

Book Review:

Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia: Islamic Groups and Identity Politics

(Leonard C. Sebastian, Syafiq Hasyim and Alexander R. Arifianto [ed.]

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Yutsrina Azimah

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia

yutsrina.azimah@uiii.ac.id

Indonesia entered the new order Era in the mid-1998 or post-Suharto era, which served as a significant transitional period that gave rise to a range of ideas, identities, and interests to the surface (Hefner 2005; Hasan 2006, 13; Hilmy 2010). One of them is the emergence of Islamic conservatism movements (Hilmy 2010). Consequently, the new and various transnational Islamic movements that emerged in that era have colored the landscape of Indonesian Islam. The term conservative itself refers to currents that reject progressive interpretations of Islamic teachings (van Bruinessen 2013). The separation of modernist and conservative groups cannot be separated from the current political tendencies in Indonesia, particularly in the quest for power. Political polarization using religion to mobilize the masses has been an inseparable thing in Indonesia (Warburton, n.d.). The post-Suharto era became one of the decisive elements since it did not accommodate the conservative spectrum of Islam (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018).

Mobilization using religious sentiments has also been one-factor causing disharmony in Indonesia. Indonesia, a country with pluralistic and tolerant ideals, is genuinely concerned about intolerance toward minorities, particularly discrimination against them. The main argument of this book is that the rising Islamic conservatism may push Indonesia closer to exclusive rather than inclusive religious practices.

Editors of the book introduce with an elaboration of Islamic conservatism activities and its intersection with identity politics, which are crucial to democratic life in Indonesia, especially in the social, cultural, and political spheres. They argue that Indonesia's rising Islamic conservatism is at odds with the ideas of tolerance, diversity, and religious freedom. As a consequence, the process of Islamization, ideological motives, and the influence of exclusivity become crucial factors in determining compatibility

and incompatibility with Indonesia's multi-religious society.

Sections 2, 3, and 4 in this book primarily focus on the complex dynamics of Indonesian Islamic conservatism and its desire to confront their foes, as well as the direction of state policy through its junction with identity politics. Muhtadi and Halida attempt to identify the causes of Indonesian Muslims' support for conservative Islamic organizations based on similar religious identities. They employ social movement theory to ascertain whether socio-economic factors nor religious political sentiments of deprivation and an individual's subjective religious identity are crucial elements of Islamist mobilization. Their research indicates that Muslims with a strong sense of religious identification are more inclined to support the conservative Islamist group due to socio-psychological factors rather than socio-economic ones.

In chapter 3, Darmadi examines the dissemination of conservative narrative. Conducting fieldwork studies in five cities (Medan, Jakarta, Pontianak, Surabaya, and Mataram), he investigates the phenomena of mainstream speakers or hardline Muslims spreading misleading information and negative sentiment about the Ahmadiyya, Shia, and liberal Islamic movements on a regional basis. In a different spectrum, Lanti, Akim, and Dermawan study religious conservatism in West Java, Indonesia, in chapter 4. West Java is seen as a conservative province that has a significant influence on Indonesia's socio-political transformation. The rising conservatism was growing visible when some cities in West Java adopted Shari'a-based regional regulations after the 1998 Reformation and 2001 decentralization. They observed the socio-political distinctions between West Java and the other Java provinces are due to the divergent historical trajectories of West Java.

This book also examines the various ways that the Islamic conservatism movement in Indonesia expanded into sizable organizations. As seen in chapter 5, Burhani demonstrates how Muhammadiyah provides social services for society as their mission is to implement the ideology of al-Maun founded by its founder, Ahmad Dahlan and its impact in order to protect Muhammadiyah from Islamist, fundamentalist and conservative tendencies. He also describes the diverse Muhammadiyah's position of its inter-faith, cultural, and political shift experience. In chapter 6, Iqbal examines how political rivalry led to the creation of NU Garis Lurus, one of NU's ideological divisions. It itself is a deviation from "the authentic" and reviving NU to become as prescribed by NU founders including Hasyim Asy'ari. NU Garis Lurus uses the internet as a forum for three different framings: a diagnostic problem, a prognosis or suggesting the solution to a diagnostic problem and motivating framing—to build, defend, and gain support for their ideology. As a result, NU Garis Lurus is highlighted as a challenge to NU as a whole. Meanwhile, Hasyim in chapter 7 depicts MUI playing crucial roles in the mobilization of Indonesia's emerging Islamic conservatism. However, the MUI is not immune from political

consideration in formulating fatwa. He also discusses its theological implications for the “Aksi Bela Islam” movement, as well as its discursive, pragmatic, and practical relevances.

The book also examines the historical context of present Islamic conservatism in Indonesia, highlighting how the term has evolved through time as a result of interactions among the state, religion, society, and politics. In chapter 8, Hilmy portrays the Indonesian Hizbut Tahrir movement that was banned by the Jokowi administration through the use of an executive decree, Perpu No.2/2017. Hilmy argues that organizationally, the decree can be dissolved in the organization and its activities, even, its ideology cannot be dissolved especially the ideology of khilafa (transnational caliphate). In consequence, he brings up the possibility to ban mass organizations which might return to haunt the state through the political process.

Ahmad discusses the weakening within the body of Islamic conservative groups due to its division. He also examines the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) to promote the application of Shari’a by laws, along with its goals and techniques, which range from violence to political contestation. He refers to the fact that internal friction is one of the elements contributing to MMI’s downfall in Indonesia. In chapter 10, Mahmudi introduces the PKS or Tarbiyah Movement and its plan to reform Islam at the level of the individual, society, and state. He considers the fight between political in-groups and out-groups to contribute to the diversity among its members. However, PKS makes an effort to change to be more moderate in its political and religious beliefs.

Vis a vis the downfall, the uprising of Islamic “transnational” conservative movement are elaborates in the following chapters. Nubowo describes in detail in chapter 11 how Wahdah Islamiyah, an Islamic organization that constitutes a Salafi Islamic movement, has embraced and adopted the new approach of forming Islamic moderation democracy. Additionally, he explicates how the organization can survive and disseminate successfully its transnational ideology widely throughout Indonesia. In chapter 12, Kailani interestingly narrates that Islamic conservatism is not always characterized by escalating intolerance or a desire to establish an Islamic state. It can also be used as a tool to push middle-class Muslims into materialism and the pursuit of wealth. He examines the extensive proliferation of Islamic “self-help” literature and seminars by focusing on two self-help and self-fulfillment authors from Indonesia

On the epilogue page of chapter 13, the editors’ conclusion raises the topic of whether Islamic conservatism fits Indonesia well. As long as the political and institutional framework is sufficiently adaptive, Islamic conservatism and democracy may coexist in Indonesia. The primary question is whether the existing mechanisms can resist and tolerate rising social conservatism without fully caving into violent extremism, intolerant groups, and damaging ideas that undercut inclusive nationalism, a defining feature of the Indonesian nation-state since

1945. The chapter comes to a close with some closing thoughts on the likely future direction of Indonesian Islam as it seeks to strike a lasting balance between Indonesian society and Indonesian democracy.

Overall, the discussion of this volume is clear and truly enjoyable to read. However, I have noticed that this book focuses primarily on writing from the standpoint of the progressive authors. It would be more refreshing if it were from the perspective of the conservative organization itself. Second, as a consequence of independent research and analysis, each chapter stands alone with a range of topics. This makes it challenging for readers to understand the correlation between themes throughout. The internal coherence might be improved and explained better if editors created a separate chapter on the correlation between chapters.

Despite its flaws, each chapter in this book covers the numerous Islamic movements and groups that could be categorized as conservative turn in Indonesia. This is what makes this book so incredibly enlightening on the development of conservative Islamic organizations in a detailed and up-to-date manner in accordance with its goals, namely to widen the concept of Islamic conservatism in Indonesia. The authors of this book, who are mostly Indonesian, attempt to be objective, in-depth, and fair in each chapter because they have a first-hand understanding of the organizations they observed. Because it discusses both political and religious issues, which are intertwined in Indonesia, this book is a great choice for specialists in Islamic studies, politics, and sociology in general as well as anyone interested in religious movements and identities in Indonesia.

Resources:

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Warburton, Eve. n.d. "Deepening Polarization And Democratic Decline In Indonesia," 17.