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SPECIAL SECTION: GROWING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN INDONESIA
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Islamic Defenders Front Militia (Front Pembela Islam) and its Impact on Growing Religious Intolerance in Indonesia

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Abstract

The processes of democratisation and liberalisation initiated during the course of the Indonesian *Reformasi* era (1998-) generated a stronger porosity in the State's frontiers and led to the formation of certain semi-institutionalised organisations. The approaching 2019 presidential elections have enabled these organisations to position themselves as political and moral brokers. The Islamic Defenders Front militia (FPI) appears to be one of the main actors in this process. It has succeeded in imposing itself in the public sphere, channelling political support and utilising extensive media coverage.

While avoiding providing direct opposition to the ruling government and the Constitution, this organisation promotes the social morals followed by a large part of the population and encourages radicalism and violent actions in the name of Islam. The organisation collaborates with a section of the regional and national political elites, some sections of the army and police, several groups that are—more or less—criminal in nature, a number of local communities in different areas, and a variety of violent Islamist groups. Thus, it is at the crossroads of multiple political, economic, social, and religious interests.

At the same time, the organisation's leaders maintain their own political objectives. They manipulate the dynamics of the electoral decentralised system to their advantage by obtaining political concessions that serve their personal goals. The capacity of the organisation to impose its discourse on the public stage has led to an urgent need to interrogate both the institutional and ideological transformations initiated by the Indonesian decentralisation since 1999.

Keywords: Islamism; Islamic Defenders Front Militia; Radicalisation; Politics; Indonesia; Front Pembela Islam

Introduction: 'Good' and 'Evil' as Defined by the Front Pembela Islam (FPI)

Around the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, Indonesia was marked by large-scale demonstrations agitating for the imprisonment of the ethnic Chinese Christian governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as Ahok). During an official visit to Pramuka Island in northern Jakarta, a journalist had asked him to express his position on the 51st verse of the Medina sura (the 5th sura), which defends Muslims to ally with Christians and Jews[1]. He criticised his political opponents' manipulative use of religious texts. Thanks to widespread media relay, his words soon led to reactions among the public, particularly across social networks. This mobilisation was essentially led by the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam [FPI]), an organisation created in 1998 under the patronage of high ranking members of the political elite, the government administration, the police, the army, and the underworld. Born from the turbulences of the Indonesian political transition, the FPI developed a discourse involving insecurity and imminent danger, either internal to the nation or exogenous to it.

[1]"O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you—then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people" (Khalidi 2008: 149).

One of the primary goals of the FPI is the integration of the Jakarta Charter into the preamble of the Constitution. It imposes an obligation on Muslim citizens to respect Islamic law. The organisation considers the foundations of Indonesia's Constitution as amoral—or even immoral—even as it pretends to defend the Pancasila, the five pillars of the national ideology; it also judges the authorities' capacity to apply the law as being defective. Furthermore, it encourages citizenship initiatives for self-justice through the execution of violent actions against what it identifies as 'perdition places' (*tempat maksiat*)—clubs, bars, gambling places, and brothels—and minority religious groups that it identifies as 'deviants'. Through its humanitarian operations, which it widely circulates reports in the media, the organisation justifies the participation of its armed branches in several conflicts in the periphery regions of the Indonesian archipelago; it has developed its branches ramifications in these areas to promote puritan Islamic ideals and norms. In addition, the FPI has enabled numerous political actors to delegate the treatment of questions situated on the margins of legality, which they, nevertheless, consider necessary for the success of their particular objectives. These questions concern issues regarding natural resource extraction, the control of territories and the migratory flux on the frontiers, and expropriation operations linked to the privatisation or nationalisation of goods.

In Indonesia, the governmental delegation of religious questions (Allès 2015a) and the collective willingness of the political elites to maintain spaces for intersectional mobility between the socio-political institutions have contributed to the development of grey zones in the heart of the juridical rights. These places have resulted in the creation of multiple semi-official courts and the proliferation of informal legal systems. These systems are built on a fluid system of tacit rules; based on this, the FPI's founder, Rizieq Syihab, has initiated a project for societal moralisation, which combines a conservative traditionalist Islamic vision with multiform ideological precepts. The definition of 'good' and 'evil' is at the heart of the discursive production on which the organisation has founded its legitimacy. Thus, it uses the slogan "The preservation of good and the struggle against evil" (from the following Koranic passage: *al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an'l-munkar*) (Hasan 2009: 126; Sekretariat Front Pembela Islam: 1999). Similarly, its motto runs "To live in nobility or to die in martyrdom" (Indonesian: *Hidup mulia atau mati syahid*).

Furthermore, its theological discourse deploys a rhetoric that plays on apparent paradoxes. An examination of its declarations in social media spaces shows that it combines various ideological resources—like the promotion of puritanism and the opposition to Wahhabism—and demagogic arguments—for instance, by inhabiting a junction between sympathy towards armed jihad and hostility towards suicide attacks. Moreover, the multiform dimensions of the FPI have resulted in various types of analyses by Islamic experts and specialists of the contemporary politics in Indonesia. Madinier identified a "religious hooliganism" (Madinier 2011: 17); Bertrand underlined the political connivances at the regional level (Bertrand 2008: 84); Njoto-Feillard showed that the patron-client relations of the political elite played a role in the organisation's development (Njoto-Feillard 2013); Allès provided evidence of the authorities' permissiveness, which facilitated the radicalisation process of FPI members (Allès 2015b: 7); Wilson (2014) examined the FPI as a moral order militia originating from a regime of rackets; and the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), which is directed by Jones, called it an Islamist group "focused on alliances with politicians and members of security forces to achieve short-term goals and material reward" (2018: 3).

By examining the FPI's genesis and taking into account its affiliations, concurrences, and the resistances to it, I will try to show that the organisation functions as described by these different analyses; however, it has also undergone deep transformations over time. This transformation process urges us to think about the way in which the FPI contributes towards the growing religious intolerance in Indonesia, and the organization also indicates that its radical views have benefited from contemporary Indonesian informal power relationships. This work is based on numerous interviews with FPI members (conducted in Banten and Jakarta between 2016 and 2018), as well its sympathisers and opponents.

An Infallible Divine Justice: The FPI's Islamist Political Project and its Rhetorical Supports

The FPI was founded on Indonesia's independence day (17 August 1998), four months after the demission of President Suharto (1966–1998). The organisation was part of a coalition of militia groups that later started the 212 Movement (IPAC 2018); members of this movement wore the colour of the

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Islamic religion. They took advantage of the confusion at the top of the political apparatus and tried to impose their legitimacy by presenting themselves as a substitute for a State that they claimed was failing.

The FPI's inauguration ceremony was held in the Al Um Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in Utan village, which is situated in Jakarta's southern Ciputat region; this region is a significant place for Indonesia's political and intellectual religious development, particularly because the regional branch of the State Islamic university (UIN) is situated in the region (van Bruinessen 2006: 162). Two religious masters (locally called *kiai*), Fathoni and Adrus Jamalahe, are the FPI's founders. They are essentially religious natives from the Hadhrami diaspora (Hadhramaut is situated in South Yemen) and are considered as Prophet Muhammad's descendants. This filiation has provided them with the title of *habib*, the Malay equivalent of *sayyid* or *seyyid* (an old aristocracy originating in Hadhramaut). The head, Muhammad Rizieq bin Husein Syihab, publicly emphasises their origins in the Hadhrami community as a mark of their superior degree of Islamic descent. Madinier (2002: 153) has pointed out that other members of the *sayyid* families played an important role in the FPI's creation (for example, Husein al-Habsyi, a leader in the Indonesian branch of the Muslim brothers; and Ali Baaqil, a relative of Tommy Suharto, who enabled his father's regime) and benefited by supporting the FPI's activities. The FPI's great imam is Habib Muchsin Bin Zaid Al-Athos. Other important members include Ali bin Abdurahman Assegaf, Ahmad bin Novel bin Jindan, Salim al-Atas, and Abdur Rasyid bin Abdullah Syafi'i. The FPI succeeded in attracting the support of preachers who had expressed their rigorist ideas during the New Order regime along with their opposition to the regime during the 1980s; these included Misbahul Anam (currently vice-president of the Salafi-modernist organisation, Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia [GNPF-MUI]), Cecep Bustomi (the late founder of the Laskar Hizbullah Islamist militia in Banten), and Idrus Jamalullail.

As in the case of Ja'far Umar Thalib, founder of the Forum of Communication for the Followers of the Sunna and the Prophet Muhammad's Community (Forum Komunikasi Ahlu Sunnah wal-Jamaah [FKAWJ]), which is the mother organisation of the Fighters for the Islamic war (Laskar Jihad), Rizieq studied for a year at the Institute for Islamic and Arabic Science (LIPIA) in Pasar Minggu in southern Jakarta. This institute was founded in 1980 under the patronage of the Islamic State University's Imam Muhammad ibn Saud of Riyad; Rizieq studied there between 1983 and 1990 thanks to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. He then came back to Jakarta, and in 1992 he focused on preaching activities. After a year of unfinished study at the International University of Malaysia, he returned to Jakarta and dedicated himself to a rigorist type of Islamic teaching that was critical to the New Order regime within the Aliyah Jami'at Khair Muslim school (*madrasa*), which was headed by a Hadhrami (Wilson 2015: 256–258).

He also participated in the large-scale mobilisation movement of the conservative and radical Islamic fringes, which had been operated by General Suharto's regime since the 1990s, through the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia [ICMI]) (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 44–46). This organisation, founded by Suharto's right-hand man, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, contributed to the emergence of a "regimist" Islam (Hefner 2000: XXIV) and became one of the main tools of the political transition that occurred in 1998–2000. The Islamist militias then worked together with Pamswakarsa (the civilian auxiliary force, which was founded in the same period by General Kivlan Zen and functioned under General Wiranto's patronage) with the aim of countering pro-reform demonstrations. Islamist militias and nationalist ones draw on the same social milieu—the underworld (several anonymous interviews with the coordinator of Pamswakarsa in Banten, February 2007, November 2014, July 2017)[2], private security groups, and demobilised and reservist militaries. As was acknowledged by General Kivlan Zen in 2004 (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 119), these militias constituted informal auxiliary groups that supported the police; their initial objective was to found an organisation following an extraordinary session of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat [MPR]) and the opposition to the massive November 1998 students' demonstrations, which had demanded deep reforms in political and military institutions (Mietzner 2009).

[2]This informant is a prominent member of the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP)'s regional branch and one of the main political players in the region since the early 1970s.

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From its inception, the FPI gained widespread popularity, but the organisation faced strong public opposition starting in 2001, when it opposed the candidacy of Megawati Sukarnoputri for the position of president under the pretext of an Islamic prohibition on women rulers. This unpopularity increased in 2002 after the Bali attacks, for which several members of the FPI were lawfully charged. Nevertheless, its public recognition increased in later years thanks to its intense use of social media and the massive dissemination of videos valorising Rizieq (for instance, mini documentaries about his Pesantren Agrokultural Markaz Syariah Mega Mendung Muslim boarding school in the Bogor countryside). The other geographic centres of the organisation are the Al-Umm Islamic boarding school in Ciputat (the place where the FPI was founded) and the Petamburan neighbourhood, which is located near Rizieq's residence. Today, the FPI probably counts a dozen thousand members (10, 0000 to 20, 0000 by some estimates [Wilson 2014: 3]), mostly in the Jakarta region; in addition, small branches function in the regions of the Indonesian archipelago where socio-religious conflicts occurred, or still occur: Aceh, Sulawesi, Moluccas, Western Papua, and Sulu, in the southern Philippines. In theory, all members must be Muslim and be able to read the Koran, but no exams or controls to determine and confirm members' suitability are imposed by the organisation.

In 2002, for the FPI's anniversary ceremony, the organisation introduced its new project of Sharia implementation. This project introduction was accompanied by repeated criticisms of democracy. Rizieq claims that anteriority is one of the foundations upon which the superiority of Islam is based, in comparison to the democratic system; according to him, this superiority is demonstrated by the fact that the first prophet, Adam, preceded Platoon. Rizieq claims that the principles of democracy, such as consultation (*shura*), justice (*al-addalah*), and responsibility (*masulliyah*), are Islamic in essence and that they have been appropriated and perverted by the founders of democracy (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 176). Furthermore, he claims that, because of its divine essence and revealed nature, Islamic law cannot contend with any error. On the contrary, democracy is enacted by men, who are fundamentally fallible. The only decisions that can be taken by believers must be decided through consultation (*musyawarah*). Such consultations can stipulate only with regard to questions that have not been settled by Sharia and they can be discussed only by a collegial government composed of ulamas and experts on economic and social questions (the *umara*), who are considered legitimate because of their knowledge of Islamic law.

Unlike the other Islamist groups, such as the Indonesian Party of Liberation (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia [HTI]), which is oriented towards the Muslim brotherhood, and the Indonesian Mujahedeen Council (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia), the FPI does not have the aim to establish an Islamic State, and it does not officially reject the State doctrine of Pancasila, which is the national ideology—even if it largely acts to delegitimise it, which led to Rizieq's trial in 2016; instead, it calls for a modification to be made to the Constitution by incorporating the Jakarta Charter into it. This Charter stipulates that it is the obligation of all Muslims to follow Islamic law. According to Wilson (2014), the Indonesian Republic's concept of Islamic law (NKRI Bersyariah), as expounded by Rizieq, is located between the Islamists' aspirations rejecting the Constitution and the Republic and those of the conservative nationalists rejecting liberal forms of democracy and not envisaging any place for political Islam.

In terms of its discourse, which contradicts its actual practices, the FPI is more nationalist than pan-Islamic because it asserts the importance of territorial integrity and the centrality of the Constitution and the State's principles, Pancasila. It has participated in many actions designed to showcase its nationalist positions, particularly prior to election periods; for instance, during the 2014 presidential elections, it held demonstrations behind the Australian embassy when the Australian government was accused of wiretapping several Indonesian ministers. To legitimate their activities, the leaders have also frequently mobilised arguments concerning national security, the defence of the territorial frontiers, and the protection of the country against *'imperialism and foreign liberalism'*. This discourse register echoes the alliances that the organisation has continued to make with the oligarchies that have existed since President Suharto's regime.

The FPI as a Stronghold for the Republic's Constitution: Supports within the Army, Police, and Political Class

The foundation of the FPI illustrates the strong porosity that persisted between the nationalist and Islamist sections of the army at the beginning of the *Reformasi* (a period of democratisation and

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decentralisation initiated in 1998, which is still ongoing) (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 79). At its inception, the organisation was funded by the brother-in-law of Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie (the then right-hand man of President Suharto), and Mochsin Mochdar, a member of the Group Citra Harapan. The funds were transited through the charity foundation Al-Kautsar, and this foundation later participated to the financing of Pamswakarsa militias (previously cited). Some of Suharto's relatives also played a financial role; these may have included some leaders of the army's charity foundation, the Yayasan Kartika Eka Paksi (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 78–79).

The FPI (as did the Indonesian committee for solidarity with the Muslim world [KISDI]) undertook rapprochements with members of the Land Force who had some political influence and could thus provide them with protection and enable them to amplify their claims towards the government. The relations among the army's members are complex and are marked by internal rivalries and influence games. These dynamics notably oppose the Generals Prabowo Subianto and Wiranto. These generals were involved in several cases of human rights violations—among other cases, during their operations in eastern Timor, which led to mass murders of civilians. Prabowo was suspected of organising the 1997–1998 kidnappings of pro-democracy activists. During this period, the FPI led violent actions together with the Fighters for the Islamic war for the Sunna (Laskar Jihad Ahlus Sunnah) against demonstrators who supported the militant Munir Saïd Thalib, who had been agitating for human rights and anti-corruption measures. At its inception, the FPI seems to have benefited from General Prabowo Subianto's (chief of the Special Forces in December 1995-March 1998, and director of the reserve army [Kostrad, between March to May 1998]) support; however, while his discredit was growing due to his implication in the torture of pro-democracy activists and suspicions of a coup attempt—and following his demotion from the army—the organisation grew closer to the relatives of General Wiranto (chief of the army in 1998–1999).

The FPI expressed its support for Wiranto on many occasions. For example, FPI members mobbed the office of the National Commission for Human Rights in order to oppose the trial of Wiranto and his relatives; later, they tried to discredit the future president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a rival of Wiranto during the 2004 presidential elections and the 2009 elections, when Wiranto was a running mate of Jusuf Kalla. Intermediation with Wiranto was assured by the general lieutenant and military commander of Jakarta, Djadja Suparman (1999–2000). The FPI also probably benefited from the support of several Land Force members; they are known for their proximity to the so-called Communitarian organisations (Organisasi Masyarakat [Ormas]). This is apparent in the political trajectories of generals such as General Major Zacky Anwar Makarim (chief of the army's intelligence services in the late 1990s), Lieutenant General Suaidi Marasabessy (a close associate of Wiranto, member of Wiranto's Hanura party between 2006 and 2010, and later a member of the Democrat party headed by Yudhoyono), General Fachrul Razi (1999–2000), and also the army's ex-major-general in the final years of Suharto's regime, Sutiyoso (Jakarta's governor in 1997–2007 and chief of the Intelligence Services in 2015–2016[3]). The rapprochement between Wiranto and Joko Widodo during the 2014 presidential campaign led to a renewed alliance between FPI and Prabowo, a finalist in the last presidential elections and the director of one of the main energy companies in Indonesia, the Nusantara Energy Group. The FPI justified its distancing of itself from Wiranto by declaring that it could not support the widespread telecast of the Miss World elections on his television channel, Bamba TV.

Such links within the army go together with protections provided in the heart of the police organisations. At its inception, the FPI was supported by the chief of the Jakarta police (1998), Nugroho Djayusman. A collection of files obtained through Wikileaks revealed that Sutanto, the former assistant of Suharto (1995–1998), who was also the chief of the national police (2005–2008) and chief of Intelligence Services (2009–2011), compared the FPI to a "watch dog" and suggested that it was necessary to utilise them under certain circumstances. It appeared that the organisation had received gifts from the police and Indonesian intelligence services (Saragih 2011). Later, the chief of the national police, Timur Pradopo (2010–2013), affirmed that he supported a partnership between the police and the Islamist militias; he had been in charge of the security forces responsible for the murder of four students in 1998, and

[3]He was also vice-commandant of the Special Forces, Kopassus (1988–1992). In 2007, the New-Zealand police interrogated him concerning the murder of five journalists in eastern Timor in 1975.

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he was also an alleged co-founder of the FPI. After the 2016–2017 rallies, however, its relationship with the police evolved, since the FPI pressured the police authorities to meet its own agenda (for the chronology of this distancing process, see IPAC 2018: 17).

The military and police patronages that the FPI benefited from are tightly linked to political bases, chiefly because of the electoral rivalries of the ex-Generals, Prabowo and Wiranto, which were carried out through their respective parties and coalitions. This opposition was in the foreground during the FPI campaign to dismiss, imprison, and—a course of action used in rare cases for the most extreme activists—execute Jakarta's governor. The pressure campaign against him began after he declared that he did not support one of the key projects of the party: the election of the region's representatives (*kepala daerah*) by the members of the regional parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah [DPRD]) and not directly by the people, as is currently the case. Next, the political party headed by Prabowo, the Great Indonesia Movement (Gerakan Indonesia Raya, Gerindra), demanded his demission from the party, and it is at this moment that the FPI initiated its disqualification campaign against the governor. Between October and December 2016, it coordinated the demonstrations entitled Actions in defence of Islam (Aksi Bela Islam) 1, 2, and 3, respectively; these were carried out on 14 October, 4 November (Aksi 411), and 2 December 2016 (Aksi 212). Their actions gained nationwide attention and gathered the support of several millions of people thanks to widespread media relay.

These demonstrations were supported by several political personalities on the national stage, including Amien Rais (head of Muhammadiyah in 1995–2000 and MPR president in 1999–2004). Rizieq also visited the national parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat [DPR]) on 28 October 2016 to meet with Fadli Zon (one of Gerindra's founders and the DPR's vice-president in 2014–2019) and Fahri Hamzah, who was one of the founders of the Indonesian Muslim Students Action Union (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia [KAMMI]). Hamzah was also a member of the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS), favourable to the dissolution of the anti-corruption commission (KPK) and DPR's vice-president within the department of the people's prosperity. President Widodo, nevertheless, succeeded in calming down the tensions by joining the demonstrators for the collective prayer and by delivering a favourable speech. In addition, he may have set into motion certain arrangements with the leaders of the opposition movement, as suggested by his meetings with Prabowo after the demonstrations.

In addition to serving the interests of a section of the political class, partly inherited from Suharto's regime, the leaders of the FPI's branches have their own objectives with regard to personal enrichment and power accumulation. The organisation has also been suspected of having autonomous political goals. In March 2011, the Qatari television channel Al-Jazeera revealed the existence of a document describing the structure of an Islamic revolutionary council. This document—written by Muhammad Al-Khathath, who is the ex-president of the HTI, the head of the Islamic Community Forum (Forum Ukhuwah Islamiyah [FUI]), and a close associate of the FPI—explained that, because of the Century bank corruption scandal, President Yudhoyono's government would likely be dismantled at any moment. It was then imperious to even consider the possibility of a replacement government. This document placed Rizieq as the chief of the State. His lawyer and spokesperson, Munarman, was placed as the defence minister within this hypothetical government, and the planned governmental cabinet included several members of the army who had been involved in the New Order regime (e.g. General Tyasno Sudarto, a relative of General Wiranto), thus indicating ideological connections between the Islamists and the New Order apologists; such connections are also indicated by their similar attitudes towards the revision of the Constitution and democracy reforms. The Salafist preacher Abu Bakar Ba'asyir was a director board member of the religious council.

The FPI leaders' political projects and the supports they received from the governing political class reflect the existence of indirect mechanisms for governance. They position themselves towards official legality but also mobilize extra judiciary values and norms that are exterior to those of the State. The FPI has been involved in numerous violent actions, and Rizieq explains that these actions are designed to make up for the shortcomings of the authorities, who have failed to maintain Islamic moral order. Before engaging in its actions, the FPI often lobbies and pressures the Provincial Assembly (DPRD) and the local executive (Pemerintah Daerah), and when the negotiations do not lead to police operations, the FPI assesses that it is legitimate to act to impose respect towards the republican laws (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 119). The organisation then pretends "to embed the indignation of the common people in

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front of the unfaithful State" (Bertrand 2008: 120). This allows the FPI to collaborate with a set of non-State actors who are located on the limits of legality.

Militancy against a Decadent Order: Self-justice Practices, Patronages within the Underworld, and Position within Vigilante Militias

Considering the media exposure of its actions and the number of its members—probably several hundred thousand—the FPI is probably the most important current Muslim civil militia in Indonesia (Wilson 2014). It forms one part of the long history and development of armed groups that act as intermediaries between the army and civil society. Militias and vigilante groups were in the frontline during the anti-colonial struggles, and later, their members joined the regular army (Cribb 1991). Under the New Order, neighbourhood watch groups and security programmes involving local communities contributed to "create a citizenship that thought and acted as the police" (Barker 1999: 89), as is suggested by the use of the popular expression 'to play the judge itself' (*main hakim sendiri*), which evokes practices of popular lynching, some of which were conducted with the support of the local police[4]. These militias then situate their actions in continuation—or even substitution—of the police and the authorities (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 120).

Concerning the Islamist militia groups, they affirmed themselves fully after the *Reformasi* thanks to, initially, the support of the State elites (Wilson 2015: 253). Their violent activities were particularly intense during the economic, social, and financial Indonesian crisis in 1998–2002. This tendency declined, but the repeated actions of these militias contributed towards spreading their norms within society. The FPI constructed its notoriety partly through strong media diffusion of its ideas and actions. Social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and the WhatsApp messenger service, which counts Indonesians as some of its top global consumers, are extensively used by the organisation's members.

The influence of the FPI also contributed to the affirmation of the religious referents of regionalist militia, who then developed identity discourses. It provoked conflicts with contemporaneous organisations, such as the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (Forum Betawi Rempug), on Jakarta's territory (for instance, in a clash on 20 June 2006). The rivalries between organisations with regard to staking claim to territories can even be considered one of the key moments in the FPI's development history. In 1998, the conflict between the FPI and the group headed by Ambon native Rozario Marshal (surnamed Hercules[5]), who was backed by Prabowo at the time, was the main event in the organisation's legitimisation process. Other clashes put the FPI in opposition to other Islamist groups, such as the Front Jihad Islam (FJI)[6], which were their rivals because their ideological sectors overlapped.

The proliferation of these Islamist militia organisations is visible during public demonstrations. For instance, the Anti-Ahok demonstrations in 2016–2017 gathered dozens of Islamist organisations, including the FUI, the HTI, the Salafi Wahdah Islamiyah, the KAMMI, the Kabah Youth Movement (Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah [GPK]), the Islamic Youth Movement (Gerakan Pemuda Islam [GPI]), the Indonesian Council of Young Intellectuals and Ulama (Majelis Intelektual dan Ulama Muda Indonesia [MIUMI]), the Forum of interest for the Islamic community (Forum Peduli Umat), or the Indonesian committee for the solidarity with the Muslim world (Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam [KISDI]). These demonstrations also indicate an instrumentalisation of Islamism through the gathering of groups for political opposition lobbying; these include the Center of Study for Indonesian Leadership and the Defence of the nation Movement (Gerakan Bela Negara), an anti-communist group headed by ex-General Agustadi Sasongko Purnomo, who was commandant of the Land Force in 2007–2009.

The pressure exerted by the FPI over the media and successive governments since the *Reformasi* contributed to the legitimisation of its ideas and practices and the appropriation of its rhetoric by a section of the political elites (Njoto-Feillard 2013). It also initiated and fed on an ideological build-up. This was favourable, in the long term, to the radicalisation of public discourse. This radicalisation is reflected in

[4]This information is sourced from personal investigations on the BPPKB organisation in Banten.

[5]Violent confrontations between several hundred thugs (*preman*) of both organisations took place in Gajah Mada in the center of Jakarta on 22 November 1998.

[6]Confrontations took place in Jogjakarta on 28 February 2012.

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the influence the FPI exerts on national-scale Muslim organisations that are traditional intermediaries between the government and the population.

Supports Provided by Politicised Islamic Institutions

Since its foundation, the FPI has benefited from the support of the State's religious institutions. In 2002, the Minister of the Religions, Said Agil Husin Al-Munawar (2001–2004), attended the FPI's foundation day ceremony to affirm his support for its Sharia introduction and implementation project and the Jakarta Charter revision (amendment 29 of the Constitution). The intolerant discourses of the FPI were also broadly repeated by nationally known charismatic puritan personalities, such as Ary Ginanjar (Rudnyckyj 2010) and Aa Gym (Hoesterey 2015). Moreover, since its inception, the organisation has had solid support within the semi-institutional Indonesian Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia [MUI]). This organisation has adopted the FPI's propositions several times; for example, in 2005, it declared liberalism, secularism, and pluralism as *haram* (prohibited) in the eyes of Islamic law. By exerting pressure to ensure that this juridical advice (*fatwah*) was adopted, the FPI aimed to position itself in opposition to the liberal currents that were originating from the Indonesian Muslim majority organisation, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

After numerous confrontations with these organisations' leaders (tensions with the NU arose as early as 2005), the FPI progressively endeavoured to poach some of the NU's members. An exemplary case illustrating this strategy concerns the creation of the NU-Straight path (NU-Garis Lurus [NU-GL]) organisation in 2015; this organisation exploits the NU's internal divisions to position itself as a broker. The NU-GL is headed by Muhammad Idrus Ramli (president), Luthfi Bashori (grand imam), and Habib Abdurrahman bin Husain Bahlega Assegaf (appointed imam). These individuals are close to the FPI and are placed informally under its tutelary supervision (for more information on this structure, see IPAC 2018: 11). However, they were once criticised by Hasyim Muzadi (head of the NU in 1999–2010) for their poor knowledge of Islam.

Another recent strategy for the Islamist organizations to position themselves as brokers was carried out in 2016 through the creation of the National movement of the juridical advice guard of the National Ulama Council (GNPF-MUI). Its founder, Bachtiar Nasir, is a former student of the reputed Islamic school of Gontor and of the Medina University. Since 2008, he has been leading the Ar-Rahman Qur'anic Learning (AQL) centre and the Islamic school Ar-Rahman Quranic College (AQC), which produced students who later became members of the LIPIA, the Medina University, and the Islamic universities in Gaza and Sudan. Beginning in 2010, Bachtiar Nasir became involved in several politicised religious organisations; he became the general secretary of the MIUMI, carried out various functions as a member of the MUI direction council, worked as a chief board member of the Muhammadiyah, and took charge as the president of the students of Saudi Arabia for all Indonesia (Alumni Saudi Arabia se-Indonesia) and the Students of Medina Islamic University for all Indonesia (Alumni Madinah Islamic University se-Indonesia).

Finally, in 2016, he created the GNPF-MUI under the guidance of Rizieq Syihab. The organisation positions itself as an intermediary for MUI, but it is not recognised by MUI's leaders. It played a major role in coordinating the anti-Ahok demonstrations. Bachtiar Nasir then provided support to important popular movements as part of the February 2017 mobilisation, but soon after this he was charged for irregular transfer of funds. The allegation was that two billion rupiah (more or less 17, 5000 dollars) accumulated through the donations of 5000 sympathisers towards the demonstrations would be transferred from the Indonesian national Sharia bank (BNI Syariah) to a Turkish account and then transferred to a Syrian Salafi rebel group called the Army of Islam (Jaish al-Islam). It was also claimed that, according to the plan, the funds would be hosted by the Justice for all (Yayasan Keadilan Untuk Semua) foundation and transferred to the Indonesian Humanitarian Relief foundation. The allegation did not hold up to scrutiny, but the FPI distanced itself from the GNPF-MUI. When summoned to the national police office on 13 February 2017, Novel Chaidir Hasan Bamukmin, its spokesperson, stated that he did not know about the foundation's existence and did not personally know Bachtiar (CNN Indonesia 2017). In March 2018, on Rizieq's instructions, Bachtiar Nasir was replaced by Muhammad al-Khathath, an FPI member, as the head of the organisation (IPAC 2018: 14).

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This case illustrates the tricky outcomes of the delegation process operated by the Indonesian government with regard to management of religious questions. This delegation process—and the methods by which it was operated in the case of the semi-governmental outcomes MUI—has been exploited by the FPI, which positions itself as a delegator agency. It thus succeeded in influencing the MUI's juridical advices and managed to secure a *fatwa* to condemn Ahok. In this way, it appropriated the MUI's legitimacy to make justice-related pronouncements in accordance with its own norms. Moreover, while positioning itself as an intermediary for political elites who aim to gain the votes of conservative Muslims, the FPI maintains its own political ambitions and follows its own Islamist ideals, including violent activities that can be potentially linked to various kinds of jihadism.

The Ramifications within Radical Islamism and Violent Militancy

Among the FPI's violent actions, the most vigorous have been directed against other concurrent religious movements. The founding episode of its politics occurred when FPI members initiated violent actions in Timor-Leste, which later had repercussions in several regions in the Moluccas. All throughout this process, the FPI encouraged murder-fuelled conflicts between the Christians and the Muslims, in particular, by regularly sending militia groups into the region for the purpose of conducting jihad (Madinier and Feillard 2006: 121–123).

The FPI fanned such tensions between Muslims and concurrent religious communities and began to express—more sporadically but on a recurrent basis—violent intentions by conducting anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic campaigns; accusing Protestants, Catholics, and Buddhists of proselytism; encouraging the promulgation of Islamic juridical advices (*fatwas*) aimed at forbidding interreligious marriages; and fuelling conflicts regarding the construction of churches in Muslim majority localities. One of the leaders of the HTI, Muhammad al-Khathath (general secretary of FUI and executive leader of GNPF-MUI), was fired from the organisation after his implication in the violence surrounding the 'national monument incident'. This rank attack against pacifist demonstrators who were in favour of religious pluralism was aided by the aggression of militants from the Alliance for the Freedom of Faith and Religion (Aliansi Kebangsaan untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan, [AKKBB]); Central Jakarta on 1 June 2008.

The FPI also directs such hostility towards Islamic movements that it considers to be deviant. Since 2007, it has remained at the core of an alliance of groups that aim to legally forbid Ahmadiyya practices and beliefs, often through violent means. In 2008, during a discourse relayed in the media, the FPI general secretary, Sobri Lubis, called upon his followers to murder Ahmadis. The FPI's frequent pressuring of State and public opinion (actions in front of the offices of television channels and press houses and large-scale utilisation of the national media and social medias) contributed to the normalisation of the Ahmadi's social marginalisation and repression. The most violent known action was led by an FPI local leader in Cikeusik, Banten, in 2011 and resulted in the murder of three Ahmadis.

Another target for repression concerns liberal Islam, particularly the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal [JIL]) (Feener 2007: 210), which was created in the 1970s and is favourable to religious pluralism. The FPI transmits the critiques of the MUI, which holds this movement to be deviant. The organisation has also created a coalition with several Islamist groups to generate a movement named the Indonesia without Liberal Islam Network (Indonesia tanpa JIL). As early as 2003, the FPI led vigilance operations (for instance, the *Apel Siaga* of 5 August 2003) against the JIL. Since 2014, it has also launched multiple anti-Shiite media campaigns together with the Anti-Shiites national Alliance (Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah [ANNAS]), whose president, Athian Ali, is also president of the Forum of Indonesian Ulama of the Muslim community (Forum Ulama Umat Indonesia [FUUI]).

The violent actions encouraged by the FPI are initially propagated based on national territorial disputes in regions marked by socio-cultural and political conflicts; the FPI then translates these disputes into religious terms. In 2015, it threatened to send an unlikely number—9500—of combatants from Banten to Tolikara in western Papua. Volunteers are also dispatched to localities that have suffered from humanitarian catastrophes, such as the annual flooding in Jakarta, the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, and the 2009 earthquake in Padang. The FPI has sent self-labelled 'jihadist groups' close to Laskar

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Jihad into several regions under the pretext of encouraging social and charity activities and is often suspected of propagating puritan and intolerant ideas (Beittinger-Lee 2010: 189).

For FPI members, campaigns involving moral attitudes contribute to their wider project of poaching militants originating from a vast array of Indonesian Islamist movements, including activists engaged in global jihad, which is led by different groups around the archipelago. They pretend to defend Muslims' rights against the West and the Zionists—enemies they discredit by using conspiracy theories. The FPI is active at the international level through two departments: the 'international affairs' and the 'Nation's defence and jihad'. On 8 April 2002, the organisation publicised the formation of the Liberation Committee of Al-Aqsa (Komite Pembebasan Al-Aqsa) to summon 30, 000 'mujahedeen' to join jihad in Palestine (Beittinger-Lee 2010: 189). Achmad Sumargono, the president of the parliamentary group within the Crescent Star Party (Partai Bulan Bintang [PBB]), who was also president of the KISDI, provided assistance during the ceremony and supported the event.

In May 2013, following the 2012 Rohingya refugee crisis, an FPI branch led by Jakfar Shidiq and other Islamist leaders from movements such as the Islam reformist Movement (Gerakan Reformis Islam [GARIS]), which is headed by Chep Hermawan (jailed in 2014 for his links to the Islamic State [ISIS]), and the Committee of defence of the Muslim Rohingya of Arakan (Komite Advokasi Muslim Rohingya-Arakan [KAMRA]), which is headed by Bernard Abdul Jabbar, called for an international jihad to defend the Rohingya. More recently, some regional branches of the organisation also called for jihad to defend Muslim fellows in Myanmar through very structured ways[7]. The FPI also sent militants—under the pretext of conducting charity activities—into Sulu (Rizieq claims that he is Sulu's grand mufti).

The struggle on these fronts and the local collaborations with jihadist organisations indicate a proximity—one that is, at least, circumstantial—with groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. In 2014, the FPI conducted a recruitment campaign to send jihadists to Gaza; this campaign was conducted in collaboration with the Community of the Helpers of Monotheism (Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid [JAT]) and the—self-proclaimed—non-violent Council of Indonesian Holy War Fighters (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia [MMI])[8]. These two groups were created by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, towards whom Rizieq has publicly expressed his proximity and sympathy. In January 2016, he presented himself to the justice court to defend Ba'asyir during the trial. Moreover, the FPI declaration about ISIS clearly expresses the sympathy of a part of its leadership with the terrorist organisation. It states that the FPI wishes to collaborate with the different components of the Al-Qaeda and ISIS with the aim of continuing jihad in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and other countries where Muslim communities face conflicts. This declaration was published in August 2014, a few days after JAT pledged allegiance to ISIS; this pledge resulted in 80 per cent of its followers breaking away and to form the Sharia Helpers Community (Jamaah Anshorus Syariah [JAS]).

In addition to such proximities—that were, at the very least, ideological—with violent radical organisations, many of the 'voluntary mujahedeen' mobilised in the course of the FPI's programs were also involved in terrorist activities. At least five members were arrested for their links with the Lintas Tanzim group, an alliance created by an associate of Imam Samudra (one of the main organisers of the Bali bombings in 2002 and the 2004 attack on the Australian embassy), with regard to plans of organising training camps in Aceh. Two relatives of Said Sungkar (regional leader of the FPI in Pekalongan) have been charged for helping Noordin M. Top flee from the police. He is a Malaysian member of the Islamic Community (Jemaah Islamiyah [JI]), an expert in explosives, and one of the main organisers of the 2004 attack behind the Australian embassy. Several other members or their relatives have been arrested for their links with groups close to Abu Roban, the head of the West Indonesian Jihad Fighters (Mujahidin Indonesia Barat [MIB]), or Santoso, the head of the East Indonesian Jihad Fighters (Mujahidin Indonesia Timur [MIT]]). In 2008, a massive group of FPI members went to the burial of Imam Samudra in Serang, Banten, and in 2009, partisans from an FPI branch in Solo assaulted pacifist demonstrators who were opposed to the burial of Noordin M. Top in their village.

Despite all these proximities between the FPI and violent Islamism and terrorism, the organisation is highly composite and heterogeneous. It remains a meeting point for divergent orientations and internal

[7]This information is sourced from personal investigations in West Java that were conducted in August 2017.
[8]https://regional.kompas.com/read/2014/08/02/18333451/Rizieq.Akan.Umumkan.Sikap.FPI.Soal.ISIS.

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tensions. It also faces numerous oppositions within a country where Islamic discourse and daily life are dominated by numerous groups and organisations, both moderate and nationalist.

Internal Tensions and Oppositions to the Organisation

The FPI is subject to tensions at two levels. The first one concerns divergences between the different social classes that form its core. Its core initially consisted of underprivileged youth and people close to delinquency or small criminality. Rizieq affirms that the FPI is mainly concerned with street children and thugs (*preman*) because this population has always been in need of major reorientation in order to conserve its link to the Muslim community (Ngatawi 2006: 106). 'Perdition' (*maksiat*), which is the main struggle of the FPI, has thus been translated into anti-liberal terms. It echoes injustices, real or imagined, of which the inhabitants of the underprivileged neighbourhoods in Jakarta and Bekasi believe themselves to be victims. Nevertheless, these challenges are distinct from those that motivate the leaders of the organisation. These individuals belong to the educated middle class and are more conscious of the Salafi ideas of transnational Islam (as promoted by the GNPF-MUI) and of the introduction of the Sharia project and Islamic norms. As noted by Allès (2015a: 102), the organisation defines itself as a pressure group that lacks any international ambitions or references. However, it is notable that the organisation's emphasis on transnational references and supports has increased over the years. The FPI has escalated its activities from demanding and initiating a national Muslim violent physical struggle (under the flag of jihad in Ambon and Poso and through violent actions to counter various popular or political demonstrations in Java) to making appeals to Indonesian Muslims to fight in Palestine, Syria, or Myanmar, often with very unclear positions towards the modalities of these struggles. Apart from these ideological mobilisations regarding transnational issues, the ascendance of its leaders, such as Sayyid, has increasingly come to concern arguments regarding legitimation; this has been achieved by linking Sayyid ascent to an imaginary 'religious authenticity'. Finally, Rizieq's self-exile to Saudi Arabia in 2017 reinforced his image as a 'pious' Muslim—one who is close to the very centre of the Islamic world.

The FPI's internationalisation has many causes, including its objective of competing with similar national-scale groups, such as the Salafi-modernist network led by Bachtiar Nasir, and larger Muslim organisations, such as Muhammadiyah and the NU. These organisations (the two biggest in the Muslim world) have themselves been involved in the country's official foreign policy since the beginning of the 2000s. Successive governments have tried to provide Indonesian Islam with an image of tolerance and thus enhance its compatibility with democratic political institutions (Allès 2015a: 1).

The FPI also recruits members from the HTI or the NU, especially those who are frustrated by the quietist positions of these organisations or those who failed to achieve promotion within these organisation's hierarchies[9]. At the leadership level, the FPI has also had to endure growing divergences between the hard-core founding Hadhrami group and some emergent leaders within the group, who are more sensible to national political challenges. Such is the case of Munarman, a lawyer who was president of the Indonesian juridical help service Foundation (Yayasan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia [YLBHI]); he was excluded from the foundation for his membership in the HTI and his anti-constitutional declarations and discourses in favour of a global caliphate.

Considering all these divergences, the success of the FPI depends on its capacity to articulate popular ideals and provide daily benefits for its members (Wilson 2015: 266). The positioning of the FPI's basic subgroups and the organization's leadership are oriented towards different goals and challenges. Sharia implementation and the inclusion of Indonesian Muslim organisations within global jihad networks are not necessarily meaningful for members who are part of the urban poor. On the other hand, the achievement of social justice is not the FPI leadership's main objective. Nevertheless, all the subgroups share a common interest in that they collaborate within the same organisation.

Moreover, the FPI's actions have drawn mixed reactions from the population. In the informal sector, its actions have provoked both anger (thanks to its intimidation of clients during the holy days and Fridays, for example) and support (thanks to its distribution of basic necessities, tents, and food in

[9]This information is sourced from personal anonymous interviews with FPI members who were previously followers of these organisations (Serang 2016–2017).

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poor neighbourhoods that represent potential support areas for its activities[10]). However, it is also the target of strong opposition from the secular classes and many religious groups from different orientations.

More recently, demonstrations organised by the FPI and its attempts to destabilise the ruling government provoked a firm backlash. President Widodo provided the first censorious reaction when he joined collective prayers and delivered a consensual discourse during a demonstration on 2 December 2016. Another major sign was the charging of Bachtiar Nasir, the leader of the GNPF-MUI, for his alleged involvement in the embezzlement of funds collected for the anti-Ahok demonstrations; these were suspected to be have been transmitted to a rebel group in Syria. Rizieq then denounced this organised 'criminalisation of the ulamas' and called upon all Muslim 'strongmen' (*jawara*) to gather together and express their anger. Finally, another expression of opposition towards radical Muslim groups was the dissolution of the HTI in 2017. This led to calls for a demonstration, which was to be called '55' (due to the date of the planned event: 5 May 2017). All these events show that the FPI elaborates its own strategies and that it has succeeded in achieving such legitimacy among the public, the media, and the political elites that it can now position itself at the centre of the political scene.

However, the recent self-exile of Rizieq to Saudi Arabia led to fragmentation within the organisation, and the counterattack strategies deployed by the government in order to channel the allegiances of conservative Muslims towards more State approved directions indicate that the FPI's efforts to impose itself on the political scene may benefit other Muslim organisations, including the Salafi-oriented GNPF-MUI and the Wahdah Islamiyah, which is led by Zaitun Rasmin (IPAC 2018: 25). In contrast with the FPI's short-term political manoeuvres, these organisations aim to Islamise society at the grassroots level through education and preaching.

Conclusion: The Growing Autonomy of Islamist Organisations towards the Political Elites—A Risk Factor for Uncontrolled Radicalisation?

Through its extended field of collaborations, the FPI can develop its actions in the political, economic, social, and religious spheres. At the political level, it enables numerous actors to exert various pressures and gain supports. In the economic sector, it has been used as a tool for reorganizing the racket networks by leading coercive actions in a selective way and considering territorial choices and types of targets. At the social level, the organisation enables some of the most underprivileged members of the Indonesian population to express their anger and obtain material gains, even if these gains are minimal and sporadic. Finally, in terms of religion, its Islamic arguments are mainly of an instrumental-rhetorical nature and are not founded on any actual elaborated projects. The organisation's success is thanks to its firm location in the middle of the ideological line. It combines the objective of social moralisation—an ideal expressed by a large part of the population—and encourages radicalism and violent actions in the name of Islam; however, at the same time, it is careful to avoid providing direct opposition to the ruling government and the Constitution. Numerous cases where this limitation has been breached are the subjects of discursive processes from FPI leaders, who then take care to distance the organisation from the 'transgressive' individuals and designate them as 'deviant members' (*oknum*).

My interpretation is that the ideological orientations presented by the leaders and the effective practices of the members must be distinguished. The organisation is far from monolithic, and the ideas disseminated from the top levels of its hierarchy often induce plenty of contradictory interpretations at the internal levels. The ideological posture is also subject to variation because of the FPI's adaptation to changing socio-political contexts. This ability is based on the strong informal dimensions of the organisation's interpersonal hierarchical positions, and it is influenced by its porosity with regard to other Islamic organisations. All these elements oblige us to be very careful when categorising the organisation—especially in terms of mere discourse and posture—but, rather, we should pay attention to the strategies through which these elements develop their own activities and follow their personal agendas.

The FPI's strong presence on the political and media scenes demands an examination of the institutional and ideological transformations that were initiated in the aftermath of the Indonesian

[10]See, for example, the Akuarium locality in Jakarta, where the houses were bulldozed under Ahok's mandate.

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decentralisation in 1999. We notice that, by generating a stronger porosity in the State's frontiers, the processes of democratisation and liberalisation favoured a process of organisational semi-institutionalisation. This institutionalisation has contributed to the legitimatisation of the FPI's discourse. On the one hand, this institutionalisation provides FPI members with the possibility of combining references to Islamic law, Indonesian national rights, and a puritan moral order that includes local cultural references in order to justify violent operations against various minorities. On the other hand, this also enables it to apply to its moral rules the status of State norms. It then enounces what is just and 'good', and it thus succeeds in influencing the processes of justice construction and application.

In addition, there has been a historical process of organisation autonomisation towards the political establishment since the FPI's creation two decades ago. The FPI thus cannot be considered an organisation of mere thugs, and its evolution shows that, the more it gains political influence, the more it is prone towards—and confident in—using violent and intolerant ideas and actions. From Saudi Arabia—where he fled to escape juridical pursuits in a pornography case—Rizieq threatened to divulge the national political arrangements between the Indonesian political elites. The recent split within the organisation and the counter-attack strategies developed by the government have probably affected the FPI's potential to bargain for a privileged position within the public and political spheres. Nevertheless, by positioning conservative Islamism as a lever of political dynamics, the FPI has opened a new path for Islamist organisations—one that could allow them to influence future presidential election campaign processes and—more deeply—influence norms and values in the long term.

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