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True Believers: Religious Intolerance and Instability in Indonesia

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Abstract**True Believers: Religious Intolerance and Instability in Indonesia**

This paper examines how religious group identification shapes socio-political stability in Indonesia. The social and political divisions between the two largest religious communities, Christian and Muslim, present an ongoing challenge to domestic stability in Indonesia. To address this challenge and preserve social harmony the central government should promote and enforce policies that support moderate Islamic perspectives. In Indonesia, religion plays a central role in the formation of social identity, orienting politics, and amplifying domestic conflict. Indonesia's transition to democracy in 1998 unleashed a series of internecine conflicts with strong religious characteristics. Research indicates that religion is not always the proximate cause for unrest, but it is a dominant underlying factor. Fundamentalist interpretations of Islam increase the potential for religiously motivated violence because of its powerful role shaping group concepts of identity, orienting politics and policy, and as a potent force in domestic competition and conflict.

Introduction

Contemporary Indonesia represents a microcosm of the challenges that are reshaping the global security environment. Indonesia has a diverse multi-ethnic and multi-faith population with approximately 300 ethnic and linguistic groups; six officially recognized religions, and hundreds of variations of indigenous beliefs.¹ The country's 260 million inhabitants are throughout an archipelagic territory with 922 inhabited islands.² Indonesia's increasing geopolitical relevance is owed in part to its role as a network of trade, cultures, and religions. Indonesia's experiment with constitutional democracy represents an ambitious attempt to build a unified vision of Indonesian national identity on a foundation of ethnic and religious harmony. However, like many other multi-ethnic and religiously diverse states, the very attributes that give Indonesia a vibrant and unique character also generate the forces that threaten entropy.

The specter of the sort of ghastly communal violence that occurred between Muslim and Christian neighbors in villages and cities across the Maluku Islands after the fall of the Suharto dictatorship haunts Indonesia's social, political, and economic progress.³ This conflict seemed to expose the idea of religious pluralism as a national fiction. The social and political divisions between the two largest religious communities, Christian and Muslim, present an ongoing challenge to domestic stability in Indonesia. To address this challenge and preserve social harmony the central government should promote and enforce policies that support moderate Islamic perspectives. In Indonesia, like many multi-religious societies, faith plays a critical role

¹ Indonesia Population. (2018-07-17). accessed 22 September, 2018 <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia/>

² U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Indonesia". accessed 13 September, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html>

³ Jones, Sidney. "Causes of Conflict in Indonesia" *Asia Society* (2018), accessed 24 September, 2018, <https://asiasociety.org/causes-conflict-indonesia>.

in the formation of social identity, orienting politics and policy, and as a potent force in domestic competition and conflict.

Religious Identification and Social Unity

Religious associations create powerful bonds of belief and custom in human societies. While scholars dispute the distinctive meaning of religious belief it can be assumed that among the Abrahamic faith traditions of Islam and Christianity there are two common core assumptions that fit into a broadly accepted definition. First, both faith traditions spring from the idea that there is an ever-living God that engages with humanity. Second, both religions posit that humans are ultimately accountable to God for ideas and behavior.⁴ Belief in these central propositions gives these religious systems tremendous power over the intellectual lives of adherents.

Religious conviction also shapes shared identity in ways that create in-group unity and widens social stratification. Each faith tradition provides adherents with a common social identity and orientation. In practice, these traditions rely on deep reservoirs of doctrine, law, and custom to shape multiple facets in the lives of believers. In many communities religious faith forms a foundation for all aspects of community life. In this regard, religion provides a powerful force for in-group unity. However, these strong community values often collide with the equally persuasive ideas held in other communities. In practice, this often results in the uneven distribution of power and resources between groups. In extreme forms, this can stratify the social order, as out-groups are excluded, setting up conditions for potential instability.⁵

⁴ Victoria, Harrison, "The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-cultural World", *The International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 59 (2006): 133–152.

⁵ Siddiq, Irfan, "Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia causes and recommended measures", Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, (2005) 33-35.

The Abrahamic faith traditions of Christianity and Islam are competitive ideologies that, despite bearing a “family resemblance” in their foundational ideas, are doctrinally incompatible in two important ways.⁶ First, at a basic level both religions place a strong emphasis on the importance of acting in accordance with their professed beliefs. This puts them in competition for adherents. That competition contributes to the second enduring challenge to Christian-Muslim relations. Both faiths have a long tradition of enmity, which in origin stems from the divergence of their central ideas concerning the relationship of the mortal to the divine.⁷ While this history of hostility and ideological competition does not preordain communal violence, it does serve as a reliable predictor of social and political friction.

The acknowledgement of this tendency toward hostility and competition is evident in the political language used in states where there are different religious beliefs, like the United States and Indonesia.⁸ The emphasis on religious tolerance as a civic virtue is an implied acknowledgement of the power of religious conviction to inspire conflict and widen social divisions- if unchecked. In widely variegated societies like Indonesia, religious and political leaders have long recognized the power of religious identification as a social and political force. How actors within Indonesia balance between tolerance and political engagement is central to the future direction of their democracy.

⁶ Harrison, “The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-cultural World”, 151-152.

⁷ Jane Smith. “Muslim-Christian Relations: Historical and Contemporary Realities”, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, (2015) 2-17. <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-11>

⁸ U.S. Department of State “Indonesia 2017 Religious Freedom Report” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, accessed 24 September, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281068.pdf>

Religion and Politics in Indonesia

Indonesia's complex mix of geography, people, customs, and interests makes politics an intricate array of compromises. Indonesia's potential for instability is discernable by considering the nexus of the relationships between religious diversity, geography, and institutional stability. First, Indonesia's imbalance between major religions places the goal of religious plurality at risk. With Muslims making up approximately 87% of the population, Indonesia is able to claim the title of the most populous Muslim nation.⁹ As a democracy, the state attempts to establish a balance between religious faiths. Indonesia state officially recognizes five other major religions and denominations: Christianity (both Protestant and Catholic), Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Christians make up approximately 9% of the overall population making Christianity the second most prominent religious group.¹⁰ In practice, this disparity presents a practical challenge to the idea of religious plurality that is central to Indonesia's identity.

Despite a record of tolerance and cultural adaptation it is a mistake to view Indonesia as a secular state. As professor Bernard Adeney-Risakotta stated in an essay for Stratfor, "Indonesia is better described as a monotheistic nation-state, which rejects both of the classic choices between a monoreligious or secular state."¹¹ This Indonesian approach advances the premise that religion has a role to play in the public sphere, but this approach also opens the gate for the exploitation of religious emotion by fundamentalists and political opportunists. The concept of tolerance, in theory, places the state-approved religions on equal footing in the socio-political life of the country.¹² This seems to point to a system that prioritizes consensus and compromise, at

⁹ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Indonesia".

¹⁰ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook: Indonesia".

¹¹ Bernard Adeney-Risakotta. (2017) "Indonesia and the Future of Islam" Strategic Review, (1 November. 2017) accessed October 5. 2018, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/indonesia-and-future-islam>

¹² Amin M. Adbulla, *The Role of Religion in Indonesian Democracy. Panel Discussion*, Council on Foreign Relations. accessed 24 September, 2018.

least at the macro level. However, that view is at odds with the reality on the ground where both local and national political movements often use religious connections to influence and exploit social divisions and consolidate political power.

The second factor contributing to enduring instability is the fragmented nature of Indonesia's geography (See Map 1). It would be a difficult task to hold this socio-religious imbalance in harmony in a geographically unified country. Indonesia's geographic segregation increases the complexity of aligning local politics and social structures with the national ideal of social harmony. Social harmony in Indonesia rests on the ability to follow a national theory of mutual respect for religions, known by the term *Pancasila*. Pancasila is described as a doctrine with five major principles: Belief in one God, Nationalism expressed in the unity of Indonesia, humanitarianism, Democracy guided by deliberation, and Social Justice.¹³ In Indonesia, the idea of the belief in one God means a God of any of the approved religions.¹⁴ This approach to managing the tensions inherent in a multi-religious state is consistent with Indonesia's tradition of accommodation and tolerance.

The third, but perhaps overlooked factor in this relationship is Indonesia's relative youth and experience as a democracy. Independence from the Dutch did not come until 1949, and then Indonesia's political development was stunted by 32 years of military dictatorship under Suharto. Democratic reform did not come to Indonesia until 1998.¹⁵ Indonesian political institutions and structures are still evolving to meet the needs, hopes, and anxieties of the people. Part of this

¹³ William H Frederick and Robert L. Worden, editors. *Indonesia: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993, accessed 23 October 2018, <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/24.htm> When the policy was enacted under Suharto the policy provoked a violent backlash from some Muslim communities because of the language used concerning the principle of a belief in a "supreme being" or Maha Esa and initial language omitted the term "Allah"

¹⁴ Hisanori Kato, (2017). "The Challenge To Religious Tolerance: Fundamentalists' Resistance To A Non-Muslim Leader In Indonesia." *Comparative Civilizations Review Vol 77, No. 77 (Fall 2017) 1*.

¹⁵ Thompson, Neil. "Islam and Identity Politics in Indonesia". *The Diplomat*, (November 17, 2017) accessed September 15, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/islam-and-identity-politics-in-indonesia/>

evolution is acceptance of a wider diversity of voices involved in political discourse. Religious conservatives, suppressed during the Suharto years, began to compete for followers and a role in shaping Indonesia's politics.

For decades Indonesian political leaders have attempted to chart a "middle path" between moderate and more fundamentalist positions regarding the relationship between religious faith and political power.¹⁶ Since independence in 1949 the government has adopted policies that have promoted a more moderate exercise of the religious-political relationship.¹⁷ So even though Islam enjoys a clear level of hegemony in the republic, the government in Jakarta promulgates a moderate vision of inter-faith relations through the tenets of Pancasila. To maintain harmony in this complex environment the government has actively supported efforts to align governance with the ideals of the constitution. The ideals of moderation and tolerance contend with the forces of instability as they intersect with the cultural, economic, and social forces at play across Indonesia's fragmented geography.

People, Places, and Politics: Religious Tolerance at the Fault Lines

In the past, the physical space between Indonesia's communities and the relatively settled power structure at local levels favored an adaptive approach that accommodated the differences in cultural and religious practices.¹⁸ After independence political, technological and demographic changes began to transform how many communities managed socio-political changes. The geographic split between majority Muslim and majority Christian communities cuts the

¹⁶ Thompson, Neil. "Islam and Identity Politics in Indonesia"

¹⁷ Krithika Varagur. "Indonesia's Moderate Islam is Slowly Crumbling." *Foreign Policy*, (February 14, 2017) accessed 25 September, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/14/indonesias-moderate-islam-is-slowly-crumbling/> 2.

¹⁸ Leslie H Palmier. "Modern Islam in Indonesia: The Muhammadiyah After Independence", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 27, No 3 (September, 1954), 255-258.

archipelago nearly in half along the 120-degree longitude line.¹⁹ In the central and Western provinces like Sumatra and Java, a majority of the population identifies as Muslim, while Christians constitute a majority in Eastern areas like Ambon, East Nusa Tenggara, and Papua (see Map 1). This divide creates religious fault lines, particularly in mixed communities, where the principles of tolerance are strenuously tested. At the seams between these two religious groups population shifts have exposed the veneer of religious tolerance that preserves social order.

Internal migration in the 1970s and 1980s furnished a foreshadowing of the communal ethno-religious segregation that would explode into violence in the Eastern provinces after the fall of Suharto's dictatorship. In Ambon, population shifts created by internal migration created competition for jobs and political power in local districts. As imbalances emerged competition between ethnic groups drove self-segregation that fell along religious lines. The perceptions of injustice between Muslim and Christian communities, and changes to local political arrangements later provided the excuse for the communal violence that occurred in the late 1990s.²⁰ Ultimately, it is unsurprising that these communities of natives and newcomers divided along religious lines because it is the religious element of social identification that provided the strongest adhesive in time of uncertainty and change.

Religious group identification constitutes a powerful filter for social ordering and group interaction precisely because it taps into the human psyche in ways that nationalist or ethnic identification cannot match. Some religious doctrines, like Islam, in its fundamentalist interpretations, do not recognize a separation between the actions and policy preferences of the

¹⁹ World Atlas, Location of Indonesia, accessed 23 October 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/indonesia/idlatlog.htm>

²⁰ Jones, Sidney. "Causes of Conflict in Indonesia"

State and the precepts of the faith.²¹ In post-Suharto Indonesia, political parties proliferated as Indonesia developed its democratic institutions.²² This proliferation of political parties enhanced the utility of religion as a sorting tool or, as Kikue Hamayotsu points out, religion becomes an “instrument of popular mobilization among increasingly pious Muslim constituents precisely because of expanded electoral competition.”²³ But despite expanded competition in Indonesia, only Islamic parties matter because of Islam’s political hegemony.

The idea that Indonesia’s Islamic political parties will surrender dominance or share the stage in the name of social harmony is a fundamental error. While the controlling influence of Islamic political parties reflects the general preferences across Indonesian society, it also undermines the idea of plurality. Within Muslim communities competition between moderate and conservative parties to define the practice and reach of their faith encourages a sharper turn toward faith-based identity politics. So for many Muslims the fundamentalist interpretations of their doctrines point back to a meaning beyond primitive group identity and cultural practice. Sayyid Qutb, a writer and theorist on political Islam, wrote in his influential book *Milestones* that the concept of an Islamic society transcends simple nationality and embraces “a community of belief”.²⁴ This concept of a universal Islam exerts a powerful pull on group members and places their objectives on a collision course with moderates promoting tolerance and a less pious approach to governing.

True Believers: Faith as a Tool for Competition and Conflict.

²¹ John Esposito, L. 2011. *Islam: The Straight Path*. New York: Oxford University Press. 144-145,149.

²² Varagur, “Indonesia’s Moderate Islam is Slowly Crumbling.” 2.

²³ Kikue, Hamayotsu, *The End of Political Islam? A Comparative Analysis of Religious Parties in the Muslim Democracy of Indonesia*, in: *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 30, 3, (2011), 133-159.

²⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, ed. A.B. al-Mehri (Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006), 60.

Both Christianity and Islam are susceptible to politicization. In fact both religions, in practice, rely on the unification of personal faith and political action to maintain their utility for believers. Among the value of religion is its ability to offer solutions to common problems such as injustice, poverty, and social harmony. Religion that fails to challenge the central problems of human social life will lose relevance for adherents.²⁵ In this relationship, the obligation of the believer is action. The varieties and expressions of what constitutes “action” diverge widely.²⁶ However, it is useful to see the connecting cords between the concepts of prophetic direction, theological interpretation, personal obedience, and action. Often this relationship is operating in the background, but it can become a lever that enables the weaponization of religion for political aims.

Conflict in Maluku 1999-2004

The conflict in Maluku from 1999 to 2004 is illustrative of the segregating and amplifying effect of religion on communal violence. In July 1999 a minor dispute between two ethnic communities on the archipelago of North Maluku erupted into a localized civil war lasting almost a year. Before the Maluku emergency was over, more than 5,315 people would die or go missing, over 250,000 people would be displaced, the infrastructure would be devastated and, most importantly, an atmosphere of enduring fear and division would settle over the region. This case provides an example to illustrate just how rapidly and intensely inter-religious conflict can consume whole communities and regions. It also provides a useful model for considering the predisposing factors that can shatter stability in complex societies. The echoes of this conflict still carry lessons for Indonesia’s government.

²⁵ Zainuddin M. “Plurality of Religion in Indonesia: Future Challenges of Religion and Democracy in Indonesia” *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol 09 No. 2 (December 2015) 154.

²⁶ Glenn Tinder. *The Political Meaning of Christianity: The Prophetic Stance: an interpretation*. Harper Collins (1991) 197-199.

There are a variety of theories concerning the ethnic conflict in the Maluku islands and a detailed comparison of the theories is beyond the scope of this paper.²⁷ Instead, it is useful to examine how these communities, with a reputation for peaceful co-existence, reflexively responded to the early spasms of violence. As the cycle of pre-emptive and retaliatory violence escalated in August through December 1999, villages and towns quickly divided themselves along religious lines. This locked the indigenous Kao Christian population and Muslim migrants into a savage struggle for survival.²⁸ As news of the conflict spread, it was telling that external discourse and support also tended to divide along religious or secular lines. Signature events, like the forced conversions of Muslims to Christianity in North Maluku in late 1999 incited external actors like Laskar Jihad and Laskar Mujahiddin to send volunteers from Muslim dominated Java.²⁹ It was religious identification, more than ethnic association, which proved to be a vehicle for expanding the intensity and reach of local unrest.

The ferocity of the violence and the religious character of the community divide presented opportunities for fundamentalist actors to sustain the conflict and expand the divide. Even following the government's qualified success at bringing the two sides together to sign a peace treaty in 2002, clear divisions and tensions remained at the surface.³⁰ Religious fundamentalists and armed militants like Laskar Jihad remain factors in the security landscape.

²⁷ Siddiq Irfan. "Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia causes and recommended measures", Irfan cites Jacques Bertrand's book *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* in Indonesia and takes three approaches to explain the ethnic component of communal violence: Constructivist approaches that provide socio-cultural explanations for violence; Instrumentalist approaches which look at socio-political structures and manipulation as a causal factor; Primordialist approaches that take a biological or anthropological view for ethnic hostility. Bertrand's argument focuses on the tensions caused by a combination of factors: political, cultural, and social factors. The transition from an autocratic form of government to a democracy tipped the community toward unrest.

²⁸ Chris Wilson, C. (2008). *Ethno-religious violence in Indonesia: From soil to God*. Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series. 2-3.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Moluccan Islands: Communal Violence in Indonesia." accessed October 3, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2000/05/31/moluccan-islands-communal-violence-indonesia>

³⁰ Qurtuby, Sumanto Al, *Religious violence and Conciliation in Indonesia: Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas*. (New York: Routledge Series, 2016) 169-171.

Since the conflict subsided in 2004, the communities have not fully reconciled and the people of the region have self-segregated along religious lines. For fundamentalists who advance religious identity as a zero-sum truth this segregation and tension provide an opportunity for further exploitation.

The Ahok Case: Identity Politics and Tolerance

The relationship of Islamic fundamentalists to Indonesian politics has recently emerged at the center of civic debate in the core of the Indonesian state, the capital of Jakarta. In 2016 the acting governor of Jakarta, the ethnic Chinese-Christian Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, commonly known by his Chinese name, Ahok, ran as an incumbent against Muslim candidates for the governorship of Indonesia's most populous city.³¹ During the race a video surfaced where Ahok made the following statement:

“Ladies and gentlemen may not vote for me, because (you have been) lied to by (someone using) Surah al-Maidah verse 51 etc. ... So if you cannot vote for me because you are afraid of being condemned to hell you do not need to feel uneasy as you are being fooled. It is all right.”³²

Author and Islamic Scholar A.J. Arberry translated the passage in question, verse 51 of *al-Maidah* (the Table), as: “Believers, take not the Jews nor the Christians as friends. They are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends is one of them God guides not the people of the evildoers”.³³ Interpretation of this verse is used to assert that a true Muslim should

³¹ Kato, Hisanori, (2017). “The Challenge To Religious Tolerance: Fundamentalists’ Resistance To A Non-Muslim Leader In Indonesia.” *Comparative Civilizations Review* Vol 77, No. 77 (Fall 2017) 2-3. Ahok assumed governorship from the deputy governor position following the elevation of Joko Widodo to the position of president in 2014. The 2017 race would be the first opportunity for the citizens of Jakarta to vote directly for Ahok.

³² Kato, “The Challenge To Religious Tolerance” , 4.

³³ Arthur J. Arberry. *The Koran Interpreted*. (New York: Simon Schuster, 1996),136.

never accept the “mastership” or leadership of a non-Muslim.³⁴ This became the theme magnified by Ahok’s Muslim opponents.

This message stuck, despite Ahok’s broad appeal and relative success as a governor. Following the release of this footage, which was widely distributed through social media and YouTube, Ahok was widely condemned and the candidate was accused of “insulting” Islam. Ahok’s political opponents, represented by Anies Baswedan, quickly seized on this opportunity and capitalized on the emotional energy present in the wider Islamic community to boost their own campaign. Fundamentalist Islamic groups like Front Pembela Islam (FPI) organized a series of mass demonstrations that underlined the volatile forces just below the surface in this election. Quickly, the balance shifted and Ahok lost his lead, lost the election, and most ominously, lost his freedom when he was sentenced to prison for blasphemy.³⁵ Ahok’s opponent was able to capitalize on the shift to a more Saudi-influenced conservative Islam increasingly popular in the heavily populated core of Indonesia.

This election and its outcome have significant consequences for Indonesia’s domestic political direction in the future. Indonesia’s current president, Joko Widodo, faces a national election in 2019. Widodo may face opposition from more conservative candidates like Anies Baswedan. Opposition candidates with the ability to tap into the organized Fundamentalist Islamic interest groups like FPI and Jamaah Anshorusy Syariah (JAS) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) may yet attempt to challenge Widodo’s authenticity as a Muslim. If they don’t oppose his election then they are likely to continue to work through citizen’s groups to advocate

³⁴ Qur’an 4:8-51., accessed 3 October, 2018, <https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-4/section-8-relation-muslims-their-opponents#surah-al-maidah-verse-51>

³⁵Tim Lindsey “The Rise of Conservative Islam in Indonesia” *Australian Institute of International Affairs*.22 Aug 2018. accessed September 24, 2018, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/jokowis-deputy-pick-confirms-rise-of-conservative-islam-in-indonesia/>.

for a more conservative, and exclusionary, Islamic character to Indonesian politics.³⁶ This contest may be political and legal in nature in the Islamic core of Indonesia, but out along the fault lines of religious sectarianism, in places like the North Malukas and Sulawesi, it may exacerbate lingering tensions.

Other Perspectives and Possibilities

There are studies considering the same set of problems that have concluded that religious affiliation is a significant, but not dominant, factor among competing social groups in Indonesia.³⁷ Many of these studies identify discreet political and economic differences as more compelling causal factors in the social unrest that results in mass-violence. Competition for political power and influence sparked by persistent economic disparity and exclusion are reoccurring themes. In culturally diverse regions of Indonesia where structural inequalities developed during colonial rule and dictatorship, the imbalances in political power and economic access can be acute.³⁸ In these settings, opportunistic political actors compete for influence within their constituencies. These “conflict entrepreneurs” will exploit strong religious self-identification as a means to amplify existing social divisions and capture the passions of their constituents.³⁹ Furthermore, in a county with dozens of ethnically distinct communities, tensions are inevitable, but it is the combination of factors that transforms that tension to conflict.

Some of these arguments seem to presume that there is a compartmentalized relationship between religion, political activity, and community identity. Political competition and the use of violence are the outward expressions of social models that promote intense

³⁶ Kato, “The Challenge to Religious Tolerance” 5.

³⁷ Stewart, Patterson. “Indonesia: A Security and Stability Analysis-Part One”, *Future Directions International*, (February 11, 2016) accessed August 18, 2018, <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/indonesia-a-security-and-stability-analysis-part-one/> 5.

³⁸ Jones. “The Causes of Conflict in Indonesia” 2.

³⁹ Irfan., “Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia” 4.

distrust and antipathy. Often, political association and action rely on a common set of values and goals. Group values and norms frequently include a relationship with truth. Group membership requires that adherents accept a series of propositions about social interaction and problem solving.⁴⁰ Accommodation between Christians and Muslims is found in more moderate interpretations of both faiths. However, fundamentalist or radical interpretations are inconsistent with tolerant approaches to inter-faith relationships. These postures toward the transcendent empower communities to assume a relationship with reality that is often at odds with the demands of tolerance. For example, how does the government persuade citizens who happen to believe that they are acting as agents of God, that attacking a neighboring village is an immoral action? This is the challenge facing the Indonesian government: to maintain that tension between the secular and the religious by empowering the “middle path of Islam”.⁴¹

The Way Ahead for the Indonesian Government: The Middle Path

In the near future, the Indonesian government approach will remain in tension with the stated beliefs among a growing conservative movement.⁴² The primary challenge for moderates is to convince Indonesians that a tolerant version of Islam is desirable but also essential to Indonesia’s flourishing in the twenty-first century. This will require sustained attention from the central government to mitigate the risk that fundamentalist interpretations of faith present to national unity, social freedom, and the protection of human rights. The central government has a critical role in supporting the mechanisms already in place in the Indonesian

⁴⁰ Pamela Johnston Conover, "The Role of Social Groups in Political Thinking", *British Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 1 (1988): 51-76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/193688>.

⁴¹ Amin M. Adbulla. "The Role of Religion in Indonesian Democracy"

⁴² Thompson. "Islam and Identity Politics in Indonesia"

constitution.⁴³ Yet, as the Ahok case indicates, simply affirming the constitutional ideals may not be sufficient.

Sitting President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo might have indicated one approach in the recent selection of Ma’ruf Amin as a running mate for the 2019 election. It is possible that in 2019 President Widodo’s coalition will work to hold onto the presidency by offering a greater voice to more conservative Muslims. Ma’ruf Amin represents the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) and the MUI is one of the organizations that supported charges against Ahok in 2016. The decision to add Amin to the ticket was a submission to pressure from a coalition of political parties.⁴⁴ Still, the inclusion of more conservative voices may be an attempt to establish some level of consensus concerning the role of Islam in Indonesian political life. For President Widodo the choice of Amin has paid off in the near term. With the MUI represented on the incumbent ticket, the sectarian and conservative agitators have been sidelined for the 2019 election.⁴⁵ In the long term though, the proliferation of voices concerning the future role of Islam in public and political life may require a concerted effort from moderates to maintain a consensus that accommodates minority views.

President Widodo’s coalition may also point to Indonesia’s positive economic outlook as a further incentive to maintain a moderate approach to religious policy. The rise of the Muslim middle class may act as a stabilizing factor in Indonesian politics.⁴⁶ Just as there is an economic component to unrest, there is also an economic component to social stability. If the

⁴³ U.S. Department of State “Indonesia 2017 Religious Freedom Report”

⁴⁴ Lindsey. “The Rise of Conservative Islam in Indonesia”

⁴⁵ Bayuni, Endy M., “April 17th is referendum on Jokowi” *The Jakarta Post*, August 15 2018, accessed 12 October, 2018, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/08/15/commentary-april-17-2019-is-referendum-on-jokowi.html>

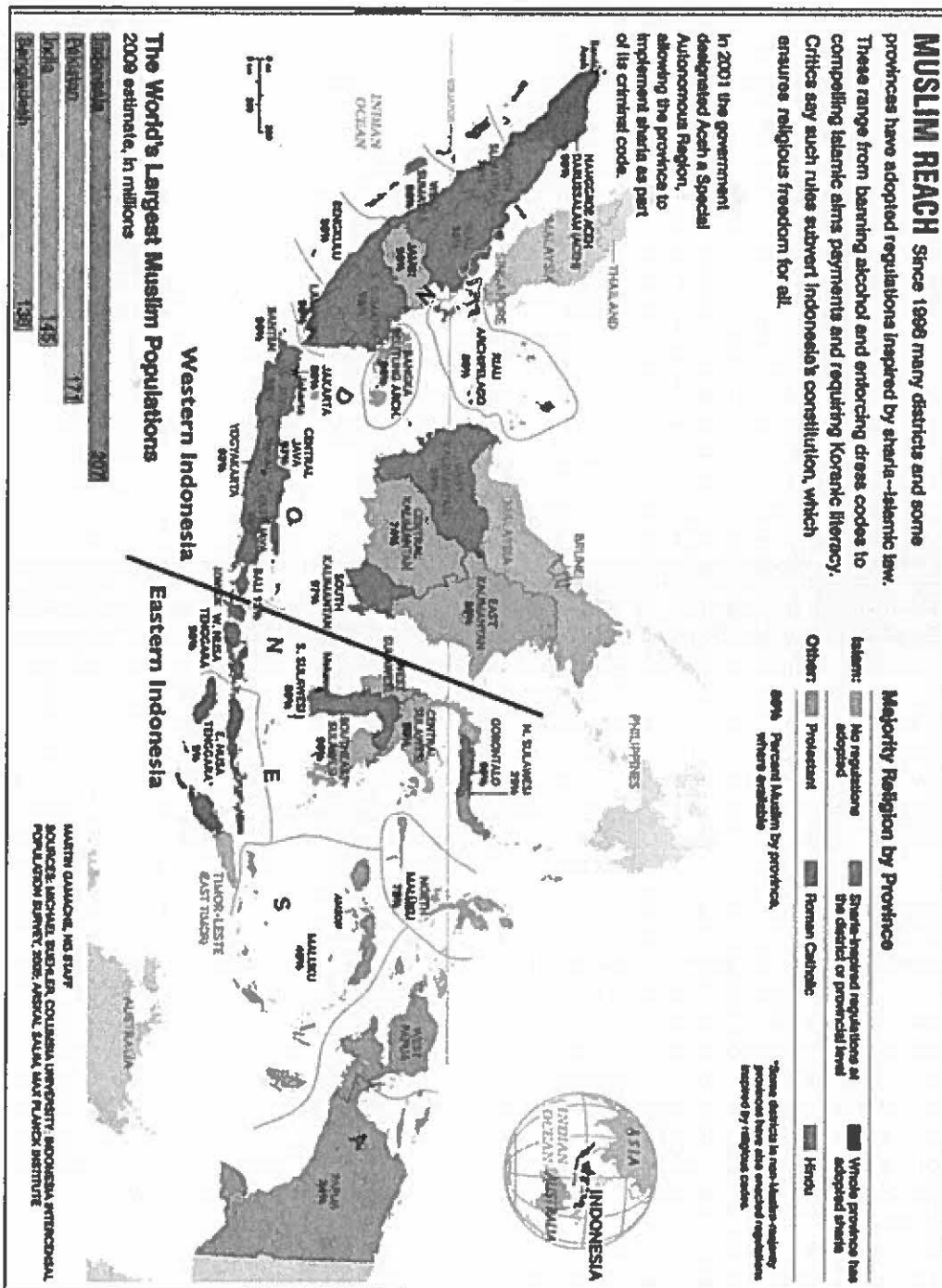
⁴⁶ Azyumardi, Amin M. *The Role of Religion in Indonesian Democracy: Panel Discussion*, Council on Foreign Relations. (Accessed 24 September, 2018).

moderate narrative can link social stability with the prospect of economic stability it may discourage support for potentially destabilizing policies advocated by groups like the MUI.⁴⁷ The possibility of a state supported weakening of the Pancasila concept is a harbinger of the kind of social fraying that can arrest long-term growth and stability. The Widodo campaign can link economic stability and religious tolerance as markers on a path away from nearly two decades of ethno-religious unrest that have marred Indonesia's experiment with democracy.

Conclusion

Islam's social and political dominance in Indonesia is assured for the foreseeable future. The intersection of faith and politics will remain a pressure point for future instability where the Christian and Muslim communities collide. The central government should bolster and enforce inclusive approaches regarding religious tolerance to promote domestic stability. That challenge will likely endure as long as some in Indonesia's Muslim majority promote fundamentalist approaches to policy and law that run counter to the ideas of religious pluralism. In a country that recognizes a belief in "One God" as an organizing principle, political power will always have a religious tone. The relationship between minority Christians and their Muslim neighbors will remain a testing ground for the Indonesian belief in a unified future.

⁴⁷ Ibid.



Map 1. Indonesia and Religious Distribution

Source: Martin Gamache, National Geographic. "Articles in Southeast Asia". accessed 28, September, 2018, <http://www.geocurrents.info/category/place/southeast-asia>

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