Islam and Democracy in Indonesia

Indonesia’s Islamic organizations sustain the country’s thriving civil society, democracy, and reputation for tolerance amid diversity. Yet scholars poorly understand how these organizations envision the accommodation of religious difference. What does tolerance mean to the world’s largest Islamic organizations? What are the implications for democracy in Indonesia and the broader Muslim world? Jeremy Menchik argues that answering these questions requires decoupling tolerance from liberalism and investigating the historical and political conditions that engender democratic values. Drawing on archival documents, ethnographic observation, comparative political theory, and an original survey, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia demonstrates that Indonesia’s Muslim leaders favor a democracy in which individual rights and group-differentiated rights converge within a system of legal pluralism, a vision at odds with American-style secular government but common in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe.

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The most enduring and illuminating bodies of late nineteenth century social theory – by Marx, Weber, Durkheim and others – emphasized the integration of religion, polity, and economy through time and place. Once a staple of classic social theory, however, religion gradually lost the interest of many social scientists during the twentieth century. The recent emergence of phenomena such as Solidarity in Poland, the dissolution of the Soviet empire, various South American, Southern African, and South Asian liberation movements, the Christian Right in the United States, and Al Qaeda have reawakened scholarly interest in religiously-based political conflict. At the same time, fundamental questions are once again being asked about the role of religion in stable political regimes, public policies, and constitutional orders. The series Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion, and Politics will produce volumes that study religion and politics by drawing upon classic social theory and more recent social scientific research traditions. Books in the series offer theoretically-grounded, comparative, empirical studies that raise “big” questions about a timely subject that has long engaged the best minds in social science.
Islam and Democracy in Indonesia

*Tolerance without Liberalism*

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Frontmatter
More information
## Contents

| List of Tables and Figures                        | page viii |
| Acknowledgments                                    | xi        |
| Note on Transcription                              | xv        |
| 1  After Secularization                            | 1         |
| 2  Explaining Tolerance and Intolerance            | 19        |
| 3  Local Genealogies                               | 36        |
| 4  Godly Nationalism                               | 65        |
| 5  The Coevolution of Religion and State           | 93        |
| 6  Communal Tolerance                              | 124       |
| 7  Religion and Democracy                          | 159       |
| Methodological Appendices                          | 169       |
| References                                         | 181       |
| Index                                              | 201       |
Tables and Figures

Tables

2.1 Organizational indicators of levels of tolerance page 27
3.1 Leaders’ tolerance toward Christians 60
3.2 Leaders’ tolerance toward Christians, by region 61
3.3 Leaders’ tolerance toward Christians, by ethnicity 62
3.4 Three ordered logit models of tolerance toward Christians with organizational and ethnic variables 63
5.1 Leaders’ tolerance toward recognized/nonrecognized groups 122
6.1 Leaders’ tolerance toward Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, and Communists 125
6.2 Tolerance and group rights I 151
6.3 Tolerance and group rights II 151
6.4 Tolerance and legal pluralism in public education 152
6.5 Tolerance and legal pluralism in private education 153
6.6 The separation of religious and social affairs in demonstration 153
6.7 The primacy of faith over tolerance 154
6.8 Majority domination 155

Figures

3.1 Causal logic of social cleavages, institutions, and intolerance 37
3.2 Causal logic of social cleavages, institutions, and intolerance applied to West, Central, and East Java 38
4.1 Front Page of Suara Merdeka with headlines, “Bung Karno is Also Leader of the Islamic World” and “Presidential Order No. 1/1965 Regarding the Prevention of Abuse and/or Desecration of Religion” 80
4.2 Vigilante groups at the constitutional court, February 2010 84
Tables and Figures

5.1 Overlap of the (secular) state and (Islamic) society 94
5.2 Structure of the Balikpapan hit squad 117
5.3 First draft of NU's fortieth anniversary painting featuring Soekarno’s slogan “Five Charms of the Revolution” (Panitia Tanzimat Revolusi) and “If God Wills It We Surely Will Be Victorious” 118
5.4 Revised version of NU’s fortieth anniversary painting: “If God Wills It We Surely Will be Victorious” 119
5.5 Final version of NU's fortieth anniversary painting, “Fighting, Worshipping, the Duty of the Ummat to Worship God” 120
6.1 Banner at the 2010 NU Congress: “Save NU from the Influence of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Liberalism” 143
6.2 Measuring communal tolerance 149
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This book has been a long time coming. In the summer of 2005 I lived in the Bulak Sumur neighborhood of Yogyakarta, where I divided my time between language study at Gadjah Mada University and weekends traveling around Java in search of an interesting dissertation project and the most delicious fried bananas (pisang goreng). I found both and have had the good fortune of accumulating debts to many institutions and people in the ensuing years.

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Any errors are my responsibility alone.
Note on Transcription

There are numerous orthographical problems that arise when writing in English about Indonesia and Islamic institutions. These concern the changes in the spelling of the Indonesian language over the past 100 years, the spelling of individuals’ and organizations’ names, and the transliteration of Arabic terms.

The Indonesian language has undergone tremendous changes in the twentieth century affecting names, places, and concepts. The organization Nahdlatul Ulama, for example, was originally written as Nahdlatoe'l Oelama or Nahdhatoe'l Oelama. I follow the modern convention, which is to render ‘dl’ as ‘d,’ ‘y’ rather than ‘j,’ and ‘u’ rather than ‘oe’ as set out in Echols and Shadily (2002). For personal and organizational names, however, the actor’s preferred spelling is used, thus Nahdlatul Ulama rather than Nahdatul Ulama and Soeharto rather than Suharto. Where multiple variants are accepted, I use the one that is most frequent in official documents except for direct quotes.

Arabic terms are spelled in accordance with Indonesian usage and based on Federspiel (1995). Terms that do not appear in either Federspiel or Echols and Shadily are copied verbatim. In cases where the Indonesian or Arabic term is awkward to the ear, such as the plural of fatwa (fatwa-fatwa in Indonesian and fatâwâ in Arabic), I follow the common English usage (fatwas).

All translation is by the author unless otherwise noted.