

## ***Hijab* and the Hegemony of Piety: Politization of Women's Identity in Indonesia \***

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### **Abstract**

The imposition of mandatory hijab in Indonesia is a growing concern that highlights tensions between religious expression and women's rights. Despite Indonesia's pluralistic ideas, the enforcement of hijab, for example in schools or public institutions, continues to affect women and girls, reflecting a broader struggle over religious authority and national identity. This study employs a qualitative approach through case studies of several incidents where women were compelled to wear the *hijab*. Data collection involved document analysis and media review to understand the socio-political and historical dynamics shaping *hijab* enforcement. Findings show that *hijab* enforcement persists in various public institutions, including schools, where women are pressured to conform to dress codes based on certain Islamic interpretations. This reflects the hegemonic entanglement of religion and politics in regulating women's bodies. We identify diverse discourses within the Muslim community regarding the necessity of *hijab*, revealing internal contestation over religious interpretation. Moreover, the politicization of *hijab* is deeply rooted in Indonesia's historical trajectory, including noninclusive education. These findings call for a critical repositioning of the *hijab* discourse in Indonesia, grounded in democratic values, gender equity, and religious inclusivity.

Pemberlakuan kewajiban mengenakan *jilbab* di Indonesia merupakan masalah yang terus berkembang yang menyoroti ketegangan antara ekspresi keagamaan dan hak-hak perempuan. Meskipun Indonesia memiliki gagasan pluralistik, praktik kewajiban *jilbab*, terutama di sekolah atau institusi publik, masih terjadi dan berdampak pada perempuan dewasa dan remaja. Hal ini mencerminkan perebutan antara otoritas keagamaan dan identitas nasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kasus beberapa peristiwa ketika perempuan dipaksa mengenakan *jilbab*. Pengumpulan data yakni dengan analisis dokumen dan telaah media untuk mengungkap dinamika sosial-politik dan historis yang melatarbelakangi kewajiban *jilbab* tersebut. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa praktik kewajiban *jilbab* masih berlangsung di berbagai institusi publik, terutama di lingkungan pendidikan, di mana perempuan didorong untuk mematuhi aturan berpakaian berdasarkan interpretasi Islam tertentu. Hal tersebut mencerminkan keterikatan hegemonik agama dan politik dalam mengatur tubuh perempuan. Studi ini juga menemukan adanya keragaman diskursus di kalangan Muslim Indonesia terkait kewajiban berhijab, yang mencerminkan perdebatan internal dalam menafsirkan ajaran agama. Selain itu, politisasi *jilbab* berkaitan erat dengan dinamika sejarah politik Indonesia, termasuk pendidikan yang tidak inklusif. Temuan-temuan ini menyerukan reposisi kritis wacana *jilbab* di Indonesia, yang didasarkan pada nilai-nilai demokrasi, kesetaraan gender, dan inklusivitas agama.

**Keywords:** hegemony; *hijab*; religious politics; women's identity; veil

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## Introduction

The mandatory imposition of the *hijab* in various public spaces in Indonesia reflects a hegemonic enforcement of identity on women. Local authorities have enforced numerous mandatory *hijab* regulations since 2001, compelling millions of women and girls to wear it in schools and government offices (Human Rights Watch 2024). Such practices constitute a violation of women's rights, particularly their freedom of expression and bodily autonomy (Swaragita 2021). Whether Muslim or non-Muslim, women possess the right to define their own identities without coercion or conformity to dominant norms (Ibrahim 2022). Forcing women to appear in a manner that aligns with a specific religious or cultural identity is a form of hegemonic control that dismisses individual agency and diversity (Burhani 2021). Politics and religion intersect in this regulation, with Islamic clothing standards seen as symbols of piety (Oktafiana 2022). However, within Islam, there are a variety of interpretations of the practice of wearing the *hijab*, many of which emphasize choice rather than compulsion (Susanti, Anom, and Iswadi 2023). Therefore, it is urgently needed to critically examine how *hijab* discourse is constructed, politicized, and enforced within Indonesia's democratic and pluralistic society.

*Hijab* is interpreted in diverse ways, ranging from a symbol of personal piety and a marker of religious identity. In Islam, the *hijab* serves as a social and moral regulator that safeguards a woman's chastity and dignity, demonstrating adherence to Qur'anic directives and embodying personal piety (*taqwa*) (Yunianti 2022). While the *hijab* was originally a religious obligation, it has since evolved into a cultural symbol and identity dimension, influenced by both religious

teachings and modern social practices (Mizel 2019). However, imposition of *hijab* in Indonesia has become a controversial issue, particularly in schools. High-profile cases, such as the 2021 incident at Padang 2 State Vocational High School, where a Christian student was pressured to wear a *hijab*, and the 2022 case in Bantul, Yogyakarta, where a Muslim student was forced by a student counselor, igniting national debates on religious freedom (CNN Indonesia 2022; Kompas TV 2021). These incidents reflect a broader trend in post-New Order Indonesia, where local regulations have mandated the wearing of the *hijab* for millions of girls and women. Over 120 local regulations since 2001 have imposed sanctions like expulsion or jail time for non-compliance (Human Rights Watch 2024).

While the Indonesian government has issued decrees prohibiting forced *hijab* wearing in schools, such as the 2021 Joint Decision Letter (SKB), which emphasizes that forced *hijab* imposition contradicts religious principles and fosters intolerance (Iqbal 2021), regions like Aceh, with special autonomy to enforce Sharia law, continue to permit such practices. This disconnects between state regulation and embedded societal beliefs highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing legal protections with entrenched cultural practices.

Scholars have noted this phenomenon is deeply intertwined with constructions of Muslim womanhood and how it shapes women's identity. Public discourse often frames the *hijab* as a personal religious choice and a societal expectation, creating tensions between individual freedom and hegemonic norms that define acceptable femininity. The growing visibility of the *hijab* is linked to the rise of Islamic conservatism, which promotes a specific

ideal of female modesty, often marginalizing those who do not conform (Bhaskara 2018; Setiawan 2022). Scholars argue that the *hijab* is not just a personal symbol, but also a tool for reinforcing hegemonic gender norms that shape women's social roles and identities in Indonesia (Jones-Gailani 2019; Shin, Lew, and Seo 2024). While some Muslim women view the *hijab* as a symbol of piety, modesty, or fashion, their perspectives are shaped by complex negotiations within diverse religious interpretations and social influences (Jones-Gailani 2019; Topal 2017). These evolving subjectivities, however, must remain free from politicized interventions that seek to define women's identities in rigid, hegemonic terms.

In addition, religious politics also play a significant role in *hijab* imposition in Indonesia, where the Islamization trend, driven by political actors, influences public and educational institutions. Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf argues that *hijab* imposition is motivated by the desire of state and community actors to define public space through religious norms (Bhaskara 2018), linking religious identity with social belonging. Similarly, Hasani and Halili (2022) connects the rise of *hijab* imposition to the government's failure to implement inclusive education policies. These hegemonic pressures limit women's agency, as their choices regarding the *hijab* become markers of religious and social belonging or exclusion. A woman's decision to wear the *hijab* is influenced by her social, cultural, and political context. In Indonesia, these choices are shaped not only by personal and cultural values but also by political conditions and historical narratives (Suhendi and Wahyudi 2023). Karaman and Christian (2022) note that the *hijab* is often politicized, complicating its perception as a personal choice. This challenge is

not unique to Indonesia; women globally face similar societal and political pressures regarding the *hijab*. Women risk losing their agency when unable to freely decide what to wear (Kadir 2024). According to Wagner et al (2012), the decision to wear the *hijab* involves exercising agency, but is shaped by external pressures, making it more complex than a simple personal choice.

Despite the growing body of literature on the *hijab* and Islamic identity, there remains a significant gap in studies that explicitly frames *hijab* enforcement as a form of hegemonic power in democratic Indonesia. Much of the existing research either examines *hijab* as a personal religious expression or focuses on state-religion relations in general. What is frequently missing is a critical examination of how particular Islamic interpretations gain dominance and become normalized through institutional mechanisms such as schools, while marginalizing alternative voices. This study addresses that gap by applying political theories, such as Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Chantal Mouffe's agonistic democracy, to analyze *hijab* enforcement as a religious practice and a strategic assertion of ideological control in public institutions. In addition to the explanation of the diverse interpretation of *hijab*, we use the perspectives of several Islamic scholars, such as Quraish Shihab and Fatima Mernissi, to determine the position of the *jilbab* in the study of Islamic interpretations and the sociopolitical context of the *jilbab* as they pertain to women who wear the *jilbab*. By focusing on the intersection of women's identity, institutional coercion, and religious politics, this research offers a novel contribution to the literature. It situates *hijab* imposition within broader power dynamics in Indonesia's democratic context, thereby extending beyond descriptive accounts

to critically interrogate how religious norms are mobilized to assert control and suppress dissent.

This study employs a case study narrative approach, a qualitative research design focused on the detailed and intensive analysis of specific cases to understand complex social phenomena in depth (Priya 2021). Case study narratives allow for rich, contextualized insights by examining multiple sources of data, including historical literature, documented incidents, and stakeholder perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the hegemonic imposition of the mandatory *hijab* in Indonesia. This approach aligns with qualitative methods focusing on depth over broadness, emphasizing the interpretation of textual and contextual information drawn from diverse narratives (Bryman 2004).

Data collection involves systematic document analysis, drawing from various sources including news media, academic journals, books, government regulations, and public statements by key stakeholders. These materials provide insight into the historical, political, and cultural dimensions of *hijab* regulation, in Indonesia and abroad, as well as the voices and counter-narratives of those affected by or resisting it. Analysis is conducted through thematic interpretation, identifying patterns, tensions, and shifts in discourse across the data. Attention is given to how narratives of modesty, morality, authority, and resistance are constructed and contested within different sociopolitical contexts. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the gendered implications of *hijab* enforcement and the possibilities for reframing the discourse toward greater justice and inclusivity (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015).

The analysis is conducted by integrating data from literature on *hijab* regulations, reported

cases involving both Muslim and non-Muslim women, and varied stakeholder opinions on the politicization and Islamization processes. Narrative analysis facilitates the exploration of how these stories construct meaning and reflect broader social and political dynamics, employing coding and thematic categorization to interpret complex qualitative data (Bryman 2004). This method allows the study to critically engage with the intersection of religion, gender, and politics through the lived experiences and discourses of those affected.

To explore this issue, seeks to critically investigate the imposition of mandatory *hijab* as a hegemonic practice that restricts women's agency and undermines democratic values in Indonesia. Specifically, the study aims to examine several questions: 1) How do diverse Islamic interpretations of the *hijab* and their socio-political impacts affect women's autonomy? 2) How has the political trajectory of regulating women through religious authority unfolded, particularly about the interactions between the state and societal actors? 3) What framework can be developed to reposition the discourse on the *hijab* in a way that supports women's identity and autonomy in a democratic society? Finally, this study argues that the imposition of the *hijab* in Indonesia is less a matter of fulfilling religious obligations and more a means for certain groups to assert ideological control. This practice poses serious challenges to the inclusivity and sustainability of democratic values, while also constraining the identity and autonomy of Indonesian Muslim women.

### **The Varieties of *Hijab* Discourse**

In the West, the *hijab* is perceived as a sign of the oppression of Muslim women and a symbol of fundamentalist Islam (Casanova 2009). The

*hijab* discourse in Western society is contextually ambivalent in its analyses and interpretations. The dichotomy between “oppression” and “freedom” has become the default in interpreting the *hijab* in Western Muslim society (Yulikhah 2017). In the context of political influence, especially in Western countries where Muslims are the minority and mostly have immigrant status, this dichotomy practically signifies demarcations of nationalism, modernity, Islam, and secularism (Najmabadi 2006). The debate on the *hijab* issues occurs not only in Western countries but also in Muslim countries, often centered more around the discourse of oppression or modernization rather than about allegiances (Abdurraqib 2006). Furthermore, the emergence of Muslim feminists indicates an attempt to reconstruct the definition of the *hijab*, Muslim women’s views on freedom and oppression, and their role in society in general.

In the discussion regarding the study of the interpretation of the Qur’an and contemporary Islam, Quraish Shihab believes the *hijab* cannot be fully determined as obligatory clothes because Muslim scholars have been debating the position of the *hijab* even to date (Shihab 2004). By using the *tarjih* approach and the *‘ill at al-hukm* approach, as well as the *istihsan bi al-‘urf* method, Shihab proposes that there is no standard approach for determining the boundaries of the *hijab* for Muslim women (Thohari 2011). The hadiths (the Prophet’s statements) addressing the *hijab* are derived from diverse readings of the al-Qur’an; hence, the position of the *hijab* becomes uncertain. Shihab’s critical hermeneutics research has led him to conclude that wearing a *hijab* is not an absolute religious mandate (Thohari 2011). In the absence of explicit passages, it cannot be considered Sharia.

In the context of the Middle Eastern region, the purpose of the *hijab* is to mask dust in the desert environment. Therefore, the *hijab* is a culturally significant item of clothing. The Islamic religion then borrowed and adopted the *hijab* (Hitti 2005), becoming more prominent as Muslim women’s apparel. Its first function was straightforward: to hide the bareness of Muslim women. The ideology of male superiority or patriarchy gradually infiltrated this idea of covering up. The *hijab* is frequently associated as a symbol of constraint and control over a woman’s body, implemented to pre-empt a source of conflict (Rohmaniyah 2021). Then, the concept of confining women to the domestic world emerged so that they would not pose a threat in the public domain. Fatima Mernissi challenged the interpretations of the *hijab* as a way of patriarchal dominance, arguing that the objective of institutionalizing patriarchy is no less than scripture manipulation (Mernissi 1996). According to Islamic teachings, men and women are equal before Allah (Mernissi 1998). Hence, discrimination against women in the name of the sacred book cannot be justified.

According to Asma Lamrabet (2019), the *hijab* continues to play an essential part in the hearts of Muslim women in the modern era. Thus, the debate about the *hijab* continues. Western feminist colonization is one of the primary opponents of the imposition of *hijab* among modern Muslim women. Yeğenoğlu stated that Western feminists believe Muslim women will achieve independence if they remove their *hijab* (Yeğenoğlu 2002). Only a woman refusing to wear a *hijab* can be considered a subject of, in the contemporary sense, enlightenment. Therefore, feminists require Muslim women to determine their autonomy by removing their *hijab*. Yeğenoğlu rejects the application of Eastern norms to a

Western feminist perspective. Muslim women believe that wearing the *hijab* is for their own sake (Yeğenoğlu 2002). Therefore, the concept of freedom is different from Western feminism. Yeğenoğlu associated the *hijab* with authority, spirituality, and ethics. It is a sign of Muslim women's faith. Yeğenoğlu defended the choice of wearing and not wearing the *hijab*, detaching it from the typical subjectification of modernity. The choice of veiling remains a free choice in the spiritual nuances of Islam.

In her book "American Muslims: The New Generation," Asma Gull Hasan details the lives of Muslim women in the US. Hasan stated that after 9/11, secularism compelled Muslim women to abandon the *hijab* (Hasan 2001). When a Muslim woman wearing a *hijab* appears in public, suspicious glances will be cast in her direction. However, for other Muslims, particularly orthodox Muslims, the desire to wear the *hijab* is even stronger. They use a religious 'sign' as a shield against public values that attack the existence of Muslims. As a Muslim woman living in a predominantly Christian country like the US, Hasan's alternative stance is that wearing a *hijab* is a matter of personal choice. She firmly stated,

"The main point of *hijab* is to preserve modesty as requested of both men and women in the Qur'an. But I don't wear *hijab* myself because I don't think God is asking me to. In the Prophet Muhammad's time, only his wives wore *hijab*, and, after his death, upper-class women wore *hijab*, attempting to emulate the status of the Prophet's wives. I know that to be accepted within conservative Muslim circles you must wear *hijab*. But like Westerners, some Muslims focus entirely too much on what's on a woman's head rather than what is inside it." (Hasan 2001).

Hasan's view further emphasizes that the meaning of the *hijab* has changed in the internal upheaval of Muslim women in this millennium. The diversity of understanding makes the *hijab*

have the position of, borrowing Jacques Derrida's term, *différance*. As the basis for deconstruction, *différance* refers to the fact that meaning cannot be fixed or static but is constantly evolving. It arises from the constant negotiation process between competing concepts (Bennington 1993). In other words, the deconstruction of the *hijab* renders it an interpretable sign. There is no single definition of *hijab*, so the word *hijab* is open to interpretation to describe the meaning of covering up for women, including among Muslim women.

The *hijab* is both a signifier and is always contextual. The surrounding circumstances always govern the placement of the *hijab*. During the ancient Arab period, early Muslims transformed the *hijab* into Islamic religious clothing. Behind the veil is a religious and societal concept. However, the meaning of *hijab* has changed over time, from ancient times to the present day, according to the context. As Gull Hasan notes, not all Muslims view the *hijab* as Islamic clothing. According to Yeğenoğlu, Sabba Mahmoud, and Fatima Mernissi, the *hijab* may even become an instrument of patriarchal ideology to subjugate women. Similarly, in Indonesia, women have their distinct deconstruction of the *hijab*. Thus, the idea of the *hijab* in the context of democracy in Indonesia must be examined and analyzed further.

### **The Roots of Imposing Mandatory *Hijab* in the Indonesia's Reformation Era: Fundamentalism vs Freedom**

In the last two decades, Muslim women in Indonesia increasingly wear *hijabs*, also known as *jilbab* or *kerudung* (headscarf). Generally, it is understood as a piece of fabric covering the head. Regarding the interpretation, Islamic scholars still debate the meaning and limits of the *hijab* as women's clothing items (Shihab 2004). However,

in daily life, many Indonesian women wear the *hijab* as a head covering, which does not include the definition of clothes because their styles may vary. The reasons for wearing the *hijab* are different, despite most scholars agreeing that the *hijab* is obligatory for Muslim women.

Before the *hijab* became a ubiquitous garment among Indonesian Muslim women, when Indonesia was under the New Order dictatorship, the *hijab* was rarely seen. Only a few Indonesians, namely the *kyai* and *santri*, were familiar with the *hijab*. Its use was marginal and limited (Leiliyanti, Kurniati, and Nannita 2020). Then, as the *hijab* entered the public sphere, a controversy erupted. Women wearing the *hijab* were often suspected as members of militant groups. Wearing the *hijab* in public places such as schools was prohibited (Umar 2021). However, there was a significant shift at the beginning of the Reformation Era, in which more and more women wore the *hijab*. A study conducted by Nancy Hefner at a state university in Yogyakarta shows a drastic increase in the use of the *hijab* by female students, initially at 3% in the 1970s to 60% in 1999-2002 (Smith-Hefner 2019).

Moreover, based on her ethnographic research in Jogjakarta, Nancy Hefner asserted that numerous public education institutions, such as Gadjah Mada University and Jogjakarta State Islamic University, require Muslim women to wear the *hijab*. The two reasons are to indicate piety and an Islamic identity (Smith-Hefner 2007). Even though the *hijab* started to become a trend among Muslim women after the Suharto Era, wearing the *hijab* is still controlled by militant Muslim men. Hefner noted that women who wear the *hijab* must maintain their behaviors and actions, remain modest, and avoid free associations. Their misconduct can besmirch the name of the *hijab* (Smith-Hefner 2007). In

other words, the *hijab* is a measure of piety as well as a limitation on women's behavior in religious and social life.

After the fall of Suharto's dictatorship, wearing the *hijab* in public in Indonesia became increasingly widespread. One of the factors that drove the rise of the *hijab* movement is Muslim women's activism, which aims to gain freedom from discriminatory actions (Candraningrum 2013). During this period, women wearing the *hijab* were subjected to discrimination and restrictions. Therefore, the shift that led Muslim women to wear the *hijab* was inseparable from historical dynamics. The *hijab* was first worn by a few Indonesian Muslim women in the 1980s (Meyrasyawati 2022). At that time, the *hijab* was not widely accepted. During the New Order era, the *hijab* was even banned. Muslim women who insisted on wearing the *hijab* were being treated unjustly. Their access to education and the workforce was limited (Umar 2021). There were regulations in schools that prohibited the use of religious attributes, including the *hijab* for Muslim women. Some jobs did not accept women who wore the *hijab*, so they had fewer opportunities to find work. The government in Soeharto's regime banned the *hijab* with the justification that it might indicate the growth of the *Tarbiyah* group from Iran, including schools. By forcing citizens to remove their headscarves (McCarthy and Menager 2017), the authoritarian government ensured that no Indonesian citizens embraced and spread *Tarbiyah* in public spaces (Umar 2021). Therefore, the struggle of Muslim women at that time was to be able to wear the *hijab* and exercise other rights without any restrictions due to their *hijab*.

### Shifts in *Hijab* Governance and Function

Nowadays, number of Muslim women in Indonesia who do not wear *hijabs* may be fewer

than those who wear the *hijab*. This is inseparable from the influence of social media, which seems to mainstream the *hijab* as identical to Muslim women (Purwaningwulan et al. 2019). Ironically, as the modern day has become more democratic, a new polemic arises, namely the imposition of mandatory *hijab* on Muslim and even non-Muslim women. The *hijab* started to gain popularity after the Reformation Era, and many more Muslim women began to wear it. According to the regulations in Indonesia, no nomenclature requires explicitly Muslim women to wear the *hijab* (Leiliyanti et al. 2020). Promoting the *hijab* as a requirement for Muslim women is then governed by a regional law called a Sharia regional regulation (Simorangkir and Pamungkas 2018) (Candraningrum 2007). These Sharia regulations are only enforced in a few areas, such as Aceh Province.

The application of this Sharia regional regulation only applies at the local level, but certain Islamic organizations with covert Islamization weaponize this regulation. Legally, the imposition of Sharia has no apparent urgency and could be interpreted as establishing political power in Indonesia through Islamic revivalism (Jati 2013). The regional regulation governs various facets of life, including family law, the business sector, the observance of religious rituals, and the requirements for women to wear the *hijab*.

Meilani and Fatmawati examined how the Padang City Government enforces the headscarf policy on both Muslim and non-Muslim students, exercising its authority to embed Islamic identity within the educational system from early childhood to senior high school. This enforcement is rooted in Qanun No. 11/2002 Article 13 paragraph (2), which mandates that government institutions, schools, businesses,

and other entities must uphold Islamic dress traditions (Meilani and Fatmawati 2022). Their study highlights the dynamics of power relations behind such regulations, which reflect the dominance of majority norms: often at the expense of minority groups, such as Christian students in Padang who are compelled to wear the *jilbab*.

Moreover, the Sharia regional restrictions may disadvantage not only the non-Muslim populations but also Muslim women with differing perspectives on the *hijab* and clothing options. The justification of mandatory *hijab* is based on the belief that the female body is taboo and that the 'oriental values' need to be preserved based on Islamic *kaffah* so they are not influenced by 'Western culture' (Candraningrum 2013). However, the requirement for women to wear the *hijab* disregards the status and rights of women who choose not to wear the *hijab*. Ahkam calls this phenomenon disenfranchisement, which refers to the denial of women's rights and the eradication of their voices from the autonomy space (Abrori 2016). Also expressed was the view that the *hijab* should be worn based on civil liberties and not as an obligation for women (Candraningrum 2007). Therefore, the critique on the implementation of Sharia regional regulations is that there is a stronger gender base that does not restrain women in the guise of religious restrictions.

Francisco Budi Hardiman argues that the imposition of mandatory *hijab* based on Sharia reflects the expansion of religious fundamentalism in democratic Indonesia. Religious fundamentalists impose their views on the entire population (Hardiman 2013). This includes requiring Muslim women to wear the *hijab* by denying their freedom to choose whether or not they want to wear the *hijab*. In



the era of democracy, wearing the *hijab* is not solely based on religious precepts. Instead, Muslim women should be allowed to interpret the *hijab* in various ways. Meyrasyawati, in her Ph.D thesis, states that the reasons for women to wear the *hijab* are a form of devotion to God's commands based on the Qur'an, as a marker of identity to differentiate themselves from non-Muslim women, as part of fashion trend among Muslim women in Indonesia, and as an impact of a commodification practice by the growing Muslim clothing industry (Meyrasyawati 2022). Therefore, religious fundamentalism in the form of imposing mandatory *hijab*, according to Candraningrum (2013), not only denies women's rights to their autonomy but also their creative space in interpreting the *hijab* for themselves.

It is also important to note that the function of the *hijab* is also the protection from sexual objectification. By wearing the *hijab*, women tend to feel a greater sense of security, protection, and respect (Simorangkir and Pamungkas 2018; Suhendi and Wahyudi 2023). This function constructs a woman's social identity. As a social identity, the *hijab* is also extensively worn by Muslim women leaders in Indonesia, as was suggested by Candraningrum. Even if they may not explicitly state that the motivation for wearing the *hijab* is political, it signifies 'repentance,' and voters tend to favor politicians who wear the *hijab* due to their religious convictions (Candraningrum 2013). Politics in Indonesia remains nuanced with religious elements, so the use of the *hijab* can help secure women's political positions.

The debate between Islamic organizations about whether the *hijab* is mandatory or a choice gives rise to the imposition of mandatory *hijab* in democratic Indonesia. The debate emerged

because, in the Reformation Era, individual freedom was synonymous with the freedom of religious expression. Consequently, a Muslim woman has the same right to interpret her religious beliefs as a woman who does not wear the *hijab*. Consequently, the establishment of the Sharia regional law, which includes the mandate for Muslim women to wear the *hijab*, posed a challenge to the Islamic groups themselves and also to the concept of freedom within the democratic ideal and the human rights of Muslim women in Indonesia.

### **Repositioning the *Hijab* in Indonesian Democracy**

Linda Zuarum, in her article states that the *hijab* as a religious symbol creates a dispute and contention in religious social life in Indonesia. In the post-reform era, the *hijab* became a fashion trend for Muslim women and was established as a beauty standard (Zuarum 2022). The imposition of mandatory *hijab* at junior high schools, such as in SMPN 5, 7, and 11 in Yogyakarta; SMPN 3 in Genteng, Banjarnegara; SMAN 2 in Rambah Hilir, Rokan; SMKN 2 in Padang; and the recent incident at SMAN 1 in Banguntapan, Bantul, indicate that the contestation over the *hijab* and politics in Indonesia remains pervasive today. The article by Zuarum also demonstrates that for some Muslims, the *hijab* is regarded as mandatory. This obligation has become the impetus for human rights violations and the exploitation of women's bodies.

Drawing upon Galtung's idea, imposing mandatory *hijab* is a form of cultural violence based on specific ideology and religious teachings (Galtung 1990). Since it has been practiced in Indonesia for decades, it is not unexpected that Islamic groups believe that the

imposition is legitimate, even if they must resort to violence and coercion. In the context of Indonesia as a Muslim-majority nation, the imposition of mandatory *hijab* has established what Antonio Gramsci refers to as cultural hegemony over other Islamic groups and non-Muslim populations. According to Saba Mahmood's thesis, when hegemony is established, women are no longer viewed as subjects or independent beings (Mahmood 2011). Muslim women are relegated to comprehending the society that rules them, which is called patriarchy in this instance. As a result, the issue of imposing the *hijab* is no longer central to Islamic teachings; instead, the emphasis has turned to ideological violence. Then, Islam stops being a progressive faith and reverts to being conservative (Bagir 2021). The imposition eliminates the range of viewpoints and perspectives on the significance of the *hijab* for a Muslim, giving rise to the patriarchal imagination that exists in the minds of a group of Muslims. Islamic experts, such as Linda Zuarum (Indonesia), Asma Gull Hassan (America), Fatima Mernissi (Morocco), and Saba Mahmood (Pakistan) have demonstrated that the imposition directly negates diversity and plurality expression within Islam itself. The Islamic understanding of the *hijab* and women is extremely diverse and non-discriminatory, and therefore, we can classify the imposition of mandatory *hijab* as an act of public aggression.

In his book "Democracy and Sentimentality," Budi Hardiman defines religion-based violence as a result of faith manifested in public piety (Hardiman 2018). Religion-based violence must be viewed through a political and democratic lens. In this case, the imposition of mandatory *hijab* is not merely a question of implementing religious precepts but is also violence in general. The *hijab* becomes a source of violence when

women are forced to wear it in public. If it continues, it will threaten the democratic society in Indonesia. Public piety, including the choice of wearing the *hijab*, must be encouraged, not imposed.

According to Mohamad Iqbal and Nadiem Makarim, the imposition of the *hijab* is an act of violence in a democratic society that may induce religious intolerance (Bhaskara 2018). This oppressive attitude reflects how religious life is controlled by discriminatory deeds and beliefs that exclude diversity in interpreting and comprehending a discourse, including the use of the *hijab*. Using Chantal Mouffe's concept, religious groups in a democratic nation should have knowledge of plurality in religious belief and instill democratic values in the perspectives on belief, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender choice. According to Mouffe, universal pluralism is the foundation for establishing an egalitarian and reasonable public space (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). The violation of human rights in the imposition of mandatory *hijab* is indicative of anti-democracy forces in Indonesia.

Moreover, based on the universal plurality in the political contestation of the *hijab* in Indonesia, we concur with Nadiem Makarim that the compulsory *hijab* is not in line with Pancasila. On the one hand, Pancasila, as the fundamental concept of democracy, criticizes the imposition of mandatory *hijab* as a violation of human rights and a form of confining the ideals of Islamic teachings, which are part of the Indonesian state. On the other hand, this does not imply that those who choose not to wear the *hijab* are not Pancasila adherents, as Pancasila then becomes an ideology used by a section of Muslims to dominate others who prefer not to wear the *hijab*. In a democratic nation, the freedom to wear or not to wear a *hijab* is

guaranteed by democracy. In addition, the state must give room for community groups that oppose wearing the *hijab* so long as their views can be accommodated in a democratic political environment. Chantal Mouffe calls this a radical democracy, where the most marginal and extreme organizations can express their viewpoints so long as they can be justified and accepted by the general public (Mouffe 2013). In this context, Pancasila can serve as a moderating guide for extremist organizations considering the obligation for women to wear the *hijab*, groups that do not wear the *hijab*, and groups confronting the existence of the *hijab*.

The imposition of the *hijab* by some people with an Islamic identity is a form of violence the diversity of Islamic interpretations and threatens both Islamic teachings and Indonesian democracy. The imposition is an ideology and hegemony in Indonesia involving structural and cultural difficulties. Borrowing Budi Hadriman's metaphor, the imposition is an inadequacy of the Muslim groups to realize public piety within the context of democracy in Indonesia. Therefore, the imposition is not only detrimental to the existence of the *hijab* among Islamic organizations in Indonesia but also disturbs Indonesia's social harmony and tolerance. It is vital to examine how certain Islamic groups interpret the *hijab* as a kind of personal devotion and as a form of public piety. Therefore, we may argue that the imposition reflects the inability to construct a state life in Indonesia that upholds humanity and justice.

## **Conclusion**

Recognizing the *hijab* as one of the integral parts of Islamic religious teachings is essential. However, making it mandatory contradicts Indonesia's democratic values and Pancasila's

founding principles. This study highlights how those in power, through regulation, have instrumentalized the *hijab* as a tool of hegemony, an approach that no longer reflects authentic religious doctrine but rather a shifting, ideologically driven interpretation. Most importantly, such imposition violates women's freedom to define their own identities, transforming what should be a personal display of faith into a forced expression.

This research contributes to the academic field by offering a critical perspective on the intersection of religious expression and democratic values in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that focused mainly on theological or cultural debates surrounding the *hijab*, this study emphasizes how the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* represents both a form of violence against individual autonomy and a broader failure of Islamic conservative forces to engage meaningfully in democratic principles. By emphasizing the fluid and historically contested interpretations of the *hijab*, this research also challenges the rigid association between *hijab* and Islamic thought.

Suggestions for future research include exploring the concept of 'counter-hegemony' as proposed by Mouffe, where the state plays a mediating role to balance conservative and progressive views on the *hijab* within a democratic framework. While fundamentalist perspectives can be justified in radical democracy, their imposition must be rejected to prevent social harm, such as student trauma or job discrimination against Muslim women and individuals from other groups. This study employed a narrative case study method through literary research; thus, further empirical research is recommended to deepen and strengthen the understanding of *hijab* freedom

and its hegemony within Indonesia's democratic context.[]

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