



## ISLAMISM VS SECULARISM IN POST REFORMATION INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

The debates on Islamism and secularism in Indonesia has coloured the political life for some decades and remain until the post of reformation Indonesia. In order to elaborate the picture of the current debates, the qualitative research used literature review was conducted. It is found that there historically, Islamism vs secularism debates in Indonesia have been started since the independent era won by the secularism became closely related to Indonesian constitution. However, in its development, there is the shifting form of the fighting in post-reformation Indonesian giving more opportunity for Islamism. Meanwhile, the concept of Islamism should be understood broadly and contextually appropriate to the development in this current time.

**Keywords:** Islamism, secularism, debates, reformation, Indonesia

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### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is famously called as the most populated Muslim country in the world assumed followed Islamic ideology in various aspects of people life. However, the debates on Islamism and secularism in Indonesia has started since the struggling for independence era. For instance, there was a civil war between Padri (Islamic scholars group) and traditional people in West Sumatra debating the effort of Islamic group to Islamize West Sumatra. These young people wanted to follow the prophet practice of Islam, while the old people rejected.

Such kind of debates continued in the discussion on the principle of *Serikat Islam* either it had to be Islamized or secularised between Islamic group consisting of Agus Salim, Muhammad Natsir, and Ahmad Hassan in one hand, and the nationalist group represented by Soekarno and Cipto Mangunkusomo. The first group wanted *Serikat Islam* to be consistency in its Islamic principle, on the other hand, the second group believed that the unity among the people coming from various backgrounds and religions should be prioritized.

The most prominent debates influencing a lot to the life of the post-independence Indonesia happened between Islamic group making the statement of following Islamic Syariah for its follower and the secularised group arguing by the unity of Indonesia. In the end, the debated concluded deleting the statement of this first principle of Pancasila showing the commitment of the

Islamic group toward the nationality and unity of Indonesia. What the argument came was the interpretation of Pancasila its self-has supported the Islamic values and should not be debated.

On the other hand, Soeharto promised the strategic position for the Islamic group by the commitment to establish various Islamic campuses producing the Islamic scholars within the country for the interests of the Islamic group. For that reason, most of the Islamic groups agreed with Soekarno and accepted Pancasila, but some other remained to reject the notion and declared the establishment of Indonesian Islamic State. While this movement emerged, Indonesian Communism Party used the issue to fight against Islamic groups (Khoo & Vedi, 2010).

It was the condition of politicisation of Islam in the majority Islamic country. To strengthen their power government tends to be closer to Islamic groups and shows of their Islamic performance. Meanwhile, after getting their power and feeling safe, they will leave the Islamic group, and make them and the enemy. In the Indonesian case, such condition mostly happened in all regimes since the old order, a new order and post-reformation.

While being the first president of Indonesia, Soekarno started strengthening his power and built a closer relation to China by establishing the Jakarta Peking link. This relations even supported him to ban Masyumi as the most prominent Islamic party at that time. Moreover, he caught and prisoned some Islamic scholars such as Buya Hamka and M. Natsir. Even, in some cases, he had no strong reason to intimidate some of the Islamic leaders.

Such momentum used by Soeharto to get the support from Islamic groups indicating the strong influences of communism in Indonesian politics. Shortly, he got strong support from a majority group of Muslim to be a president of Indonesia replacing the position of Soekarno. He began his power by giving some specialisation to Muslim groups by allowing establishing PPP as an Islamic party and released the Islamic leaders prisoned by Soekarno. After a while obtaining his strong legitimacy Soeharto firmly communicated with the secular and military group starting to leave Islamic group. His effort to secularise Indonesia supported by the military and bureaucracy power at that time (Perwita, 2007).

Finally, any Suharto was overthrown by reformers in the year 1998. At that time, Amien Rais also used Islam as a tool to subvert the authoritarian rule of President Suharto. He argued that Islam is an anti-authoritarianism religion and supports the democratic system of government. Therefore, he invited the Muslim groups especially among the university students to struggle against Soeharto. In the end, by 1998, Indonesia has come to the Reformation era while Soeharto resigned from his power as Indonesian president.

This era was characterised by the emergence of freedom and sophisticated political reformation giving an opportunity towards various Muslim groups revivalist and Islamism to show up their existence. Moreover, such condition also followed by the flourishing of Islamic pop culture among the people in public places such as in the campus area. The reformation phase also has supported the bravery of people to study Islam openly and brought their Islamic symbol in life. Meanwhile, in academic and political life the debates of Islamic and secularism remain to influence the people with their notions and belief. Therefore, this paper will elaborate on how are the debates between Islamism and secularism in post-reformation Indonesia?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper is a qualitative kind of research used the literature reviews methods of data collecting. After the data have been compiled, the processes of reduction, displaying, verification and conclusion process were conducted. Moreover, in term of the strengthening, the analysing the concept of Islamism and secularism were used. Islamism means the belief and efforts to bring Islam guiding all social, political and personal life of the people (Berman, 2003). This Islamism has various other names such as Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic movements, political Islam, Islamic activism, Islamic revivalism and new religious politics (Bayat, 2005).

Meanwhile, the secularism is the condition of left the connectedness of religions and public affairs, especially in politics. However, the level and practice of secularism in different countries are not the same, but the majority explain the concept of secularism related to the neutrality of the state towards any particular religions. Therefore, the state should not be religious (An-Naim, 2008).

## **RESULTS**

As a consequence of long debates history between Islamism and secularism in Indonesia, some of the salient points need to be elaborated in post-reformation Indonesia can be explained as follows.

### **The Continuing Debates in Post Reformation Indonesia**

Post-reformation Indonesia is the era of democratisation where the competition among various ideologies, including Islamism and secularism has its field. For the Islamic groups, reformation is the opportunity to compete through the political system to bring the Islamic values within the society. On the other hand, the secular groups also believe that the democratic era of Indonesia politics should represent the modern values implemented in the western society.

Each of groups does believe by their position and hardly performs a win-win solution by negotiating the concept of Islamism and secularism with their opponent. Basically, since Independent to the Reformation era, most of the characteristics of Indonesian politics coloured by secularism, meanwhile the political cultures of people tend to force the government to consider the position of Islam. Unfortunately, most of the policies taken by the government were reactive to manipulate the demands of Islamic groups (Perwita, 2007).

After the Reformation, the existence of Islamism in Indonesian political emerged stronger. Such condition supported by the alliance made by Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama as two most prominent Islamic organisations, having two prominent leaders at that time, Amien Rais and Abdurrahman Wahid. This collaboration challenged the prevailing belief at that time that political Islam should not turn in Indonesian politics (Noor, 1999). After a while, this phenomenon followed by the emergence of some Islamic political movements in post-reformation Indonesia struggling for the Islamic interests.

In political affairs, some researches show that up to August 2015, at least there are 443 local rules relating to Islamic laws on different aspects of life, whether political, economic, educational, legal and so on. It describes the reality of the existence of desire and competition from Islamic leaders to confront the secularism that is reasonably supported by the various interests (Prajuli, 2017). In the era of democratic life, all groups race to showcase their ideologies. At least,

after the reformation Indonesia, the Islamic groups have more chances to compete for their Islamic values target.

Meanwhile, those Islamic groups are not united even tend to fight each other. Some of them are involving in democratic political circumstance, and the rests have a principle to reject the democracy. Those support the democracy also do not collaborate in one Islamic political parties, but some made alliances secular parties. Moreover, those against the democracy have quite a big spirit to follow the Islamic principles implemented in the era of Prophet Muhammad with lack of understanding on this current situation.

Such condition causes are not appropriate for the notion of Islamism in Indonesia. Moreover, the public opinion of the majority of people created by media has different position picturing the Islamism closely related to terrorism, anti-Pancasila and other negative images. The strength of these anti-Islamic groups is strong enough since they have the capital and international networks such as media. As a result, many people have misconceptions issue against Islamism because of the framework they built. They collaborate each other against Islamic for their interests because of the Islamism has emerged as a threat.

For the capitalist, their political and business interests will be hampered if Islamism is growing actively in Indonesia. The logic is that the Muslim population in this country are very prospective in term of market opportunity as they are the majority in the world consisted of more than 200 millions of people (Barton, 2006). If they perform Islamism optimally, for instance in term of economic, Islamic economic will undoubtedly emerge as one of the most robust powerful economic systems in the world. Such condition, perhaps also will be followed by the reformation of Islamic system in politics, social, and culture.

### **The Future Possibility**

Regarding the debates explained above, though Islamism has not been purely implemented in Indonesian politics, but the Islamism trend in Indonesia has been supported by the existence of Islamic organizations supporting for the Islamism and against the secularism, such as Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Laskar Jihad, Hizbut Tahrir and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) (Ichwan, 2003). Even some years ago, MUI (Islamic Scholars Board) of Indonesia had announced the statement (fatwa) to against the secularism (Lanti, 2006). Furthermore, there is also a tendency to reinterpret the meaning of Pancasila state as a concept compatible with Islam (Ichwan, 2012). It can be seen from the book of Adian Husaini explaining the similar principles of Islam and Pancasila. Therefore he argues that the debates on Islam and Pancasila should be ended.

Such discussion does not only concern on the domestic issues but also has influenced the Indonesian foreign policy giving Islam significant roles. For instance, in some of its policies, government tends to give attention towards the public opinion of Muslim people especially on its policy towards some sensitive issues in Islamic worlds, such as Palestinian conflict (Perwita, 2007).

Meanwhile, although the majority of the people are Muslim, Indonesia has a different characteristic of Saudi Arabia since Indonesia accepts secularism in its politics (Engineer, 2006). Something which needs to be understood is that the meaning of secularism here means that Indonesia is still accepted and respects religions, but it cannot accept the religions coming to its

political system. It is also the reason why the political system in Indonesia called as secular democracy system (Barton, 2010). Even, the previous research has already indicated the rise of secularism in Indonesia by the name of modernisation and westernisation (van der Kroef, 1953).

Therefore, the project to redefine the meaning of Islamism should be tackled well in Indonesia as a remarkable potential country. Regarding natural wealth either mine or agricultural, livestock and marine wealth, Indonesia seems without limit as well as, culturally, the nation can unify more than 490 ethnicities with nearly 90 per cent of the population is Muslim. However, the various potentials have not been well-managed since this potentially great country is facing serious issues as the following:

First, Indonesia has no economic independence. Meanwhile, it is clear that the economic dependency on other countries will affect the social life of politics and culture of the people. Because of this reality, various potential which should be well managed cannot be optimally utilised. This condition can be seen from the variety of products that should be produced, but in fact, it is precisely derived from the import result either in agriculture or animal husbandry. For instance, as one of the countries with the longest coastline in the world, Indonesia still becomes a salt importing country.

Furthermore, the development of Indonesia relied on much foreign debt and unproductively, sometimes for being corrupted. Based on some reports, 17 of the Governors (of 34 provinces) and 157 head of regency and mayor (from about 500 cities) is indicated have corruption cases. Therefore, the welfare of the people has not been able to be implemented. In this condition, Islam has a potency to perform its self as the solution for such problems.

Second, there is no real welfare and social equality for the whole people of Indonesia as mentioned in Pancasila. This condition can be understood because the concept of development in Indonesia is more influenced by the doctrine of liberalism supporting the concept of individualism. As a consequence, there is a considerable gap between the performance of macro and microeconomic indicating the social disparities within the society being bigger, while the rich are getting richer, but the poor are becoming poorer. This phenomenon also related to the education issue in Indonesia cannot create its product to get better jobs. The reality shows that the Indonesia education is more focus on the knowledge transfer and less concern on the building of strong mentality.

As well as this issue, if there is reformation on the understanding of Islam in Indonesia becoming more implemented, the meaning of Islamism will not be limited only on the eternal and statement but will able to emerge as an alternative of implementing the real social system obtaining the social equality and welfare.

Third, other severe issues in Indonesia is related to the lack of security feeling among the people since violence and conflict many times happened (Greenlees, 2011). Just because of the small issue, the people kill each other causing some social conflict. On the other hand, the law enforcement in Indonesia is quite low making some issues cannot be resolved fairly. The people look like living only by their efforts without any control and support from the government. By redefining its concept of Islamism, the Islamism in Indonesia will find its place and possibly to be implemented.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, we can realise that talking about the debates on the Islamism and secularism in Indonesian politics is not the simple issue since the process has emerged since independent era. Reformation period has given the opportunity for Islamism to show up and struggle to bring their vision, even though it is not easy. In this current time, introducing and bringing Islamism by the traditional way can be accepted quickly. Therefore, the possibility of Islam to take part at such circumstance is by redefining the concept of Islamism not only based on its symbol but also concern on the real substantial issues facing by the people coming from the various background at this current time.

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