

The ‘Floating’ *Ummah* in the Fall of ‘Ahok’ in Indonesia¹

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Abstract

The article examines the idea of a ‘floating’ ummah in Indonesia today that affects the workings of Indonesian Islamic politics and democracy itself. It is asserted that the ummah, or community of believers, are more disconnected from the large mainstream Islamic organisational vehicles in Indonesia than is often claimed. A considerable cross-section of this community has become increasingly disaffected with the status quo, as social inequalities sharpen and educated youths who face uncertain futures find appeal in the tough rhetoric of fringe Islamic organisations. This rhetoric emphasises absolute standards of morality as a solution to social and economic predicaments, thereby resulting in the mainstreaming of rigid religious attitudes. Consequently, organisations seen as guardians of ‘religious moderation’ have also picked up on them in an attempt to remain relevant to their increasingly socially heterogeneous constituencies. The overall result is an Islamic politics that has become more intolerant, especially when identity politics gets absorbed into conflicts between different oligarchic factions. This was seen in the dramatic fall of the ethnic-Chinese and Christian former governor of Jakarta known as ‘Ahok’ in 2017.

KEYWORDS: Islam, Indonesia, Politics, Democracy, Oligarchy

WHY HAS THERE NOT been a more unambiguous ‘moderation’ of Islamic politics in Indonesia as a result of the unequivocal inclusion of its major organisational vehicles within democratic processes, as might have been expected (Ufen 2011: 86–87)? Why does Indonesia instead confront rising religious intolerance, and even religious violence, in spite of a much-lauded shift to democracy after decades of centralised authoritarianism after the fall of Soeharto in 1998? It is argued here that the answers to these questions lie less in any intrinsic relationship between Islam and democracy than in the context within which Islamic politics has evolved in Indonesia, especially after the demise of Soeharto’s New Order and the advent of democratic politics. The article builds on the idea put forward by Hadiz (2017) that Islamic politics in present-day Indonesia must operate within a democracy that remains dominated by oligarchic interests that

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were largely nurtured during the authoritarian New Order but have continued to preside over the institutions of governance. From this point of view, the evolution of Indonesian oligarchic politics itself is important, given that competition between its different (and easily shifting) factions has come to harness religious and other forms of identity politics. This is especially the case when these forms of politics are useful for mass mobilisations of support during the heightened periods of conflict that often accompany electoral contests.

This was witnessed with exceptionally great clarity in the Jakarta gubernatorial race of 2016–2017, which saw the defeat of the incumbent ethnic Chinese and Christian governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, more commonly known by his nickname, ‘Ahok’. The defeat occurred after a concerted campaign against him, involving mass rallies, which combined issues of identity politics with pent-up socioeconomic animosities. But more generally, links between vehicles of Islamic politics and oligarchic interests have drawn the former ever more deeply into the logic of Indonesia’s highly money-politics-driven democracy. The result has been the hardening of attitudes on various moral issues, including on the part of Islamic political and mass organisations that have been considered the guardians of Indonesia’s ‘moderate’ form of Islam – which is usually juxtaposed against the perceived rigidities in religious practices in the Middle East. This is because references to absolute standards of morality can resonate strongly with those increasingly disaffected with the corruption and backroom wheeling and dealing that has become so integral to Indonesian politics.³

Furthermore, such disaffection is closely linked to broader socioeconomic developments in Indonesia that began in the heyday of the authoritarian New Order in the 1980s. These pertain to growing socioeconomic inequalities that become ever more blatant as large numbers of people continue to be hindered from upward social mobility and material wealth despite their significant educational credentials or skills. Indonesia is demographically young, but even its relatively well-educated youths face precarious life situations or uncertain futures, as Hadiz and Rakhmani (2017) suggest. The self-narrative of perpetual marginalisation of the *ummah* (community of believers) that is such an integral part of the history of Indonesian Islamic politics, quite unsurprisingly, holds considerable appeal for such members of Indonesian society. This narrative helps people to make sense of, and find ways to respond to, the stark socioeconomic conditions that all too frequently clash with hopes and dreams nurtured by the necessary embrace of the workings of a modern economy.

Islamic organisational vehicles that are otherwise identified as moderate – in the sense that they accept the institutional format of the secular state in spite of

³It has been reported that parliament and political parties are among the least trusted institutions in Indonesia. See <http://news.metrotvnews.com/politik/Gbm6mAek-survei-parpol-dan-dpr-paling-tak-percaya-publik> (accessed 16 April 2018).

desiring, to varying degrees, to infuse it with religious values – have to operate in this broader socioeconomic context. It is because such a context brings with it growing insecurity, even precarity, for members of their constituencies that they have come to adopt more and more overtly conservative positions on issues of morality. This is the case even for vehicles that are explicitly active in Indonesia's democratic political life. Those associated with violent organisations such as Jemaah Islamiyah – responsible for the infamous Bali bombings – have regularly condemned such vehicles for contravening the idea that sovereignty lies with God rather than with the people.⁴ In other words, the drift to conservatism, including among so-called moderate organisations, is not mainly the result of newly dominant forms of theological contemplation or innately inflexible ideas about how the *ummah* should be governed. It has had more to do with the necessity of self-preservation in the face of competition for grassroots-level support by more 'fringe' organisations whose fiery and anti-establishment rhetoric caters particularly well to the pent-up frustrations within much of contemporary Indonesian society. The latter type of vehicle has been particularly prone to refer to Islamic morality when identifying the problems of Indonesian society and calling for immediate solutions. That this has 'worked' so well for them is linked to the relative dearth of viable ideological alternatives that could articulate the same frustrations as effectively, given the lingering legacies of political repression by the New Order.

Thus, a more specific argument developed here is that the increasingly conservative shift on moral issues within Islamic politics indicates that the constituencies of Indonesia's mainstream Islamic organisational vehicles are less attached to them than those vehicles might like to profess. These are constituencies that might readily be stirred by calls from competing or newer organisations that also claim to represent the interests of Indonesia's vast and actually quite heterogeneous community of believers. Indeed, it is suggested that the most established Islamic vehicles in Indonesia, including the giant NU and Muhammadiyah, actually preside over a 'floating mass' of followers rather than a base that has developed any significant sense of organisational discipline or of exclusive loyalty. They preside over what may be called a 'floating' *ummah*:⁵ constituencies that self-identify with the major Islamic mass organisations, but whose members have little compulsion to follow the directions of their leaderships when it comes to contested issues in the public sphere.

⁴The views of the organisation's once so-called spiritual leader, Abubakar Ba'asyir, have been well publicised. See <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/541845/ketika-baasyir-bicara-demokrasi-dan-aristoteles> (accessed 16 April 2018).

⁵Though inspired by the idea of New Order-era 'floating mass' politics – in which political parties were deliberately cut off from their grassroots support – the notion of a 'floating *ummah*' put forward here is not directly related to it. Rather than the result of political design, it is the product of a long social history that predates the present democratic period and the preceding authoritarian one, which has resulted in persisting fragmentation and political incoherence within Indonesian Islamic politics.

Thus, such a floating *ummah* could be said to exist even if large numbers of people still notionally profess an affinity for these venerable organisations, each of which regularly claim tens of millions of followers – due to regional or social backgrounds, prevailing family ties, or real attachments to local patronage networks. Such a circumstance stands in sharp contrast to the case of the far more disciplined Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, and its followers within civil society before it was brutally suppressed by the country's military following the overthrow of the Morsi government in 2013. The reason for the difference is that, in spite of their long histories and involvement in civil society, neither the NU nor Muhammadiyah have ever had the reach and depth of civil-society influence that the Muslim Brotherhood achieved through its much better resourced and ubiquitous social service and health facilities, which especially catered to the less privileged members of society. So effective was this civil society presence that the present military dictatorship in Egypt has taken great pains to root out Muslim Brotherhood-linked managements of hospitals, clinics, and the like, by attempting to replace them with bureaucrats and security officials and enforcing new kinds of registration requirements for these institutions (Brooke 2015).

Therefore, as this article posits, there is no inherent contradiction between the drift to conservative morality and the fact that major Islamic mass organisations continue to cooperate fully with the democratic process, for instance by regularly supplying key figures to Islamic political parties. Indeed, these organisations appear to have developed a stake in the workings of Indonesian democracy, with all of its flaws, which is as strong as that found within parties and organisations that do not particularly cultivate followings on the basis of an Islamic identity. It is important, though, that parties and organisations that self-consciously nurture Islamic constituencies do not necessarily pursue the same immediate political agendas, and therefore there has been no dominant source of leadership over the Indonesian *ummah*.

For example, the PKB (National Awakening Party) is closely associated with the traditionally Java- and rural-based NU, which in turn is now aligned with the government of President Jokowi, whilst the PAN (National Mandate Party) is linked to Muhammadiyah, which is usually regarded as more urban and less Java-centred. The PAN – a party that has been critical of the Jokowi government whilst still nominally in a ruling coalition with it – was founded by Amien Rais, a former *reformasi* movement leader who had embraced many pluralist-inclined intellectuals in the early post-Soeharto years.⁶ Yet Rais overtly supported the mass rallies against Ahok, despite their expressions of racial and religious antagonism.

Such inconsistencies are not unusual. Both the PKB and the PAN have been in and out of ruling government coalitions since the advent of democratisation in

⁶See, for example, <https://news.idntimes.com/indonesia/rochmanudin-wijaya/mengenal-pan-partai-reformasi-yang-lahir-pasca-orde-baru/full> (accessed 16 April 2018).

Indonesia, for reasons that have less to do with ideology than with the imperative to compete for power and resources through electoral contestation. Thus they have sometimes found themselves in the same camp and sometimes in opposing ones, both in national- and local-level politics.

But likewise, both the NU and Muhammadiyah have become more and more wary of relative 'upstarts' who have started to infringe on their traditional constituencies. The NU has been particularly hostile towards Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), for example, which was banned by the Indonesian government in 2017 for supposedly contravening the state ideology of Pancasila by calling for an international caliphate.⁷ This hostility stemmed from the fact that HTI had been gaining a foothold amongst disenchanted youths, especially in the NU's vital strongholds in East Java. On the other hand, the broader Tarbiyah movement that underpins the Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) – the most consistently successful of the *reformasi*-era Islamic political parties – has been more of a thorn in the side of Muhammadiyah. Thus, it is often said within Muhammadiyah circles that PKS grassroots activists have been encroaching on or 'taking over' neighbourhood mosques that had customarily been under its control.⁸

In this way we can make better sense of what van Bruinessen (2013) and others have dubbed the 'conservative turn' in Indonesian Islam. This turn is characterised by the mainstreaming of highly rigid and conservative takes on Islamic morality. Specifically, it concerns such issues as the role and position of women in society, acceptance of minority religious groups and sexual orientations, alcohol consumption, and also the adoption of a hard line on an imagined possible resurgence of communism. Interestingly, a recent poll reported by the respected newsmagazine *Tempo* suggested that nearly 88 per cent of Indonesians now viewed LGBT orientations as a threat to the nation, as opposed to just under 11 per cent that viewed them as not posing such a threat. According to the newsmagazine, homophobia in Indonesian society has become increasingly common, as religious conservatism grows among the general public.⁹ It is instructive that rigidly conservative moral positions are put forward not only by fringe organisations that have no formal place in the political sphere – or have only limited historical pedigrees – but increasingly by figures associated with 'mainstream' and longstanding Islamic vehicles. Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Muhammad Nasir – himself linked to the NU – has controversially

⁷The banning was widely seen as a government response to the anti-Ahok rallies in which the HTI had participated. Yet HTI spokesman Ismail Yusanto feels that his organisation was singled out for punishment and that other Islamic organisations did not come out to defend it for their own political reasons. Interview with Ismail Yusanto, Jakarta, 4 December 2017.

⁸Interview with Haedar Nashir, Yogyakarta, 22 July 2010. He is currently Chairman of the Muhammadiyah.

⁹See, for example, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1053909/survei-smrc-876-persen-masyarakat-menilai-lgbt-ancaman> (accessed 16 April 2018). Paradoxically, the same survey reports that 57.7 per cent of respondents thought that members of the LGBT community 'had a right to live in Indonesia'.

declared that there is no place for members of the LGBT community on Indonesian university campuses. The ostensible reason cited is behaviour that is deemed incompatible with Indonesian cultural norms of decency.¹⁰

It is against such a broad background that this article now explores the implications of a ‘floating’ *ummah* for Indonesian democracy today. This and related themes are further addressed through engagement with recent analyses of Indonesian Islamic politics that have revolved around the unceremonious fall of Ahok and its potential implications. This article is additionally informed by original survey data compiled in 2017. The survey involved respondents who participated in the biggest mass rallies against the then-governor of Jakarta, which took place in the capital city on 4 November and 2 December 2016.

THE SAGA OF AHOK

There is a long and quite divisive debate over whether the Islamic religion and democracy are compatible, with diametrically opposed positions often taken by scholars over time. For example, the “clash of civilisations” thesis, originating from Lewis (1990) but extended and popularised especially by Huntington (1993), posits a basic cultural conflict between democratic values and Islamic doctrine and its related set of norms. Writing on Indonesia in the early post-Soeharto period, Hefner (2000) suggested, by contrast, that the Indonesian experience challenged stereotypes about the intrinsic incompatibility between Islam and democratic politics. Others, like Berman (2013), thought of the Arab Spring as offering exciting new democratic possibilities. Though such hopes were soon dashed, the events of 2010–2011 in the Middle East did provide a brief window through which to glimpse democratic aspirations arising from significant sections of predominantly Muslim societies. Bayat’s (2010) concept of post-Islamism suggests that, under some circumstances, Islamic politics could move in a less dogmatic direction, due to the need to respond to the realities of the modern world. But the prevailing scholarly opinion is still scepticism about the democratic adaptability of Islamic politics.

It remains attractive to suggest, therefore, that Islamic ‘radicals’ will inevitably ‘hijack’ democratisation processes in the Muslim world (e.g., Bradley 2012; Bukay 2009). There is, in fact, the well-known dictum that Islamic political forces will adhere to the principle of ‘one man, one vote’ – but for only ‘one time’ (quoted in Akbarzadeh 2011: 6). The implication is that these forces would eradicate democracy after they had gained victory through it, an assertion that recent developments in Turkey (under the AKP – Justice and Development Party – government) have no doubt reinforced. With regard to the Middle East more generally, Posusney and Angrist (2005: 5) reminded us some time ago that

¹⁰See <https://news.detik.com/berita/3125654/menristek-saya-larang-lgbt-di-semua-kampus-itu-tak-sesuai-nilai-kesusilaan> (accessed 16 April 2018).

the prevailing cultural theory for the persistence of authoritarianism in the region still 'links it to the Islamic religion....' This assertion, by and large, still holds for many. The problem, however, is that it is premised on the notion that Muslims' political behaviour and orientations are basically determined by their religion (Al-Azmeh 2003), in spite of the more tangible matters at stake in contests over power and resources in the modern world. This should be no less true in Muslim-majority societies than anywhere else, unless one subscribes to an extreme view of Muslim exceptionalism.

The Indonesian case is particularly relevant to this debate for several reasons. First, Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, with 88 per cent of its roughly 260 million people claiming adherence to Islam. Second, it is often put forward as a successful case of a shift within the developing world from authoritarianism to democracy, even if a highly flawed one. Third, Indonesia is frequently presented as a bastion of 'moderate' Islam – in other words, a model for the melding of religious values in a society that is predominantly Muslim with the mechanisms and norms commonly seen to underpin democratic life. Yet it is also the site of the birth of the terrorist organisation, Jemaah Islamiyah. Now defunct, its networks are believed to have spawned other violent groupings whose actions are inimical to democratic life. Furthermore, vigilante organisations like the FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) have been able to defy the country's own laws through acts that have included raids on entertainment venues deemed 'dens of vice', as well as acts of violence and intimidation against members of sexual and religious minorities (Mudhoffir 2017; Wilson 2015). In recent years, moreover, laws against 'pornography' and 'blasphemy', as well as religiously inspired local edicts colloquially known as *perda syariah*, have been utilised in ways that infringe on rights and norms usually associated with functioning democracies.

More specifically, Indonesia is the country where the nationally prominent ethnic Chinese and Christian politician Ahok has been imprisoned for blaspheming Islam in a largely improvised campaign speech. The speech included brief comments on a Koranic verse dealing with the question of Muslims accepting non-Muslims as leaders. The two-year prison sentence came shortly after he lost a drawn-out and fiercely fought race for the governorship of Jakarta, from an initially almost unassailable position of incumbency. As mentioned, the electoral contest featured mass rallies against him. These were presented as 'defending Islam', but they will be remembered partly for expressions of hatred directed at his person, religion, and ethnicity. Such rallies, which reached their high point during an especially tense period of campaigning in late 2016, were spearheaded by the FPI in a coalition with like-minded organisations under the banner of an ad-hoc vehicle that purported to act on behalf of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) – the GNPFMUI (Movement to Defend the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council).

The MUI itself is an organisation initially set up during the Soeharto dictatorship as a means of controlling organised Islam and has lately been under the influence of more conservative groupings, nationally and in many localities. For such groupings, the Ahok case presented an opportunity to demonstrate to entrenched political elites the power of religious issues and sentiments when organised and articulated within a society whose piety has increased.¹¹ The political currency of Islamic moral issues was indeed affirmed by the widespread negative reaction to Ahok's 'blasphemous', and therefore, by definition, 'immoral', remarks. The rallies targeting Ahok thus brought together a number of high-profile mainstream politicians. Besides Amien Rais, Fadli Zon of the Gerindra (Great Indonesia Party) and Fahri Hamzah of the PKS (Justice and Prosperity Party) were also prominent supporters of them.¹² Not surprisingly, both of these parties have led the opposition to the government of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), who was previously considered a close ally of Ahok, although it is common for party leaders to distinguish between the participation of party members or cadres and official support for the rallies.¹³

The defeat of Ahok himself, and his subsequent jailing, could yet be seen as a defining moment in the development of Indonesian democracy. The saga of his rise and fall could be construed as revealing the conjuncture at which primarily religious-based identity politics came to the fore in mainstream Indonesian post-Soeharto electoral competition. Because Ahok was arguably the highest profile ethnic-Chinese and Christian politician in modern Indonesian history, he had served as a kind of symbol for the potential of Indonesian democracy to be more inclusive of minority religious and ethnic groups. For this reason, his spectacular fall could be seen as a cautionary tale about the limits of democratic inclusiveness in Indonesia.

However, the point should not be missed that the feverish expressions of identity politics – channelled against him during the Jakarta gubernatorial contest of 2016/2017 – would not have been possible in the first place without some of the underlying socioeconomic developments discussed earlier. The World Bank (2016: 7) has shown that the richest 1 per cent of the population have more wealth than the poorest 50 per cent of their fellow citizens. It has also been pointed out that a mere four of Indonesia's tycoons are worth as much as 100 million of their poorest countrymen (*The Guardian* 2017a). Winters has suggested 'the average net worth' of Indonesia's 40 richest people

¹¹Interview with Karman, chairman of GPII (Indonesian Islamic Youth Movement), Jakarta, 10 November 2017.

¹²No less a figure than retired General Kivlan Zein, a veteran intelligence operative, served as FPI leader Habib Rizieq's head of security during the 4 November 2017 rally. He claims there were intelligence reports that Rizieq was to be assassinated at that day's rally, during which political party luminaries like Rais, Zon, and Hamzah shared the same stage with the FPI leader. Interview with Kivlan Zein, Sentul, Bogor, 8 December 2017.

¹³Interview with Ferry Juliantono, Gerindra vice-chairman, Jakarta, 1 December 2017.

'to be over 630,000 times the country's GDP per capita. By his estimate, although these wealthy individuals 'constitute less than 2/1,000,000ths of the population, their combined assets equal 10 per cent of GDP' (Winters 2013: 11).¹⁴

Indonesia, in fact, went through a period of growth in inequality between 1990 and 2012 that led to the greatest level of inequality recorded in its history – this during a time span that covers the late authoritarian period as well as democratisation (CEDS-AUSAID 2013: 4).¹⁵ So the problem is not that of absolute poverty, which has actually fallen since Indonesia undertook its long recovery from the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s. It is more about accruing social disaffection at a time when the richest 10 per cent of Indonesians were consuming as much as the poorest 54 per cent combined in 2014, compared to just the poorest 42 per cent in 2002 (World Bank 2016: 7), or at about the point when a recovery from economic crisis was beginning. Given chronic unemployment and underemployment on top of this, one can see how a social base could develop for those effectively articulating the dissatisfactions found within broad cross-sections of Indonesian society. Though the official unemployment rate has hovered around five to six per cent in recent years, what is more important is that, at any given time, one-third or more of the workforce is underemployed (Tadjoeddin 2014). Furthermore, Indonesian youths – who are better educated now and more literate than their predecessors – suffer disproportionately high levels of unemployment and underemployment.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, inequalities are particularly stark in Jakarta. This is a megacity where the markers of extreme wealth and poverty exist side by side – as shopping malls and exclusive hotels regularly give way to side roads leading to labyrinthine urban slums and neighbourhoods populated by the poor. It is also significant that studies have shown consistently that organisations like FPI and FBR (Betawi Solidarity Forum) recruit members from among the urban poor (Mudhoffir 2017; Wilson 2015; Yasih 2017), many of whom join them as part of a strategy of economic survival. It is for such reasons that Wilson (2017) could point to the urban poor's strong economic antagonism towards Ahok that accounted for the success of the mass rallies against him.

In this context, the race for the governorship of Jakarta became a particularly ugly one, as was amply documented in news coverage within and outside Indonesia (e.g. *The Guardian* 2017b). The main competitors involved in the contest were the following:

¹⁴According to Winters (2013: 11), 'in Thailand and South Korea the gap is 190,000 and 69,000 times, respectively'.

¹⁵According to this document, the Gini coefficient grew from .33 in 1990 to .41 in 2012 – although it has dropped marginally since then.

¹⁶See World Bank data in <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/indonesia/unemployment-youth-total-percent-of-total-labor-force-ages-15-24-wb-data.html> (accessed 16 April 2018).

- 1) Basuki Tjahaja Purnomo or Ahok, the incumbent governor mainly backed by the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle) – the party of former president Megawati Soekarnoputri (herself the daughter of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno). It is notable that Ahok replaced Jokowi as governor of Jakarta after a period as deputy governor, when Jokowi became president in 2014;
- 2) Agus Yudhoyono, a former mid-ranking military officer who is the son of another former president, retired General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono – founder of the Democratic Party (PD). In order to be eligible to run for the Jakarta governorship, the younger Yudhoyono had to abandon what seemed to be a promising military career, in a move widely seen as an attempt to perpetuate the political influence of the former president's family;
- 3) Anies Baswedan, a former minister of education and culture, who was sacked by Jokowi in an early cabinet reshuffle. Interestingly, Baswedan had formerly developed a reputation as a 'moderate' Muslim intellectual and academic, and thus the support he acquired from hard-line Islamic groups could be seen as anachronistic in some ways. In more formal terms, his candidacy was backed by the Greater Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) Party, founded by yet another New Order-era general, Prabowo Subianto – a former son-in-law of the late dictator Soeharto – and the 2014 presidential candidate defeated by Jokowi.

All the candidates for governor of Jakarta in 2016/2017 thus represented competing blocs within which rival political forces had been coalescing since the advent of the Jokowi presidency. Ahok represented the coalition that was behind that presidency, while Anies Baswedan, Ahok's eventual vanquisher, represented the coalition behind Prabowo that had formed the main parliamentary opposition to Jokowi. Agus Yudhoyono represented the interests of the Democratic Party, controlled by his own father, and its allies. These are also the political blocs that will likely play the main roles in the next Indonesian presidential and national legislative elections, scheduled for mid-2019, though Yudhoyono's bloc might merge with one of the other two stronger ones, at least at the time of writing. It is notable that Prabowo has a long history – going back to the 1990s – of courting the support of Islamic political activists when they entered into a truce with the New Order, as Soeharto himself came to develop an interest in incorporating them within his regime (Hefner 2000). Though the Gerindra-backed Anies Baswedan was the main beneficiary of mass rallies that flaunted a language of politics based on an *ummah*-oriented identity, it was initially Agus Yudhoyono – eliminated in the first round of a two-round electoral process – who was seen to have reaped the rewards of the then-growing anti-Ahok sentiment. According to Deddy Rachman, consultant to Anies Baswedan's 'cyber campaign team', the latter politician had originally felt uneasy about overtly exploiting primordial sentiments against Ahok – which makes some sense given his prior reputation as a

respected pro-democratic Muslim intellectual.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, both Anies Baswedan and Agus Yudhoyono would try to woo Habib Rizieq, the firebrand leader of the FPI who came to symbolise the anti-Ahok rallies more than any other individual, and to be seen as receiving his blessing. Baswedan would even claim some morally conservative credentials on the basis that he curbed pro-LGBT rights activities at Jakarta's Paramadina University when he served as its rector.¹⁸

It is widely accepted that Ahok was regarded as a competent, if frequently controversial, governor of Jakarta before his political fortunes began to nosedive as a result of the aforementioned campaign speech. In it – or in an edited video recording uploaded to the Internet that went viral – he seemed to suggest that Muslims were not actually prohibited from electing non-Muslims as their leader. This statement drew ire, ostensibly because a non-member of the *ummah* had deigned to make a self-serving interpretation of Islamic precepts. Known for his blunt talk and no-nonsense style, Ahok was particularly well regarded by sections of Jakarta's middle and upper classes, who were impressed by his efforts to impose transparency and efficiency on the city's sluggish bureaucratic apparatus as well as a semblance of order on a city renowned for its disorder.

His urban renewal plan for the metropolis of over ten million people, however, was quite contentious. As Wilson (2017) has pointed out, it involved the wholesale razing of densely populated urban slums. This made Ahok unpopular among sections of the urban poor and made it easy to depict him as being against the interests of the economically underprivileged – those who, in the narrative of Islamic politics, are synonymous with members of the *ummah*. A reclamation project in Jakarta Bay was also steeped in controversy, not only for its questionable ecological impact but also because it would displace whole communities of traditional fishers, while allegedly constructing new residential projects catering for the well-heeled, with major investments by rich ethnic-Chinese tycoons. Parties like Gerindra, opposed to both Ahok (ironically, himself a former party cadre) and Jokowi, were therefore practically given *carte blanche* to emphasise how the governor's policies were anti-poor in nature,¹⁹ in a bid for support from those hurt by them. But for Mietzner and Muhtadi (2017), such class-derived divisions were less important than the fact that Muslims were successfully mobilised on the basis of their religious identity – which induced them to reject a relatively successful governor at the polling booths because of his different religious and ethnic background.

¹⁷Deddy Rachman suggests that he worked for the Jokowi-Ahok gubernatorial campaign in 2012 and had been involved in others in Sumatra and Java since then. Interview, 2 April 2018.

¹⁸He reminded his audience of his track record as rector of that university during a talk at the FPI headquarters in Jakarta. See <https://www.smh.com.au/world/jakarta-governor-contender-anies-baswedan-under-fire-for-meeting-islamic-hardliners-20170103-gtlasx.html> (accessed 17 April 2018).

¹⁹Interview with Ferry Juliantono, vice-chairman of Gerindra, Jakarta, 1 December 2017.

Another interpretation is given by Hadiz (2017), who believes that the connection between the economic and identity-politics factors was made stronger by the manoeuvrings of oligarchic interests. According to this account, which does not necessarily contradict the insights of the first two, a faction of the oligarchy managed to unseat Ahok by taking the economically based antagonism towards him and harnessing it to Islamic identity politics. The purpose was also to weaken Jokowi's position in anticipation of the presidential election in 2019. The suggestion that comes to the fore in this account is that an alliance of mutual benefit was forged between otherwise fringe organisations like the FPI and an oligarchic faction primarily linked to Prabowo Subianto.²⁰ In this interpretation, intra-oligarchic conflict in the lead-up to the Indonesian presidential election of 2019 is a key factor in explaining the fall of Ahok.²¹ The oligarchic dimension of the contest was perhaps best illustrated by the fact that members of the Soeharto family, still wealthy but long politically marginalised, were seen to display support for the anti-Ahok rallies, perhaps sensing that they too could benefit from growing identity-politics-based mass mobilisations.

THE FLOATING *UMMAH* AND ITS STRUGGLES

It should be reiterated at this point that the members of the floating *ummah* mentioned earlier are quite flexible in terms of the groupings or leaders they would follow in any given circumstance. Thus, rather than dictating the *ummah*'s political direction, organisations like the Muhammadiyah and NU are increasingly being steered towards uncharacteristically hard-line positions on a number of issues that pertain to Islamic identity in order to maintain influence among their claimed constituencies. Not surprisingly, this provides ample opportunity for hard-line narratives to be mainstreamed into Indonesian Islamic politics, especially during times of great political tension, such as a high-stakes electoral contest.

Officials of mainstream Islamic organisations, normally viewed as sources of moderation, appear to be acutely aware of this situation, if powerless to address it effectively. The leader of the youth wing of the Muhammadiyah, Dahnil Anzar

²⁰Deddy Rachman suggests that he was 'placed' by the Anies campaign within the GNPFMUI to help maintain the anti-Ahok momentum that the mass rallies had created and to steer support towards that campaign. The GNPFMUI itself already had its own cyber-team, which, along with offline efforts like mobilising the support of religious figures, helped create the conditions for the mass convergence of people on Jakarta on 4 November and 2 December 2016. Interview, 2 April 2018.

²¹According to Fahri Hamzah, a controversial member of parliament for PKS, the realms of politics and religion will continue to intersect, and thus political and religious interests will continue to make use of each other within Indonesian democracy. He points out that both Jokowi and Prabowo have employed the tactic of seeking support from Islamic religious leaders for their own political agendas and that one result has been the growing prominence of formerly fringe organisations like the FPI. Interview, Jakarta, 5 December 2017.

Simanjuntak, points out that despite objections by the organisation's leadership, members of its community readily joined in a December 2017 celebration to commemorate the mass actions against Ahok and his candidacy a year earlier.²² The leader of the HMI (Islamic Student Union) – a nationally organised student organisation that had provided not only apparatchiks for the New Order but also operators for present-day political parties – admitted the difficulty he experienced in reconciling the more pluralist beliefs he claims to hold with those of the members of the GNPFMUI. Yet he also admitted to participating in meetings with the fringe organisations that operated under the latter's umbrella, even if only to ensure that Ahok's 'blasphemous statement' did not go unpunished – rather than to plot to ensure the governor's electoral defeat.²³ Indeed, the big Islamic mass organisations gave the *ummah* mixed messages. MUI chairman – and senior NU cleric – Ma'ruf Amin was a leading light of the forces instigating the anti-Ahok rallies, and a number of mainstream religious leaders could be found among the crowd, thereby providing tacit support.²⁴

Thus, the interpretation put forward here of Islamic politics in Indonesia after the downfall of Ahok considers the effects of a floating *ummah* on democratic life more broadly. As mentioned, this analysis relies partly on research conducted in Jakarta and its environs in 2017/2018. Its main component was a survey of individuals who had participated in the 'defending Islam' actions that targeted Ahok. The survey aimed to understand the links between their Islamic morality, economic circumstances, and social and political orientation. The survey, whose results are discussed in this section, was supplemented by select interviews with some key political actors who provided insight into the dynamics at work that surrounded the events leading to the fall of Ahok.

More specifically, the survey participants were people who had participated in either the "411" (4 November 2016) or "212" (2 December 2016) anti-Ahok rallies, or both, and who reside in the densely populated Jabodetabek (Jakarta-Bogor-Depok, Tangerang and Bekasi) region. Only individuals aged eighteen or over were included in this survey. Because it was impossible to accurately estimate the size or make-up of the participants of these rallies, a non-random sampling technique in the form of snowball sampling was used in the survey. In this approach, an initial group of contact persons referred the researchers to family, friends, and acquaintances who had participated in these rallies, with the understanding that they would be prospective respondents in the study. In total, 600 people participated as respondents, with 60 of them residing respectively in

²²Interview, Jakarta, 6 December 2017.

²³Interview, Mulyadi P. Tamsir, chairman of HMI, Jakarta, 30 November 2017.

²⁴Sapto Waluyo, a Muslim intellectual and activist who participated in the defence of Islam rallies, suggests that the senior leaders of the mass organisations were also present but mostly kept a low profile because of their need to maintain a particular image. He says it was a strategic decision to push younger-generation leaders to the forefront of the GNPFMUI-driven rallies in place of these senior leaders. Interview, Depok, 7 November 2017.

West Jakarta, Central Jakarta, South Jakarta, East Jakarta, North Jakarta, Bekasi, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and South Tangerang – the major localities that make up the greater metropolitan region of Jakarta.

It should be noted that the many people who reportedly descended on Jakarta from other – including some more geographically peripheral – parts of Indonesia to take part in the anti-Ahok protests were not represented in the survey. They were excluded for practical reasons, as they were too difficult to locate, being dispersed all over the country, after typically returning to their homes after the rallies to resume their normal lives.

Some of the basic characteristics of the survey respondents should be stated at this point. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were male, which is not surprising, given that there was visibly more male than female participation in the anti-Ahok rallies. A significant portion of the respondents, 109 people, were categorised in the study as low- to mid-level employees, while another 101 people were categorised as students. In terms of education, just a little more than half of all the respondents had tertiary-level education credentials, while secondary education was the highest level attained by another 47 per cent of the respondents. Only five individuals out of the 600 reported educational attainment levels that were lower than that of both of their parents.

In terms of income, 44 per cent of the survey participants could be considered precariously middle class or lower-middle class, with monthly household expenditures that ranged between Rp 4.5 million to Rp 7 million. But perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the respondents was their youthfulness. Nearly four-fifths of the survey participants were in their 20s and 30s – 60 per cent in the former age group and 18 per cent in the latter. Reflecting the respondents' relative youth, just 316 (53 per cent) of them were married at the time of the survey – three of whom were in polygamous marriages. Those who were 40 years of age or older made up only 14 per cent of all survey participants. It is no wonder that, according to Deddy Rachman, much of his work and that of his associates was targeted at influencing the views of what he called 'the millennial generation', including by analysing social media accounts and trending topics pertinent to them.²⁵ The representativeness of these figures seems to be confirmed by the sight, during the mass rallies, of many groups of young men supplemented by families consisting of young couples and the very young children they often brought to enjoy the almost 'festive' nature of these occasions.

It is telling that a range of commonly held gripes and similar sources of anxieties about the future appear to have contributed to survey participants sharing similar attitudes on a range of matters. Among these gripes were those pertaining to economic issues and circumstances. Although participants did not generally share those gripes when answering questions concerning the present day, the reason may have been a desire to display gratitude for whatever 'good fortune'

²⁵Interview, Jakarta, 2 April 2018.

God has provided the respondents thus far, rather than contentedness. Indeed, such an attitude would be expected of a pious Muslim. However, when probed further, more than 60 per cent of the respondents expressed varying levels of fear that they would not have regular employment or adequate incomes within the next five years, thus indicating the precarious nature of their present social positions. At the same – and in spite of a general youthfulness – up to 54 per cent of those surveyed had concerns about their ability to meet the health-care needs of family members in the future. Such is the case, interestingly, in spite of President Jokowi's signature and highly vaunted policy reforms in expanding access to healthcare.

Moreover, on many questions pertaining to Islamic morality, the survey shows little difference in opinion between those who sympathise with hard-line organisations and those who claim to follow one of the more established mainstream ones. While the major anti-Ahok mobilisations of late 2016 were spearheaded by the FPI, as well as similarly fringe organisations like the now-banned Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, nearly 60 per cent of the survey respondents thought of themselves as being part of the communities associated with organisations like the Muhammadiyah and NU. Yet they were participating in rallies whose underlying sentiments – directed at least partly against Ahok's status as a double minority – contradicted the ostensibly inclusive values that the leadership of these organisations have expressed as part of their acceptance of the trappings of the secular state.

For example, concerning the role of women in society, those who claimed affinity with the mainstream mass organisations held similar opinions as those who did not.²⁶ Of the 600 respondents, two-thirds believed that women did not have the right to divorce their husbands, including nearly 70 per cent of those who saw themselves as part of those mainstream organisations and almost 68 per cent of those who felt closer to the newer and more fringe ones. Fully 75 per cent of all respondents, moreover, felt that wives should always obey their husbands, while 89 per cent thought that all adult females should don the traditional Islamic headscarf.²⁷ They held similar opinions on relations with fellow citizens who belonged to minority religions, regardless of whether they considered themselves part of the communities presided over by mainstream Islamic mass organisations – which have been widely credited with a major role in maintaining religious harmony in the country. Nearly 87 per cent of all respondents felt that members of religious minority groups held a level of public influence disproportionate to their size, including 88 per cent of those who considered themselves linked to the traditional mass organisations.

²⁶See Rakhmani (in this volume) for more details on issues of women in society.

²⁷Some deviation from what would be considered conservative values occurred, however. For example, a large majority of respondents – male and female – were not keen on encouraging the practice of polygamy.

While 60 per cent of all respondents thought that Muslims should not congratulate non-Muslims on the latter's religiously significant occasions, fully 63 per cent of those who felt an affinity with organisations like NU and Muhammadiyah held such an attitude, which seemed to diverge from the ideals of religious harmony and mutual tolerance that they are meant to be upholding.²⁸

Significantly, approximately one-fifth of the 600 respondents felt that their interests were not represented by any single Islamic mass organisation. This represents a considerable number of people who feel a sense of outright isolation from religious organisational life, which reflects particularly badly on the established mainstream Islamic vehicles rather than on their upstart competitors. Such a situation is indicative of the development of a broader floating *ummah* as described above. Though made up of people who may still profess affinity for the mainstream organisations, this *ummah* does not exhibit the kind of organisational discipline or loyalty necessary to ensure sustained political impact and influence. If the lack of strong allegiance to such organisations is in any large part due to the perception that they are incapable of addressing the real-world problems and anxieties of large sections of the *ummah*, then it makes sense that religious figures associated with Muhammadiyah or the NU would increasingly mimic the more assertive and 'heroic' narratives of marginalisation and push-back associated with the likes of the FPI and its allies that found a common platform in the GNPFMUI.

Given the preponderance of the attitudes described above, there was ample room for well-targeted efforts to depose Ahok, ranging from the organising of the aforementioned mass rallies to carefully crafted cyber-campaigns.²⁹ While the stakes would be high in any contest for control of Jakarta, given the extreme concentration of the nation's wealth there, they were elevated as the 2017 gubernatorial election became an arena to test the prospects of political blocs getting ready for the presidential election of 2019. In this sense, the concerted campaign against the then-governor of Jakarta must be understood as involving not just expressions of religious (or racial) solidarity, or of pent-up economic frustrations only. It took a clash of oligarchic factional interests to link these up so strongly and to have such a profound effect on the outcomes of the race, and probably on the terms through which some other electoral contests will be fought in Indonesia in the future.

²⁸But again, there are deviations from what may be considered conservative values. For example, most respondents had no difficulty dealing with banks, even though many regard the banks' charging of interest as a violation of Islamic economic precepts.

²⁹Such a cyber-campaign was utilised to strengthen the position of the eventual victor, Anies Baswedan, among the electorate, and weaken that of his opponents – particularly Ahok as the incumbent. A major part of it was the use of carefully constructed and widely disseminated social media content designed to stir negative emotions against the latter. Of course, cyber-campaigning was also undertaken by the Ahok and Agus Yudhoyono camps, but apparently with less effectiveness. Interview with Deddy Rachman, Jakarta, 2 April 2018.

The worry, commonly expressed subsequently, is that some regional elections in 2018, as well as the presidential election of 2019, would feature strategies for mobilising support that make similar use of the interlinkages between communal and economic animosities. For example, even if reflecting some exaggerated fears, the Indonesian Interior Ministry deemed no fewer than 17 provinces, 39 cities, and 115 districts to be vulnerable to such strategies in the lead-up to those regional elections.³⁰ Yet such fears could not have been dismissed outright, given still-fresh memories of the Ahok saga, although it was unlikely that the specific circumstances that facilitated the rearing of an entire movement ostensibly unified by antagonism towards one individual could be replicated exactly – if only for the dearth of prominent Indonesian ethnic-Chinese and Christian leaders and politicians. Still, President Jokowi, himself a Muslim, albeit one without a particularly strong religious pedigree, has felt vulnerable to possible mobilisations of public sentiment that would target his perceived lack of Islamic credentials.³¹ After all, the *Jakarta Post*³² had reported on how – in the midst of the 2018 regional elections – FPI figures were calling for ‘a change of presidents’ the following year, not in campaign rallies but during sermons in mosques. One way in which Jokowi has tried to pre-empt such attacks has been to rather spectacularly recruit the cleric Ma’ruf Amin – an influential figure within the anti-Ahok movement – as running mate in the 2019 presidential contest.

CONCLUSION

The article has shown that – driven in part by competition to speak for the grievances of growing key sections of the *umamah*, including the younger and more educated members of the lower-middle and middle classes – mainstream Islamic mass organisations (and political parties) are increasingly adopting moral positions that can be regarded as rigidly ‘conservative’. It has found that the ‘underpinnings’ of the conservative turn within Indonesian Islamic politics do not derive from some innate incompatibility between Islam and democracy. But nor does the article suggest that democratic inclusion would necessarily have a moderating effect on Islamic politics, in Indonesia, or logically, elsewhere in the Muslim world. Hence, Indonesia is experiencing a move in a direction contrasting with Bayat’s post-Islamism, despite the fact that Islamic parties have developed a strong stake in the survival of democracy – as have most established Islamic mass organisations – following the end of authoritarian rule in 1998.

³⁰See <http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-44562329> (accessed 16 April 2018).

³¹False rumours have long swirled on social media about Jokowi having a secret ethnic-Chinese background and/or communist family links.

³²See <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/06/27/indonesian-election-season-is-a-gauge-of-rise-of-political-islam.html> (accessed 16 April 2018).

All of these developments are affecting democratic politics in Indonesia in ways that are not conducive to the protection of the rights and well-being of minorities and others who are most vulnerable to abuses of power. Though the production of *perda syariah* has long abated, for example, there is still a strong political impulse to regulate women's public behaviour according to conservative takes on Islamic morality. The narrative of hatred against those of minority sexual orientations has also become increasingly prominent, as the *Tempo* report cited earlier makes clear.

On balance, Islamic politics in Indonesia appears to be evolving in ways that highlight less tolerant and anti-pluralist values and attitudes. This contradicts the country's reputation for flexibility and adaptability that contrasts with more austere versions in the Middle East – even if much of both reputations has been produced by rather simplistic and lazy stereotyping. But as this article has demonstrated, the reasons for the challenge to Indonesia's reputation as a bastion of less rigid Islamic practices have to do with the context within which Islamic politics has been reshaped, particularly since the advent of the democratic period, rather than any intrinsic propensity to move into either more exclusivist or inclusivist directions.

Symptomatic of the direction that Indonesian Islamic politics has now taken is the clearer development of a floating *ummah*. This *ummah* is more disconnected from the country's mainstream Islamic organisations than might be envisaged, and large sections of it harbour growing feelings of frustration with the socioeconomic and political status quo. While such a development does not in any way signal widespread support for a return to authoritarian politics and the ditching of democracy, it will inevitably help to shape the *kind* of democracy that continues to evolve in Indonesia.

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Interviews

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