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Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia

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Abstract: Since independence, Islamic civil society groups and intellectuals have played a vital role in Indonesian politics. This paper seeks to chart the contestation of Islamic religious ideas in Indonesian politics and society throughout the 20th Century, from the declaration of independence in 1945 up until 2001. This paper discusses the social and political influence of, and relationships between, three major Indonesian Islamic intellectual streams: Modernists, Traditionalists, and neo-Modernists. It describes the intellectual roots of each of these Islamic movements, their relationships with the civil Islamic groups Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), their influence upon Indonesian politics, and their interactions with the state. The paper examines the ways in which mainstream Islamic politics in Indonesia, the world's largest majority Muslim nation, has been shaped by disagreements between modernists and traditionalists, beginning in the early 1950s. Disagreements resulted in a schism within Masyumi, the dominant Islamic party, that saw the traditionalists affiliated with NU leave to establish a separate NU party. Not only did this prevent Masyumi from coming close to garnering a majority of the votes in the 1955 election, but it also contributed to Masyumi veering into Islamism. This conservative turn coincided with elite contestation to define Indonesia as an Islamic state and was a factor in the party antagonizing President Sukarno to the point that he moved to ban it. The banning of Masyumi came as Sukarno imposed 'guided democracy' as a soft-authoritarian alternative to democracy and set in train dynamics that facilitated the emergence of military-backed authoritarianism under Suharto. During the four decades in which democracy was suppressed in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, and associated NGOs, activists, and intellectuals were the backbones of civil society. They provided critical support for the non-sectarian principles at the heart of the Indonesian constitution, known as Pancasila. This found the strongest and clearest articulation in the neo-Modernist movement that emerged in the 1980s and synthesized key elements of traditionalist Islamic scholarship and Modernist reformism. Neo-Modernism, which was articulated by leading Islamic intellectual Nurcholish Madjid and Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman Abdurrahman Wahid, presents an open, inclusive, progressive understanding of Islam that is affirming of social pluralism, comfortable with modernity, and stresses the need for tolerance and harmony in inter-communal relations. Its articulation by Wahid, who later became president of Indonesia, contributed to Indonesia's transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The vital contribution of neo-Modernist Islam to democracy and reform in Indonesia serves to refute the notion that Islam is incompatible with democracy and pluralism.



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1. Introduction

More than two decades after the fall of Suharto and a sudden transition to democracy, Indonesia remains a democratic nation, despite fears that it lacked the critical mass in civil society to ballast democratic transition (Elson 2001; Liddle 1996). Moreover, the pluralist,

non-sectarian principles of Pancasila and the 1945 constitution continue to be supported by the vast majority of Indonesians. At the same time, Indonesia remains a deeply religious, Muslim majority nation. Almost 100 million Indonesians are affiliated with one of the two major Islamic civil organizations: the Islamic Modernist Muhammadiyah and the Islamic Traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (Barton 1995; Fealy and Barton 1996; Bush 2009). Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, is vast and ethnically diverse but has a large Muslim majority, with 86% of its 275 million citizens identifying as Sunni Muslim. Yet, political parties based on Islam have enjoyed rather limited sustained political success, and radical Islamist parties have achieved very little success at all (Epley and Jung 2016). Why, then, despite the overwhelming majority of Indonesians practicing Islam, and the political and social importance of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) do Indonesian Muslims remain resolutely supportive of a non-sectarian, democratic polity?

The answer lies, this paper contends, in large part in the complex contestation of Islamic ideas in Indonesia, and the relationship between the key Islamic intellectual streams of Modernism, Traditionalism, and neo-Modernism, and the Indonesian state and society (Barton 1994, 1995). With this in mind, the paper discusses the contestation of Islamic ideas in Indonesia and examines the social and political influence of three Indonesian Islamic movements: Modernism, Traditionalism, and neo-Modernism. It examines these movements through the prism of their relationships with the Islamic mass organisations Muhammadiyah and NU, and with the Indonesian state, in the second half of the Twentieth Century, during which time the nation was governed first by the left-leaning authoritarian secular nationalist Sukarno and, after 1965, by the anti-communist dictator Suharto (Elson 2001; Liddle 1996; Robison 1988).

The purpose of the paper is to show how these three streams of thought, and the very different (yet, in some aspects, complementary) conceptions of Islam they embrace, have influenced Indonesian society and politics during the years of authoritarian rule. The paper shows how Islamic Modernism, which called for rationalism and modernization yet also stressed the authority of the Qur'an and Hadith literature, was a powerful influence on Indonesian society, and the catalyst for practical efforts at improving education, absorbing modern Western ideas, and improving Indonesian's overall welfare. Through Muhammadiyah (founded in 1912), Islamic modernism, inspired by the ideas of the influential Egyptian reformer Muhammad Abduh, took root in Indonesia's urban centres and became an important political and social force.

The paper describes how the rising influence of Islamic modernist ideas and the rapid growth of Muhammadiyah schools (known by the Arabic term, *madrasa*, but teaching conventional non-religious subjects) in towns and cities across Indonesia prompted traditionalist *ulama*, or Islamic scholars to form Nahdlatul Ulama—the name translates as the 'awakening of the *ulama*'—to protect the rural and peri-urban networks of traditionalist religious schools (*pesantren*). NU stressed the importance of classical Islamic scholarship and of education focused on the passing on the knowledge of, and a capacity to work with, the canon of Islamic texts. Connected with this was an approach to understanding and practicing Islam imbued with Sufi mystical teaching encapsulated in local culture. At the same time, the *ulama* of NU were not opposed to modernising classrooms and teaching secular subjects, such as science, maths, and European languages. Tensions between the two groups were substantially sublimated during the period of Japanese occupation and through the formation of the unifying, Islam-based, Masyumi Party. Masyumi was divided over the question of whether the newly independent Indonesia ought to be an Islamic state, leading to further disagreements. Ahead of the first parliamentary elections of 1955, members of NU left Masyumi and formed their own political party, depriving Masyumi of an opportunity of dominating Indonesian politics.

The paper also discusses how, after the banning of Masyumi and the side-lining of Nahdlatul Ulama in the 1960s, and especially after the downfall of Sukarno and Suharto's rise to power, Muhammadiyah and NU continued to contest Islamic notions of religious practice and conceptions of the state. It describes their continuing important work in

education and welfare, which helped Indonesian society continue to develop even under authoritarian rule. On a darker note, it acknowledges that members of both groups become caught up in the anti-communist killings of 1965, which claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people (Cribb 2001). Without diminishing their involvement in this eruption of violence the paper also describes how Muhammadiyah and NU have tended to exercise a moderating presence in Indonesia. For example, both came to support the non-sectarian principles at the heart of the Indonesian constitution, known as Pancasila, which established the nation as theistic but not narrowly Islamic and therefore gave permission for religious minorities to express themselves publicly.

Finally, the paper describes the advent of neo-Modernism, and the role its adoption by Nurcholish Madjid and NU leader Abdurrahman Wahid played in helping Indonesia preserve its non-sectarian character and transition to democracy after the sudden resignation of Suharto in 1998. It argues that neo-Modernist interpretations of Islam have proven especially beneficial for Indonesia in promoting democratic reforms and have assisted Indonesian society as it grappled with the problems created by modernity, authoritarianism, and finally the transition to democracy. Indonesian society is rich with Islamic intellectuals who have provided, over many decades, a productive synthesis of Islamic ideas and modern concepts such as democracy, liberalism, and secularism.

In telling this story the paper describes how a small ‘renewal of Islamic thought’ movement emerged to play a significant role in pushing for political and social reforms. Inspired by the ‘neo-Modernist’ ideas of reformist scholar Fazlur Rahman and led by the charismatic Nurcholish Madjid, the movement supported the desacralization of politics and the liberalizing of Islam (Rahman 1984, 2009; Faisal Bakti 2004). Similar ideas were articulated by Abdurrahman Wahid. Madjid and Wahid presented Indonesians with a sophisticated synthesis of classical Islamic scholarship and modern critical thought and demonstrated that religion need not be tied to political parties in order for it to define the character of the nation.

2. Islamic Civil Society Groups in Indonesia

Islamic political and civil society groups and individual actors have been important participants in debates on democracy and the role of Islam in politics and society since the early 20th century (Barton et al. 2013). Two of the largest and most significant groups in this sense are the modernist Muhammadiyah and traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama. Throughout the century, these groups have remained the most powerful actors in the Indonesian civil society sector through their religiously-driven civic and political activism.

The first important mass-based Islamic organisation to be founded in Indonesia was Muhammadiyah. Founded in 1912 by Ahmad Dahlan, the group attracted support mostly from the ‘*santri*’ (or observant orthodox Sunni) Muslim traders and small businesspeople of Yogyakarta (Barton 2014). The observant *santri* Muslims living in Yogyakarta were attracted by the teachings of Dahlan, inspired by the Islamic modernism of seminal Egyptian thinker Muhammad Abduh, and his successor Rashid Rida (Barton 2014). For *santri* Muslims who rejected the local, partially syncretic practices of ‘*abangan*’ Indonesian Muslims, Dahlan’s modernism was appealing insofar as it stressed the importance of a return to the ‘pure’ Islam of the Qur’an and Hadith literature. At the same time, the petit-bourgeois traders were no doubt also drawn to the other aspect of Modernism: its “vision for combining spiritual and intellectual reform with practical innovations in education and health care” (Barton 2014).

It is important to understand that while Muhammadiyah is a religious organization, its modernist Islamic ideology, which stresses the importance of *ijtihad*—the rational interpretation of scripture—was itself oriented toward action rather than theological scholarship. *Ijtihad* literally means ‘striving’ but is generally understood as “the capacity for making deductions in matters of law in cases to which no express text or rule already determined by *ijma*’ (consensus) is applicable” (Ali-Karamali and Dunne 1994, p. 238). From the beginning, then, Muhammadiyah was a very practical organization, dedicated to establishing secular

schools and building health clinics and hospitals. Thus, the organization paid relatively little attention to advancing Islamic knowledge and training *ulama*, but rather called upon its members and followers to adopt rational, scientific learning and use it to improve their society (Syamsuddin 1992).

Muhammadiyah's practical, action-orientated, approach led the group to largely neglect the study of classical Islamic texts. Its inability to reproduce ranks of sophisticated religious thinkers such as Dahlan by training large numbers of modern *ulama*, together with a deep 'Protestant' suspicion of traditionalist Islamic practices such as *ziarah* (making pilgrimages to the tombs of saints) that centred around communication between the world of the living and the dead, contributed to an increasing antipathy toward classical Islamic scholarship. In many respects, Muhammadiyah's problems were reflected in the wider global Islamic Modernist movement. For example, Abduh's disciple Rashid Rida was not educated in classical Islamic scholarship and was therefore limited in his capacity to engage with the deep learning and sophistication of Abduh's Islamic thought. Abduh was widely travelled, could read and speak multiple European languages, and was well-equipped to synthesize modern Western and classical Islamic thought as an Islamic intellectual. Lacking a similar education, Rida, as a Muslim activist but not an Islamic intellectual, was simply unable to replicate Abduh's extraordinary range and sophistication in thought. In a similar manner, most Indonesian modernists, too, were unable to synthesize Western and Islamic scholarship and therefore focused mainly on practical action in the social sphere, and upon what they imagined to be the purification of Islam of the unorthodox practices and beliefs common among 'abangan' Muslims.

Muhammadiyah, therefore, rejected the deep religious educational tradition common to Indonesia's *pesantren*, the religious boarding schools, and created their own schools, which were to be based upon a modernist approach to education. Muhammadiyah referred to these schools as *madrassa*, yet they taught only the rudiments of Islamic theology and were more focused on secular education in science and mathematics (Barton 2014, p. 296). The group's opposition to the *pesantren* was not merely due to their neglect of secular teaching but also born out of their hostility to the Sufism and local practices which were an integral part of *pesantren* education (Woodward 2001). Despite its hostility to Indonesian cultural approaches to Islamic practice, Muhammadiyah played a mostly positive role in Indonesian society, although its hostility towards 'abangan' practices created tensions with *ulama* making them feel threatened by Modernism, and the ideas of Abduh, Rida, Dahlan, and later modernist political actors such as Mohammad Natsir. A complex and large organization, Muhammadiyah is the product of many different personalities, and its positions on important political and religious issues have shifted over time. At the same time, it has long remained a powerful and important influence over Indonesian politics and society and continues to represent Islamic modernism in Indonesia. The group has generally been opposed to the Salafi fundamentalism associated with Saudi Arabia that has spread rapidly through Indonesia since the transition to democracy (Qodir et al. 2020, p. 326). Muhammadiyah tends to see itself, in contrast with the Saudi Salafis, as being modern, progressive and supportive of the Republic of Indonesia. Muhammadiyah "does not reject the modern nation-state, but instead embraces those elements that it deems conform to Islamic values" (Qodir et al. 2020, p. 326). There has been some Salafi influence within the small group of Muhammadiyah *ulama* who have studied in Saudi Arabia but in general, the austerity and narrow dogmatism of Saudi Salafism are at odds with Muhammadiyah's focus on education, health care, and moderate, practical religion.

The traditionalist *ulama* involved in networks of *pesantren* across Java were concerned by the rise to dominance of Salafi extremism in Saudi Arabia, and by the rapid spread of Muhammadiyah *madrassa* in Indonesia, and were spurred into creating Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The creation of NU is not surprising, given how quickly Muhammadiyah had grown, and the rapid spread of its modernist ideas, which threatened to eliminate the traditionalist practices and scholarship of most Indonesian Muslims.

In the 1920s a leading group of *ulama* in East Java, concerned that the influence of *pesantren* and classical Islamic scholarship was under threat Indonesia, came together to form the ‘Awakening of the Ulama’—Nahdlatul Ulama. This step was itself influenced by the success of Muhammadiyah insofar as the idea of *ulama* coming together to form a mass religious civil society organization was the product of modern ideas and hitherto unknown in the region. Previously, *ulama* themselves acted almost as lone sages, wielding powerful charismatic authority over their students, who often travelled large distances to study with a particular teacher. Muhammadiyah, with their rational, modernist approach, had shown that mass organizing was in some ways superior to the traditionalist approach. NU, the, came into being as the Islamic traditionalists’ response to Muhammadiyah.

Although NU grew quickly, from the beginning it appealed mostly to rural Indonesians and struggled to capture members from urban areas where Muhammadiyah already dominated. Thus, the two groups quickly came to represent different regional and socio-economic groups in Indonesian society. Unsurprisingly, the two groups came into intellectual dispute with one another. This, however, had the benefit of engendering new discussions about the role of Islam in society and politics. At the same time, these differences and tensions made it difficult for the two groups to work together, a problem that was to have a decisive impact on Indonesian politics in the 1950s.

The Japanese wartime invasion of Indonesia in 1942 had a critical influence on Indonesian history and politics. By the time of the invasion, both NU and Muhammadiyah each had hundreds of thousands of supporters. Muhammadiyah was already responsible for the opening of religious and secular schools across the Indonesian archipelago, while NU was increasing its reach by encouraging traditionalist *ulama* to affiliate with the group. The Japanese were not ignorant of the importance of the two groups and of the special place Islam had in the hearts and minds of Indonesians (Benda 1955, pp. 356–57). Desiring greater control over Islam in Indonesia, they created a political party, Masyumi, which brought together NU and Muhammadiyah (Benda 1955, p. 356). After the surrender of Japan in 1945, Masyumi members voted to continue the party (Benda 1955, p. 360). The influence of Masyumi in early post-independence Indonesia was considerable. For example, Masyumi’s leader, Mohammad Natsir was elected Prime Minister under the Sukarno presidency in 1950 (Kahin 2012).

This was partly due to the long-standing historical influence of the two organizations, but also because even after the Japanese began to support the secularists, NU and Muhammadiyah were allowed to remain active when most of the smaller Islamic groups were suppressed (Munhanif 2012).

Masyumi appeared, for a time, to be the natural governing party of this massive new Muslim majority nation. It was not long, however, before cultural and social problems—which had their roots in the key differences between the modernist and urban-based Muhammadiyah and the rural traditionalists of NU—began to tear the party asunder. Traditionalists within Masyumi, the majority of whom were also members of NU, were upset that the modernists affiliated with Muhammadiyah who dominated the party were not giving traditionalists more senior roles within the new government.

In 1952, Masyumi was split when the traditionalists left, resulting in NU henceforth engaging in the political arena as an independent political party. Despite ending in acrimony, during its relatively short life as a unified Islamic party, one in which traditionalists and modernists shared power, Masyumi was deeply involved in some of the key discussions and events which were to shape the Indonesian constitution and, especially, the relationship between Islam and the state.

3. Indonesian Independence and Pancasila

Both NU and Muhammadiyah, as mass-based religious organisations, played important roles in Indonesian public life after independence, helping to shape the constitution and contributing to politics through their participation in the Masyumi party. To understand their impact on Indonesia during the early years of independence and the period

before Suharto's dictatorship, we must first comprehend the state of Indonesia after the end of Dutch colonial rule and during the period of the Sukarno regime.

When the Indonesian nationalists declared independence in August 1945, in the immediate wake of the Japanese surrender and after 300 years of Dutch colonialism and three years of Japanese occupation, the Dutch reacted by attempting to resume control of the new nation. After a four-year struggle, and facing international pressure to surrender their colonial aspirations, and the threat of being denied post-war reconstruction financial assistance at home, the Dutch were forced to acknowledge Indonesian independence. Independence leader Sukarno became the nation's first president. Sukarno was a secular nationalist and did not wish for Indonesia to become an Islamic state. Aside from his own ideological reasons for opposing this, Sukarno and the secular nationalists were concerned that insisting on an Islamic state would lead to some of the non-Muslim militia—who had fought the Dutch—moving to support separatist movements, and at the very least feared that it would fuel sectarian division. Additionally, they were concerned that the presence of vast numbers of non-*santri* Muslims, whose unorthodox, syncretic beliefs and practices would become drawn into contention if the state was given authority to determine religious practice. In short, they feared that the creation of an 'Islamic state' would generate strife and division. The Islam of the urban *santri* and modernists was, simply put, not the Islam of perhaps half the population of Indonesia, who were '*abangan*' Muslims following local traditions rather than the orthodox Islam of the modernist and traditionalist *santri* of Muhammadiyah and NU.

Even before independence, Sukarno and other independence leaders had become concerned about this problem. Therefore, they rather hastily sketched out a draft constitution that insisted on Indonesia not being cast as an 'Islamic state', but rather as being non-sectarian whilst respecting theistic belief—described in a deliberately ambiguous fashion.

On 22 June 1945, two months before the declaration of independence of 17 August 1945, a group of nine leading nationalists working on the draft constitution formulated a preliminary text known as the 'Jakarta Charter'. This preamble to the constitution included the contentious 'seven-word' phrase "with the obligation to abide by Islamic law for adherents of Islam". The Jakarta Charter was supported by Natsir and the modernist factions in Masyumi and many other Muslims involved in the party and political Islam in general, but it disturbed both the secular nationalists and the senior NU leaders. At the same time, Sukarno and the nationalists' desire for a secularized state was a point of contention for many Muslims in Indonesia and especially within Masyumi.

Yet among the Islamic elements, including NU and Muhammadiyah, there was confusion over what kind of Islamic state might be ideal. Some wanted the state to recognize Islam as the official national religion, and to enforce Islamic law and morality across the archipelago. Mohammad Natsir, then leader of Masyumi, believed that Islam should form the basis of the new state, and he opposed the secular separation of religion and the state. Despite its curious origins in Japanese occupied Indonesia, Masyumi represented a "concerted effort by Muslim groups to build a united political arm in order to continue their struggle to draft the Islamic state constitution after its failure in the BPUPKI [the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence] in 1945" (Munhanif 2012, p. 257). Beyond being a mere political party, Masyumi had a "vision for the establishment of a nation-state organized according to Islamic principles and practices". Indeed, as Munhanif points out (2012), one of NU's founders, K.H. Wahab Hasbullah, described Masyumi as aiming to "defend Indonesian independence. But we also seek an independent state which is based on the shari'ah and democracy that is accorded with Islamic teachings" (Fealy 1994, p. 91).

Natsir and the other Masyumi leaders who were in clear support of the 'seven words' in the Jakarta Charter, and called for Indonesia to become an Islamic state, were influenced both by the ideas of Maududi in South Asia and more directly by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which itself had taken on many of Maududi's ideas (Platzdasch 2009).¹ Sukarno, however, used his considerable influence to force a compromise between the secular

nationalists, modernists, and traditionalists. Ultimately, Sukarno rejected the demand in the Jakarta Charter that all Muslims follow Shari'a law. Instead, it was agreed that the Indonesian state would be based on Pancasila and would therefore be a 'theistic' but a non-sectarian state.

Pancasila was introduced to the people of Indonesia in a speech by Sukarno in 1945, in which he described his vision for the newly independent nation (Elson 2009, pp. 111–12). Derived from Sanskrit rather than Arabic (in a concession to non-Muslims and in recognition of the pre-Islamic history of the region) *panca sila* means 'five principles'. The first principle or 'sila' was that there is one God. While in congruence with Islam, this principle forced Buddhists and Hindus to begin describing their own beliefs as, in essence monotheistic (Intan 2006). A draft proposal contained the seven word caveat "with the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out Islamic law" ("dengan kewajiban untuk menjalankan Syari'ah Islam untuk pemeluk-pemeluknya") (Elson 2009, p. 112) but the contentious 'seven words' were subsequently dropped in order to ensure that Indonesia would be, if not a secular state, then at the very least a non-sectarian state.

After the conclusion of hostilities with the Dutch, Indonesia was established as a unitary republic. An unelected parliament dominated by nationalists was created in 1950, and a draft constitution was written in the same year. This constitution replaced the 1945 draft and emphasised parliamentary democracy over the more authoritarian vision of the previous version. Nevertheless the 1950 constitution was not considered to be satisfactory (Juwana 2006).

As discussed above, by 1952, Masyumi had lost the important support of the traditionalists, who broke away and formed the Nahdlatul Ulama political party. This split was several years in the making and the product of both internal machinations and socio-cultural differences. Indeed, in some ways, the split symbolises the complex relationship between Islamic modernists and traditionalists in Indonesia. Understanding why this divide between the two groups persists is somewhat difficult, and not simply a matter of different understandings of the core values and correct practices of Islam, although the two groups do indeed disagree on these issues. One of the problems was geographical. Muhammadiyah was an urban and peri-urban organization, while NU was more village-based. The former's supporters were generally wealthier and better acquainted with western education. Equally, the two groups had bases for support in different regions of the Indonesian archipelago.

By 1949, cracks in the party were already beginning to show. While the party attempted to create an Islamic ideology that all could agree upon, it was not able to overcome the cultural differences and approaches to practicing Islam between the traditionalists and modernists. Perhaps more importantly, while NU members generally were given the task of running the Ministry of Religious Affairs, many traditionalists were frustrated they were not allowed to expand beyond this role, into other ministries, many of which were controlled by modernists from Muhammadiyah. Organizational issues caused the first fracture: disagreement over new parliamentary electoral rules saw Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII) leave Masyumi, "followed by a Sumatra-based traditionalist faction, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (Perti) in early 1950" (Munhanif 2012, p. 258).

As noted above, in 1952, NU abandoned the party and essentially split the Islamic vote. There were several complex reasons behind the split. Masyumi had responded to the loss of PSII and Perti by changing elements of their bureaucratic structure, giving more power to its Executive Council, and taking control away from the Advisory Council. This decision, however, essentially took power away from NU, which had greater influence over the Advisory Council, and little over the Muhammadiyah dominated Executive Council (Munhanif 2012, p. 259). In centralizing party power within the executive, Masyumi diminished the authority of the *ulama* who served on the Advisory Council. Consequently, the views of traditionalists were also diminished, and the party became more beholden to the modernist views of the urban Islamic intelligentsia.

NU and Muhammadiyah, despite in theory being united in political action in the one political party, were in fact vastly different organizations with differing ideas on how an Islamic state ought to be run. For Modernist Muhammadiyah, an Islamic state would ideally incorporate secular Western education, yet also be based on the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith and downplay the authority of local *ulama* and their traditionalist practices, which the modernists considered to be dangerously heterodox. For traditionalist NU, an Islamic state would empower local *ulama* and preserve local practices sometimes at odds with the Islam of the modernists and their Middle East orientated Arab intellectual forebears (Munhanif 2012, p. 259). This difference meant that Masyumi could only function as long as the notions of an Islamic state remained somewhat vague. As soon as details about this state began to be discussed, complex differences would arise and create tension. By 1952, and with Masyumi increasingly dominated by modernists, NU members perhaps felt they had little choice but to leave the party and form their own traditionalist political organization.

The 1955 elections were very significant for the Islamic parties, and in certain respects cemented the core Islamic traditionalist—Islamic modernist binary that continues until this day in Indonesia. Importantly, both Islamic traditionalism and Islamic modernism represent modern, twentieth Century, understandings of Islam (in contrast with Saudi Salafism) and so this binary reflects competing interpretations of Islam and modernity (much as modern Roman Catholicism and protest Christianity are both shaped by the Reformation).

Elections of the DPR and the Constitutional Assembly produced broadly similar results to the previous occasion, with 402 out of the 514 seats in the Assembly going to the four largest parties. The centre-left Indonesian National Party (PNI—Partai Nasional Indonesia) secured 119 seats. Support for the two centre-right Islamic parties each almost equalling that for PNI: the Islamic modernist (dominated by Muhammadiyah affiliates) Masyumi party with 112 seats, and the Islamic traditionalist (dominated by Nahdlatul Ulama affiliates) Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) party with 91 seats. The left-wing Indonesian Communist Party (PKI—Partai Komunis Indonesia) secured 80 seats, having done surprisingly well in both the September and December elections (Lev 1967). The Constitutional Assembly met in four blocks of sittings between November 1956 and June 1959 to thrash out a series of political compromises and produce a permanent constitution. The results of the 1955 elections were a surprise to many in the four large parties—the 1955 elections representing as they did the first-ever opportunity to ascertain an objective and comprehensive map of communal allegiances in Indonesia. It was clear that the *aliran*, or 'streams' of communal allegiance associated with the large parties, were surprisingly evenly matched in size. Moreover, it must have proven extremely disappointing for Masyumi to find that it could not win government without the support of NU. Nor could it rely on the support of rural Muslims and especially of the largely Javanese *abangan* Muslims, who must have been fearful of Muhammadiyah's modernist notions of Islam becoming the basis of an Indonesian Islamic state. The split between the traditionalists and modernists effectively prevented Islamic parties from turning Indonesia into an Islamic state.

The failure of Masyumi confirmed the wisdom of Sukarno and the leading nationalists in pushing for a pluralist and inclusive philosophical foundation for the new state. It did not, however, resolve the issue of the Jakarta Charter and the aspirations of the Islamic parties. Heated disagreements continued over the philosophical basis for the state: whether it was to be a state based on Pancasila, Islam, or the family, with none of the factions able to secure the necessary two-thirds majority. Curiously, NU failed to come up with a truly coherent idea of what an Islamic state might look like, while Masyumi took a harsher line against Pancasila. NU, moreover, began to act in a more conciliatory manner towards the secular nationalists, while Masyumi became hardened in its hostility towards secularism (Munhanif 2012, p. 268). This cleavage between the two largest Islamic parties made it all but impossible for Masyumi to bring back the Jakarta Charter and turn Indonesia into an Islamic state guided by Modernist Islamic principles and systems of education and

organization. Masyumi's opposition to Pancasila was also grounded in the notion that the idea was unclear and meant different things to different people. Natsir, moreover, was concerned that communists could use the ambiguities of Pancasila to their advantage, and claim that Pancasila was a pro-communist, secular ideology (Anshari 1981, p. 76; Munhanif 2012, p. 269). In an era when support for communism was common in the region, this fear was perhaps not entirely unfounded.

4. Suharto's Coup and Guided *Demokrasi*

The upshot of all of this was that Indonesia's first democratic period could not produce a parliamentary agreement on a constitution. This led to a cabinet decision in 1959 to return to using the draft 1945 constitution. However, Sukarno decided to dissolve the Constitutional Assembly charged with drawing up a constitution on the grounds that it had failed to come to a consensus. Sukarno's position was somewhat understandable, yet it overlooked the not entirely inconsiderable achievements of the Constitutional Assembly, which had created consensus positions between disparate parties on human rights and the separation of powers (Fealy 1994).

Sukarno, however, had other goals. Having visited China in 1956 and been impressed by Mao's centralization of power (Bhakti 2004), he decided—with cabinet support—to implement 'Guided Democracy' (*Demokrasi Terpimpin*). In 1959, Sukarno dissolved the Constitutional Assembly and reinstated the 1945 constitution which allowed him to become both head of state and head of government, effectively ending the separation of powers.

Such was Sukarno's power that few political leaders of parties dared stand in his way. The Sukarno-affiliated secular nationalist PNI immediately supported Guided Democracy. The significant exception was Masyumi, but the party, by itself, lacked the numbers to prevent Sukarno's takeover of the nation (Majid 2010). NU, which was facing allegations of corruption, reluctantly agreed to support Sukarno. Masyumi's woes, however, were merely beginning. In 1960 Sukarno banned the party claiming links between its leaders and separatists in West Sumatra. Importantly, however, he did not ban Muhammadiyah, and the group continued to operate in the meantime despite Masyumi becoming a proscribed organization. The banning, however, dealt a blow to the modernists' political ambitions, and Muhammadiyah distanced itself from politics and retreated to the civil sphere for the time being.

Growing polarization ultimately came to manifest as a threat to Sukarno. And the geopolitics of the Cold War meant that perceptions of his increasingly close relationship with the Communist Party began to alarm the United States. Sukarno, for his part, adopted an increasingly anti-American stance when the United States began to support anti-government and anti-communist fighters in Sumatra. He entered his so-called 'Year of Living Dangerously' in 1965, and this culminated in a mysterious US-backed internal military coup/ regime-change exercise on the night of 30 September.

Sukarno was forced to turn power over to General Suharto. The transition saw the beginning of a Cold War and a CIA-guided pogrom against Communist Party members which grew into a massive bloodletting. In 1965–1966, at least half a million people were killed. Many of the communists were killed by NU and Muhammadiyah members, who justified their participation in the killings by arguing that "if they did not eliminate the Communists the Communists would have eliminated them" (Cribb 2001).²

5. Suharto and the New Order

Having taken power from Sukarno, who ultimately died under house arrest in 1970, Suharto ruled Indonesia with the backing of the military until the fall of his regime in 1998 (Crouch 2007; Jenkins 2010). During this period, he allowed several elections to take place, though none were seen to be truly legitimate. After 1977, he allowed only two opposition parties in parliament, the nationalist Democratic Party of Indonesia (PDI—Partai Demokrasi Indonesia) and the Islamic United Development Party (PPP—Partai Pembangunan Indonesia). These two parties, alone, were allowed to run against a member

of the Suharto-supported governing Golkar party. And only Suharto was allowed to run for the position of president prior to 1997.

The purpose of these elections was to legitimize the regime without allowing the possibility of Suharto and Golkar being removed from power. At the same time, Suharto persecuted Islamist and communist political actors and attempted to incorporate all non-state political groups within the state. Civil society, however, was not entirely destroyed by Suharto. NU and Muhammadiyah remained active throughout the dictatorship, and their numbers grew as they provided Indonesians with education and health care services. As many as a third of all Indonesians have been affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, whose membership by the end of the century was thought to number around forty million and thirty million members, respectively (Barton 1995; Fealy and Barton 1996). So influential and respected were these two civil Islamic groups that not even Suharto dared to proscribe them.

Despite their electoral shortcomings and failure to create an Islamic state, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama each maintained a powerful presence throughout the archipelago, with each dominating in influence in different regions and among different socio-economic groups, especially through their schools and welfare programs (Hicks 2012, p. 40). Equally, they represented the class and religious interests of urban and rural Muslim Indonesians respectively, who had never been convinced of the superiority of secular nationalism or communism. Since they were never banned by Suharto, NU and Muhammadiyah were able to maintain the support of many Indonesians and were also able to provide important education and welfare services to people who were ignored by the Suharto regime. In this way, the two organizations played a very positive role in Indonesia and helped to keep civil society alive during a time of authoritarian rule.

6. Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama under Suharto

While Muhammadiyah was never banned, Masyumi remained an illegal organization under Suharto. Natsir and his Masyumi colleagues were hopeful they might be politically rehabilitated by the regime due to their shared opposition to communism (Madinier 2015; Fealy and Platzdasch 2005). Unfortunately for Masyumi, Suharto feared Islamism almost as much as he despised communism.

With Masyumi banned, the Suharto regime created the tame Parmusi party, which sought to represent the same religious and socio-economic groups. The party, however, failed to achieve much support and won just 5.4% of the vote at the admittedly un-free and unfair 1971 elections. NU, however, was allowed to contest the election and won 18.7% of the vote, giving Islamic politics a strong voice in parliament (Effendy 2003).

In 1973, Suharto consolidated all opposition parties into just two the secular nationalist Democratic Party of Indonesia (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia—PDI) and the Islamic United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan—PPP). Neither party was allowed to develop a strong oppositional ideology distinct from the government. Rather, both were designed by the regime to represent certain socio-economic and religious elements within Indonesian society and to give voters a feeling that their voices mattered. The regime met with some success in creating this sense, as the PPP, despite being a relatively non-threatening party that was not allowed to adopt an oppositionist or Islamist platform, remained popular with voters, and won 29% of the vote in the 1977 elections (Suryadinata and Emmerson 1991).

Significantly, the continuation of the ban on Masyumi altered Muhammadiyah's stance on political involvement. Having failed to achieve political rehabilitation, the organization's members decided "that party politics is not conducive to the organization" (Jung 2014, p. 81). Moreover, Muhammadiyah decided, in 1971, to "distance itself from partisan politics and to emphasize its autonomy from any organizations and political parties: individuals were free to be political, but Muhammadiyah as an organization was not" (Jung 2014, p. 81). This policy, known as *Khittah* [Spirit] 1971, became an important principle of Muhammadiyah (Jung 2014, p. 81). Continuing as a civil society organization,

Muhammadiyah used its Islamic modernist principles to teach the importance of rationality and to promote the notion of politics existing within the realm of *ijtihad* (Jung 2014). For Natsir, politics was a matter of personal choice that an individual must make on a rational basis, and he and Muhammadiyah would, after 1971, no longer involve themselves in politics nor tell their supporters to vote for a particular party or candidate (Jung 2014).

NU, on the other hand, continued as a civil society organization but saw its political affiliate absorbed into the United Development Party (PPP) in 1973, effectively ending its ability to influence Indonesian politics. In 1984 and under the leadership of Wahid NU withdrew from the PPP and, like Muhammadiyah, began to concentrate on its social activities, especially upon education and training ulama. NU would not involve itself directly in politics until 1998 when, after the fall of Suharto, Wahid created the National Awakening Party. Yet by then, NU had changed, in large part due to the influence of Wahid and the neo-Modernism that inspired his vision for Indonesia.

7. Neo-Modernism

A significant intellectual—and later social and political—development took place in Indonesia during the 1970s and 1980s: the advent of Islamic neo-Modernism. Neo-Modernism became influential among students who had studied at traditionalist *pesantren* yet had gone on to higher education (Barton 1997). Once at university, many involved themselves in modernist Muslim organizations. One modernist movement, the RMI (Association of Muslim Students) but more popularly known as the Renewal of Islamic Thought movement, was especially important as it sought to bridge the gap between traditionalism and modernism. One striking aspect of the Renewal of Islamic Thought movement is that its attempts to bridge this gap echoed—although they were initially unaware of one another—the thoughts of Pakistani-born University of Chicago scholar Fazlur Rahman. According to Rahman, neo-Modernism arises when Islamic intellectuals become disenchanted with Modernism and its call for rationalism and the purification of Islam at the expense of classical Islamic scholarship. In a way, Rahman thought, this neo-Modernism would resemble the early Modernism of Abduh, which sought to incorporate secular Western learning within Islam. Yet neo-Modernism, for Rahman, would not trample upon classical Islamic scholarship and cultural practices in the manner of later Modernism (Cone 2002; Fealy 2008).

In 1974, Fazlur Rahman visited Indonesia, where his ideas were well received by the Renewal Movement. The movement's leader, Nurcholish Madjid, impressed by Rahman's ideas and parallels with his own thinking, went on to visit America and to accept an invitation to study with Rahman at the University of Chicago. By the 1980s, Rahman's books had become well known among a certain group of sympathetic Indonesian Islamic intellectuals. Nurcholish, an Islamic scholar educated in one of the few modernist *pesantren* (Pesantren Modern in Gontor, East Java), "transcended the boundaries of that intellectual tradition and successfully combined traditionalist Islamic scholarship, with its deep knowledge of the Koran, of Islamic jurisprudence and of Sufi mysticism, with critical modern thought" (Barton 2006, p. 148). Madjid's project was to reinterpret the Qur'an for the modern age, though without violating the core tenets of Islam. To do this he employed, much like other modernists, *ijtihad* (or a rational approach to interpreting passages of scripture). Through his reinterpretation of the Qur'an, Madjid found that "true godliness, in an individual and in a nation, comes from inner transformation" rather than from legal imposition or violent force (Barton 2002). This being so, he argued that Islam was in congruence with pluralism and democracy and that to force individuals to obey strict Shari'a law may in fact violate the core tenets of Islam (Barton 2002; van Bruinessen 2006).

The Renewal Movement created controversy in 1970 when, after a private seminar, Madjid decried the poor state of Islamic Modernism in Indonesia and made a bold call for the secularization and the desacralization of Islamic "religious texts, symbols, and beliefs" (Bakti 2005, p. 494). For this Nurcholish Madjid was condemned by a number of influential modernist leaders, who suggested that his remarks were heretical, and who were no doubt

offended by the suggestion that their movement was moribund (van Bruinessen 2006). Madjid's call for renewal and de-sacralization, however controversial it first appeared, contributed to a growing sense among Indonesian Muslims that the religion required liberalization (see Anderson 1977; Geertz 1984). Indeed, the neo-modernism of Nurcholish became, within two decades of his 1970 private seminar, an accepted part of Islamic discourse in Indonesia.

NU chairman Abdurrahman Wahid aligned himself with the Renewal Movement (Barton 2002), and in doing so encouraged traditionalist Muslims to embrace its core ideas, which were largely in accordance with his own commitment to Pancasila, democracy, and pluralism. The influence of Wahid on spreading neo-Modernist ideas was considerable, although it coincided with a wider process of reform within Indonesia's State Islamic Institutes (IAIN, later to become UIN—State Islamic Universities), in which Madjid had considerable influence, and through the leadership of the progressive Islamic leaders, these institutes produced. Wahid, through his extroverted leadership of NU, and open challenging of Suharto, had a higher profile. The urbane, bookish, introverted, Madjid was much more a public intellectual than a political activist, but both Madjid and Wahid contributed to inspiring generations of *santri* Muslim democracy and reform activists. Therefore, we can surmise that neo-Modernism in Indonesia was not the product merely of one or two minds, but that it came also from a larger effort by many observant Muslim Indonesians to change their society through engagement with Islam and Islamic ideas.

Yet two Islamic thinkers, Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid were undoubtedly the two most significant intellectuals of Indonesia's Islamic neo-Modernist movement. Nurcholish, in particular, argued persuasively that for Islam to define the character of Indonesia and its people, it need not be represented in Parliament by specific political parties. He famously decreed 'Islam Yes, Islam Party No'. Indeed, one of Nurcholish's greatest achievements came through his demonstration of the ways in which religion can contribute to modern, plural, and democratic society.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s and into the 2000s Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid and were major public intellectuals in Indonesia. Additionally, because an important element of neo-Modernism was to break down the barriers between both traditionalist and modernist Muslims, and also between secular intellectuals and Muslim intellectuals, the two men played an important role in improving relations between the *santri* and *abangan*, while also engaging in debates with secular nationalists. Equally, both were keen supporters of democracy and pluralism and therefore played key roles in preparing Indonesians for the transition to democracy. Abdurrahman Wahid, who became Indonesian president in October 1999, was an especially important bridge figure. His undoubted credentials as an Islamic leader and thinker, through his long-term leadership of NU, allowed him to advocate for pluralism, democracy, and secularization without being accused of defying Islamic law. Indeed, by couching these notions within an Islamic context, and presenting them as being in accordance with Islam—perhaps even extensions of Islam—Wahid increased acceptance among Muslims of their inherent goodness.

8. The Transition to Democracy, the Presidency of Wahid, and the Influence of Neo-Modernism on Indonesian Politics

As the 1990s drew to a close, the military-backed Suharto regime was becoming increasingly unpopular with Indonesians. There was disquiet about endemic corruption, much of which was blamed on Suharto and his family, who had indeed encouraged and participated in a culture of systemic corruption. Equally, Indonesians were increasingly upset by the behaviour of the nation's military, which engaged in frequent human rights violations. Voices began calling for an end to Suharto's rule. Among them was NU chairman Abdurrahman Wahid. Due to the large size and influence of NU, Wahid's voice could not be silenced (Barton 1997, 2002). Nurcholish Madjid, too, began openly calling for democratic reforms, alongside Muhammadiyah chairman Amien Rais. The deep impact of the Asian Financial crisis on Indonesia finally eroded whatever remaining support Suharto enjoyed and, being unable to find anyone willing to join his cabinet, his regime collapsed

in May 1998. In the chaos that followed, Wahid, Rais, and Madjid were at the forefront of the push for democracy, and the three men and their followers played an important part in preventing the establishment of another authoritarian regime. The fall of Suharto led, significantly, to Muhammadiyah and NU explicitly returning to the political sphere. NU became the primary group behind the new National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB), while Muhammadiyah's leader Amien Rais supported the creation of the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN) (Osman and Waikar 2018, p. 97).

Following Suharto's resignation, Vice-President B. J. Habibie became the head of the transitional government. Habibie, an erstwhile protégé of Suharto, surprised many by becoming a remarkably effective transitional president focused on reform (Diprose and Azca 2020). Habibie's key achievement was the holding of the first completely free and fair elections in decades in June 1999, on the back of a raft of legislative reforms that restored political and media freedom, diminished the political role of the military, and laid the foundations for democracy. The peaceful transition of power from Habibie to Wahid was a great achievement for all Indonesians, but particularly for Habibie. While the transition of power was largely peaceful, however, it was not without violence, with more than a thousand people killed in riots and assaults in the final days of the old regime, and thousands more in the years that followed due to inter-communal and political violence.

Communal violence, some of it deliberately manufactured by elements of the old regime, military, or other political elites, dogged the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid. Indonesia's first democratically elected president, Wahid's victory was something of a surprise. Many had assumed that the daughter of Indonesia's first president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, would emerge victorious (Bhakti 2004). Yet Wahid, who in 1998 was recovering from a series of strokes that robbed him of his sight, was a popular figure and managed to bridge at least part of the once yawning gap between secular nationalists and Muslims, and between *santri* and *abangan* Muslims.

One might imagine that the election of the leader of NU to the position of President might have been seen as a victory for political Islam. President Wahid, however, played a critical role in consolidating secular democracy. Wahid's reformist but chaotic presidency represented a continuing period of transition, building on the reforms of Habibie (Barton 2002). The aspirations and expectations of the general public were given a benchmark of what to expect from a democratic administration in terms of freedom of speech and the ending of political oppression.

The embattled president, however, attempted to do too much with too little and lacked the political capital and capacity to push through to completion many of the reforms that he had started. Not only did he make enemies within the military, adding to the ranks of entrenched opposition from radical Islamists, but he also refused to appease powerful figures within established political and business elites, whilst having to battle a self-serving legislature and a sclerotic civil service. His idealistic maverick style and his refusal to do deals with the establishment ultimately saw him impeached and removed from office in July 2001 (Barton 2002).

Wahid's political thought synthesizes Western notions of liberal democracy with elements of both Islamic traditionalism and modernism, and like that of Nurcholish Madjid, bears a strong resemblance to the thought of Fazlur Rahman, although placed within an Indonesian political context. We may therefore describe Wahid as a neo-modernist, despite his differences with Rahman and other figures which can be similarly described. Neo-Modernist ideas, then, played a significant role in the transition from tyranny to democracy, and Wahid himself was a crucial figure in determining the course of post-dictatorship Indonesia. Wahid's neo-modernism inspired thought and political action often proved controversial. When the Suharto regime established the Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association, Wahid "refused to join it, arguing that the organization represented a political manipulation of Islam", something which he believed also endangered "the development of democracy in Indonesia" (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 339). Wahid's refusal to politicize Islam speaks to his neo-Modernist conception of Islam and Islamic practice in the modern state.

Wahid believed that culture and religion were interdependent and was therefore concerned about the state politicizing Islam and thereby reifying it as if it were something that exists beyond all cultural contexts. This notion, which Wahid introduced as *pribumisasi*—making indigenous—posits that “religion and culture can be differentiated but cannot be separated because they overlap” (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 342). Therefore, for the state to decide what Islam was, and how it ought to be practiced, was absurd, because much of what was believed to be authentic Islam was cultural and not a core aspect of the religion. Indeed, Wahid argued that “Contextualization of Islam is part of Islamic history in both its original country, that is, Saudi Arabia, and non-original countries, including Indonesia” (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 343). He, therefore, defended the variety of Islamic expressions in Indonesia, while also defending himself from the charge that *pribumisasi* permitted syncretism, arguing that *pribumisasi* did not allow for the harmonizing of Islam with other religious belief systems, but only for different cultural expressions of Islam (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 343).

Wahid, like Madjid, was critical of Islamic actors who sought to create Islamic states based on a particular interpretation of Shari’a law. He called instead for an ‘integrative strategy’ in which Muslims would not force Shari’a on others, but instead apply it “in its substantive principles” through the secular state (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 343). According to Wahid, Islamic history, and particularly the history of Islam in Indonesia, teaches Muslims that “Islam requires that the state protect Muslim religious freedom, but does not require a certain model of state (i.e., kingdom, republic, federation, etc.),” but rather “allows Muslims to consider their own historical needs (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 344). Pancasila was for Wahid an example of the success of this integrative strategy because it represents the universal teachings of Islam including that there is one God and is based on Islamic ethics and ideals including religious freedom and justice (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 345).

Equally, Wahid, in accordance with his neo-Modernist-inspired thought, did not reject democracy because it comes from outside the Islamic tradition. Rather, like Madjid, he conceived of Islam as a cosmopolitan civilization, which contains many cultures and different ideas which come from different sources (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 346). Democracy may have developed in the West, he argued, but it did not contradict the teachings of Islam. Rather, democracy was, Wahid asserted, very much in harmony with the core teachings and values of Islam (Mujiburrahman 1999, p. 346). Islamic intellectuals such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid, who defended cosmopolitanism and democracy as being inherently in harmony with Islam, represent a tolerant and dialogue-based approach to Islam. This approach is post-Islamist, in that it rejects the Islamist project of trying to change individuals and society through ‘Shari’ah legal reforms’ that would force them to ‘become more pious’.

These Islamic civil-society movements represent strong support for Jose Casanova’s thesis (2011) that religious movements can be progressive, inclusive, and actively engaged in the public discourse whilst at the same time maintaining their core religious teachings (Hefner 2000). This is because they are social movements that not only function in the civil sphere but conform to the ideals of pluralism and tolerance that John Keane (2003, pp. 175–209) and others list as being required for global civil society to operate optimally.

Thus Wahid, while his time as president was short, contributed to the creation of a new democratic Indonesia and to the preservation—even extension—of Pancasila. For example, Wahid removed the ban on using Chinese calligraphy and did much to end the official repression of Chinese culture in Indonesia. He steadfastly refused to entertain notions of Indonesia enforcing a particular type of Shari’a law on its Muslim citizens, began peace talks with secessionist movements in Aceh, sought to protect the nation’s Christian minorities and applied himself to defending democracy and pluralism in Indonesia (Budiman 2001, p. 146). Indeed, as Budiman observed at the time (2001) Wahid’s “political opponents can criticize him openly {and} his approach in solving problems is

always through political dialogue (such as in dealing with the independence movements in West Papua and Aceh) (Budiman 2001, p. 146).

Wahid's presidency was, of course, by any measure imperfect. He was, in certain respects, a weak leader and was unable to put an end to the endemic corruption which continues to plague Indonesia. Nor was he able to completely force all elements within the police and armed services to stop the mistreatment of religious minorities by various Islamist groups (Budiman 2001, p. 146). Nevertheless, his two years as a transitional president, like those of Habibie before him, proved to be immensely beneficial to Indonesia, largely due to his characteristically neo-Modernist blending of traditionalist Islamic tolerance of cultural difference with a Modernist penchant for rational, independent thought, and Western conceptions of liberal democracy. Through this synthesis, Wahid, assisted by others such as Nurcholish Madjid in advocating for cosmopolitanism, democracy, and religious freedom, was able to help preserve democracy and Pancasila in Indonesia in a dangerous time, and substantially increase the official support for pluralism and tolerance within Indonesia.

Post-Wahid Indonesia has largely kept to the principles of Pancasila and pluralism, although these have come under increasing challenge from radical Islamists (Fealy 2004; Yilmaz and Barton 2021a, 2021b). After the impeachment and removal of Wahid from power Sukarno's eldest daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri became Indonesia's first female President. Megawati remained committed to democratic transition and Pancasila. Overall, the Megawati administration was more a caretaker presidency than a genuinely reformist presidency. From mid-2001, when Megawati took office, until late 2004 when her part-term expired, Indonesia remained very much in the grip of a "multi-dimensional crisis". In 2004, there was another successful set of elections, first for the members of parliament and then, for the first time ever, for the direct election of the president. The peaceful and constructive atmosphere that accompanied both elections and the clear 61% mandate that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono achieved against Megawati Sukarnoputri in the presidential elections appeared to have finally ushered in the beginning of democratic normality.

Yet since 2004, Indonesia has witnessed the growth of radical Islamism, sometimes in the form of violent militias and terrorist organisations. The more successful of these groups, such as the now-banned Islamic Defenders front, pushed religious and political discourse in Indonesia to the right, empowering anti-pluralist elements. For example, members of NU and Muhammadiyah, against the wishes of their leaders (Peterson and Schäffer 2021, pp. 111–12), participated in large-scale rallies calling for charges of blasphemy to be laid against former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, better known as 'Ahok' (Nuryanti 2021; Amal 2020; Adiwilaga et al. 2019; Fossati and Mietzner 2019).

The charge of blasphemy against Ahok was spurious and politically motivated and involved a heavily edited video of Ahok speaking (Nuryanti 2021), yet tens of thousands of NU and Muhammadiyah members joined radical Islamists in the streets to demand Ahok be held to account for his alleged crimes. At the same time, the leadership of both civil Islamic groups remain committed to the non-sectarian constitution and refused to condemn Ahok. We may surmise, then, that while Indonesian society has moved, since 2004, in some respects in a more conservative and anti-plural direction, NU, Muhammadiyah, and associated civil society organisations continue to play a largely moderating role through their support for Pancasila and religious pluralism.

9. Conclusions

In this paper, we discussed the contestation of Islamic ideas in Indonesian politics during the period of dictatorship and the transition to democracy. From this survey of the relationships between Islamic intellectual movements, civic Islamic groups, and the Indonesian state, we make three findings. First, and most broadly, the contestation of Islamic ideas in Indonesia has informed and heavily influenced Indonesian politics since independence. While Indonesia was ruled for decades by secular nationalist authoritarian strong men, Islamic political actors and their internal contestation of ideas played an

important role in Indonesia's political and social spheres. From independence onwards, the interplay between Islamic traditionalists and modernists, and their respective relationships with the state, have helped define the character of Indonesian politics.

While Sukarno ultimately forced the Islamic actors in parliament to accept a non-sectarian constitution, Natsir and Masyumi helped shape the constitution and its preamble and were instrumental in preventing the secularists from removing references to God altogether and creating a secular state perceived as being hostile to Islam. Indeed, the constitution ended up as a compromise between secular and Islamic forces (and their non-Islamic religious allies in parliament) and, despite its shortcomings, made certain that neither secular nor religious-political domination was legally possible in Indonesia.

While Islamic political actors have proven important since independence, Islamic politics in Indonesia was weakened by the split between NU and Masyumi in 1952. The divisions between NU's traditionalism and the modernism of Muhammadiyah, who dominated Masyumi, meant that the party was deeply divided. The traditionalists and modernists in the party, never easy allies, did not merely differ over doctrinal issues but represented different communities, regions, and economic groups. When Masyumi was finally banned by Sukarno in 1960, NU did not protest, creating further tensions between the two great civil Islamic groups. Muhammadiyah's leaders still hoped to return to political significance after the banning. When Suharto assumed power after a coup there was much disappointment when he retained Sukarno's ban on the party. During the mass killings that followed the coup, members of NU and Muhammadiyah played significant roles in the anti-Communist pogroms in Indonesia, which saw at least 500,000 alleged Communists and fellow travellers killed by their neighbours. Thus, Muhammadiyah and NU helped to establish Suharto's firm rule in Indonesia and moved the nation within the American-dominated capitalist side of the Cold War.

Yet both Muhammadiyah and NU also suffered under Suharto's reign. While the former gave up direct politics in the 1970s due to the failure of the Masyumi party, NU remained politically active until Suharto forced the various Islamic parties in parliament to form a single, unified bloc effective under the dictator's command. Then executive chairman, Abdurrahman Wahid, decided to end NU's participation in active politics and return to being a social movement. Yet as social movements, the influence of NU and Muhammadiyah did not diminish. Indeed, in some respect, both groups increased in social and political significance. By embracing Pancasila and democracy during the 1980s and 1990s, the two mass organisations played a major role in helping preserve civil society during the late stages of the dictatorship, and in helping the nation transition to democracy when both returned to using direct political action.³

Perhaps most importantly, NU and Muhammadiyah helped Indonesians accept a progressive understanding of Islam and a relatively liberal form of democracy that respected religious freedom and minority rights. Importantly, both groups and the intellectual movements they represent came to accept Pancasila, effectively renouncing the distant dream of an Islamic state and embracing pluralism and non-sectarianism in its place. Had they not done this, but rather allowed others to continue to push for an Islamic state, a peaceful transition to liberal democracy would have been much less likely. Islamic traditionalists and modernists might have agreed that Indonesia ought to be an Islamic state, but it is unlikely they could ever have agreed on what kind of 'Islam' ought to become the state religion. Over time, and through bitter experience and the influence of Islamic neo-Modernism, NU and Muhammadiyah accepted the ideals of non-sectarianism and pluralism and encouraged their members to do the same. Both accepted that Pancasila guaranteed the religious freedom of Muslims, and yet also represented the core values of Islam while not forcing Indonesians to adopt Islam or express themselves religiously through a single form of Islamic practice (be it the 'purified' and reform influenced Modernist form of the local practices associated with traditionalism and NU's ulama).

The second finding of this paper is that Islamic neo-Modernism played an especially important role in modern Indonesian history, and provided Indonesians with a pluralist,

democratic alternative to authoritarian secular nationalism and radical Islamism. The Islamic neo-Modernism of Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid argued that Islam was a cosmopolitan civilization that had at its core, a religion that emphasized the importance of social and economic justice. Therefore, they argued, the civilizational and cultural aspects of Islamic practice could differ so long as the core beliefs remained. In making this argument, Madjid and Wahid made it possible for traditionalism and modernism to be substantially reconciled, and moreover for Islam to be more accommodating of democracy and pluralism, two ideals which when put into practice by a polity permit a wide variety of religious expression. Wahid, as leader of NU, encouraged his followers to support Pancasila on the basis that it was an expression of Islamic ideals and to embrace democracy on the basis that, while perhaps a foreign ideal, it could easily be accommodated within cosmopolitan Islamic civilization. Indeed, Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid alike argued that democracy was in complete accordance with Islam and called upon their supporters to push for a full transition to pluralist democracy following the fall of Suharto.

As president, though his reign was short and marred by allegations of incompetence, Wahid pushed through democratic reforms and upheld religious freedom, and the protection of minorities. While post-Wahid Indonesia has, in certain respects, become a less tolerant nation with growing radical and populist Islamist movements (Yilmaz 2020; Barton et al. 2021), Wahid's ability to put his neo-Modernist ideals into action contributed to the consolation of pluralist democracy in Indonesia.

Finally, our paper shows how democracy and pluralism emerged in post-dictatorship Indonesia, to a significant degree, out of the Islamic contestation of ideas. This point is important because it is sometimes assumed that Islam is inherently hostile to 'foreign' ideas which emerged from the Christian world, including democracy and pluralism (Lewis 2002, p. 36).

Challenging this perspective in the wider global community is, of course, not helped by the radical Islamist groups who declare democracy to be inherently anti-Islamic. Yet in Indonesia, we find that while secular nationalists were often responsible for authoritarianism and dictatorship, and moreover the arbitrary use and abuse of the law, the destruction of freedom of expression, and attacks on religious groups and religious freedom, Islamic actors often played a more positive role in politics and society. NU and Muhammadiyah have largely played, their role in the mass killings of 1965–1966 notwithstanding, a moderating role in Indonesian society. Moreover, from the 1980s onward, when both groups chose to withdraw from direct political action, NU and Muhammadiyah became supporters of Pancasila and democracy, and upon their return to politics in 1998 continued to support Pancasila and democracy. Yet most of all, the Islamic neo-Modernism of Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid show how Islam can be a powerful force for not merely economic and social justice, but democratic pluralism, freedom of religion, and the protection of minorities.

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Notes

- ¹ For background and analysis of the development of Islamist thought in Indonesia refer to: Barton (2005, 2009, 2010, 2021); Hefner (2000); and van Bruinessen (2006).

- 2 We make an early distinction between the ‘radical’ Islamists (Darul Islam) and Muslim mass organizations in Indonesia (NU and Muhammadiyah): “Throughout its ninety-year history, Muhammadiyah has consistently remained a force for moderation and public good”. But these mass killings of communists seriously contradict this argument. Per *Independent*, “A December 1965 cable from the US Consulate in Medan, Indonesia, reported that preachers in Muhammadiyah mosques were telling congregations that all who joined the communist party must be killed, saying they are the “lowest order of infidel, the shedding of whose blood is comparable to killing chicken”. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/indonesia-anti-communist-massacres-1960s-us-knew-cia-desclassified-embassy-files-jakarta-a8006186.html>; accessed on 9 August 2021) Neither NU nor Muhammadiyah remained the same: their ideas moderated over time, and in 2000, Wahid apologized for what happened to the Communists in the hands of NU Islamists back in the 1960s (which is rarely, if ever done in the Muslim world, especially by Islamists). Nonetheless, this looks more like a trajectory of ‘moderation’, rather than always being a moderate. Also, the whole 1965 fake coup reminds us of the mysterious 15 July coup in Turkey (see [Yilmaz 2021](#); [Yilmaz Ihsan and Demir 2021](#); [Yilmaz and Shipoli 2021](#)), especially insofar as how each was used by the state to exterminate the opposition (Communists and Gülenists, respectively).
- 3 While Muhammadiyah does not tell its members to vote for a particular political party, Amien Rais’ position as leader of PAN demonstrates that the organization is not entirely politically neutral. At the same time, since 2005 Muhammadiyah has not allowed political parties to use its name emphasizes its political neutrality ([Jung 2014](#), p. 79).

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