

# FROM ACCOMMODATION TO REPRESSION: THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN DEMOCRATIC INDONESIA DURING SBY AND JOKOWI PRESIDENCIES

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## Abstract

*This study examines the evolution of political Islam in Indonesia during the presidencies of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and Joko Widodo (Jokowi), focusing on the shift from accommodation to repression. During the SBY era (2004–2014), the government adopted an accommodative approach towards Islamic groups, engaging moderate organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah as strategic partners in maintaining social stability. However, conservative groups began to challenge the democratization agenda. In contrast, Jokowi's administration (2014–2024) has faced increasingly complex challenges due to the rise of Islamic populism and identity politics, as exemplified by Aksi Bela Islam (ABI) 212. In response, Jokowi implemented more assertive measures, such as banning the HTI and FPI, to safeguard national stability and prevent radicalization. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach and a literature review to analyze the dynamics of political Islam's rise and transformation during these two periods. The findings reveal that SBY's accommodative policies created relative stability but compromised pluralism, while Jokowi's repressive approach exacerbated political polarization. The study concludes that the evolution of political Islam reflects a dynamic process in which the state must balance Islamic aspirations, democratic commitments, and the need for stability amidst the increasing challenges to pluralism. Understanding these shifts is essential for comprehending the complex relationship between Islam, democracy, and national stability in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** Political Islam, SBY, Jokowi, Islamic Populism, National Stability.



## A. Introduction

The trajectory of Indonesia's democratic development in the post-reform era began with the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, marking the conclusion of more than three decades of authoritarian governance. Political reformation, which emerged from societal demands at that time, precipitated fundamental changes in Indonesia's governmental system and political structure. A primary achievement of this reform was the adoption of democratic principles, including free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and strengthening of civil society's role. The 1999 election was a significant milestone, representing the first democratic election in the post-reform period, wherein various political parties, including those based on Islamic and nationalist ideologies, were able to participate openly.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the decentralization of power through regional autonomy strengthens the foundation of democracy by promoting active citizen participation in local-level

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "Political Conflict Resolution and Democratic Consolidation in Indonesia: The Role of the Constitutional Court," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2010): 397–424, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1598240800003672>; Azlan Tajuddin, "Development, Democracy, and Post-Islamism in Indonesia," *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 4, no. 11 (October 14, 2016): 41–50, <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v4i11.1924>.



policymaking processes.<sup>2</sup> However, this journey has not always proceeded smoothly. Challenges in the form of corrupt practices, weak legal institutions, and the emergence of anti-reform elites demonstrate that the consolidation of democracy still requires prolonged and sustained effort.<sup>3</sup>

As time progresses, Indonesian democracy continues to experience complex dynamics, reflecting efforts to balance political freedom with government stability.<sup>4</sup> Reformasi has facilitated the expansion of freedom of expression; however, this liberty is frequently accompanied by political polarization and social fragmentation. The emergence of civil society movements and press freedom have become crucial instruments for safeguarding the democratic process. Nevertheless, challenges such as the prevalence of money politics and co-optation of democratic institutions by elite

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<sup>2</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "3. Indonesia's Decentralization: The Rise of Local Identities and the Survival of the Nation-State," 2014, 45–67, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814519175-010>.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "Authoritarian Innovations in Indonesia: Electoral Narrowing, Identity Politics and Executive Illiberalism," *Democratization* 27, no. 6 (2019): 1021–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1704266>; Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's Democratic Stagnation: Anti-Reformist Elites and Resilient Civil Society," *Democratization* 19, no. 2 (2012): 209–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.572620>.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's Democratic Paradox: Competitive Elections Amidst Rising Illiberalism," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 295–317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2019.1690412>.



interests continue to persist.<sup>5</sup> At the institutional level, the reform process also engendered new entities such as the Constitutional Court, which plays a significant role in resolving political conflicts and safeguarding democratic rights. However, democratic stagnation has become apparent as oligarchic forces and populism have emerged, thereby posing a threat to the quality of the established democratic system.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of post-reform democratic dynamics, Islamic politics have emerged as a significant factor influencing the trajectory of national political development. During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) administration from 2004 to 2014, Islamic politics strengthened through the active participation of Islamic-based parties, such as PKS, PPP, and PAN, in elections and public policy. SBY's moderate and accommodative approach successfully engaged moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah as strategic partners in maintaining social stability and promoting tolerance. However, concurrently, conservative Islamic groups began to challenge the

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<sup>5</sup> Zainuddin Syarif and Abd Hannan, "Islamic Populism Politics and Its Threat to Indonesian Democracy," *Al-Tahrir Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 20, no. 2 (2020): 251–77, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v20i2.2128>.

<sup>6</sup> Mietzner, "Authoritarian Innovations in Indonesia: Electoral Narrowing, Identity Politics and Executive Illiberalism"; Marcus Mietzner, "Fighting Illiberalism With Illiberalism: Islamist Populism and Democratic Deconsolidation in Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2018): 261–82, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2018912261>.



democratization agenda by advancing a more exclusive and ideological narrative.<sup>7</sup>

During the era of Joko Widodo (Jokowi), the dynamics of Islamic politics became increasingly complex with the rise of Islamic populism and identity politics. The 212 Islamic Defense Action preceding the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election serves as a concrete example of how religious issues were utilized as a tool for political mobilization.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to SBY's approach, the Jokowi administration implemented more assertive policies, such as the dissolution of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Front Pembela Islam (Front Pembela Islam: FPI), to maintain national stability and prevent radicalization. Although these measures were considered effective in suppressing extremist groups, the policies also garnered criticism regarding the freedom of association and human rights. This phenomenon illustrates how Islamic politics

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<sup>7</sup> Rubaidi Rubaidi and Dwi Setianingsih, "Politik Identitas Islam Indonesia Kontemporer: Radikalisme Islam Versus Moderatisme Islam Dalam Politik Elektoral Pilpres 2019 (Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Identity Politics: Islamic Radicalism Versus Islamic Moderatism in the 2019 Presidential Election Electoral Politics)," *Potret Pemikiran* 25, no. 2 (2021): 149, <https://doi.org/10.30984/pp.v25i2.1593>.

<sup>8</sup> 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>; Iradhad Taqwa Sihidi, Ali Roziqin, and Dedi Fitrah Suhermanto, "Pertarungan Populisme Islam Dalam Pemilihan Presiden 2019," *Jiip Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pemerintahan* 5, no. 2 (2020): 174-89, <https://doi.org/10.14710/jiip.v5i2.8516>.



remain a crucial element of political contestation and democratic stability in Indonesia.

The divergent approaches adopted by SBY and Jokowi raise critical questions regarding the evolution of Islamic politics during their respective government periods. During the SBY era, the resurgence of Islamic politics through the active participation of Islamic parties and moderate organizations contributed to national political stability.<sup>9</sup> However, the emergence of conservative groups has challenged the government's policy of moderation, thereby introducing new dynamics into the relationship between the state and Islamic groups.<sup>10</sup> During the Jokowi era, the challenges posed by political Islam evolved into a more complex landscape, characterized by the intensification of Islamic populism and the exploitation of religious issues in political contestation. This development has prompted the government to implement more stringent policies in response to these phenomena, such

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<sup>9</sup> 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>; Mukrimin Mukrimin, "Islamic Parties and the Politics of Constitutionalism in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 6, no. 2 (2012): 367, <https://doi.org/10.15642/jiis.2012.6.2.367-390>.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Zuhdi, "Challenging Moderate Muslims: Indonesia's Muslim Schools in the Midst of Religious Conservatism," *Religions* 9, no. 10 (2018): 310, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100310>.



as the dissolution of Islamic organizations deemed to be extremist.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the dynamics of Islamic political resurgence and its transformation during two governmental periods: the SBY and Jokowi eras. The primary focus of this research is to identify the characteristics of policies adopted by each administration in response to the development of Islamic politics, and how these policies influence the direction of democracy and national political stability. Furthermore, this article explores the impact of shifting political strategies, ranging from moderate approaches to more assertive policies, on mitigating the challenges of Islamic populism and social polarization. Consequently, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of Islamic politics and its contribution to the strengthening or stagnation of democracy in Indonesia.

## B. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach utilizing the literature review method to analyze the dynamics

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<sup>11</sup> Haryanto Haryanto, "Boundary Crossers: The Transformation of Civil Society Elites in Indonesia's Post-Authoritarian Era," *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 3 (2020): 120–29, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i3.3011>; Ihsan Yilmaz, Nicholas Morieson, and Hasnan Bachtiar, "Civilizational Populism in Indonesia: The Case of Front Pembela Islam (FPI)," *Religions* 13, no. 12 (December 12, 2022): 1208, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121208>.



of Islamic political resurgence and transformation during the SBY and Jokowi eras. The data utilized in this research were derived from government policy documents, official statements, and various relevant political events from both administrative periods. Additionally, this study utilizes scientific literature such as journals, books, and research reports as supporting references to comprehend the context of Islamic politics in Indonesia. A comparative analysis was applied to identify differences in the approaches, policies, and impacts of Islamic political dynamics during the SBY and Jokowi administrations to provide a systematic and in-depth understanding of the evolution of Islamic politics and its influence on national democracy and political stability.

## **C. Result and Discussion**

### **The Revival of Political Islam in the SBY Era (2004 - 2014)**

The resurgence of Islamic politics in Indonesia during the SBY era between 2004 and 2014 occurred amidst national political dynamics characterized by competition between Islamic parties and nationalist parties. The 2004 and 2009 elections demonstrated that although Islamic parties such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), and Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN) succeeded in garnering significant support from Muslim voters, they remained less dominant than major nationalist





parties, such as Partai Demokrat, Partai Golkar, and PDI-P. This composition reflected a political equilibrium between secular and religious forces, wherein nationalist parties maintained their position as primary contenders for voter support, while Islamic parties sought to capitalize on the increased religiosity in a post-reform society.<sup>12</sup>

Among Islamic parties, the PKS emerged as a new political force capable of attracting Muslim voters through a modern and strategic approach to political da'wah. In the 2004 legislative elections, the PKS successfully obtained 7.3% of the votes, a significant achievement that demonstrated an increase in political awareness among Muslim voters and the party's success in articulating the aspirations of the religious urban population.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, despite the rapid growth of the PKS, challenges in maintaining support persist, particularly amidst competition with more established secular parties possessing

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<sup>12</sup> R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Leadership, Party, and Religion: Explaining Voting Behavior in Indonesia," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 7 (July 2007): 832–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006292113>; R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Indonesia in 2004: The Rise of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono," *Asian Survey* 45, no. 1 (2005): 119–26, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2005.45.1.119>.

<sup>13</sup> Jacqueline Hicks, "The Missing Link: Explaining the Political Mobilisation of Islam in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 42, no. 1 (2012): 39–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2012.634640>; Thomas B. Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani, "Testing Islam's Political Advantage: Evidence From Indonesia," *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 3 (2012): 584–600, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00570.x>.



stronger resources.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, PPP, as the oldest Islamic party in Indonesia, has experienced a decline in support due to limitations in political innovation and internal conflicts, whereas PAN has endeavored to attract voters with a more inclusive and moderate platform, although the results have not yet significantly enhanced their competitiveness.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of governance, the SBY recognized the significance of support from Islamic parties in maintaining political stability. Although he originated from a military background and tended to advocate a secular approach, the policies often reflected a compromise between nationalist and religious interests. Support from Islamic parties, such as the involvement of the PKS in the government coalition, served as evidence of the equilibrium SBY sought to achieve.<sup>16</sup> However, the high expectations of voters of Islamic parties to provide solutions to economic and social issues are often unmet, resulting in a long-term decline in political support.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Liddle and Mujani, "Leadership, Party, and Religion."

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Ziegenhain, "The Re-Election of the Indonesian President: Reasons and Background," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2009): 81–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810340902800303>; Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesian Politics in 2014: Democracy's Close Call," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 50, no. 3 (2014): 347–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2014.980375>.

<sup>16</sup> R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Indonesia in 2005: A New Multiparty Presidential Democracy," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 1 (2006): 132–39, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2006.46.1.132>.

<sup>17</sup> Mietzner, "Indonesia's Democratic Stagnation: Anti-Reformist Elites and Resilient Civil Society."



Thus, the resurgence of political Islam during the SBY era demonstrates the complexity of the interactions among increased religiosity, political party performance, and voter dynamics. Although Islamic parties possess a significant potential to influence the direction of national politics, the internal and external challenges they face limit their capacity to dominate the Indonesian political landscape.<sup>18</sup>

Moderation and inclusion in the relationship between the state and Islamic civil society organizations (CSOs) became a significant aspect of SBY administration. SBY recognized the strategic role of Islamic CSOs, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, in maintaining political and social stability in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim. NU, as the largest Islamic CSO, possesses a strong tradition in promoting the values of pluralism, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue. Through its moderate approach, the NU actively supported SBY's inclusive government policies, which sought to maintain a balance between secular and religious interests. These policies encompassed NU's involvement in national dialogue and advocacy for social harmony, which not only strengthened the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslim community,

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<sup>18</sup> Liddle and Mujani, "Leadership, Party, and Religion"; Marcus Mietzner, "Comparing Indonesia's Party Systems of the 1950s and the Post-Suharto Era: From Centrifugal to Centripetal Inter-Party Competition," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (2008): 431–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022463408000337>.



but also served as a mediator in preventing potential social and religious polarization..<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, Muhammadiyah, with its modernist approach, plays a significant role in promoting moderation through its focus on education, community empowerment, and the enhancement of human resource quality. By establishing educational institutions and health services throughout Indonesia, Muhammadiyah substantially contributes to fostering constructive political and social awareness. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah encourages the political participation of its members in a moderate manner, eschewing extremism and radicalization that could potentially disrupt national stability.<sup>20</sup> In the political context, Muhammadiyah's role as a bridge between society and the government demonstrates this civil society organization's capacity to positively influence public policy and foster an inclusive political environment.

The harmonious relationship between the state and Islamic mass organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah

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<sup>19</sup> Andi Rosa, "Politik Dakwah Dan Dakwah Politik Di Era Reformasi Indonesia," *Walisono Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 22, no. 1 (2014): 57, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.2014.22.1.259>; Hicks, "The Missing Link: Explaining the Political Mobilisation of Islam in Indonesia."

<sup>20</sup> Hicks, "The Missing Link: Explaining the Political Mobilisation of Islam in Indonesia"; Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, "4. Voters and the New Indonesian Democracy," 2010, 75–99, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814279918-009>.



during the SBY era became a significant factor in strengthening the moderation of political Islam in Indonesia. This inclusive approach reflected the government's strategy of embracing moderate elements of civil society to maintain social stability and constructively accommodate the aspirations of Muslims. Furthermore, the contributions of NU and Muhammadiyah in advocating faith harmony and national development reinforced the legitimacy of democracy and prevented polarization amid increasing political dynamics and challenges from conservative groups.<sup>21</sup> It is evident here that moderation and inclusion in the state's relationship with Islamic mass organizations during SBY's administration not only strengthened political stability but also affirmed the crucial role of Islamic mass organizations as pillars in maintaining harmony and democracy in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the most significant challenge during the SBY era was maintaining a balance between religious freedom and political interests amidst the increasingly powerful resurgence of Islamic politics. Controversial issues such as the Ahmadiyah case, fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), and the implementation of the Sharia Regional Regulations (Perda) reflected the complexity of interactions among religion, state, and human rights. The MUI fatwa declaring Ahmadiyah teachings heretically exacerbated

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<sup>21</sup> Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani, "Testing Islam's Political Advantage: Evidence From Indonesia."



discrimination against this group and was frequently utilized by conservative factions to justify acts of intolerance and violence.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the SBY administration's efforts to maintain social stability have frequently been criticized as sluggish and insufficiently resolute in safeguarding minority groups, such as the Ahmadiyah, consequently eliciting severe censure from human rights activists and civil society organizations.<sup>23</sup>

This lack of assertiveness reflects the government's dilemma in responding to pressure from the Muslim majority group, while maintaining the principles of pluralism and inclusion. Furthermore, the implementation of Sharia-based Regional Regulations in various areas, particularly in Aceh, demonstrates the local political dynamics that focus on religious identity. The application of Sharia law often conflicts with constitutional values such as religious freedom and human rights, and precipitates social segregation within society.<sup>24</sup> The central government under SBY endeavored to

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<sup>22</sup> Aan Suryana, "Discrepancy in State Practices: The Cases of Violence Against Ahmadiyah and Shi'a Minority Communities During the Presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono," *Al-Jami Ah Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 1 (2017): 71–104, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.551.71-104>.

<sup>23</sup> Aan Suryana, "Indonesian Presidents and Communal Violence Against Non-Mainstream Faiths," *South East Asia Research* 26, no. 2 (2018): 147–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828x18769393>.

<sup>24</sup> Arip Purkon, "Political Parties and Islamic Law Positivation in Contemporary Indonesian Governance," *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 9, no. 2 (2021): 75–86, <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2021.928>.



implement regional regulations to ensure their compliance with the constitution; however, challenges arising from the decentralization of power rendered oversight difficult. This issue further reinforces the perspective that the resurgence of political Islam during the SBY era did not consistently align with an increase in tolerance and pluralism. This demonstrates that although SBY attempted to balance the interests of moderate and conservative Islamic groups, the policies adopted often failed to provide equitable justice for minority groups and exacerbated social tensions.<sup>25</sup> Thus, while the government promotes interfaith dialogue and social harmony, challenges from conservative groups and injustices experienced by minority groups impede the establishment of inclusive political and social stability in Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

Another critical issue during the SBY era was the challenge of radicalism and terrorism, which reflected the complexity of the resurgence of hardline Islamic groups in Indonesia. Although SBY was committed to maintaining national stability and security, the occurrence of terrorist incidents, such as the bombing of the Australian Embassy in 2004 and attacks on the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in

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<sup>25</sup> Suryana, "Indonesian Presidents and Communal Violence Against Non-Mainstream Faiths"; Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani, "Testing Islam's Political Advantage: Evidence From Indonesia."

<sup>26</sup> Hicks, "The Missing Link: Explaining the Political Mobilisation of Islam in Indonesia."



Jakarta in 2009, demonstrated that terrorist networks such as *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) and its affiliates remained active and capable of perpetrating violent acts that disrupted public safety.<sup>27</sup> The incident not only resulted in fatalities and significant economic consequences, but also elicited fear among the population and heightened the urgency for government authorities to respond effectively to the threat of terrorism. However, the repressive measures implemented by security forces frequently invited criticism regarding human rights violations and led to the stigmatization of certain Muslim groups, thereby increasing the complexity of efforts to address radicalism.<sup>28</sup>

The administration of SBY recognized that addressing radicalism could not be accomplished solely through security measures. Consequently, the government initiated the involvement of moderate Islamic organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, in deradicalization programs. NU, with its tradition of moderation and pluralism, and Muhammadiyah, with its modernist approach and focus on education, became

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<sup>27</sup> 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>.

<sup>28</sup> Paige Johnson Tan, "Reining in the Reign of the Parties: Political Parties in Contemporary Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 20, no. 2 (2012): 154–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2012.714132>.





strategic partners in efforts to counter extreme ideologies within society.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, the SBY administration strengthened international cooperation in combating terrorism, including with neighboring nations, through regional mechanisms such as ASEAN and bilateral partnerships with Australia and the United States.<sup>30</sup> The government has implemented internal measures to bolster the capabilities of security forces through comprehensive training programs and institutional reinforcement, with Special Detachment 88 (*Densus 88*) playing a crucial role in counterterrorist efforts. Nevertheless, critics argue that this strategy fails to adequately address the fundamental causes of radicalization, which are deeply rooted in the societal inequalities, economic hardship, and educational deficiencies prevalent in various regions across Indonesia.<sup>31</sup> Radical groups frequently exploit these conditions to recruit new members and disseminate extremist ideologies through propaganda targeting vulnerable populations.

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<sup>29</sup> R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "2. Indonesian Democracy From Transition to Consolidation," 2013, <https://doi.org/10.7312/kunk16190-006>.

<sup>30</sup> Ziegenhain, "The Re-Election of the Indonesian President: Reasons and Background."

<sup>31</sup> Aspinall and Mietzner, "Indonesian Politics in 2014: Democracy's Close Call."



## The Transformation of Political Islam in the Jokowi Era (2014–2024)

The transformation of political Islam during the Jokowi era reflects complex dynamics characterized by the resurgence of identity politics, Islamic populism, and the diminishing influence of Islamic parties in formal political contestation. The primary catalyst for this transformation was the 2016 case involving Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), who was accused of blasphemy. This accusation precipitated a large-scale mobilization of Muslims through Action to Defend Islam 212, which involved conservative Islamic groups. This action not only symbolized dissatisfaction with the Jokowi administration, which was perceived as insufficiently responsive to Muslim aspirations, but also marked the emergence of Islamic populism as a new political force.<sup>32</sup> The movement transformed into a more structured political entity through the establishment of Persaudaraan Alumni 212 (PA 212), which successfully utilized digital technology and public spaces to construct networks across organizations and expand

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<sup>32</sup> Indiana Ngenget, “Kebangkitan Islam Politik: Analisis Gerakan Aksi Bela Islam Dalam Pilkada DKI Jakarta 2017,” 2018, <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/q782c>; 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>.



their political support base.<sup>33</sup> The political role of this group became increasingly evident during the 2019 Presidential Election, when PA 212 supported the opposition as a form of resistance against the government, which was perceived as pro-elite and secular.<sup>34</sup>

Conversely, the Jokowi administration faced significant challenges from groups deemed radical and in opposition to Pancasila ideology. One of the stringent policies was the dissolution of the HTI in 2017 and the FPI in 2020. The dissolution of HTI was based on the Government Regulation in Lieu of Law (Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang: Perppu) on Mass Organizations, Number 2 of 2017, which was subsequently ratified as Law Number 16 of 2017. The government assessed that the HTI actively disseminated the caliphate ideology, which contradicted Pancasila and had the potential to undermine national unity. This decision was substantiated by evidence of HTI's activities, which were characterized as clandestine and ideological, aimed at delegitimizing Indonesia's democratic system.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kusumo and Hurriyah, "Populisme Islam Di Indonesia: Studi Kasus Aksi Bela Islam Oleh GNPF-MUI Tahun 2016-2017."

<sup>34</sup> Gili Argenti, "Islam Politik Di Indonesia: Transformasi Gerakan Sosial Aksi Bela Islam 212 Dari Gerakan Demonstrasi Ke Gerakan Kelembagaan Sosial, Politik Dan Ekonomi," *Jurnal Politikom Indonesiana* 4, no. 2 (2019): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.35706/jpi.v4i2.3228>.

<sup>35</sup> 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>;



This action was subsequently followed by the dissolution of the FPI in December 2020, on the grounds that the organization frequently engaged in activities deemed disruptive to public order and in violation of the law. The government also disclosed the association of FPI with potentially radical activities and the use of symbols that contravene national values.<sup>36</sup> Although implemented to maintain political stability and national security, this policy has elicited severe criticism from conservative Islamic groups, including PA 212, who perceive the action as a form of restriction on freedom of association, contradictory to democratic principles. Consequently, this policy has exacerbated political polarization and reinforced the narrative that the Jokowi administration marginalized the aspirations of the Muslim community.

In the context of electoral politics, the decline in the influence of Islamic parties presents an additional challenge for formal Islamic groups. Data from the 2019 General Election demonstrate stagnation in support for parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the United Development

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Peter Schmitz, "Conservative Islamic Factions vs. Secular Nationalists: Toward a Civil Contestation in Democratic Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Social Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2021): 62, <https://doi.org/10.20473/ijss.v13i2.30425>.

<sup>36</sup> Bani Syarif Maula, "Post-Islamism and the Rise of Sharia Laws in Contemporary Indonesia: Aspirations of Implementing Islamic Laws in a Democratic Era," *International Journal of Social Science and Religion (Ijssr)*, 2023, 163–84, <https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v4i2.137>.



Party (PPP), while nationalist parties such as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and Gerindra experienced significant increases in support.<sup>37</sup> The internal fragmentation of Islamic parties, the lack of innovation in political platforms, and their inability to respond to populist issues that are more relevant to young and urban voters constitute the primary factors contributing to this decline.<sup>38</sup> This situation provides an opportunity for nationalist parties to dominate political contestations through more inclusive and populist agendas. Consequently, conservative Islamic groups, such as PA 212, opt for social mobilization channels outside the formal political system to advocate for their aspirations.

In response to radicalization and political polarization, the Jokowi administration implemented a religious moderation program to instill values of tolerance and harmony among religious communities. This initiative involves moderate Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah in efforts to promote inclusive dialogue and counter the dissemination of extremist ideologies.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, this

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<sup>37</sup> Asep Nurjaman, "The Decline of Islamic Parties and the Dynamics of Party System in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 27, no. 2 (2023): 192, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.79698>; Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, "Indonesia: Jokowi Sidelines Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 72–86, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0053>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Mujani and Liddle, "Indonesia: Jokowi Sidelines Democracy."

<sup>39</sup> Denny Febriansyah and Dawoud El-Alami, "Moderate Islam Vis-a-Vis Salafism in Indonesia: An Ideological Competition," *Walisono Jurnal*



approach is considered to remain predominantly top-down and has not yet effectively addressed the root causes of the issue, such as social injustice, poverty, and low religious literacy, which are frequently exploited by extremist groups to recruit new sympathizers, particularly from marginalized segments of society.<sup>40</sup>

The Jokowi administration's response to Islamic political dynamics demonstrates a concerted effort to maintain national stability amid increasing Islamic populist pressures. The government's primary focus on national security and social harmony is evident in its implementation of repressive policies such as the dissolution of HTI and FPI, coupled with the promotion of religious moderation. However, these measures have inadvertently created opportunities for conservative Islamic groups to establish alternative political networks outside the formal system that are more structured and capable of influencing national political dynamics. The dominance of nationalist parties in elections, accompanied by the weakening influence of Islamic parties due to internal fragmentation,

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*Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 29, no. 1 (2021): 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.29.1.7212>; Maula, “Post-Islamism and the Rise of Sharia Laws in Contemporary Indonesia: Aspirations of Implementing Islamic Laws in a Democratic Era.”

<sup>40</sup> Bambang Irawan and Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution, “The Political Dynamics of Islamophobia in Jokowi’s Era: A Discourse Analysis of Online Media Reporting,” *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 3 (2021): 607–35, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i3.17589>.



further underscores the complexity of Islamic political transformation during the Jokowi era. Consequently, religion functions not only as a moral identity but also as an effective instrument for political mobilization within Indonesia's democratic space, reflecting the evolving challenges and dynamics of the political landscape.

### **Comparative Analysis of Policies and Approaches between SBY and Jokowi**

Islamic politics in post-reformation Indonesia continues to experience complex dynamics, particularly in the context of the relationship between the state and Islamic organizations. Two prominent leadership periods, the SBY and Jokowi eras, reflect significant differences in responding to the challenges of Islamic political resurgence and maintaining national stability. Both SBY and Jokowi faced political contexts influenced by the increasing aspirations of Islamic groups and the emergence of Islamic movements in various forms ranging from moderate to conservative. However, the approaches taken by the two presidents to address these dynamics demonstrate different strategies, in line with the political and social conditions, as well as the challenges faced in each era. A comparative analysis of the policies of these two leaders is crucial for understanding how the state interacts with Islamic groups, maintaining a balance between democracy, pluralism,



and national stability amid the changing landscape of Islamic politics in Indonesia.

During the SBY era (2004–2014), government policies exhibited a tendency towards accommodation and inclusivity toward Islamic groups. SBY endeavored to engage moderate Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, which functioned as strategic partners in maintaining social stability and promoting tolerance. This approach was evident in SBY's support for policies that accommodated the aspirations of the Muslim community, including providing broader opportunities for Islamic parties to participate in governance. SBY was recognized as a leader who exercised caution in addressing sensitive issues related to religion, such as the Ahmadiyah case and implementation of sharia-based regional regulations in certain areas. He opted for a path of moderation and dialogue to avert overt conflict, although criticism emerged that this policy was often characterized as compromising and insufficiently assertive in addressing intolerant groups.<sup>41</sup> This strategy facilitates relatively maintained political stability; however, it also elicits criticism regarding the government's inconsistency in upholding the principles of pluralism and democracy.

In contrast to SBY's administration, the Jokowi government (2014–2024) has adopted a more assertive and

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<sup>41</sup> Zulfadli and Taufani, “Kemunduran Demokrasi Dan Pelarangan Organisasi Islamis Di Era Pemerintahan Jokowi.”





arguably repressive approach towards Islamic organizations deemed radical and in opposition to the Pancasila ideology. The dissolution of HTI in 2017 and FPI in 2020 served as evidence of this strategy. The disbandment of HTI was predicated on concerns regarding the propagation of caliphate ideology, which was considered contradictory to nationalist principles and potentially disruptive to social stability. Conversely, the dissolution of the FPI was justified on the grounds of the organization's alleged involvement in activities deemed unlawful and conducive to public unrest.<sup>42</sup> This policy reflects President Jokowi's commitment to upholding Pancasila ideology and safeguarding national cohesion, despite eliciting criticism from conservative Islamic groups who perceive their rights to organize and freedom of expression as marginalized.

Furthermore, Jokowi implemented a religious moderation program in response to the challenges of radicalization. This initiative involves moderate Islamic organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, to promote dialogue, tolerance, and harmony among religious communities. However, this approach is often perceived as top-down and insufficiently effective in addressing the root causes of these issues, including social injustice, poverty, and

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<sup>42</sup> 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>.



low religious literacy at the community level.<sup>43</sup> This program is evaluated more as an effort to mitigate political unrest than as a long-term solution for radicalization rooted in structural inequality.

From a political dynamics perspective, the SBY successfully maintained a balance between Islamic and nationalist political forces. Islamic parties such as the PKS, PPP, and PAN obtained significant representation in the government and became part of a broader political coalition. However, during the Jokowi era, Islamic parties experienced a significant decline in influence during the electoral contestation. Data from the 2019 election indicate stagnation in support for the PKS and PPP, while nationalist parties such as the PDI-P and Gerindra experienced a substantial increase in support.<sup>44</sup> Internal fragmentation, failure to respond to populist issues relevant to young voters, and the dominance of nationalist populist narratives constitute the primary factors marginalizing Islamic parties within the dynamics of formal politics.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Denny Febriansyah and Dawoud Sudqi El-Alami, "Moderate Islam Vis-a-Vis Salafism in Indonesia: An Ideological Competition" 29, no. 1 (2021): 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.29.1.7212>; Irawan and Nasution, "The Political Dynamics of Islamophobia in Jokowi's Era: A Discourse Analysis of Online Media Reporting."

<sup>44</sup> Nurjaman, "The Decline of Islamic Parties and the Dynamics of Party System in Post-Suharto Indonesia."

<sup>45</sup> I Nengah Suastika, "Fenomena Susilo Bambang Yudhono Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Pendidikan Politik Masyarakat Indonesia Pasca



**Table 1. Comparison of Islamic Political Policies in the SBY and Jokowi Eras**

Aspects	SBY (2004-2014)	Jokowi (2014-2024)
<b>General Approach</b>	Be accommodating and inclusive. Maintain dialog and harmony.	Firm and repressive against groups deemed radical.
<b>Relationship with CSOs (Ormas)</b>	Embrace NU and Muhammadiyah as stability partners.	Involving NU and Muhammadiyah in religious moderation programs.
<b>Handling Radical Groups</b>	Tends to be compromising. Handling is moderate.	Dissolution of HTI (2017) and FPI (2020) as repressive measures.
<b>Moderation Policy</b>	Focus on interfaith dialog, but less strategic.	Promotion of religious moderation, but it is top-down.

Pemilu 2004,” *Media Komunikasi Fpips* 19, no. 2 (2020): 104, <https://doi.org/10.23887/mkfis.v19i2.27317>; Wasisto Raharjo Jati, “Polarization of Indonesian Society During 2014-2020: Causes and Its Impacts Toward Democracy,” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 26, no. 2 (2022): 152, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.66057>.



<b>Dynamics of Islamic Parties</b>	Islamic parties have significant space in the coalition.	Decline in the influence of Islamic parties, dominance of nationalist parties.
<b>Challenges</b>	Intolerant groups and less assertive compromises.	Political polarization, radicalization, and repressive critique.

Thus, a comparison of the policies and approaches of SBY and Jokowi revealed two contrasting strategies. SBY tended to be accommodative and inclusive, maintaining harmonious relations between the government and moderate Islamic groups, yet less assertive towards intolerant groups. Conversely, Jokowi adopted a more assertive approach with repressive policies against groups deemed radical while promoting religious moderation as a national strategy. This difference reflects the changing context of political Islam in Indonesia, where challenges to democracy, pluralism, and stability became increasingly complex during the Jokowi era.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the resurgence and transformation of Islamic politics in Indonesia during the SBY



and Jokowi administrations reflects the complex state-Islam interplay and challenges to democracy, pluralism, and national stability. The SBY era was marked by an accommodative approach, engaging moderate organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah to promote social cohesion. This fostered stability, but required compromises with intolerant groups and local sharia policies, sparking debates on religious freedom and minority rights. In contrast, Jokowi's administration adopted more assertive policies towards groups such as HTI and FPI to uphold Pancasila and national stability. The rise of Islamic populism and identity politics, as seen in the Ahok case and the 212 Movement, heightened political polarization and shifted Islamic political power from formal channels to social mobilization. Jokowi's religious moderation program is viewed as ineffective in addressing structural issues, such as social injustice and poverty. Thus, the evolution of Islamic politics in both eras highlights the state's efforts to balance Islamic group aspirations, democratic commitments, and national stability within a challenging pluralistic context.

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