dominate public policy while sidelining minority protections.[33] Such dynamics challenge the coherence of constitutional pluralism and risk fragmenting the rule of law, as local legal regimes increasingly assert values that diverge from national civil liberties frameworks. Scholars have pointed out that Indonesia's decentralization framework, while intended to deepen democratic participation, has also opened pathways for the localization of conservative religious norms.[34] These dynamics call for a critical reassessment of whether regional autonomy, in practice, advances or undermines national ideals of pluralist citizenship and equal protection under the law.

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[30] R. Michael Feener, *Shariʿa and Social Engineering: The Implementation of Islamic Law in Contemporary Aceh, Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Oxford University PressOxford, 2013), 61–97, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199678846.001.0001.

[31] Michael Buehler, *The Politics of Shari'a Law: Islamist Activists and the State in Democratizing Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316417843; Bush, "10. Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia."

[32] Abd. Kadir Ahmad, "The Whip Law, Implementing Shari'a Formalization at Local Community: The Case of Padang Village in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi," *International Journal of Engineering & Technology* 7, no. 2.29 (2018): 311, https://doi.org/10.14419/ijet.v7i2.29.13644.

[33] Jeremy Menchik, "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (2014): 591–621, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417514000267.

[34] Buehler, *The Politics of Shari'a Law*; Faguet, "Decentralization and Governance"; Bush, "10. Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia."

At the very moment when regional governments were expanding moral regulation under the banner of local autonomy, national leaders found themselves compelled to confront an escalating transnational security crisis—one with implications far beyond domestic politics. Following the institutionalization of Islamic law in Aceh and the spread of sharia-inspired local regulations, Megawati's presidency was soon confronted with a new national security dilemma. The 2002 Bali bombings, which killed over 200 people, exposed the presence of transnational jihadist networks such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and their connections to al-Qaeda. The Indonesian government responded by adopting more centralized counterterrorism measures, including forming the elite unit Densus 88 and issuing the 2003 Anti-Terrorism Law.[35] While framed as necessary to ensure public security, these policies also raised concerns about overreach. Civil society actors and segments of the broader Muslim community expressed fears that the enforcement of such laws could marginalize mainstream Islamic groups and reinforce perceptions of disproportionate scrutiny.

Importantly, this securitization dynamic did not operate in isolation. Instead, it intersected with the simultaneous expansion of moral conservatism at the regional level—producing a hybrid mode of governance where both Islamic and pluralist dissent could be contained through legal instruments. As Diprose and McRae argue, Indonesia's trajectory reveals a form of *securitized pluralism*, where legal frameworks originally designed to neutralize extremism are also deployed to regulate civic dissent and moral deviance.[36] In this context, securitization and Islamization do not stand in contradiction, but often reinforce one another through overlapping bureaucratic and normative apparatuses. Drawing on Scheppele's (2018) notion of *autocratic legalism*, the state's use of legal tools reflects a dual strategy of consolidating executive authority while selectively accommodating dominant moral forces. This convergence risks entrenching a model of governance that treats both radical Islam and liberal pluralism as threats—each to be neutralized through calibrated forms of legal control.[37]

While framed as necessary to ensure public security, these policies raised concerns about excessive reach and selective enforcement. Civil society groups and segments of the broader Muslim community feared that counterterrorism laws, rather than solely targeting violent extremists, could be used to marginalize mainstream Islamic actors and

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35 Sidney Jones, "Briefing for the New President: The Terrorist Threat in Indonesia and Southeast Asia," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (2008): 69–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208316962.

36 Rachael Diprose, Dave McRae, and Vedi R. Hadiz, "Two Decades of *Reformasi* in Indonesia: Its Illiberal Turn," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, July 25, 2019, 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1637922.

37 Kim Lane Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 85, no. 2 (2018): 545–83, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev/vol85/iss2/2/.

intensify scrutiny toward lawful religious expression.[38] In a context where pluralism remained structurally fragile, the shift toward securitized governance risked compounding the already complex relationship between Islam, democracy, and national identity in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Parallel to the securitization of Islam, Megawati's administration also witnessed the formalization of Islamic law in Aceh as part of a broader recalibration of religion–state relations. The enactment of Law No. 18 of 2001, granting Aceh special autonomy, represented a negotiated compromise aimed at containing separatist aspirations through institutional concessions. As Feener argues, the legal accommodation of Islamic identity in Aceh enabled religious norms to be codified within a formal subnational legal system, operationalized through qanun legislation under provincial autonomy.[39]

This precedent contributed to the proliferation of sharia-based regulations in other regions, where local elites—particularly in several Muslim-majority districts across West Sumatra, South Sulawesi, and West Java—pursued morality-based legislation without the formal autonomy granted to Aceh.[40] Between 2002 and 2008, more than 150 sharia-inspired regional regulations were issued across Indonesia, institutionalizing moral conservatism through decentralized legal frameworks.[41] This pattern did not represent a coherent ideological transformation, but rather emerged from the intersection of diverse political incentives, legal permissiveness, and socio-religious pressures that varied across local contexts.

The ideological momentum generated during the Megawati administration laid the groundwork for new forms of religious engagement that became increasingly structured under her successor. During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's presidency, conservative Islamic actors gradually broadened their influence—not merely by reinforcing the legacy of local moral legislation, but by institutionalizing their presence within national religious and political frameworks. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), in particular, expanded its role beyond theological guidance to actively shape legal and policy debates through fatwas and legislative lobbying. Debates over Islamic morality and democratic pluralism, once peripheral to state discourse, became embedded in formal mechanisms of governance. This evolution marked a shift toward more negotiated, bureaucratized, and legitimized forms of religious authority within the apparatus of the state.

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38 Leo Suryadinata, "Indonesia: Continuing Challenges and Fragile Stability," *Southeast Asian Affairs, ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institut*, 2004, 87–103; Choirul Mahfud et al., "Religious Radicalism, Global Terrorism and Islamic Challanges in Contemporary Indonesia," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora* 11, no. 1 (July 27, 2018): 8, https://doi.org/10.12962/j24433527.v11i1.3550.

39 Feener, *Sharīʿa and Social Engineering*, xvii–xviii, 17–19.

40 Michael Buehler and Dani Muhtada, "Democratization and the Diffusion of Shari'a Law," *South East Asia Research* 24, no. 2 (2016): 261–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828x16649311.

41 Buehler, *The Politics of Shari'a Law*, 6; Bush, "10. Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia," 174–75.

V.   The SBY Era: Moral Conservatism and the Erosion of Religious Pluralism

During the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) (2004–2014), issues of religious identity and national cohesion gained increasing salience in state policy. Instead of diverging from prior trajectories, his administration deepened ties with religious authorities—particularly the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), whose influence steadily expanded. Over time, Islamic morality became more central to state discourse, often invoked to preserve social order.

This dynamic was most visible in the state's handling of the Ahmadiyah. In 2005, MUI declared the sect deviant, prompting calls from hardline groups such as FPI to ban its activities. The government responded with a 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree (*Surat Keputusan Bersama: SKB*) restricting Ahmadiyah's religious practice.[42] The 2011 Cikeusik tragedy, where three Ahmadiyah members were killed, underscored the cost of this permissive stance.[43] As Menchik argues, such behavior reflects "productive intolerance," where exclusionary actions operate within democratic institutions.[44]

Beyond sectarian conflict, the Yudhoyono administration laid the groundwork for the broader institutionalization of Islamic morality through legislative and regulatory means. MUI's authority was no longer confined to doctrinal interpretation; over time, it extended deep into public policy, influencing both national legislation and bureaucratic decision-making. The Council's 2006 fatwa against pornography, for instance, became a key moral justification for the Anti-Pornography Law passed in 2008, which was vigorously supported by Islamic parties such as the PKS. While fatwas carry no legal decision in formal terms, they were frequently cited in parliamentary debates and local government bylaws, thereby elevating MUI's position from an advisory body to a de facto regulatory institution.[45] This shift illustrates how the SBY government drew upon Islamic moral discourse as a means of maintaining political stability—even at the expense of democratic pluralism. This trajectory corresponds to what Mietzner and Muhtadi conceptualize as a shift from inclusive pluralist engagement toward calculated containment, wherein dissenting Islamic voices are not outright suppressed but strategically managed through selective co-optation, bureaucratic accommodation, and legal constraints.[46]

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[42]   Nina Mariani, "Ahmadiyah, Conflicts, and Violence in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 1 (June 1, 2013): 1, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v3i1.1-30.

[43]   Wulan Purnama Sari, "Analisis Wacana Kritis Kasus Penyerangan Terhadap Jemaah Ahmadiyah Di Cikeusik," *Jurnal Komunikasi* 10, no. 1 (2018): 87, https://doi.org/10.24912/jk.v10i1.1507.

[44]   Menchik, "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia."

[45]   Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulema Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam," *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (May 2020): 21–35, https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2019.13; P. Gillespie, "Current Issues in Indonesian Islam: Analysing the 2005 Council of Indonesian Ulama Fatwa No. 7 Opposing Pluralism, Liberalism and Secularism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (February 9, 2007): 202–40, https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etm001.

[46]   Mietzner et al., "The Myth of Pluralism."

The convergence of state power with religious authority profoundly impacted the boundaries of permissible public expression. Civil society groups, particularly in culturally diverse provinces like Bali and Papua, voiced strong opposition to the law, warning of its vague language and potential to justify state-sanctioned moral surveillance. Women's rights advocates, as documented by Rinaldo, were especially critical, arguing that the legislation threatened gender freedoms and curtailed cultural expression.[47] Despite such resistance, conservative Islamic narratives gained hegemonic traction—not only in legal and political domains, but also through widespread dissemination in mainstream media.[48] These developments contributed to the formation of a more exclusive and morally prescriptive public discourse.

From the perspective of public sphere theory, as articulated by John B. Thompson, the public arena is not a neutral space but a site of ongoing ideological contestation.[49] Within this contested space, institutions such as MUI, backed by sympathetic political elites and segments of the bureaucracy, successfully institutionalized conservative moral norms as the de facto standard for what counts as legitimate public expression. This phenomenon reflects a broader trajectory in post-reform Indonesian democracy: the steady resurgence of Islamic conservatism, a trend widely noted in contemporary scholarship on the ideological realignment of the state, religion, and morality in Indonesia's public sphere.[50]

Yudhoyono's pragmatic leadership, anchored in coalition management and policy moderation, inadvertently facilitated the entrenchment of conservative Islamic norms in state institutions. PKS, leveraging its strategic position within the ruling coalition, actively promoted legislation grounded in moral regulation—most notably the Anti-Pornography

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[47] Rachel Rinaldo, ed., "10. Religion and the Politics of Morality: Muslim Women Activists and the Pornography Debate in Indonesia," in *Encountering Islam* (ISEAS Publishing, 2012), 247–68, https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814379939-012; Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia* (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199948109.001.0001.

[48] Gareth Barkin, "Commercial Islam in Indonesia: How Television Producers Mediate Religiosity among National Audiences," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 2014): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479591413000181; Jennifer Lindsay, "Media and Morality: Pornography Post Soeharto," in *Politics and the Media in Twenty First Century Indonesia; Decade of Democracy* (oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 172–95.

[49] Simon Thompson, "The Regulation of Religion in Public Spaces," *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 1 (2022): 27–44, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755048322000372.

[50] Muhammad Misbah and Anisah Setyaningrum, "Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia Islamic Groups and Identity Politics, by Leonard C. Sebastian, Syafiq Hasyim, Alexander R. Arifianto," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 178, no. 1 (April 5, 2022): 136–39, https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17801008; Yanwar Pribadi, "Kebangkitan Konservatisme Islam: Politik Identitas Dan Potret Demokrasi Di Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 2 (2021): 457–71, https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i2.22204; Din Wahid, "Kembalinya Konservatisme Islam Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 21, no. 2 (November 12, 2014), https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v21i2.1043.

Law.[51] In contrast, moderate Islamic parties such as PKB and PPP struggled to articulate a unified pluralist counter-narrative. Their internal fragmentation left a representational void increasingly filled by extra-parliamentary religious actors, including MUI and various da'wah (Islamic proselytizing) networks.[52] No longer confined to the margins, these groups expanded their influence through religious decrees, legal advocacy, and public campaigns. Their growing authority was bolstered by strategic alliances with sympathetic bureaucrats and by their adept use of media platforms to shape moral discourse.[53]

At the local level, decentralization opened further avenues for moral conservatism to become codified into law. Between 2005 and 2009—corresponding with the peak of PKS's political influence—sharia-inspired regional bylaws multiplied, often framed as expressions of cultural identity or public virtue. While these regulations were formally justified within the framework of local autonomy, they frequently aligned with broader religious agendas. Recent findings show that Islamist individuals in Indonesia are significantly more supportive of decentralization than pluralists, largely because they view subnational governance as a strategic opportunity to implement moral and religious norms that are less viable at the national level.[54] This dynamic reflects a deeper historical pattern in which political Islam, having been marginalized in national politics, has actively leveraged regional autonomy to pursue its normative agenda. A 2017 national survey further revealed that nearly 40 percent of Indonesians supported implementing sharia law at the national level, indicating a growing public receptiveness to Islamic legalism by the close of Yudhoyono's presidency.[55]

These social-political conditions and law developments cultivated the emergence of an informal moral regime—sustained not by constitutional mandate, but by bureaucratic convergence, moral persuasion, and popular religious sentiment. While often framed as an expression of democratic consensus, this regime gradually eroded pluralist safeguards and normalized exclusionary governance practices under the banner of public morality. Scholars have noted that such institutional arrangements obscure the boundaries between religious authority and legal rationality, producing hybrid moral-political configurations

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[51] Misbah and Setyaningrum, "Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia Islamic Groups and Identity Politics, by Leonard C. Sebastian, Syafiq Hasyim, Alexander R. Arifianto," 54–79.

[52] Kikue Hamayotsu, "The End of Political Islam? A Comparative Analysis of Religious Parties in the Muslim Democracy of Indonesia," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30, no. 3 (September 2011): 133–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341103000305; Diprose, McRae, and Hadiz, "Two Decades of *Reformasi* in Indonesia."

[53] Ihsan Yilmaz et al., "Competing Populisms, Digital Technologies and the 2024 Elections in Indonesia" (European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS), January 2, 2024), https://doi.org/10.55271/pp0029.

[54] Diego Fossati, "When Conservatives Support Decentralization: The Case of Political Islam in Indonesia," *Regional & Federal Studies* 33, no. 2 (March 15, 2023): 209–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.1951252.

[55] Diego Fossati, Hui Yew-Foong, and Siwage Dharma Negara, *The Indonesia National Survey Project: Economy, Society and Politics* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017).

in which religious prescriptions increasingly inform public regulation.[56] These hybrid regimes do not merely reflect societal piety, but represent a strategic entrenchment of conservative norms within ostensibly secular institutions. The legal ambiguity and symbolic power that characterized this period would become the foundation for a more centralized, securitized, and state-managed engagement with religion in the subsequent Jokowi administration.

VI. The Jokowi Era: Governing Islam Between Accommodation and Control

The leadership of Joko Widodo (Jokowi) (2014–2024) marked a shift in the relationship between the state and Islam in post-reform Indonesian democracy. In contrast to the accommodationist tendencies of the SBY era, Jokowi's administration confronted a more visible and structured ideological contestation. Three major developments define this phase: intensified identity-based polarization, the state's response to religious radicalism, and the rise of alternative ideological narratives such as the *"NKRI Bersyariah"* (Sharia-Based Unitary Republic of Indonesia). These dynamics reflect how the state, conservative Islamic actors, and pluralist forces increasingly compete within a political landscape shaped by identity and religious symbolism.

Identity-based polarization peaked in 2016 with the Aksi Bela Islam protests triggered by the blasphemy allegation against Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok).[57] However, the seeds of this conflict were already visible during the 2012 gubernatorial election, when Ahok's candidacy catalyzed religious mobilization.[58] The mass demonstrations of 2016, led by FPI and coordinated by GNPF-MUI (*Gerakan National Pengawal Fatwa MUI*, National Movement of MUI Fatwa Guard), mobilized millions and signaled the resurgence of Islamic populism outside formal party structures. These protests exemplified what Vedi Hadiz describes as the rise of a "floating ummah"—a politically activated Muslim public organized through religious symbolism.[59] This

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[56] Arifianto, "The State of Political Islam in Indonesia"; Bush, "10. Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia."

[57] For further perspectives on the Aksi Bela Islam movement, see Rangga Kusumo and Hurriyah Hurriyah, "Populisme Islam Di Indonesia: Studi Kasus Aksi Bela Islam Oleh GNPF-MUI Tahun 2016-2017," *Jurnal Politik* 4, no. 1 (2019): 87, https://doi.org/10.7454/jp.v4i1.172; Muzayyin Ahyar and Alfitri Alfitri, "Aksi Bela Islam: Islamic Clicktivism and the New Authority of Religious Propaganda in the Millennial Age in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–29, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v9i1. 1-29; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Aksi Bela Islam: Konservatisme Dan Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan," *MAARIF* 11, no. 2 (2016): 15–28; Indiana Ngenget, "Kebangkitan Islam Politik: Analisis Gerakan Aksi Bela Islam Dalam Pilkada DKI Jakarta 2017," 2018, https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/q782c.

[58] Ken Miichi, "The Role of Religion and Ethnicity in Jakarta's 2012 Gubernatorial Election," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2014): 55–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341403300104.

[59] Vedi R. Hadiz, "The 'Floating 'Ummah in the Fall of 'Ahok' in Indonesia," *Trans Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 7, no. 2 (2018): 271–90, https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.16.

phenomenon challenged the dominance of pluralist-nationalist actors and underscored how religion was increasingly used as a source of political legitimacy amid ideological fragmentation.

Framed within Castells' theory of collective identity, the mobilization can be seen as a response to perceived exclusion from dominant power structures. Conservative Islamic actors instrumentalized religious identity not only to influence electoral politics, but also to shape public morality and national discourse. Consequently, the public sphere evolved into a contested arena of competing nationhood visions, placing new pressures on the state's pluralist commitments.[60]

Under Jokowi's presidency, the state's approach to religious dissent grew more assertive. Most notably, the government disbanded HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) and FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Islam Defender Front).[61] HTI's vision of a global caliphate and its rejection of Pancasila positioned it as an "ontological enemy" to Indonesia's democratic framework.[62] Meanwhile, FPI was dissolved for repeated violations of public order and incendiary rhetoric. While these actions were legally justified and supported by segments of moderate Islam, they raised concerns over shrinking civic space and a pattern of selective repression.[63]

This trend aligns with what Mietzner and Muhtadi describe as a transition from pluralist inclusion to calculated containment.[64] Instead of fostering ideological competition, the state prioritized moderate Islamic institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, while sidelining more oppositional groups. Figures such as Mahfud MD were positioned by the state as representatives of moderate Islam aligned with national ideological consensus. In practice, pluralism became conditional—extended only to ideologically compliant actors. The state constructed a curated religious consensus

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[60] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity: The Information Age, Economi, Society, and Culture* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010).

[61] Achmad Nasrudin Yahya and Kristian Erdianto, "Azyumardi Azra: Pembubaran HTI Dan FPI Jadi Peristiwa Penting Dalam Sejarah Gerakan Islam Di Indonesia," *Kompas.Com* (blog), 2021, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/01/15/19374191/azyumardi-azra-pembubaran-hti-dan-fpi-jadi-peristiwa-penting-dalam-sejarah; Arief Nuryana and Tri Guntur Narwaya, "Discourse on the Disbandment of Front Pembela Islam and Renegotiation of Democratic Ideas," *Journal Communication Spectrum: Capturing New Perspectives in Communication* 13, no. 1 (2023): 60–71.

[62] Masdar Hilmy, "Manufacturing The 'Ontological Enemy': Socio-Political Construction of Anti-Democracy Discourses among HTI Activists in Post-New Order Indonesia," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 3, no. 2 (December 1, 2009): 341, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2009.3.2.341-369.

[63] Zulfadli Zulfadli and Taufani Taufani, "Kemunduran Demokrasi Dan Pelarangan Organisasi Islamis Di Era Pemerintahan Jokowi," *Potret Pemikiran* 26, no. 2 (2022): 117, https://doi.org/10.30984/pp.v26i2.2033; Nuryana and Narwaya, "Discourse on the Disbandment of Front Pembela Islam and Renegotiation of Democratic Ideas"; Rakhmat Nur Hakim and Icha Rastika, "Beda Pembubaran FPI Dan HTI," *Kompas.Com* (blog), 2020, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/12/31/06310021/beda-pembubaran-fpi-dan-hti.

[64] Mietzner et al., "The Myth of Pluralism."

through bureaucratic sanctions and regulatory control that muted dissent under the banner of harmony.

This evolving pattern reflects what scholars term "limited democracy"—a system in which democratic procedures endure in form but are hollowed out in substance.[65] It intersects with "autocratic legalism," where the law is weaponized not to ensure rights but to reinforce executive control and delegitimize dissenting ideologies.[66] In this context, legality becomes increasingly ambiguous: is it still a safeguard of democratic pluralism, or a veil beneath which authoritarian tendencies quietly take root?

VII. The Contest Between Religious Nationalism and Pluralist Nationalism

Since the fall of authoritarianism, Indonesian political life has seen ongoing tension between religious and pluralist visions of nationalism.[67] Religious nationalists often argue that Islamic norms—defined through majoritarian lenses—should shape laws, social institutions, and the foundations of public legitimacy. In this view, the state plays a central role in promoting faith-based values, with piety treated as a civic ideal rather than a private matter.[68]

Pluralist nationalism in Indonesia draws its strength from the constitutional vision of unity through diversity, grounded in the ideological legacy of Pancasila. Far from marginalizing religion, this model incorporates faith as a foundational element of democratic civic life. Robert Hefner, in his account of post-authoritarian Indonesia, describes this as a process shaped by *civil Islam*—a tradition of Islamic civic engagement that embraces democratic norms while preserving religious identity.[69] He argues that this form of Islam has made it possible for Muslim leaders and institutions to participate in political life in ways that affirm pluralism and constitutionalism. In recent years, this vision has found further expression in public discourses such as Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan, promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah as cultural frameworks for democratic coexistence.[70]

The interaction between pluralist and religious ideologies has shifted over time, especially following Indonesia's democratic transition. As decentralization took hold, new political spaces opened for both groups to shape the public sphere.[71] Islamic actors, in

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[65] Andreas Schedler, "Elections Without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 36–50, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0031.

[66] Mietzner et al., "The Myth of Pluralism."

[67] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400823871; Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute., 2008).

[68] Arifianto, "The State of Political Islam in Indonesia."

[69] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 6–9.

[70] Arifianto, "Moderate Islamic Organisations and Contestation Over Political Theology."

[71] Buehler and Muhtada, "Democratization and the Diffusion of Shari'a Law."

particular, have used moral language with populist appeal to influence legislation and debates on public ethics.[72] Although the state has at times voiced support for inclusivity, it has also enacted regulations that align with conservative pressures.[73]

Over the past decade, Indonesia's digital sphere has emerged as a dynamic arena for competing visions of national identity—particularly between proponents of religious nationalism and defenders of pluralist civic ideals. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok now serve not merely as spaces for personal expression, but as strategic venues where Islamic symbols—ranging from hijab fashion and Qur'anic verses to hashtags linked to fatwas—are deployed to articulate moral claims and signal group affiliation.[74]

Far from enabling neutral deliberation, these networks often heighten ideological polarization by amplifying emotive content and sharpening symbolic boundaries. While pluralist narratives rooted in Pancasila and "civil Islam" remain influential, they increasingly contend with the viral resonance of moral populism propagated across online platforms.[75] Such populism exploits digital affordances not only to mobilize followers but to reconfigure public morality through emotionally charged appeals and selective visibility.

In the ongoing contest between religious and pluralist nationalisms, Indonesia's digital sphere has become a critical terrain. As Hadiz observes, the rise of the "floating ummah"—a politically mobilized Muslim public untethered from formal party structures—reveals a shift in the locus of legitimacy.[76] Instead of deriving authority from institutional representation or legal norms, religious nationalist actors increasingly assert their claims through digital mobilization and symbolic dominance. This development reflects a broader transformation in post-reform politics, where national identity is negotiated as much through algorithmic visibility as through constitutional discourse. This digital repositioning of ideological conflict provides a lens into how algorithmic visibility increasingly mediates state legitimacy in Muslim-majority democracies navigating post-authoritarian transitions.

These ideological dynamics—shaped by competing visions of nationalism, the evolving role of Islam, and the reconfiguration of authority in both offline and digital spaces—have not played out uniformly across presidential regimes. While the broader contest between religious and pluralist nationalisms defines the ideological landscape, the specific ways in which the state has responded to Islamic political expression vary

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[72] Fealy and White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*.
[73] Arifianto, "The State of Political Islam in Indonesia."
[74] Edwin Jurriens, ed., "9. Social Media and Islamic Practice: Indonesian Ways of Being Digitally Pious," in *Digital Indonesia* (ISEAS Publishing, 2017), 146–62, https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814786003-015.
[75] Yilmaz et al., "Competing Populisms, Digital Technologies and the 2024 Elections in Indonesia."
[76] Hadiz, "The 'Floating'Ummahin the Fall of 'Ahok' in Indonesia."

depending on leadership styles, coalition alignments, institutional leverage, and contextual pressures.

The table below presents a comparative mapping of five post-reform presidencies to understand better how these factors unfold in governance. Rather than listing individual events, the matrix identifies recurring patterns of state strategy across six analytical dimensions, viewed through the lens of "*contested accommodation*". This framework offers a way to compare how regimes have negotiated Islamic aspirations while managing the boundaries of pluralism.

Table 1. Regime-Based Patterns of *"Contested Accommodation"* in Post-Reform Indonesia

Aspects	B.J. Habibie (1998–1999)	Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001)	Megawati Soekarnoputri (2001–2004)	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–2014)	Joko Widodo (2014–2024)
Mode of Accommodation	Symbolic inclusion without institutional depth; legal opening but minimal structural change	Principled pluralism through symbolic restoration and deregulation	Crisis-responsive accommodation limited to conflict zones (Aceh)	Institutionalized moral filtering through conservative partnerships	Dual-track governance: strategic co-optation and legal repression
Policy Orientation	Political liberalization; civic opening for Islamic groups without full state coordination	Inclusive civil Islam; prioritization of minority inclusion over majoritarian claims	Pragmatic pluralism constrained by post-conflict stabilization and security logic	Moral normativity embedded through selective accommodation and legal codification	Legal containment of radicalism; centralization of state ideological authority
Key Policies	Law No. 22/1999 on decentralization; press freedom; zakat institutionalization	Confucian recognition; repeal of discriminatory laws; rejection of religious exclusivism	Aceh special autonomy (Sharia-based qanuns); Anti-terrorism Law 2003	Anti-Pornography Law 2008; SKB Ahmadiyah; strengthened role of MUI	Dissolution of HTI and FPI; regulation against NKRI Bersyariah;

					executive legalism
Main Challenges	Managing post-authoritarian fragmentation and decentralized demands	Strong elite resistance from conservative and military actors	Balancing post-conflict order with rising Islamic regional aspirations	Mediatized moral politics; fragmentation among Islamic parties	Containing religious populism while preserving pluralist commitments
Ideological Conflicts	Islamic resurgence vs. residual New Order secularism	Religious inclusion vs. legacy of moral orthodoxy and elite militarism	Strategic compromise with Islamists vs. pluralist legal norms	Codified morality vs. pluralist constitutional guarantees	Religious populism vs. constitutional pluralism; ideological securitization
Impacts on Pluralism	Local experimentation with sharia bylaws; fragmented civic normativity	Symbolic reinstatement of minority dignity; institutional fragility	Precedent for regional sharia institutionalization; pluralist retreat at a local level	Expansion of moral policing; narrowing of civic freedoms and religious diversity	State-managed pluralism; reduced tolerance for ideological dissent

This table presents a synthesized typology of state–Islam relations across five presidential administrations in Indonesia (1998–2024). The categorization is developed through a qualitative comparative analysis of legal instruments, official policy documents, and secondary literature, focusing on six key analytical dimensions: mode of accommodation, policy orientation, key policies, institutional challenges, ideological conflict, and impacts on pluralism.

VIII. Analytical Patterns of Contested Accommodation

A comparative reading of regime-level approaches to Islamic political expression, as outlined in Table 1, reveals that "*contested accommodation*" is not merely a descriptive label, but also a strategic logic through which the Indonesian state has continuously managed religion—not through binary inclusion or exclusion, but via calibrated negotiation. Each administration has adapted this pattern in response to its own institutional conditions and ideological priorities. Habibie offered symbolic inclusion without structural transformation. Wahid pursued principled pluralism by recognizing minority rights and loosening restrictive policies, but faced entrenched resistance from conservative and military elites. Megawati introduced pragmatic accommodation, limited to post-conflict sharia experimentation in Aceh while avoiding broader integration. Under Yudhoyono, the model became more institutionalized: conservative actors, particularly MUI, gained quasi-regulatory authority as their fatwas were increasingly referenced in legal and administrative instruments. Jokowi's era advanced this logic under conditions of heightened polarization through *dual-track governance*—a simultaneous strategy of co-opting moderate Islamic actors and legally repressing groups deemed ideologically incompatible with the state.

Key mechanisms such as *strategic co-optation* and *legal containment* are central to this model. The former refers to the deliberate incorporation of cooperative Islamic actors—such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah—into the state apparatus to reinforce moral legitimacy and secure ideological compliance. The latter denotes the use of legal and bureaucratic tools—including decrees, bans, and organizational dissolutions—to constrain dissenting or oppositional movements, exemplified by the state-sanctioned dissolution of HTI and FPI. These mechanisms show how pluralism is not granted universally, but allocated conditionally, structured by political expediency rather than normative openness.

Importantly, this logic is neither static nor purely repressive. It evolves across regimes, shaped by shifting ideological alignments, electoral pressures, and national identity discourses. This emerging model of pluralism is neither wholly inclusive nor explicitly exclusionary, but constantly negotiated through law, institutional discretion, and symbolic legitimacy. In this sense, "*contested accommodation*" has become the normalized grammar of post-authoritarian religious governance in Indonesia. It articulates both the flexibility and constraints of state-managed pluralism, where Islamic expression is not merely tolerated or rejected, but continually filtered through the architecture of power.

IX. Conclusion

What does Indonesia's experience tell us about the relationship between Islam and democracy in a plural society? Instead of unfolding in a linear or uniform trajectory, this relationship has evolved through asymmetrical negotiations shaped by regime strategies, legal constraints, and competing national visions. The state has rarely adopted a consistent stance—often oscillating between symbolic inclusion, strategic repression, and pragmatic engagement in response to shifting political dynamics.

This study argues that Islamic political expression in Indonesia is profoundly context-dependent, ranging from institutional moderation to populist mobilization. Accordingly, state responses vary—accommodating religious values when framed in terms of national unity or social justice, yet constraining exclusivist claims through legal and political filters.

The "contested accommodation" framework captures this fluid dynamic, a negotiated process in which both state and Islamic actors adjust to ideological, legal, and societal shifts. Rather than binary inclusion or exclusion, religion–state relations are better understood as adaptive calibrations shaped by evolving power configurations.

Indonesia complicates the assumption that democratization in Muslim-majority societies necessarily leads to religious dominance. Instead, it illustrates that pluralist democracy demands institutional resilience, civic vigilance, and a willingness to continually renegotiate the boundaries of faith and citizenship—especially amid intensified ideological contestation and digital polarization. Scholars like Menchik and Roy have argued that pluralism in Indonesia is not a fixed doctrine, but a strategic and often fragile tool of political engagement.

Thus, Indonesia's trajectory offers broader insight into how pluralism can be managed—though never fully resolved—in emerging Muslim democracies navigating both moral diversity and majoritarian pressures. As such, this study not only enriches our understanding of post-authoritarian governance in Indonesia but also contributes to comparative debates on religious accommodation and democratic resilience across the Muslim world.

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