

Evolving Dynamics of Civil Islam in Post-Reformation Indonesia: Balancing Democratic Aspirations and State Authority

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative examination of civil Islam's impact on democratization in Indonesia, with a specific focus on the Reformasi period. It investigates how Indonesia's distinct socio-political landscape shapes the role of civil Islam, setting it apart from Western models of civil society. Arguing that civil society is essential for democratic governance, the study underscores civil Islam's contribution to reinforcing democratic institutions and fostering political change rooted in justice, tolerance, and social rights. Using a qualitative case study approach, the analysis delves into civil Islamic movements as they intersect with Indonesia's democratization efforts, highlighting civil Islam's unique characteristics within its authentic context, distinct from Western civil society frameworks. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the specific influences shaping civil Islam's evolution and its contributions to democratization in Indonesia, illustrating how civil Islam serves as a counterbalance to state authority and elite influence. Unlike the largely secular and institutional forms of Western civil society, Indonesia's civil Islam integrates cultural and religious values, reflecting a community-oriented catalyst for democratic reform. However, civil Islam's role is nuanced, facing challenges such as the risk of political co-optation, which may hinder its reformative potential. The study emphasizes the need for a robust civil society that promotes civic engagement and public accountability, enabling civil Islam to maintain its crucial role in Indonesia's democratic framework and ensuring governance that resonates with the nation's collective aspirations.

Keywords

civil society, democratization, civil Islamic movements, public participation

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1. INTRODUCTION

The discourse surrounding civil society and democratization is grounded in several foundational assumptions. Central to this framework is the belief that civil society functions as a vital catalyst for fostering democratic governance. Furthermore, civil society is regarded as a crucial element in both the establishment and the preservation of democratic states and institutions. This context prompts a pivotal inquiry: Can Islam emerge as a transformative force toward political progressivism? At its core, every major religious tradition endorses principles of tolerance and the protection of civil rights (Barton, 2008).

In this scholarly context, the term "civil Islam" denotes a conception of Islam that actively



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participates in civil society to advance democratic values, social justice, and human rights. In contrast to more traditional or politically oriented interpretations, civil Islam emphasizes tolerance, equality, and the advocacy of civic rights within a democratic framework. Its objective is to positively influence political transformation by adhering to the principles of social progressivism and contesting authoritarianism. Civil Islam distinguishes itself from Western models of civil society by intertwining Islamic values with democratic aspirations. This synthesis empowers religious communities and organizations in Indonesia to assume proactive roles in political reform and societal well-being. This investigation explores whether Islam, as a component of civil society, can serve as a mechanism for democratization within Muslim-majority societies, with a particular focus on Indonesia. It considers how civil Islam can mediate state authority and advocate for a participatory model of governance that embodies both religious principles and civil rights.

The research underscores Indonesia's experiences with civil Islam, offering insights into the intersection of Islamic principles and democratic practices. This may potentially provide a framework for other Muslim-majority societies striving for democratic governance that reconciles religious beliefs with democratic ideals. The conceptualization of civil society varies markedly across different cultural and theoretical traditions. In the 1990s, the term "civil society" was frequently employed to describe a diverse range of entities, including religious organizations, human rights groups, and other collectives united by shared interests. During this period, a significant insight emerged, highlighting how formal democratic institutions could serve as platforms for these groups to voluntarily engage and integrate into a broader democratic framework.

De Tocqueville posited that intermediary associations are crucial for the vitality of any democracy. His admiration for America's success in cultivating effective democratic institutions—contrasted with France—stemmed from his observation that Americans adeptly nurtured a more advanced system through extensive citizen involvement in independent organizations (Sukanto, 2008). Thus, civil society must play an integral role in checking state power, particularly in instances where the state neglects public welfare. The interaction among autonomous, self-governing associations is essential for balancing state authority.

The notion of civil society has evolved, becoming intertwined with the development of political society, or "madani society," as part of the political contract theories advanced by thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes (Heffner, 2001: 51), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1964), and John Locke. Both Locke and Rousseau envisioned civil society as a mechanism for cultivating a more organized and civilized social order, akin to the perspectives of Cicero and Aristotle, whose conceptions of civil society highlighted the necessity of mutually agreed-upon laws and governance within a democratic framework. In its capacity as a regulator of political behavior, civil society must be endowed with adequate authority. Locke argued that democratic societies are tasked with the creation and preservation of freedom while, most crucially, safeguarding individual rights (Locke, 1997).

Leading social and political theorists Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau did not distinctly differentiate between civil society, political society, and the state, perceiving them instead as interconnected spheres of political power. For Locke, civil society was an extension of political society, playing a pivotal role in the formation of a democratic state. Conversely, Hegel viewed civil society as a product of the bourgeoisie, inextricably linked to capitalist production. This perspective is consistent with Karl Marx's view, which also characterized civil society as a reflection of bourgeois interests. However, Marx further contended that civil society must exert control over the government or state, ultimately positioning civil society as an essential component of the bourgeois class.

These intricate empirical insights provide a fertile ground for dialogue, particularly in the Indonesian context. Contemporary Indonesia has faced numerous challenges in addressing the aspirations and needs of its citizens. Despite its abundant natural resources, Indonesia, particularly its Muslim demographic, has yet to fully cultivate a robust civil society and democratic life comparable to smaller, resource-constrained nations such as Singapore. Within this framework, the state is perceived as an intrinsic component of civil society, wielding power through rationality and steering society toward the common good under the rule of law. However, Hegel asserted that civil society cannot operate independently and necessitates state intervention. He argued that the state must intervene for two principal reasons: to rectify societal injustices and to strategically confront challenges that could jeopardize the broader social order (Rahardjo, 2010).

This research contributes to the scholarly discourse on civil society and democratization by analyzing the specific roles and challenges encountered by civil Islam within Indonesia's socio-political landscape, building on the theoretical foundations established in the broader civil society discourse. The study investigates whether Islam, particularly civil Islam, can act as a catalyst for progressive political transformation, thereby contesting assumptions grounded in Western models of civil society. By engaging with established theorists such as de Tocqueville, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx, this research illuminates the complexities involved in defining civil society and its functions across various socio-political contexts. Tocqueville's assertion regarding the role of intermediary associations in fortifying democracy, coupled with Locke and Rousseau's emphasis on civil society as integral to democratic governance, lays the groundwork for analyzing civil Islam's potential to serve as a constructive counterbalance to state authority. Furthermore, the research highlights Marx and Hegel's insights into the relationship between civil society and state power, applying these concepts to the Indonesian experience, where civil Islam grapples with both the potential for democratizing influence and challenges posed by elite political interests and limited institutional autonomy.

In addressing a gap in the literature, this research examines how Indonesia's unique context—characterized by its substantial Muslim population, diverse cultural influences, and evolving democratic framework—modifies conventional civil society theories. Through this lens, it seeks to illuminate how civil Islam might contribute to a more participatory democratic order, offering a comparative perspective on the role of civil society that is relevant not only within Indonesia but also in broader discussions concerning Islam's relationship with democratic governance in other Muslim-majority countries.

2. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology with a specific emphasis on case studies. Utilizing this approach enables the researcher to conduct a thorough and nuanced examination of the dynamics surrounding democratization and civil Islamic movements in post-Reform Indonesia. The researcher will select one or more targeted cases, encompassing both individuals and groups, to investigate their interactions within a broader political and social framework (Maleong, 2002). To facilitate a comprehensive analysis, political research methodology will serve as the analytical framework, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the relationship between civil Islamic movements and the democratization process in Indonesia. The researcher will explore the dynamics of power, the role of Islamic organizations, and the influence of civil movements on public policy and democratic practices.

The data collected will undergo systematic processing and analysis to uncover patterns and

relationships between civil Islamic movements and the democratization process in Indonesia. Based on these findings, the researcher will draw informed conclusions and offer recommendations for further advancement in the study of civil movements and democracy. This approach aspires to contribute meaningfully to the scholarly understanding of civil Islamic movements within the context of democratization in Indonesia during the Reform era.

A diverse array of cases will be selected to represent different contexts, including urban and rural settings as well as various Islamic organizations, thereby capturing the multifaceted nature of civil Islamic movements. By employing systematic data processing and analysis, the researcher seeks to identify critical patterns and relationships that illuminate the interplay between civil Islamic movements and democratization in Indonesia. Ultimately, this analysis will yield valuable insights and recommendations for future development within the realm of civil movements and democratic studies, enhancing the overall comprehension of the complexities at work during the Reform era.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Civil Islam and Democratic Governance: A Philosophical and Practical Exploration of Islamic Values, State Authority, and Societal Engagement in Indonesia

The historical evolution of civil Islam in Indonesia is intricately intertwined with the nation's legal and cultural frameworks, characterized by fluid interpretations that underscore the interplay among politics, societal realities, and religion. A foundational aspect of this development is the concept of justice as articulated in the Qur'anic verse Al-Maidah (5:8), which highlights the ethical responsibilities of believers. This verse establishes a pivotal basis for institutionalizing Islam through legal and political mechanisms, notably the role of Islamic political parties that confront societal issues while adhering to Islamic principles.

Contemporary discourse reveals two primary perspectives on civil Islam, emphasizing its dynamic and evolving interpretations regarding the interplay between politics, society, and Islam. Central to this notion is the institutional realization of Islam through juridical mechanisms, with Islamic political parties tasked with addressing issues of justice and maintaining adherence to Islamic principles. The endeavor to create a significant connection between Islam as both a doctrinal framework and a broader civilization entails engaging with its ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Within this context, Islam positions itself as inherently open, advocating for justice, tolerance, unity, and integrity—values that should guide national governance rather than narrowly focusing on establishing an Islamic state (Taufik Abdullah, 1999).

Philosophically, civil Islam has been conceptualized as a means to scrutinize and critique state-imposed regulations. Effective policy implementation must be accompanied by adherence and commitment, ensuring that civil Islam transcends mere theoretical discourse and is practically and functionally realized. Thus, civil Islam is crucial for facilitating meaningful engagement in both societal and state-building endeavors. It serves as an instrumental force in enhancing democratic life by counterbalancing state authority and mediating interactions between the state and society, thereby ensuring that governance aligns with the common good.

However, contemporary challenges to civil Islam in Indonesia involve navigating the complexities of state influence while ensuring that civil society effectively checks state power. The discourse surrounding civil Islam, as articulated by scholars such as Heffner, underscores the state's significant role in shaping societal life through legal frameworks. While civil Islam must uphold democratic values, it also functions as a counterweight against state policies that may compromise

justice or undermine the democratic fabric of the nation.

The Indonesian conception of a *madani* society diverges markedly from traditional Western models of civil society, emphasizing a democratic socio-political system that safeguards individual and collective civil rights while promoting autonomy. This divergence reflects Indonesia's unique historical and cultural context, which has shaped the evolution of civil Islam from its colonial roots to its present form. Organizations that emerged during the colonial period played a vital role as checks against oppressive governance, thus laying the groundwork for contemporary civil society movements.

Furthermore, the discourse on civil Islam, as highlighted by Heffner, points to the state's considerable influence in shaping societal norms through established legal frameworks. Compliance with these frameworks fosters the development of a principled and civilized society. Nonetheless, civil Islam must also act as a counterbalance when state policies contribute to injustice or undermine democratic principles.

Unchecked state power, absent the balancing influence of civil society or civil Islam, risks leading to its own decline. Therefore, civil Islam must be substantively realized in both conceptual and practical terms, affirming its relevance in a grounded socio-political context. The success of civil Islam may inspire further scholarly inquiry as a potential model for fostering a more intelligent and progressive civil society, particularly in Indonesia, which aspires to solidify its status among the world's most democratic nations (Hikam, 2000).

Heffner (2018) posits that civil Islam did not arise as a predetermined concept but rather emerged in response to cultural and institutional shifts, reflecting humanity's capacity for positive change in addressing societal challenges. In Indonesia, civil society and civil Islam align with the broader notion of civil society that gained prominence during the early stages of the Reformasi period. Influential figures such as BJ Habibie, Gus Dur, Amien Rais, Syafi'i Ma'arif, and Cak Nur were instrumental in guiding Indonesia's transition from authoritarianism to a more open and democratic state, with an emphasis on social justice.

The historical roots of civil society in Indonesia trace back to the Dutch colonial era, where diverse groups—such as farmers, workers, and youth organizations—resisted colonial oppression and played crucial roles in early nationalist movements, advocating for political freedom and improved labor conditions. Even seventy-eight years after Indonesia's independence, civil society continues to articulate itself through various social movements, including symbolic acts of resistance against excessive state control. This resistance manifests through essays, public forums, and critical examinations of governmental policies, with pragmatic forms of resistance also emerging in response to government decisions, engaging political parties and civil society organizations.

The relationship between civil Islam and the state in Indonesia reflects a mutualistic symbiosis, with each entity complementing the other in addressing societal needs. However, achieving this balance necessitates time and collaborative efforts between government and civil society to realize the ideals of civil Islam, ensuring harmony between governance and Islamic values. For this reason, the principles of civil Islam must be articulated and implemented in parallel, fostering a comprehensive understanding across society. The dissemination of Islamic values within the socio-political framework is critical, utilizing media and public platforms effectively. Furthermore, it is essential to persuade the public that civil Islam embodies an ideal societal model, promoting mutual trust and collective advancement.

In contemporary Indonesia, civil Islam continues to grapple with issues of autonomy, governance, and the mobilization of civic potential. As the nation strives to balance state authority with

civil society initiatives, the principles of civil Islam must be articulated and implemented in a manner that fosters understanding and trust among the populace. Engaging the public through media and platforms that promote Islamic values is vital for cultivating a cohesive vision of civil Islam as a model for societal progress.

Islamic Political Movements and Civil Islam in Indonesia: Historical Evolution, State Relations, and Democratic Governance from the New Order to the Reformasi Era

The significant role of Indonesian Muslims in securing national independence and their unwavering support for democratic principles has created elevated expectations for Suharto's administration. Hefner asserts that Suharto's regime was initially viewed as a potential opportunity to restore Islam to its rightful position within the political landscape. However, Islamic political movements seeking to articulate their aspirations through Suharto's government encountered formidable challenges and harsh realities. The New Order regime prioritized its own political objectives, focusing on consolidating power and establishing dominance. Hefner observed that Suharto's political strategy involved not only the control but also the suppression of political Islam while simultaneously nurturing spiritual Islam.

The political parties that emerged during Indonesia's Reformasi era have played a crucial role in shaping the evolution of civil Islam and the democratization process within the country. The context of the Reformasi movement saw Indonesian Muslims, who had historically been pivotal in the nation's quest for independence and consistently championed democratic ideals, striving for effective political representation that aligned with their values.

Historically, Islam has served as a robust source of political legitimacy, symbolizing justice and the pursuit of the common good. In Indonesia, the relationship between Islam and politics has often been mutually supportive and deeply intertwined. Cak Nur (Madjid, 2007) emphasized Islam's inherent compatibility with human nature (*fitrah*), as it addresses the spiritual, legal, and social needs of both individuals and communities (Hadiz & Robison, 2013). As both a doctrine and a civilization, Islam's impact on political systems is profound. From the migration of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to Medina, Islam has influenced governance models that persist today in countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This enduring interplay between Islam and politics has fostered the rise of political Islam, where faith becomes central to political struggles. Conversely, adversarial relations between Islam and the state have often catalyzed the development of more culturally accommodating forms of Islamic political engagement.

In Indonesia, the relationship between Islam and the state has undergone fluctuations, shaped by the broader sociopolitical context. Nonetheless, Islamic teachings have consistently demonstrated adaptability to varying circumstances, as encapsulated in the principle "Islam is suitable for all times and places" (*shalih likulli zaman wa al-makan*). Ibn Taimiyah, as cited by A. Syafi'i Ma'arif, emphasized that the Prophet's mission was primarily to convey divine revelations, rather than to serve as a political ruler. Within the Islamic paradigm, governance is viewed as a mechanism for advancing the faith, with political authority serving as a tool for upholding Islamic principles (Ma'arif, 1985).

In Indonesia, the relationship between religion and state has long been perceived as mutually reinforcing. The state is regarded as a key institution for preserving and promoting religion, while religion provides the moral, ethical, and spiritual foundation for governance (Madjid, 2019). As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia has strategically positioned Islamic movements

within both local and national contexts. However, the role of Islam in Indonesian politics has been neither consistent nor linear. As the Old Order regime collapsed, Islamic groups faced a choice: to either collaborate with the regime or oppose it. Ultimately, these groups united to address the failures of the Old Order (Azra, 1999).

A similar dynamic emerged during Suharto's New Order. In its early years, Islamic groups played a crucial role in scrutinizing government policies, but by the regime's conclusion, Islam had evolved into a balancing force. Through non-political Islamic organizations, civil Islam helped counteract state hegemony, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. These organizations employed persuasive strategies to fill the void created by monopolistic power structures. The resurgence of Islamic political movements following the Reformasi era was not a spontaneous occurrence; rather, it was the culmination of a lengthy and intricate process influenced by global, regional, and national factors. As a majority religion, Islam and its associated organizations played a vital role in mobilizing the masses against the New Order's three-decade rule (Zarkasyi, 2008). The Islamic resurgence during the Reformasi era illustrates Islam's dual role as a moral compass and a unifying force, advocating for human equality and a shared destiny. This resurgence encompasses not only religious practices but also political leadership and state governance, demonstrating the comprehensive nature of Islam's role in public life.

The restrictions imposed by the New Order on Islamic expression sparked a revival of societal engagement among Indonesian Muslims. John L. Esposito (1987), in "The Dynamics of Islamic Resurgence," described this revival as a reassertion of Islam's socio-political role aimed at establishing a more just and Islamic society. Chandra Muzaffar attributes this resurgence to the disillusionment with Western-dominated ideologies, such as socialism and capitalism, which failed to deliver on their promises of social justice. This disillusionment led to calls for Islam to assume a more significant role in governance and politics.

As Islamic movements evolved, the belief that ideology strengthens Islamic political thought became firmly entrenched. Ideological Islamic movements began to flourish, mirroring the rise of groups like Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Indonesia's own movements, such as Masyumi and Sarekat Islam, during the early years of independence. This perspective, which views Islam as both a religion and an ideology, underscores its connection to all facets of life—social, economic, and political—creating an integrated approach to state governance (Ramage, 1995). In the context of democracy and reform, Indonesia's Islamic movements have played a pivotal role, as evidenced by the emergence of Islamic political parties during the Reformasi era. These parties, although ideologically diverse, consistently invoke Islamic symbols and narratives to resonate with the public. Some explicitly base their platforms on Islamic principles, while others—led by figures from Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Mathlaul Anwar—maintain a strong Islamic identity despite not formally adopting it as an ideological foundation.

The Reformasi era has seen the rise of various political parties representing a wide spectrum of Islamic perspectives. Despite their ideological differences, these parties frequently utilize Islamic symbolism, underscoring that Islam remains a central theme in Indonesian political discourse. The complex lessons from Indonesia's political history highlight the importance of open dialogue in addressing contemporary challenges. As Indonesia continues to navigate its sociopolitical landscape, civil Islam and civil society will remain crucial in balancing governance with public aspirations.

Civil Islam is a fundamental element of state and societal development. It contributes positively to democracy and public life by acting as a counterbalance to state power and bridging the gap between government and society. To strengthen civil Islam in Indonesia, it is essential to identify and address

the significant societal challenges confronting civil society. Moreover, civil Islam must leverage the nation's potential, aligning the strengths of the Indonesian people with the country's capabilities. Reorienting civil Islam is critical in this context, requiring it to evolve beyond outdated and conservative models to promote self-reliance and empower civil society. Several key elements are essential for building a vibrant civil society: autonomy, access to governmental institutions, and an open public sphere. As a balancing force in governance, civil society's political engagement is vital to ensuring that policies reflect public aspirations.

Each ruling regime, including President Jokowi's decade-long administration, faces the risk of co-optation by political elites and oligarchs seeking to monopolize power. Thus, civil society, including civil Islam, must remain vigilant and active in safeguarding democratic governance and resisting undue political dominance. To address the challenges posed by the political parties that emerged during Indonesia's Reformasi era, a legal solution must concentrate on fostering inclusive political representation, protecting civil Islam, and enhancing the democratic process. (Asrinaldi, 2022) This entails creating a transparent and equitable process for the registration of political parties, emphasizing the importance of accommodating diverse ideologies, including those aligned with civil Islam. Additionally, it is crucial to grant legal recognition to civil society organizations that promote civil Islam and democratic engagement, facilitating their access to necessary funding and resources for their activities. Furthermore, establishing legal frameworks that mandate regular consultations between the government and representatives of Islamic organizations would facilitate discussions on policies affecting civil Islam, ensuring that their voices are adequately represented in the political arena. By implementing these legal solutions, Indonesia can cultivate an environment where civil Islam and democratic governance can coexist and thrive, ultimately enhancing political representation and participation for Indonesian Muslims.

4. CONCLUSION

The discourse on civil Islam in Indonesia emphasizes its evolving interpretation and significance as a counterbalance to state authority, particularly in the context of democratic governance. Grounded in Islamic principles, civil Islam encompasses legal, ethical, and moral dimensions, as exemplified in the Qur'anic call for justice. The concept has historically influenced Indonesian society and governance, with a rich tradition of civil engagement that dates back to colonial resistance movements. Civil Islam must be effectively institutionalized through political mechanisms, such as Islamic parties, to ensure alignment with societal aspirations and the common good. Its role extends beyond mere critique of state policies to actively participating in state-building processes, enhancing democratic life, and fostering social justice. The historical relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia has been characterized by mutual reinforcement, yet challenges persist, necessitating a vigilant civil society to counterbalance state power.

The emergence of civil Islam as a key player in Indonesia's socio-political landscape highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and adaptation. As the nation navigates contemporary challenges, civil Islam's relevance remains crucial in promoting democratic values, ensuring individual and collective civil rights, and aligning governance with the ethical and moral foundations of Islam. The continued strengthening of civil Islam is vital for fostering an intelligent and progressive civil society in Indonesia, ensuring that it remains responsive to the aspirations of its people while safeguarding against the pitfalls of unchecked state power.

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