

The Relationship between Religion and State: The Role of Islamic Politics in the Development of Democracy in Indonesia

Amanda Putri Widia^{1*}, Heri Kurniawan¹, Yazid Imam Bustomi²,
Nurninashahawana Hj Osmara³

¹Institut Agama Islam Negeri Pontianak, Indonesia

²Universitas Gajah Mada, Indonesia

³Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, Brunei Darussalam

*Corresponding Author: amandaputriwidia11@gmail.com

Abstract: Political Islam in Indonesia plays an important role in democratic development, although it is often faced with challenges in managing the relationship between religion and the state. As a Muslim-majority country, the application of Islamic values in politics raises debates about its compatibility with democratic principles such as freedom, equality and pluralism. On the one hand, Islamic politics can strengthen political ethics and social justice, but on the other hand, it has the potential to trigger polarization if not managed properly. This research explores the contribution of Islamic politics to democracy in Indonesia, particularly in instilling ethical values, strengthening public participation, and building inclusive dialogue. Using a qualitative approach and literature review, this research analyzes literature that discusses the role of Islamic politics in Indonesia's democratic dynamics. The results show that Islamic politics contributes through the values of justice, welfare, and transparency, as well as expanding political participation through religious parties and organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah. Islamic politics also plays a role in creating interfaith dialogue and resolving social conflicts. The findings confirm the importance of inclusive and democracy-oriented Islamic politics to unite plural societies. However, this research is limited to a literature review, so a field study is needed for a more comprehensive understanding.

Keywords: Islamic Politics, Democracy, Religion and State

Received: February 11, 2025

Accepted: April 13, 2025

Published: April 14, 2025

To Cite this Article: Widia, Amanda Putri, Heri Kurniawan, Yazid Imam Bustomi, and Nurninashahawana Hj Osmara. 2025. "The Relationship Between Religion and State: The Role of Islamic Politics in the Development of Democracy in Indonesia". *El-Suffah: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2 (1):62-82. <https://doi.org/10.70742/suffah.v2i1.159>.



Copyright © 2025 by Author(s)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Abstrak: Politik Islam di Indonesia memainkan peran penting dalam pembangunan demokrasi, meskipun sering dihadapkan pada tantangan dalam mengelola hubungan antara agama dan negara. Sebagai negara dengan mayoritas Muslim, penerapan nilai-nilai Islam dalam politik kerap memicu perdebatan mengenai kesesuaiannya dengan prinsip demokrasi seperti kebebasan, kesetaraan, dan pluralisme. Di satu sisi, politik Islam dapat memperkuat etika politik dan keadilan sosial, tetapi di sisi lain, ia berpotensi menimbulkan polarisasi sosial jika tidak dikelola dengan baik. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi kontribusi politik Islam terhadap demokrasi di Indonesia, khususnya dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai etis, memperkuat partisipasi publik, dan membangun dialog inklusif di tengah masyarakat yang beragam. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan kajian pustaka, penelitian ini menganalisis literatur akademik tentang peran politik Islam dalam dinamika demokrasi Indonesia. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa politik Islam berkontribusi melalui nilai-nilai keadilan, kesejahteraan, dan transparansi dalam pengelolaan negara. Partai-partai berbasis Islam serta organisasi seperti NU dan Muhammadiyah turut memperluas partisipasi politik bagi kelompok yang kurang terwakili. Selain itu, politik Islam juga berperan dalam menciptakan dialog lintas agama dan menyelesaikan konflik sosial. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya politik Islam yang inklusif dan berorientasi pada nilai-nilai demokrasi untuk mempersatukan masyarakat plural Indonesia. Namun, penelitian ini terbatas pada kajian pustaka tanpa analisis empiris, sehingga diperlukan penelitian lanjutan dengan metode studi lapangan untuk pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif.

Kata kunci: Politik Islam, Demokrasi, relasi Agama dan Negara

Introduction

The relationship between religion and state in Indonesia has experienced complex dynamics, especially in the context of Islamic politics and democracy. Since the 1998 reforms, Indonesia has undergone a democratic transformation characterized by increased political freedom and public participation. However, the role of Islam in politics is often debated between those who see Islam as a reinforcement of democratic values and those who consider Islamism as a threat to the sustainability of the democratic system in Indonesia.¹

The development of political Islam in Indonesia shows a trend of political pragmatism that leads to Islamic moderation in democracy, as is

¹ Syariful Alam, Sholahuddin Al-Fatih, and Merve Ozkan Borsa, "Islamism and The Challenge of Democratization in Indonesia," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 15, no. 2 (December 29, 2023): 198–213, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v15i2.23398>.

the case with Islamic parties that have begun to adapt to democratic political mechanisms.² However, conservative Islamic groups are also increasingly prominent in their efforts to influence public policy and state regulation, which, in some cases, has the potential to undermine democratic values.³ In addition, the emergence of the phenomenon of commodification of Islam in politics shows that religious symbols are often used for electoral political purposes, both by Islamic-based parties and nationalist parties.⁴

Previous studies have extensively discussed the relationship between Islam and democracy in Indonesia. Some studies highlight the compatibility of Islamic values with democracy, suggesting that Islamic principles such as equality, deliberation, and justice are in line with democratic values.⁵ In addition, some studies highlight the role of moderate Islamic organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, in strengthening democratic values and tolerance in Indonesia.⁶ On the other hand, other studies have shown that democracy in Indonesia is challenged by the rise of conservative Islamic groups that are trying to change public policies using Sharia law.⁷ However, there is still a gap in research regarding how the dynamics of political Islam can constructively support sustainable democratic development. Existing

² Ali Munhanif and M. Bakir Ihsan, "Ideas, Politics, and The Making of Muslim Democracy: An Historical Trajectory in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 30, no. 3 (December 31, 2023): 525–60, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v30i3.38203>.

³ Asep Nurjaman, "Islamic Movements and the Future of Democracy in Post-Suharto Indonesia Era," *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 29, 2023): 33–50, <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.007.01.03>.

⁴ Dodi Suryana and Tito Handoko, "Islamic Commodification in Representation of Political Development in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review," *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 29, 2023): 51–76, <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.007.01.04>.

⁵ Hamdan Zoelva, "The Development of Islam and Democracy in Indonesia," *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (May 31, 2022): 37, <https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev812>.

⁶ M Khusna Amal, "Revisiting Southeast Asian Civil Islam: Moderate Muslims and Indonesia's Democracy Paradox," *Intellectual Discourse* 28, no. 1 (2020): 295–318.

⁷ Defny Holidin, "The Compatibility of Islam And Pancasila In Indonesia's Declining Democracy," *POLITICS AND RELIGION JOURNAL* 16, no. 2 (December 5, 2022): 179–202, <https://doi.org/10.54561/prj1602179h>. Azyumardi Azra, *Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context* (Equinox Publishing, 2006).

studies tend to focus on the dichotomy between Islam and democracy without highlighting how political Islam can function as a transformative agent in Indonesia's democratization.

This research aims to fill a gap in the literature by explaining how political Islam can play a positive role in democracy building in Indonesia. Specifically, this research will answer four main questions: How is Political Islam in the Context of Democracy in Indonesia? To what extent are the Dynamics of Religion and State Relations Post-Reformation? What are the Challenges of Political Islam in Democracy? What is the Role of Political Islam in Democracy Building?

This research departs from the hypothesis that political Islam in Indonesia has an ambivalent role in democracy: on the one hand, it can strengthen democratic values through political participation and social justice-based policy advocacy, but on the other hand, it can also threaten democracy if it is dominated by conservative groups that reject political pluralism. Therefore, the development of democracy in Indonesia is highly dependent on how political Islam is constructed in the national political space. This research adopts a multidisciplinary approach that combines Islamic political studies, democracy theory, and public policy analysis. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and the state and how political Islam can play a transformative role in democratic development in Indonesia.

This research uses the literature review method as the primary approach in analyzing the role of Islamic politics in the development of democracy in Indonesia. This method provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how Islamic politics develops in Indonesia's democratic system and identifies gaps in existing research⁸. To achieve the research objectives, this study uses a descriptive-analytical design with a qualitative approach. This design aims to describe and analyze how Islamic politics has developed and its role in Indonesia's democratic system. The study also utilizes historical analysis to trace the evolution of the relationship between Islam and democracy from the independence era to the reform era.

The data collected was analyzed using the thematic analysis

method, in which various literatures were categorized based on the main themes that emerged in the research. The analysis aims to identify patterns, relationships and implications of Islamic political engagement in Indonesia's democratic system. By understanding historical and contemporary trends, this research is expected to provide insights into how Islamic politics can play a constructive role in strengthening democracy in Indonesia.

Political Islam in the Context of Democracy in Indonesia

Political Islam in Indonesia has shown significant dynamics since the country's independence.⁸ As a Muslim-majority country, Indonesia not only faces challenges in maintaining political stability but also in managing the interaction between religion and the state.⁹ The relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia has unique characteristics, where religion, especially Islam, has a significant influence in social, cultural and political life, even though the state does not explicitly make Islam the basis of the state. The history of Islamic politics in Indonesia began in the early 20th century when the *Sarekat Islam* (SI) emerged as the first organization to fight for Indigenous rights under Dutch colonialism.¹⁰ The Islamic Union not only served as a forum to fight for the interests of Muslims but also played a role in strengthening the awareness of nationalism among the Indonesian people. This organization played an important role in mobilizing the power of Muslims to fight colonialism, as well as being a forerunner of greater Islamic political awareness in the future.¹¹

Indonesians, despite being predominantly Muslim, do not see

⁸ Robert W Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2011); Saiful Mujani, R William Liddle, and Kuskridho Ambaridi, *Voting Behavior in Indonesia since Democratization: Critical Democrats* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁹ Muchamad Ali Safa'at, "The Roles of the Indonesian Constitutional Court in Determining State-Religion Relations," *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (May 31, 2022): 113, <https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev815>.

¹⁰ Frial Ramadhan Supratman, "Before the Ethical Policy: The Ottoman State, Pan-Islamism, and Modernisation in Indonesia, 1898-1901," *AlJami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 54, no. 2 (December 14, 2016): 447, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2016.542.447-475>.

¹¹ Azra, *Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context*.

Islam only as a religion that regulates personal worship but also as a system of life that includes social and political aspects. Against this backdrop, the emergence of Sarekat Islam as an organization that combined religious struggle and nationalism became an essential symbol of the interaction between religion and state in Indonesia. In this period, Islam acted not only as a religion that regulated individual spiritual life but also as a force that mobilised the collective struggle to achieve independence from Dutch colonisation.¹²

After Indonesian independence, Islamic-based parties such as Masyumi emerged as a significant political force that played a vital role in national politics.¹³ Masyumi, as one of the largest parties of its time, had a significant influence in the drafting of the constitution and state policies at the beginning of independence. The party sought to incorporate Islamic principles into Indonesia's legal framework and political system, with the hope that the Indonesian state would not only be free from colonialism but also run in accordance with Islamic values. However, during the Old Order, President Soekarno's government disbanded Masyumi in 1960 due to political tensions that arose between Islamic groups and the more secular government.¹⁴ Although Masyumi was disbanded, the influence of Islamic political ideology and ideas did not wholly disappear. Instead, Islamic political ideology lived on in various forms, and Islam-based parties, such as the United Development Party (PPP), formed in the New Order era, took over that role. In the New Order era, despite Soeharto's highly authoritarian system of governance, Islam-based parties still played a role in the political system, albeit limited to a narrower space, with the PPP serving as the main Islamist party involved

¹² Nathan John Franklin, "Islam and the Dutch in the East Indies: Oppression or Opportunity?," *The European Legacy* 25, no. 5 (July 3, 2020): 572-87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2020.1760467>.

¹³ Hasanuddin Yusuf Adan et al., "Islam and the Foundation of the State in Indonesia: The Role of the Masyumi Party in the Constituent Assembly the Perspective of Fiqh Al-Siyāsah," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (March 31, 2023): 377, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i1.16650>.

¹⁴ Zainal Rahawarin, "Values of Pancasila in the View of Nationalism in the Indonesia New Order Era," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 4 (2021): 64-92.

in practical politics.¹⁵

One of the most interesting aspects of post-reform Islamic politics is the increasing political plurality and influence of major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah in influencing social and political policies.¹⁶ NU and Muhammadiyah, which previously focused more on da'wah and education, now play an active role in influencing government policies, both at the local and national levels. They have become social forces that not only talk about religion, but also contribute to state policies related to education, health, economy and social development. This is where the role of Islamic politics is increasingly relevant in the context of Indonesian democracy.¹⁷ These organizations promote the principles of inclusivity and pluralism in state life, which are in line with democratic values, although significant challenges remain. One such challenge is how to adapt Islamic values to more universal democratic principles, such as individual freedom, human rights and pluralism.

As a country based on Pancasila-which accommodates religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, needs a framework that can bring together Islamic values with broader democratic principles.¹⁸ Pancasila, as Indonesia's national ideology, demands a balance between individual freedom and collective interests, between the rights of minority and majority groups, and between principles of social and economic justice. For Islamic politics, the challenge is how to preserve the sanctity of Islamic principles while at the same time contributing to the

¹⁵ Masooda Bano, "Welfare Work and Politics of Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2012, 86-93.

¹⁶ Wachid Ridwan, "The Dynamics of Islamic Mass Organisations in Preventing Violent Extremism," *Countering Violent and Hateful Extremism in Indonesia: Islam, Gender and Civil Society*, 2022, 215-31.

¹⁷ Eunsook Jung, "Islamic Organizations and Electoral Politics in Indonesia: The Case of Muhammadiyah," *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 1 (March 18, 2014): 73-86, <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2014.0192>.

¹⁸ Novendri Mohamad Nggilu et al., "Indonesia's Constitutional Identity: A Comparative Study of Islamic Constitutionalism," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 16, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 480-500, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v16i2.29851>.

strengthening of a democracy that values diversity.¹⁹ This often presents a dilemma: how to harmonise the principles of Islamic law with the need to create policies that are inclusive of all sections of society, including non-Muslims.

With the advent of a more open democratic system, Islamic politics in Indonesia must now prove its ability to adapt to broader democratic values while still maintaining the religious values that underpin their politics. Political Islam must learn to be more pragmatic in the context of a more dynamic and national consensus-oriented political world. Along with the increasing awareness of the importance of inter-religious and cultural dialogue, Islamic politics in Indonesia has the potential to be a transformative agent that can strengthen social cohesion and strengthen Indonesian democracy in the future.

The Dynamics of Religion and State Relations Post-Reformation

As a Muslim-majority country, Indonesia faces a major dilemma in regulating how religion, particularly Islam, interacts with an increasingly democratic and plural political system. During the New Order era, under Soeharto, although Islam played an important role in social and cultural life, the state sought to control and limit the role of religion in politics through a highly centralized and authoritarian political system.²⁰ Pancasila as the national ideology was recognized as the basis of the state that accommodated plurality, but at the same time suppressed more explicit religious ideologies in politics. In this era, Islamic parties such as the PPP, although still in existence, were not given enough space to play a role in the political process. However, after Reformasi, the wide-open political space provided an opportunity for Islam-based parties to play a more active role in Indonesian politics.

¹⁹ Bradley J. Cook and Michael Stathis, "Democracy and Islam: Promises and Perils for the Arab Spring Protests," *Journal of Global Responsibility* 3, no. 2 (September 21, 2012): 175-86, <https://doi.org/10.1108/20412561211260485>.

²⁰ Imron Rosidii, "From Political Parties to Cultural Organizations: Indonesian Islamic Movements during the New Order," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 43-53, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no1.4>.

Islamic parties such as PKS and PPP began to play a more significant role in post-Reformasi Indonesian politics. The emergence of a more open multi-party system allowed Islam-based parties to participate in government and political decision-making. Here, Islamic politics was no longer compartmentalized within strict ideological boundaries, but instead became more pragmatic and focused on broader issues, such as social justice, people's welfare and clean governance.²¹

Post-Reformation, we have witnessed an increase in the use of religion-based identity politics as a tool for mass mobilization. Religious issues are often used in political campaigns to gain support from certain groups of voters. Religion, which is supposed to be a source of morality and ethics, is sometimes used to enforce certain views that can exacerbate existing social differences.²² For example, in some elections and local elections, religious issues are often politicized to appeal to voters based on their religious affiliation, which in turn exacerbates polarization in society.²³

This phenomenon is increasingly evident in the use of religious symbols by some political groups that claim to defend Islam and sharia-based policies. Although they express legitimate aspirations to fight for religious values in the life of the nation, the use of religious politics often raises concerns about the future of pluralism in Indonesia.²⁴ Issues such as restrictions on religious freedom, rejection of minority groups, and inter-religious tensions often arise as a result of the utilization of religion in the political sphere. In this regard, while Islamic politics has the potential to strengthen social cohesion and promote a more inclusive democracy, it can also be a source of conflict that jeopardizes political and

²¹ Munhanif and Ihsan, "Ideas, Politics, and The Making of Muslim Democracy: An Historical Trajectory in Indonesia."

²² Christopher Weber and Matthew Thornton, "Courting Christians: How Political Candidates Prime Religious Considerations in Campaign Ads," *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 400-413, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381611001617>.

²³ Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi, *Voting Behavior in Indonesia since Democratization: Critical Democrats*.

²⁴ Faisar Ananda Arfa, "Problems of Pluralism In Modern Indonesian Islam," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 2014): 209, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2014.8.2.209-234>.

social stability.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of religious commodification in Indonesian politics has become a very prominent issue in the post-Reformation era. Religious commodification refers to the use of religious symbols and teachings to gain political advantage, especially in the context of elections and local elections. Political parties, both Islam-based and secular, are increasingly using religion as a tool to win over voters.²⁵ This practice often exacerbates polarization as religion becomes more than just a spiritual belief, but a political tool that can be used to widen the gap between groups in society.

The commodification of religion in politics can also affect state policy, because political parties and political figures tend to direct their policies to be in line with certain religious values, in order to gain support from the majority group. This can lead to the neglect of democratic principles that prioritize freedom, equality, and minority rights.²⁶ In this context, the use of religion in politics not only affects the dynamics of general elections, but can also change the direction of public policy that affects the lives of all Indonesian people.

As a country with very rich diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, and culture, Indonesia faces a major challenge in maintaining pluralism and tolerance amidst identity-based politics. Pancasila as the state ideology, which emphasizes diversity in unity, presents its own challenges in managing the interaction between religion and state.²⁷ On the one hand, Pancasila accommodates various religions and ethnicities, but on the other hand, the use of religion in practical politics often exacerbates social divisions, which risks threatening the social cohesion that has been built

²⁵ Faizal Hamzah Lubis, Faiz Albar Nasution, and Rahma Hayati Harahap, "The Commodification of Religious Rituals: Representations of Political Actors in Indonesian Elections," *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no. 105(2) (March 2024), <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.214>.

²⁶ Remedio Sánchez Ferriz, "Del 'Todos Nacen Libres e Iguales' a La Clasificación Algorítmica de Los Que Vivimos o Vivirán," *Revista de Derecho Político*, no. 120 (July 11, 2024): 13-41, <https://doi.org/10.5944/rdp.120.2024.41761>.

²⁷ Supratman, "Before the Ethical Policy: The Ottoman State, Pan-Islamism, and Modernisation in Indonesia, 1898-1901."

in this country. Islamic politics, although it has great potential to strengthen democracy based on ethical values, faces a major dilemma in terms of maintaining a balance between religious interests and the interests of a more inclusive state.²⁸ Nevertheless, Islamic politics that emphasizes tolerance and social justice still has the potential to be a positive force in strengthening pluralism and democracy in Indonesia. However, this requires greater efforts from all political elements to make religion a source of moral inspiration and not a tool for mobilization that divides society.

Challenges of Islamic Politics in Democracy

Islamic politics in Indonesia faces various challenges that must be overcome to strengthen a more inclusive and just democracy. As a country with a Muslim majority, Islamic politics has a very significant role in the life of the nation and state. However, this role is often overshadowed by a series of major challenges that are not only related to the management of religion in the political realm, but also to the ability of Islamic politics to adapt to the dynamics of modern democracy that prioritizes plurality and individual rights.

The polarization that arises as a result of identity politics not only damages social solidarity, but also reduces the quality of democracy itself. Democracy, which ideally prioritizes inclusion and diversity, is eroded by an exclusive narrative that claims that only those based on one religion have the right to rule. In cases like this, Islamic politics that use religion to gain votes often exacerbates social differences and widens the gap between groups of people who have different religious or ideological affiliations. Thus, although Islamic politics has the potential to strengthen political life, if not managed wisely, it can actually create tensions that disrupt the sustainability of a healthy democracy.²⁹

One of the biggest challenges for Islamic politics is how to ensure that Islamic politics remains inclusive amidst the diversity of Indonesian society.

²⁸ Nikola Gjørshoski and Goran Ilik, "Detecting the Ideological Position of Political Islam towards Liberal Democracy in Muslim Countries," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2020): 102-15.

²⁹ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*.

Indonesia is a highly pluralistic country, with more than 300 ethnicities and various religions and beliefs living side by side. In this context, Islamic politics that only focuses on the interests of Muslim groups can risk creating social tensions and even endangering the country's political stability. Therefore, Islamic politics must be able to accommodate religious and ethnic diversity and ensure that the policies proposed are not exclusive to specific religious or ethnic groups.

Inclusive Islamic politics must place universal democratic values as an integral part of its platform. Values such as individual freedom, equal rights, social solidarity, and protection of minority rights must be the main pillars of Islamic politics that prioritise social justice. In addition, Islamic politics needs to approach this diversity more openly, for example, by fighting for policies that respect religious freedom and the rights of minority groups and avoiding the use of religion as a tool to discriminate against different groups.³⁰

However, maintaining inclusivity in Islamic politics is not an easy matter. Several groups in Indonesian society, both religious and secular, often have very different views on the role of religion in politics. In this regard, Islamic politics must be able to demonstrate flexibility and the ability to adapt to the reality of existing pluralism while still adhering to the basic principles of Islam that teach the values of peace, tolerance, and justice.³¹ This challenge is even more significant amidst the increasing religious sentiment that is often politicised for personal or group gain, which can ultimately threaten harmony between religious communities and worsen social divisions in Indonesia.

Another challenge that is increasingly relevant in the context of Islamic politics in Indonesia is religious freedom. The growing number of Islamic politics in Indonesia, with an increasing number of religious voters, has sometimes encouraged some groups to call for the implementation of more conservative policies, which are not always in

³⁰ Azra, *Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context*.

³¹ Gustav Brown, "Civic Islam: Muhammadiyah, NU and the Organisational Logic of Consensus-Making in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 397-414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1626802>.

line with the principle of religious freedom contained in Pancasila.³² For example, some groups seek to enforce the implementation of Islamic sharia law at the state level, even though Indonesia adheres to a secular legal system that gives all citizens the freedom to choose their religion and beliefs.

The Role of Islamic Politics in Democracy Development

Although Islamic politics in Indonesia faces various challenges and debates regarding its role in the democratic system, its contribution to the development of an inclusive and just democracy is very significant. Islamic politics, which is based on the moral and ethical principles contained in Islamic teachings, plays a vital role in strengthening democratic values that are oriented towards social justice, people's welfare, and transparent state management.³³ One of the most significant contributions of Islamic politics is in instilling ethical values in democratic practices. Fundamental values such as justice, welfare, and transparency taught in Islam are very much in line with the basic principles of democracy. For example, the concept of justice in Islam not only includes aspects of social justice but also includes the fair distribution of resources and the protection of individual rights regardless of religious, racial, or ethnic background.

These principles are very relevant to the ideals of Indonesian democracy that prioritise equality and empowerment of all levels of society, not only the majority but also the minority. Islamic politics in Indonesia often emphasises the importance of state management that is oriented towards people's welfare.³⁴ Many Islamic political parties, such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), focus their programs on issues of

³² Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "The Rise of Islamic Religious-Political Movements In Indonesia: The Background, Present Situation and Future," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 2, no. 2 (December 1, 2008): 336, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2008.2.2.336-378>.

³³ Anand Kumar, "The Welfare State System in India," *Welfare States and the Future*, 2005, 336-63.

³⁴ Tauchid Komara Yuda, "The Development of 'Islamic Welfare Regime' in South East Asia," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 40, no. 3/4 (April 9, 2020): 220-35, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-08-2018-0137>.

social welfare, poverty alleviation, and equitable development. In this context, Islamic politics does not only focus on aspects of sharia or religious rules in social life but also touches on practical aspects of public welfare. By bringing Islamic values that prioritise justice and welfare, Islamic politics seeks to realise a clean, transparent, and just government for all Indonesian people.³⁵ This is very important in strengthening democracy that is genuinely based on the needs and aspirations of the people.³⁶

One of the critical roles of Islamic politics in strengthening democracy is to expand public participation in the political process. Through large Islamic community organisations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, Islamic politics in Indonesia has opened up various channels for community groups that have been underrepresented in the mainstream political system. NU and Muhammadiyah, although better known as religious and social organisations, have a significant influence in encouraging people to participate in political life and decision-making.³⁷ Both organisations have extensive networks in various regions, which allows them to convey the aspirations of the people to the government and play a role in advocating for social and political policies.

Through the active participation of Islamic organisations, Islamic politics also plays a role in encouraging community involvement in the political process. By bringing up social issues that are relevant to the lower classes, such as education, health, and economic empowerment, these organisations strengthen democracy by ensuring that the interests of marginalised communities, such as farmers, labourers, and the poor, can be heard in the political decision-making process. Broader public participation helps create more inclusive policies, reduces social inequality,

³⁵ Hilman Latief, "The Politics of Benevolence: Political Patronage of Party-Based Charitable Organizations in Contemporary Indonesian Islam," *AlJami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 51, no. 2 (December 5, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.512.337-363>.

³⁶ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*.

³⁷ Greg Fealy and Robin Bush, "The Political Decline of Traditional Ulama in Indonesia: The State, Umma and Nahdlatul Ulama," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, no. 5 (2014): 536–60.

and strengthens the political legitimacy of policymakers. For example, NU and Muhammadiyah are often involved in voicing policies that support free education, protection of workers' rights, and gender equality, all of which contribute to the development of a more just democracy.³⁸

One of the significant contributions of Islamic politics to the development of democracy is its ability to create inclusive dialogue between various groups in Indonesian society.³⁹ In a highly pluralistic country like Indonesia, which consists of multiple religions, ethnicities, and cultures, creating space for dialogue that respects differences is an essential step in strengthening democracy. Islamic politics, with its approach based on universal religious values, can be a bridge to unite different groups in society. For example, in the context of inter-religious relations, Islamic political parties are often involved in inter-religious dialogue, whether with Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or other religious groups. This inclusive dialogue aims to resolve horizontal conflicts that frequently arise due to religious or ethnic differences while at the same

time strengthening national unity. Through an approach based on spiritual values that prioritises peace, tolerance, and harmony, Islamic politics in Indonesia can act as an agent for conflict resolution, which not only prioritises the interests of one religious group but also maintains social harmony amidst the existing plurality.⁴⁰

In addition, Islamic politics also has the potential to strengthen democracy by prioritising moral values in politics. In a political world that is often characterised by pragmatism and opportunism, Islamic politics that prioritizes the values of honesty, accountability, and integrity can be a moral foothold that reminds politicians to act in the interests of the people and not for personal or group interests. By emphasizing ethical values in political practice, Islamic politics can encourage the creation of a political

³⁸ Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).

³⁹ Greg Barton, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morieson, "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (August 13, 2021): 641, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641>.

⁴⁰ Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi, *Voting Behavior in Indonesia since Democratization: Critical Democrats*.

culture that is cleaner, more transparent, and more oriented towards the public interest, which will strengthen public trust in the democratic system.⁴¹ In addition to playing a role in enhancing dialogue, Islamic politics also has an essential role in resolving social conflicts that often arise in society.

As a religion that teaches the values of peace and tolerance, Islam has excellent potential to be a mediator in horizontal conflicts involving differences in religion, ethnicity, or ideology.⁴² In tense situations, Islamic politics can act as a unifying bridge that offers peaceful solutions through a universal, religion-based approach. The importance of the role of Islamic politics in conflict resolution is also reflected in its community-based approach. With their extensive networks and significant influence in society, Islamic organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, often play a role in reconciling conflicts between communities.⁴³ They do not only focus on religious issues but also play a role in promoting democratic principles that prioritise social justice, equal rights, and tolerance between religious communities.

Overall, Islamic politics in Indonesia plays a vital role in the development of democracy that is not only procedural but also substantial. Through the ethical values contained in Islamic teachings, Islamic politics can strengthen the democratic system by instilling moral principles that underlie a just political life that is oriented towards the welfare of the people. In addition, Islamic politics also plays a role in strengthening public participation, creating inclusive dialogue, and resolving social conflicts, all of which contribute to the creation of a more stable and just democracy in Indonesia.

⁴¹ Abbas Ali Rastgar et al., "Transparent Government Based on Nahj Al-Balagha and Social Trust among Muslim Citizens," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (January 31, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8052>.

⁴² Thoriqul Haq and Noor Aqsa Nabila Mat Isa, "From Combating Religious Blasphemy to Promoting Peace: Reflections on the Role of Islamic Da'wah and Law in Indonesia's Pluralistic Society," *International Journal of Law and Society (IJLS)* 3, no. 2 (August 14, 2024): 90-109, <https://doi.org/10.59683/ijls.v3i2.95>.

⁴³ Abdullah M. Al-Ansi et al., "The Islamic Organizations in Indonesia 'Muhammadiyah and NU': Social Perspective Explanation," *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences* 50, no. 5 (September 30, 2023): 550-64, <https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i5.1124>.

Conclusion

Islamic politics in Indonesia has a complex role in the development of democracy. As a country with a Muslim majority, the interaction between Islam and the democratic system has continued to develop since the 1998 Reformation. Islamic politics has contributed to strengthening democratic values through the instillation of political ethics, increasing public participation, and creating inclusive dialogue in a pluralistic society. Islamic-based parties, such as PKS and PPP, as well as prominent religious organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, play an essential role in expanding community involvement in the political process and fighting for policies oriented towards social welfare.

However, Islamic politics also faces various challenges that cannot be ignored. Religious-based political identities are often used as a mobilization tool, which in some cases contributes to social polarization. In addition, political pragmatism has caused Islamic parties to have to balance religious idealism with the need to form a coalition with secular parties, which sometimes creates an ideological dilemma among their supporters. The commodification of religion in politics is also a phenomenon that reflects how religion is used for electoral interests, which risks reducing the quality of democracy that should be based on freedom and equal rights.

Nevertheless, Islamic politics still has great potential to strengthen a more inclusive and just democracy. To remain relevant and constructive, Islamic politics must prioritize universal values such as justice, tolerance, and equal rights and avoid exclusivism that can hinder diversity in Indonesia's democratic system. By continuing to encourage interfaith and cultural dialogue and upholding the principles of inclusive democracy, Islamic politics can contribute to building a stronger and more stable democracy in the future. However, further research is needed with an empirical approach to better understand the dynamics of Islamic politics in the context of Indonesia's evolving democracy.

References

- Al-Ansi, Abdullah M., Tri Sulistyaningsih, Muhammad Agung Wibowo, and Askar Garad. "The Islamic Organizations in Indonesia 'Muhammadiyah and NU': Social Perspective Explanation." *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences* 50, no. 5 (September 30, 2023): 550–64. <https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i5.1124>.
- Alam, Syariful, Sholahuddin Al-Fatih, and Merve Ozkan Borsa. "Islamism and The Challenge of Democratization in Indonesia." *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 15, no. 2 (December 29, 2023): 198–213. <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v15i2.23398>.
- Amal, M Khusna. "Revisiting Southeast Asian Civil Islam: Moderate Muslims and Indonesia's Democracy Paradox." *Intellectual Discourse* 28, no. 1 (2020): 295–318.
- Arfa, Faisar Ananda. "Problems of Pluralism In Modern Indonesian Islam." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 2014): 209. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2014.8.2.209-234>.
- Azra, Azyumardi. *Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context*. Equinox Publishing, 2006.
- Bano, Masooda. "Welfare Work and Politics of Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2012, 86–93.
- Barton, Greg, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morieson. "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia." *Religions* 12, no. 8 (August 13, 2021): 641. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641>.
- Brown, Gustav. "Civic Islam: Muhammadiyah, NU and the Organisational Logic of Consensus-Making in Indonesia." *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 397–414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1626802>.
- Cook, Bradley J., and Michael Stathis. "Democracy and Islam: Promises and Perils for the Arab Spring Protests." *Journal of Global Responsibility* 3, no. 2 (September 21, 2012): 175–86. <https://doi.org/10.1108/20412561211260485>.
- Fealy, Greg, and Robin Bush. "The Political Decline of Traditional Ulama in Indonesia: The State, Umma and Nahdlatul Ulama." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, no. 5 (2014): 536–60.
- Fealy, Greg, and Sally White. *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008.

- Franklin, Nathan John. "Islam and the Dutch in the East Indies: Oppression or Opportunity?" *The European Legacy* 25, no. 5 (July 3, 2020): 572–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2020.1760467>.
- Gjorshoski, Nikola, and Goran Ilik. "Detecting the Ideological Position of Political Islam towards Liberal Democracy in Muslim Countries." *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2020): 102–15.
- Haq, Thoriqul, and Noor Aqsa Nabila Mat Isa. "From Combating Religious Blasphemy to Promoting Peace: Reflections on the Role of Islamic Da'wah and Law in Indonesia's Pluralistic Society." *International Journal of Law and Society (IJLS)* 3, no. 2 (August 14, 2024): 90–109. <https://doi.org/10.59683/ijls.v3i2.95>.
- Hefner, Robert W. *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Holidin, Defny. "The Compatibility of Islam And Pancasila In Indonesia's Declining Democracy." *POLITICS AND RELIGION JOURNAL* 16, no. 2 (December 5, 2022): 179–202. <https://doi.org/10.54561/prj1602179h>.
- Jung, Eunsook. "Islamic Organizations and Electoral Politics in Indonesia: The Case of Muhammadiyah." *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 1 (March 18, 2014): 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2014.0192>.
- Kumar, Anand. "The Welfare State System in India." *Welfare States and the Future*, 2005, 336–63.
- Latief, Hilman. "The Politics of Benevolence: Political Patronage of Party-Based Charitable Organizations in Contemporary Indonesian Islam." *AlJami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 51, no. 2 (December 5, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.512.337-363>.
- Lubis, Faizal Hamzah, Faiz Albar Nasution, and Rahma Hayati Harahap. "The Commodification of Religious Rituals: Representations of Political Actors in Indonesian Elections." *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no. 105(2) (March 2024). <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.214>.
- Mujani, Saiful, R William Liddle, and Kuskridho Ambardi. *Voting Behavior in Indonesia since Democratization: Critical Democrats*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Munhanif, Ali, and M. Bakir Ihsan. "Ideas, Politics, and The Making of Muslim Democracy: An Historical Trajectory in Indonesia." *Studia Islamika* 30, no. 3 (December 31, 2023): 525–60. <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v30i3.38203>.
- Nggilu, Novendri Mohamad, Wahidullah Wahidullah, Evi Noviawati, and Dian Ekawaty Ismail. "Indonesia's Constitutional Identity: A Comparative Study of Islamic Constitutionalism." *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah*

- 16, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 480–500. <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v16i2.29851>.
- Nurjaman, Asep. “Islamic Movements and the Future of Democracy in Post-Suharto Indonesia Era.” *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 29, 2023): 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.007.01.03>.
- Rahawarin, Zainal. “Values of Pancasila in the View of Nationalism in the Indonesia New Order Era.” *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 4 (2021): 64–92.
- Rastgar, Abbas Ali, Rekurd Sarhang Maghdid, Iskandar Muda, and Seyed Mehdi Mousavi Davoudi. “Transparent Government Based on Nahj Al-Balagha and Social Trust among Muslim Citizens.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (January 31, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8052>.
- Ridwan, Wachid. “The Dynamics of Islamic Mass Organisations in Preventing Violent Extremism.” *Countering Violent and Hateful Extremism in Indonesia: Islam, Gender and Civil Society*, 2022, 215–31.
- Rosidii, Imron. “From Political Parties to Cultural Organizations : Indonesian Islamic Movements during the New Order.” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 43–53. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no1.4>.
- Safa’at, Muchamad Ali. “The Roles of the Indonesian Constitutional Court in Determining State-Religion Relations.” *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (May 31, 2022): 113. <https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev815>.
- Sánchez Ferriz, Remedio. “Del ‘Todos Nacen Libres e Iguales’ a La Clasificación Algorítmica de Los Que Vivimos o Vivirán.” *Revista de Derecho Político*, no. 120 (July 11, 2024): 13–41. <https://doi.org/10.5944/rdp.120.2024.41761>.
- Supratman, Frial Ramadhan. “Before the Ethical Policy: The Ottoman State, Pan-Islamism, and Modernisation in Indonesia, 1898–1901.” *AlJami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 54, no. 2 (December 14, 2016): 447. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2016.542.447-475>.
- Suryana, Dodi, and Tito Handoko. “Islamic Commodification in Representation of Political Development in Indonesia: A Systematic Literature Review.” *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 29, 2023): 51–76. <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.007.01.04>.
- Weber, Christopher, and Matthew Thornton. “Courting Christians: How Political Candidates Prime Religious Considerations in Campaign Ads.”

- The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 400–413.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381611001617>.
- Yuda, Tauchid Komara. “The Development of ‘Islamic Welfare Regime’ in South East Asia.” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 40, no. 3/4 (April 9, 2020): 220–35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-08-2018-0137>.
- Yusuf Adan, Hasanuddin, Iskandar Iskandar, Husaini Ibrahim, Sutri Helfianti, and Rosmawati Rosmawati. “Islam and the Foundation of the State in Indonesia: The Role of the Masyumi Party in the Constituent Assembly the Perspective of Fiqh Al-Siyāsah.” *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (March 31, 2023): 377. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhc.v7i1.16650>.
- Zarkasyi, Hamid Fahmy. “The Rise of Islamic Religious-Political Movements In Indonesia: The Background, Present Situation and Future.” *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 2, no. 2 (December 1, 2008): 336. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2008.2.2.336-378>.
- Zoelva, Hamdan. “The Development of Islam and Democracy in Indonesia.” *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (May 31, 2022): 37. <https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev812>.