ISLAMIC POPULISM AND THE QUESTION OF SECULARISM: THE CASE OF INDONESIA AND TURKEY

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Abstract

Turkey and Indonesia are among a few Muslim-majority countries that have embraced democratisation since their independence. While the development of their democracies is not linear and marred with periods of autocratic regimes, the debate over the position of Islam within the secular state has remained relevant throughout the history of the modern Indonesian and Turkish Republic. This article uses Comparative Historical Analysis to examine how the contention over Islam in politics has been utilised by populist groups espousing Islamic aspirations as their ideological basis. This article argues that the formation and success of Islamic populist currents in Turkey and Indonesia is not dictated by their specific political and economic conditions, but also by their different adoption of secularism. Comparative analysis of these two countries is conducted in two steps. First, I explain the specific historical trajectories of secularisation, democratisation, and state-building of both Turkey and Indonesia. Second, I contrast both countries to demonstrate how their diverging process of secularisation has impacted the political success of Islamic populism. This article concludes that a stricter adoption of Secularism in Turkey has, inadvertently, brought more decisive success to Turkish Islamic populist groups; on the other hand, the ambiguous secularisation in Indonesia has hindered its Islamic populist forces from enjoying a similar degree of success. A stricter adoption of Secularism in Turkey brings more decisive success to Islamic populist groups, while an ambiguous approach in Indonesia hinders the Islamic populist groups from enjoying the same success.

Keywords: Democratisation, Secularism, Islamic Populism, Turkey, Indonesia

Introduction

In recent years, the phenomena of populism in democratic states have emerged as one of the most widely-debated and heated topics in academia. Political scientists generally agree with its status as a global phenomena—spreading across both advanced and emerging democracies, as well as the threats it might eventually pose to the liberal democratic order (Hadiz & Chryssogelos, 2017). Nonetheless, the rise of Islamic populism—or any populism based on religious values—have problematized several widely-held assumptions within the discipline of political science. First, political scientists tend to see the modern-state, since the establishment of the Westphalian nation-state system, to be defined by secular logic. Second,

religious populisms also pose a challenge to the central tenet of Modernization Theory, namely that the influence of religion over the state will degrade, over time, through the course of modernization.

This research presents a historical-comparative study of Islamic populism in two of the most prominent democratic states of the Muslim world: Turkey and Indonesia. Both countries share similar features of housing a significant Muslim-majority population, but were *not* founded on the basis of Islam. While the modern Turkish state is founded on *Laiklik* (secularism with Turkish interpretation), its political history has largely been defined by a contestation between secular and Islamist forces

(Öztürk, 2019). Indonesia, on the other hand, is founded with an ambiguous dual-identity of being secular *as well as* religious, which was the result of a compromise between secular and Islamist founding-fathers (Sukma, 2003). Nonetheless, Indonesia does not associate the embedded religiosity within its statehood to one particular religion—not even Islam—and rather asserts, in a rather vague manner, of the irrevocable importance of religion in civic life. Finally, both countries, in the turn of the twenty-first century, have enjoyed a period of democracy and political freedom. In recent years, however, they have also seen Islamic populist groups gaining more robust mass support and political power.

Regardless of similarities within their historical factors and upwards conjecture, the Islamic populism project in Turkey and Indonesia have yielded very different results. While Islamic populists in Turkey have succeeded in consolidating their political-economic power and forming a government, Indonesian religious populist groups have only been able to influence national politics without being able to properly seize control over the state. An extensive comparison between both countries can be found in Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East by Vedi Hadiz (2016). In this volume, Hadiz argues that the recent ideological contestation between nationalist and religious populist factions in Indonesia and countries such as Turkey and Egypt is the result of a particular structure of political-economy—which was, in turn, influenced by particular dynamics within the state formation and economic development of each country.

While Hadiz' study explores class differentiation as a byproduct of political-economy relations, this research attempts to extend the discussion by focusing on the historical and ideological aspect of the position of Islam within the state. I argue that the different shades of success amongst Islamic populist movements around the world are not merely influenced by the political-economy makeup of a country, but are also related to struggles over the position of Islam within their statehood. As such, this research is organised around a central question, namely: "*How does the debate on the position of Islam within the state contribute to the trajectory of Islamic populist groups in Turkey and Indonesia?*".

In the following section, I will explain the three main concepts that inform this article: democratisation, Islamic populism, and secularism, as well as arguing how a comparative-historical analysis method will help illuminate the answers to our research question. Afterwards, I will proceed by zooming in on each case of Islamic populism in Turkey and Indonesia. In the final section, I will critically discuss how the different adoption of Secularism in Turkey and Indonesia have affected the degree of success of their respective Islamic populism forces.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The first concept within our study is democratisation. For Turkey and Indonesia, democracy was not their native form of governance; both countries adopted the system from the democratisation experience—and experiments—of modern Western states. Nonetheless, the notion of democracy had already been part of nation-building in Turkey and Indonesia since their independence. Huntington's thesis on the Three Waves of Democratisation (1991) is widely-cited as a classical explanation to how countries across the globe gradually adopt a democratic system. Huntington argued that democratisation—or the process in which countries shift to a democratic system of governance—occured in three major waves. The first, long wave began in the late eighteenth century, and was heralded by the industrial revolution in England, France, and the United States. The second wave occurred during post-World War II, and was concentrated in other countries throughout Western Europe. Finally, the impetus of the third wave, which began in the late 1970s, was the crumbling-down of authoritarian regimes in Latin America and gradual dissolve of Communism in Eastern Europe. Within this third wave, democracy finally came to be adopted into the broader part

of the world. Within Huntington's elaborate historical scheme, the democratisation of Turkey and Indonesia took place within the second wave.

While being ambitious in its scope, Huntington's theorization has been criticised for overlooking the subsequent dynamics within countries *after* their initial period of democratisation. Every country is likely to experience phases in which their democracy goes on an upward or downward trend;　this means that each polity warrants a historical and chronological analysis of their own internal dynamics of democratisation.

More recently, Charles Tilly (2007) argues that even advanced democratic countries suffer from continuous democratisation and de-democratisation, which stems from the tension between state and civil society and the broad, equal, protected, and mutually-binding consultation that is generated from their interaction. Although Tilly's work provides important ground for the study of populism—particularly for assessing if populism is a sign of democratisation or de-democratisation—his focus on Western European countries does not reflect the dynamics of democratisation in emerging democracies, especially from the Global South or Muslim World. These countries often had to deal with internal conflicts resulting from colonialism, while simultaneously being affected by global geopolitical tensions during the Cold War. This research, on the other hand, shall focus on the particular problematics of democratisation within the Muslim world.

Meanwhile, populism has become a timely subject of research within the field of Comparative Politics. The term itself is perceived to encapsulate a conceptual dilemma: on one side, it captures the robustness of mass movements in raising the voices of common people, hence empowering them within the democratic polity; on the other side, it has also been widely-cited as the main challenge to democracy around the world. To overcome this confusion, it is essential to clarify what I mean by populism in this article, specifically Islamic populism.

The Oxford Handbook of Populism lists at least three existing approaches in the study of populism: ideational, political-strategic, and socio-cultural (Kaltwasser et al., 2017). In this article, I will follow Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017) definition of populism, which considers populism as a "thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people". Implicitly, this definition posits populism to be fundamentally in opposition with liberal democracy. Even though it anchors itself on a notion of "the people" not unlike the basic tenets of democracy, populists treat the people as a homogenous entity with shared values and beliefs, while in liberal democracy they are plural and diverse, yet bound together by free and equal citizenship (Rummens, 2017).

Following this definition, the source of populist logic and antagonism might be derived from various identities, including nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. This paper focuses on the religious identity shaping the political aspirations of people. Globally, religious populism has appeared both in advanced and emerging democracies. In the United States, for example, the political preferences between the Democratic and Republican Party were shaped by the religious differences among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (Layman, 2001). Furthermore, religion does not only shape political preferences, but has also been an important factor in the framing of political narratives. In Europe, anti-immigrant rhetoric have been intertwined with an anti-Islam sentiment, which has been exploited by politicians to raise their influence. Opportunistic politicians have utilised ideas of a "Judeo-Christian European identity" and sought the support of constituents by uniting them against non-European Muslim immigrants. Ironically, some of these politicians have been documented to be non-religious, which demonstrates the "pragmatic" character of populist strategy beyond "organic" intergroup conflict (Wagenvoorde, 2019).

Nonetheless, these accounts of populism, too, do not sufficiently consider the particularities of populism beyond Western societies. In the Muslim world, for example, dynamics within the political-economic sphere have been entangled with social-ideological aspirations to expand the influence of Islam and enhance public piety. Therefore, populisms within dominantly-Muslim nations require a distinct conceptual apparatus. In this study, I follow Hadiz' description of "Islamic Populism" as the socio-political division between "the ummah"—which, in secular terms, could be translated as "the people"—against the immoral "elites" (Hadiz, 2016). Through the concept of the "ummah", political leaders have been able to mobilise the Islamic community against the elites. Hadiz sees Islamic populism through the lens of political economy: in his conception, populism in Islamic countries is the result of a cross-class political contestation made possible by the absence of Leftists forces after they were eliminated throughout the Cold War (Hadiz, 2016).

Although Hadiz managed to capture important factors behind the rise of Islamic populism in Egypt, Turkey, and Indonesia, his assessment largely overlooked the ideational debates between Secularism and Islam that have proven to be significant in these emerging democratic countries. As one significant point within these debates pertains to the position of religion within the state, this article needs to clarify firsthand the concept of Secularism and secularisation processes. While social sciences—including political science—mostly regard secularism as a basic assumption of the modern nation-state, Asad (2003) argues that secularism does not only account the relegation of religion into the private space, but also as an *exclusively* private mode of reasoning. However, since the end of the Cold War, political scientists have begun to rethink the irrefutability of this assumption. For instance, there has yet to be a firm conclusion on the adherence of Muslim states to the strict border between religion and politics, which is a defining feature of the Westphalian nation-state model that became widespread in the 20th century. One event, namely the September 11 tragedy in the United States, further amplified the suspicion that the influence of religion has indeed vanished in modern nation-states; if anything, religion has emerged as a pivotal factor in significant political events across the globe.

In order to develop the argument on how the Secularism Debate is paramount for understanding Islamic populism in Turkey and Indonesia, I critically engage with the works of Talal Asad, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jose Casanova. Secularisation, the process by which society moves from religious to secular logic, seemed to be natural as the consequence of modernisation. Casanova, for example, identifies the secularisation of society in three different features: institutional differentiation between the religious authority and the state, privatisation of religion, and the progressively-diminishing influence of religion in the public sphere (1994). Nonetheless, Casanova also argued that these three features of secularisation work differently in a non-European context. As this article will explain, Muslim societies do not only have a harbour a different attitude towards secularisation compared to their (Western)-European counterparts, but also fundamentally diverge in viewing how ideals of Secularism should be adopted within their modern nation-state.

By the end of the Cold War, widespread claims that the Liberal world order had finally emerged triumphant was frequently accompanied with concerns of a new constellation of inter-civilisational war. Huntington's influential conception on a Clash of Civilisations, which pits Islamic polities as the next big threat to Western Hegemony, is indicative of this view. This thesis became increasingly more salient after the events of 9/11, spurring up both stalwart proponents and ferocious critics. For some, Huntington's homogenous view of the Islamic world as a direct opposition of the West amounts to a gross simplification. Furthermore, his thesis did not sufficiently explain the critical question on *how* religion manages to find its "revamped moment" after the Cold War. Juergensmeyer (1994), for example, identifies the newfound momentum of religious influence as a two-directional process. First, secular nationalism

had failed to provide sufficient room for religion within the state, which was corroborated by the assumption that religion would, by itself, gradually step back from the public sphere as modernisation continues to prevail. On the other hand, religious groups have deliberately reformed themselves to accommodate the modern nation-state into their religious life. This is where religious nationalism, Juergensmeyer (1994) suggests, managed to find its ground in bridging religious doctrine and modern nation-state. Furthermore, as Tibi (2007) argued, globalisation does not simply intensify the secularisation of society, but also pulls the sacred back into political debate, gaining significant support from Islamist political groups across the globe. Islamic populists would later utilise this nation using narratives that do not only contrast the "corrupt elite" against the "pure people", but also between the "secular elite" vis-à-vis the "pious ummah".

The democratisation process in Turkey and Indonesia has seen regimes swinging between democracy and authoritarian modes of governance. In general, a more authoritarian regime has tended to be more repressive towards Islamic politics, which will generate an Islamic populist movement in return. Expression of populism can be manifested either through formal politics, ie. by delegating populist aspirations to political parties, or by informal channels, such as creating pressure groups or public demonstrations. However, the case of Erdogan demonstrates how the populist tendency of his regime does not only rely on a disintermediated popular support, but also pushes for an entrenched concentration of power. Therefore, the defining feature of Islamic Populism is in its function of mobilising pious Muslims to drive public attention and frame various political issues rather than an inherent authoritarian inclination within the populist logic, notwithstanding opportunistic politicians who might ride this wave (Hadiz, 2018; Yilmaz, 2018).

The historical trajectories of Turkey and Indonesia suggest that degree of success amongst Islamic populist groups is related to the degree of Secularism adopted by each state.

This article will further examine the debate on Secularism and how Islamic populist groups have utilised secularisation within a democratic setting using Comparative Historical Analysis (CHA). This method, as Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) suggest, will analyse the causality of phenomena, emphasise the process over time, as well as utilise both systematic and contextualised comparisons. Analysis will be conducted in two phases. In the first phase, I shall cover the historical background of each country, briefly introducing their political trajectory starting from independence to contextualise the presence of Islam within the political constellation, as well as the influence of ideas of democracy. In the second phase, I compare the similarities and differences between the debates on Secularism and rise of Islamic populist groups in Turkey and Indonesia, establishing the case in which different ways of adopting Secularism would influence the outcome of Islamic populism in both countries.

Ultimately, this research explores how the inconclusive debate surrounding secularisation, democratisation, and influence of religion in the public domain within Muslim polities has laid the ground for Islamic populism. Therefore, while a political-economy analysis is paramount in explaining the *pre-conditions* for Islamic populism, popular aspirations pertaining to the status of Islam within the modern-state should be seen as an *ideational* prerequisite for this particular type of populism—at least in Turkey and Indonesia.

Turkey: Strict Secularism and Successful Islamic Populism

Islam in Turkey is defined by following the Hanafi tradition of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the Maturidi tradition of theology, and a strong influence of Sufism in everyday life (Uğur, 2004). This practice descended from the Ottomans, who formalised its jurisprudence primarily based on the Hanafi tradition for centuries. Turkey's geographical location and long history as a contentious place between Europe and the Islamic world has also resulted in competing interpretations of Islam and its

position in politics and public life, including internal disputes within various Islamic factions Yavuz, 2006).

The secularisation of Turkish society began as a modernisation project in the late Ottoman Empire of the 19th Century, which laid the foundation of the Modern Turkish Republic. The *Tanzimat* (reform) period saw the establishment of a centralised government, as well as a National Constitution incorporating elements of the secular-modern legal tradition; this transformation can be observed, among others, in the adoption of Romanist Law along with the jurisprudence derived from *Fiqh* (Ortayli, 2018). While the initial period of modernisation of the late Ottoman did not attempt to revoke the centrality of Islam within political life, the subsequent modernisation following the establishment of the Republic tried to reform Islam in order to facilitate the secularisation project (Yavuz, 2009). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey, adopted the French *Laïcite* type of secularisation, in which the state strictly regulates religion from entering public space. He then replaced the Islamic Ottoman canon with the constitution inspired by Switzerland Law (Uğur, 2004).

Thus, secularisation in Turkey was a two-way process, in which the state claims its authority upon religious affairs, whilst simultaneously creating its own "modern" version of the religion (Yavuz, 2009). This heavy-handed approach to secularisation within the new Turkey Republic raised various degrees of animosity from the public, which, in return, led to three types of response from the regime: silencing strong oppositions into Secularism; self-subversion of other opponents; while some minority groups was subject to repression by the state and Kemalists (Köker, 2010).

The "oppressive Secularism" within the early days of the Turkish Republic began facing challenges after the death of Kemal Atatürk. Significantly, the adoption of a multiparty system in what year allowed democratisation to further take place. The Islamic-oriented Democratic Party even managed to come into power in 1950 with the election of its figurehead, Adnan Menderes, as Prime Minister of Turkey. During his tenure, Menderes sought to undo the legacies of Kemalist Secularism. He was successful in abolishing some laws which had disenfranchised the influence of Islam in public life, before eventually being sentenced to death by the military. These events exemplify the historically-antagonistic relation between Islamic and secular forces in Turkish politics. As Azak (2012) argued, debates on how the state forcefully imposed Secularism and tried to establish its own version of Islam is a central denominator for political polarisation in Turkey.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, a series of military coups dominated the Turkish political landscape. Despite this turbulence, the Islamic movement remains alive through Sufi groups such as *Nurcu*, which was galvanised by the teachings of theologian Said Nursi. During this period, Fethullah Gülen also rose to popularity as a prominent Islamic scholar and preacher. He, too, was inspired by Nursi, and sought to reform Turkish society through Islamic education. For many years to come, Gülen's movement managed to establish a nationwide foothold in Turkey while achieving global prominence. Although his organisation was initially not involved in political activity, it provided the basis for articulating Islamist political aspirations. Gulen would eventually collaborate with the Islamist *Refah* (Welfare) Party, and later form a strategic alliance with the conservative-democratic Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Dogan, 2020).

Islamists managed to regain power in Turkish national politics in 1983, with the Motherland Party (ANAP) claiming election victory; their leader, Turgut Özal, was elected Prime Minister (1983-1989) and later President (1989-1993). This period has been regarded as a "cautious re-Islamisation of Turkish society" (Ozzano, 2020). During Özal's regime, the capital that had been previously concentrated within secularist elites was redistributed into greater society, most prominently Islamist groups. Özal's economic policy of liberalisation—which was inspired by his background in the World Bank—has also been credited in establishing a stronger Muslim

middle-class in Turkey with Islamist political aspirations (E. Balkan & Oncu, 2015).

The tides of Turkish re-Islamisation continued with the victory of the *Refah* Party in the 1996 elections. Similarly, its leader Necmettin Erbakan was also appointed as Prime Minister. However, Necmettin's administration was cut short by military intervention in the form of a "postmodern coup" due to their stance in openly-challenging Secularism and other Kemalist principles (Ozzano, 2020). These turn of events culminated in the dissolution of the *Refah* Party, and Islamists were once again forced to form various new political platforms for their agendas. The most prominent Islamist party within the post-*Refah* constellation is the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been led by current Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan since its establishment in 2002. Contrary to *Refah*'s strategy of openly-challenging secularism, however, Erdogan's AKP employed a "hybrid" approach instead (Ozzano, 2020). While Erdogan openly accepts Secularism as the historical basis of the Turkish Republic, he has simultaneously tried to redefine Secularism in order to make it more "Islam-friendly".

While Erdogan and AKP initially received strong support from Fethullah Gülen and his movement, their alliance did not last very long. The relationship between the two has been observed to be strained as early as 2010; in 2016, the AKP government accused Gülen of being responsible for a coup attempt, subsequently closing his schools and banning his movement in Turkey. Contrary to previous coups, in which the military assumed the role of guarding Kemalist ideology against an increasingly-hostile Islamist regime, the planned coup of 2016 was mainly supported by Gülen loyalists in the military structure, which threatened by Erdogan's tendency to cleanse the Army from Gülen loyalist (Yavuz & Koç, 2016).

Erdogan's critics have cited his ambiguous approach to Secularism, along with the employment of a brand of strong-handed, personal, and charismatic leadership, as strong evidence of Islamic populism in current Turkish politics (Lancaster, 2014; Yilmaz, 2018). While some analysts have further asserted that Turkish Secularism has not been threatened by Islamists that have dominated the Turkish political landscape throughout the Erdogan era (Heper, 2012), a recent academic survey suggested that Islamic populism provides a more subtle and cautious way for Islamists to enter politics, especially due to their past experiences of conflict with the military.

Indonesia: Ambiguous Secularism and Moderate Success of Islamic Populism

With more than 85% of its 280 million population adhering to the Islamic faith, Indonesian houses the greatest number of Muslims in a single country—even more than all Arab states combined. As a nation-state, however, Indonesia does not inherit modes of governance from ancient Islamic Kingdoms or Sultanates founded separately throughout the Islands. Instead the nation was built on the ashes of Dutch colonialism. The idea of Indonesia did not emerge until the late nineteenth century, following the colonial government's introduction of the Western European education system. Therefore, before the idea of Indonesia was established, Islamic Sultanates were the strongest forces of anti-colonial resistance. In the early twentieth century, anti-colonial resistance came to be a collaborative endeavour between Islamic, communist, nationalist, and other ethnic-based groups.

The debate over Secularism and Islam in Indonesia occurred in three major waves. The first wave took place shortly before independence, when a small committee was gathered to formulate the Indonesian state-in-the-making ideology and National Constitution. While they quickly came into agreement on the five foundational principles—dubbed as "Pancasila" and later constituted as the Jakarta Charter—one detail proved to be a point of prolonged contention. In the First Principle, it was stated that Indonesia would be based on "The One Almighty God, *and* the obligation for Muslims to follow the Islamic jurisprudence". Other religious and secular groups opposed the

religious obligation, citing that it will lopsidedly assert the status of Muslims in the newfound nation, and successfully amended the passage to simply contain "Belief in the One Almighty God".

Although not all Muslim groups agreed with this result, the debate itself would only resurface in the 1950s as the newly-independent nation was facing a state of emergency and a re-colonisation attempt from the Dutch military. When Indonesia gained the status of full independence and proceeded to hold a democratic election in 1955, debates over state ideology began to re-emerge. Two Islamic political parties who supported the introduction of Islam as state ideology, named Nahdlatul Ulama and Masyumi, gained the second and third-largest spots in the parliament. However, they were unable to secure a combined majority-rule in the legislative to push for a Constitutional change. Towards the end of the 1950s, Indonesia's socio-economic conditions worsened, leading for President Sukarno to dissolve the parliament and enact his own brand of "Guided Democracy". Consequently, the ideological debate ended in an anti-climactic fashion, with Sukarno issuing a Presidential Decree to return to the previous constitution, along with the ambiguous position of Islam within it.

An arduous regime change in the mid-1960s from Sukarno to Suharto entails a shift within the Indonesian nation, as Suharto's regime pursued to transform the country into a developmental state with a heavy technocratic approach. This time, the second wave of ideological debate was heralded with the rise of Muslim intellectual Nurcholish Madjid and his controversial 1970 speech entitled "Islam Yes, Islamic Party No!" that called for the further secularisation of Indonesian politics (Bachtiar, 2017). While Madjid's speech reignited the debate among Indonesian scholars to find the place of Islam in Indonesian politics, the Suharto government acted upon it further by imposing Pancasila as the *only* principle of the state (*Asas Tunggal*), as well as providing strict definitions in interpreting it. Hence, recently-fomenting organic aspirations to establish a new Islamic Party was soon blocked off. As a counterbalance, the regime also created the United Development Party (PPP) to become the only official stream for Muslim communities to further their political aspirations.

The New Order regime was only able to repress Islamic political aspirations due to strong support from the military, especially the Armed Forces, towards Suharto's vision of the developmental state. By the late 1980s, however, the relation between Suharto and the military began to sour, forcing him to forge a rapport with Islamist groups as another act of counterbalancing. It is around this period that the wave of ideological debate re-emerged, coinciding with the widespread fervour for democratisation in the early 1990s. The Suharto administration tried to incorporate this intellectual spirit by creating ICMI (Indonesia Alliance of Muslim Intellectuals); nonetheless, the appointment of aerospace industrialist BJ Habibie as its leader signalled the ultimately technocratic orientation of ICMI—something that does not resonate very well with Islamic activists (Latif, 2021). During this third wave, which lasted until the early 2000s, many Muslim intellectuals would also dub themselves as part of a "liberal, progressive, pluralist, and open Islam". The global "war on terrorism" following the September 11 tragedy in New York City helps this group to gain momentum and resonate with widespread calls of a more tolerant stream of Islam. Nonetheless, a counter-group opposing the idea of a Liberal Islam also began to flourish within this era, including the wave of Attasian thinkers that studied in Malaysia (Bachtiar, 2017).

How do these more-recent streams of Islam shape social differentiation within Indonesian Muslims? Early observations of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (2013) delineate Indonesian Muslims into three groups: *Abangan*, *Santri*, and *Priyayi*. However, Geertz's typology cannot capture the various political aspirations among Islam groups in Indonesia as his categorisation is derived from particularities in cultural roots and religious expression. On the other hand, other researchers have observed that dividing Indonesian Muslims on the basis of their

political aspirations would, in reality, yield a far more fluid categorisation of groups.

Following the eradication of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) after the 1965 tragedy, the Indonesian political spectrum has been defined by competing poles of nationalist and Islamist aspirations in the absence of the political Left. After *Reformasi*, this political spectrum has become more diversified due to widespread democratisation. While nationalist and Islamist aspirations remain far more prominent, Left-leaning groups have attempted to re-emerge as a political power (Baswedan, 2004). Nonetheless, Leftist aspirations have also failed to gain strong electoral support and enter the parliamentary arena, leaving most of its progenitors and key actors being absorbed into bigger political parties, such as PDI-P (Aspinall, 2005). The failure of Leftist aspirations to gain political traction is indicative of the failed effort to sustain the post-*Reformasi* spirit of democratisation for a prolonged period of time. A recent survey suggests that the increasing proliferation of new political parties has paradoxically been accompanied by an increasingly homologous ideological stance *amongst* parties (Aspinall et al., 2018). Given the circumstances Nationalist parties would not be adverse to employ Islamic rhetorics, while Islamic parties themselves have also increasingly espoused a far more religious-neutral narrative.

While much of the recent "ideological flattening" can be ascribed to the prolonged absence of Leftist political aspirations, Islamic groups have continued to demonstrate their credibility in challenging the hegemony of the Nationalist camp within national politics. Aside from a brief period of public enthusiasm towards democratic cosmopolitanism following the fall of Suharto (Bourchier, 2019), Islamic political aspirations have emerged as the prevailing political alternative against the nationalist status-quo. Their influence became more evident during the Presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014), whose administration would often accommodate Islamic political aspirations in order to generate political and economic stability. The most prominent Islamic faction within this period was PKS—a party whose establishment was, to

some extent, inspired by the Ikhwanul Muslimin movement in Egypt, as well as the general idea of "gradual Islamisation" of Islamist parties in Turkey (Machmudi, 2008).

The strategy of accommodating Islamic aspirations seemed to be a success for Yudhoyono, who himself can nominally be dubbed as a nationalist. Not only did this gesture accommodate political aspirations that had fomented during the nation's period of democratic euphoria: on the global level, his administration also extensively endorsed the Indonesian *Reformasi* experience as a success story of dealing with the question of compatibility between Islam and democracy. Various global democracy indicators echoed this optimism, predicting an upwards trajectory for democratisation in Indonesia (Sukma, 2009). Meanwhile, Islamic forces would ride this wave of democratisation by substantially expanding their influence in regional governments. Taking advantage of political decentralisation and increased regional autonomy, various local governments have issued regulations inspired by Islamic jurisprudence. For van Bruinessen, these intrusions of Islamic aspirations within national and regional politics indicates the post-*Reformasi* "Conservative Turn" (2013), which foreshadows the upcoming success of political movements that mobilise themselves under the banner of religious narrative.

The current administration of President Joko Widodo (2014-2024) espouses a more ambiguous approach towards Islamist groups. At first, Joko Widodo's government was poised to deliver significant reforms in Indonesian politics—an expectation which stemmed from his persona as a non-elite who managed to rise into national politics through democratic means. In his early years, Widodo's administration was promised to be technocratic and merit-based, which sharply differs with the political makeup of his two-time Presidential opponent, Prabowo Subianto, who opted to utilise a strategy of ultra-nationalist populism to gain electoral votes (Mietzner, 2020).

A pivotal point in Widodo's tenure occurred in 2016, when Muslims from various backgrounds across the country—including

moderates—joined the national *Aksi Bela Islam* (Action to Defend Islam) rally to convict the then-Governor of Jakarta Capital Region Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) under accusations of committing blasphemy towards Islamic verses within the Quran. While some scholars have pointed the rally itself to be short-lived and thus cannot be identified as an Islamic populist movement (Kusumo & Hurriyah, 2018), its influence have persisted in the years to come, profoundly affecting regional elections in West, Central, and East Java, as well as the 2019 national elections.

During his 2019 Presidential bid, Widodo chose Ma'ruf Amin, the head of the Indonesian Council of Ulemas (MUI) and a well-respected Islamic scholar from Nahdlatul Ulama, as his running mate. While Widodo's own party, PDI-P, thoroughly belongs to the nationalist camp and harbours no traces of Islamic aspirations, his Vice-Presidential pick was, to some extent, generated by the necessity to neutralise public sentiment surrounding his alleged "anti-Islam" persona. Moreover, this political gambit should also be seen as an attempt to cast a wide net for electoral votes from both moderate-nationalist and conservative-religious groups, which had been in prolonged tension since 2014. Having lost the 2019 elections, Prabowo made the surprising move of joining Widodo's cabinet as Minister of Defence, which signals the consensus amongst political elites of their desire to abandon previous social and political divisions. Nonetheless, the inclusion of former opponents into the regime have not led to a drastic decrease in societal tensions, and polarisation has continued to deepen ever since (Warburton, 2020).

While the Islamic movement has been an influential driving force of political and social antagonisms in Indonesia in the past few decades, it is also important to note that parallel factions within Islamic civil society also have a long trajectory of contributing democratisation in Indonesia. Robert Hefner (2000) describes a distinctive stream of Islam in Indonesia as "Civil Islam", and credits their long-standing work of fostering norms of religious tolerance, as well as protecting freedom of belief in an immensely diverse and heterogeneous Indonesian state. Nonetheless, Civil Islam does not derive their argument for tolerance from the liberal stream of thought, but rather encourages Muslims to view other believers as fellow-citizens instead of more-traditional categories such as *dhimmi* or *ahl Kitab*—both referring to the status of non-Muslims living in an Islamic state with legal protection (Menchik, 2016).

Furthermore, groups that are often lumped together as "Islamic populists" in Indonesia actually possess crucial differences from one another. Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), for example, espouses an ideology of transnational idealism—of re-introducing the Caliphate at the global level and rejecting democracy entirely. Others, such as the Islamic Defender Front (FPI), harbours a more local-sectarian sentiment, and have tried to utilise democratic means in efforts to "Islamising the state". Ironically, both groups had supported Prabowo in the 2014 and 2019 elections, although the Presidential Candidate himself has always leaned towards a nationalist brand of populism instead of an Islamic one.

Comparing Islamic Populisms In Turkey and Indonesia

In the previous sections, I have outlined the flows and ebbs of democratisation process in Turkey and Indonesia, as well as the influence of Islamic political aspirations within their state ideology; its uneasy, often antagonistic relation with secularisation; and how debates over the influence of Islam in modern statehood contribute to the degree of success for Islamic populism. While a brief comparison suggests that Islamic populist groups in Turkey have enjoyed more success compared to Indonesia, this section will proceed to examine the historical trajectory between secularisation and populism in both countries in order to infer a causal relation between them.

For Turkey and Indonesia, populism—or populist logic—has already been present ever since the conception of their modern nation-state. Much similar to the strand of nationalist populism in post-independence Indonesia, Kemalist ideology was also influential in driving

the Turkish Republic during its early years of state-making. The historical trajectory of these countries began to diverge when it comes to the *point of reference* in which their populist ideology pivots upon. In Kemalist Turkey, the imposition of secularism was far stricter as the modern Republic tried to distance itself from the Ottoman past; while in Indonesia, the irrefutable historical contribution of Sultanates and religious civil movements against colonial forces resulted in a far more ambiguous interplay between religious tradition and ideals of secular modernism. This recognition had also led to a much more open debate pertaining to the position and status of Islam in Indonesian state ideology—something that did not occur in Turkey and resulted in a massive political gap between Turkish secular elites and their opposing Islamic groups.

Thus, the political developments of the Turkish and Indonesian Republic are both shaped by some degree of tension between nationalist and Islamic populism. While this tension is not always palpable, this is not because liberal democracy has prevailed in subduing populist modes of politics; instead, it is the result of a forced alienation of opposition Islamic forces by the authoritarian regimes of Atatürk and Suharto. Nonetheless, these oppressive strategies resulted in its own paradox. When Turkey and Indonesia eventually came to embrace a more democratic political system, aspirations for political Islam quickly re-emerged. In addition, contrary to Ahmet T. Kuru's argument that an alliance between *ulemas* and the state is the determinant factor of authoritarianism in Muslim countries (2019), the historical heights of authoritarianism in Turkey and Indonesia was that of secular regimes. While secular autocracies are usually bolstered with the support of more regime-friendly *ulemas*, these religious figures would also bear the cost of dissociating from their religious counterparts who assume a more critical stance towards the regime.

Another critical point pertains to the absence of the political Left in Turkey and Indonesia due to global geopolitical tensions during the Cold War. On one hand, the absence of a Political Left provided states the stability for economic development; on the other hand, this economic development had also generated a new middle class with religious aspirations and the economic resources to influence political processes. As this new religious middle class grew in industrial areas, they fostered a religious polity in urban settlements and laid the groundwork for religious populism as a political driver amongst the urbanised populace. The proliferation of a religious and urbanised Turkish middle class is visible in the electoral dominance of the *Refah* Party—and later AKP—in urban areas such as Istanbul and Ankara. In Indonesia, PKS managed to gain significant support in several elections throughout Greater Jakarta in the 2000s. In both cases, an emerging middle class has been inseparable to the rise of Islamic political aspirations.

Ultimately, these Islamic aspirations managed to gain further traction with the demise of secular authoritarian regimes, propelling themselves forward by utilising the strong winds of democratisation. While the Turkish military regime has always been antagonistic towards notions of democracy, their willingness to join the European Union has forced them to ramp up the transition to democracy in order to suit European standards. In his early years as President, Erdogan himself was also in favour of catering to EU aspirations, before eventually abandoning this project and pivoting to a more authoritarian mode of governance (Arat & Pamuk, 2019).

Islamic populism, however, has found more success in Turkey rather than Indonesia: in the latter, Islamists have been nowhere near in achieving the electoral dominance of AKP and strong Erdogan leadership—let alone sustaining them for two decades. The success of the Islamic populism project in Turkey can be attributed to the historically strong public support for political parties espousing Islamic aspirations. The enforced, often violent secularisation in Turkey did not eradicate ideas of an Islamic polity and longing for the hastily-suppressed legacies of the Ottoman Empire. To some extent, the organisational capabilities of Islamic Sufi groups were crucial in preserving neo-Ottomanism political ideals,

especially in the years of secular autocratic rule (Yavuz, 2020). The paradox in which "strict secularisation" inadvertently paves the way for Islamic populism lies in how these residual religious ideals generate a niche sense of social identity as "Turkish People" against the dismantling of Ottoman legacies by Kemalists (Keyman, 2007). Political actors leveraging on Islamic populism provide answers for the absence of a Turkish identity, which explains the long-standing support for Erdogan. This is the moment when Islamic populism found its ground in Turkish politics.

In Indonesia, the post-Reformasi internal consolidation within Islamic civil organisations espousing significant mass support—most prominently Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah—has led them to adopt a dual position. First, they remained committed to democratic ideals and procedures that have enabled them to gain political influence in a post-authoritarian landscape. Second, they opted to maintain, at the same time, a critical distance from the government. These organisations are able to afford the costs of this dualism due to their historical role of mediating the debate between Islam and nationalism, in which they deem Pancasila to be suitable with Islamic values, while also posing no harm against other religious beliefs. Throughout the democratisation process, the Indonesian state continued to lean in favour of this ideological interpretation. In contrast with the Turkish *Laiklik*, religious-based aspirations in democratic Indonesia could be catered to without having to recourse to the Islamic populist narrative that would engender social conflict with other religious groups. As these aspirations do not question or seek to delegitimize state ideology, post-*Reformasi* regimes are able to integrate these Islamic civil groups within its political landscape. For the same reason, Islamic populist groups have found it difficult to generalise themselves as the legitimate representation of the 'ummah' as a whole.

While the Islamic populism project in Indonesia has not culminated in an autocratic Islamic regime in the mould of Erdogan's Turkey, recent developments in Indonesian democracy suggest that competing populisms have resulted in a deepening social polarisation. Various democratic indicators, according to V-Dem, show a steady decline in Indonesian democracy (Herre & Roser, 2021). This democratic decline is exemplified, among others, by the increasingly-reactive stance of Widodo's administration to critics and the systematic deployment of power to suppress opposition (Power, 2018). Meanwhile, in Turkey, the prominent economic growth in Erdogan's early years provided his regime with the material support to consolidate power, with the 2016 failed coup providing the momentum for an authoritarian turn (Ekber Doğan, 2020).

Conclusion

The resurgence of Islamic populism in Turkey and Indonesia provides new insights for understanding the process of democratisation and secularisation in Muslim countries. Their dual status as a Muslim-majority country that had adopted a democratic political system meant that their citizens were able to enjoy, to a certain degree, the freedom to express their political aspirations, including to discuss the position of religion within the secular state. This gives rise to a "paradox of secularisation" that contradicts mainstream notions of modern democratisation: it is only through a greater degree of political freedom that Islamists are able to raise their aspirations to provide more space for religion in politics. Politicians in Turkey and Indonesia have utilised this religious sentiment for electoral gain, with varying degrees of success. The Islamic populism project found greater success in Turkey, where Secularism was imposed in a strict manner and entailed oppression of political opponents, rather than Indonesia, where the state has always been in a state of continuous compromise between Secularism and Islam—preventing Islamic populist groups from gaining total support from the Muslim populace. Nonetheless, the dynamic of democratisation in Turkey and Indonesia indicates a possible turn towards partial authoritarianism in the following years. As such, both countries are currently facing a critical juncture, in which the strength of their democratic systems will be put to the test.

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