

FEAR APPEAL AS COERCION VERSUS PERSUASION IN A DEMOCRACY: THE POWER OF ISLAMIC DISCOURSE IN THE INDONESIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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Abstract

While Indonesia claims to be the world's third largest democracy, it recognizes itself as both a secular and religious state. The negotiation of the state-religion relationship influenced by Islamic discourse continues to shape the socio-political development of this largest Muslim nation. This paper describes how Indonesia's discursive contention is molded by the power and popularity of Islamic discourses. It will present examples and analysis of appeal to fear as coercive discourses from recently published speech events, debates, edicts, regulations, and publications as well as examine the vital role of Islamic discourses in the Indonesian public sphere and democracy. This paper concludes that coercive religious discourses and some government policies not only marginalize the voices of minority and opposing groups, but also curtail participative critical debates that are necessary for a democratic Indonesia.

Walaupun Indonesia mengklaim sebagai negara demokrasi terbesar ketiga di dunia, Indonesia mengakui dirinya sebagai negara sekuler dan agama. Negosiasi hubungan negara-agama yang

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dipengaruhi oleh wacana Islam terus membentuk perkembangan sosial-politik negara Muslim terbesar ini. Makalah ini menjelaskan bagaimana perselisihan diskursif Indonesia dibentuk oleh kekuatan dan popularitas wacana Islam. Penelitian ini akan menyajikan contoh-contoh dan analisis ‘propaganda ketakutan’ sebagai wacana koersif dari pidato yang baru-baru ini diterbitkan, debat, dekret, peraturan, dan publikasi serta memeriksa peran vital wacana Islam dalam ruang publik dan demokrasi Indonesia. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa wacana keagamaan yang bersifat koersif dan beberapa kebijakan pemerintah tidak hanya memarginalkan suara-suara kelompok minoritas, tetapi juga membata-si perdebatan kritis partisipatif yang diperlukan untuk Indonesia yang demokratis.

Keywords: coercion; democracy; equal participation; Islamic discourses; public sphere.

Introduction

A frequent claim about Indonesia is that it is the most populous Muslim majority nation, the third largest democracy, and the fourth most populous country in the world, as well as a democratic nation that identifies itself as both a secular and religious state.² Throughout its journey of democratic transition, Islam has been an inextricable force in forming the direction of Indonesian politics as well as in shaping the discourses on state-religion relationship. Nonetheless, while the implementation of democracy in many Muslim majority nations is challenging, it seems to work quite well in Indonesia, such that world leaders, experts, scholars and commentators frequently use Indonesia as an example for justifying the compatibility of Islam with democracy (Menchik 2016).

² Although constitutionally a secular state, the Indonesian government recognizes six official religions, with Islam having an increasingly powerful influence in Indonesian politics. For more discussion, see Seo (2012).

In addition to the Islam-democracy debates, issues of hate speech, intimidation and violence based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations, known as “SARA”,³ continue to inundate the Indonesian socio-political development. This leads to the inevitable Islamic identity politics that have created socio-political challenges such as tension and conflicts that emerged throughout the history of independent Indonesia. The Indonesian Islamic “conservative turn” described by Ricklefs (2012), supported by Bruinessen (2013), has enhanced the influential role of Islamic discourses in various venues concerning not only political matters, but also daily life issues such as gender, marriage, tourism, film, banking, foods, and clothing. This power of Islamic discourses in Indonesia may be attributed not only to the nature of less-contested faith-based discourses, which often employ fear appeals, but also to the enactment and enforcement of religiously inspired government regulations (Cammack and Feener 2012).

With the above observation, a question should be raised concerning what is the state and the future of Indonesian democracy. There are many ways of answering this question, but this paper focuses on one crucial aspect of theories of democracy (Dahl 1989), i.e. citizen participation through freedom of expression, especially the use of language and discourse in shaping Indonesian democracy. Discourses in a democracy must inevitably concern the discussion of the public sphere (Habermas 1962), where, to be successful, the discursive contention in any society must be civil, voluntary, unthreatening, and emancipative. Considering recent development of Islamic discourses in Indonesia, one can assess the type of dominant discursive practices in Indonesian democracy.

³ SARA, which literally stands for Suku (ethnicity), Agama (religion), Ras (Race), and Antar golongan (intergroup), is a common term used to refer to tension and conflicts among various groups based on discrimination on these sensitive issues.

This paper shows that the “conservative turn” can lead to unequal participation by the multiplicity of existing groups in the public sphere due to coercive discourses, especially concerning religiously related issues by some conservative Islamic groups. This paper presents some examples and analysis of the use of fear appeals as coercive discourses in the forms of widely discussed texts from various events, publications, debates, and fatwas as well as examine the vital role of Islamic discourses and government rules that shape the Indonesian public sphere and democracy. These issues are complicated because, religious discourses are not always readily subject to critical argumentation, worsened by government regulations that restrain freedom of speech for equal democratic participation. When the Indonesian people accept faith-based coercive discourses and support government regulations forbidding criticism, it signifies a decline in the quality of Indonesian democracy.

Democracy and Citizen Participation in the Public Sphere

Dahl (1989) calls democracy in advanced countries “polyarchies,” defined by their free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, rights to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and autonomy of association. He underlines that ideal democracy requires adequate and equal opportunities for effective participation on preferred matters, equal voting rights, ample and equal opportunities for choice of interests, opportunities to decide what issues that matter most, and the inclusion of all citizens. His emphasis on equal rights for citizen participation intersects perfectly with Habermas’ (1962) belief in equal, empowering democratic participation for shaping public opinions that influence politics, criticize state power, and oppose special interest or sectarian groups. Habermas’ (1962; 1989) “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” described an ideal democracy whereby public sphere should be an open

discussion of all public issues through freedom of speech and assembly as well as the right to freely participate in political debates and decision-making.

Concerning the idea on the active participation of religious groups in public sphere, and Rawls' (1997) argument about public reason, Habermas (1989) suggests how religious voices and traditions of different communities, influenced by the separation of state and religion, could still play a role in the public sphere. This question is especially important for a religiously plural society such as Indonesia, because, according to Habermas (1962) and Rawls (1997), democracy prevails only when there is reasonable pluralism. They agree that religious communities represent an important voice of a society that can be included in the public sphere, if they translate their beliefs and doctrines into reasonable arguments.

Similarly, Rawls (1997, 801) argues that religious principles can become a "comprehensive doctrine" and thus become reasonable only if they support a pluralist democracy with equal rights for all citizens regardless of their religious or non-religious backgrounds. Religious doctrines, which tends to be sectarian, cannot lead to an agreement or mutual understanding when the supposedly reasonable arguments are based on irreconcilable beliefs and faiths. The challenge, as described in the next sections, is that a recent increase in Indonesian Islamic conservatism seemed to have led to an upsurge in the dominance of faith-based sectarian Islamic discourses with limited critical debates, equal participation, public reasons, and plural rational arguments.

The Power of Islamic Discourse in the Indonesian Public Sphere

While many claims that Indonesian Islam is tolerant, open-minded, and pluralistic, as promoted during the Soeharto's regime (1966-1998), conservatism and radicalism have tainted

the image of moderate Indonesian Islam, since the demise of the New Order regime, mostly due to the rise in religiously motivated coercions. Although the culprit is frequently attributed to small radical Islamists mostly linked to international organizations, some scholars have searched for the root of the growing conservatism in Indonesia (Bruinessen 2013; Ricklefs 2012).

According to Bruinessen (2013), Indonesian Islam has taken a significant “conservative turn,” such that the moderate, progressive, and liberal Islam that prospered during the New Order regime began to fade after the reform era of freedom of speech. Conservative groups that have been sidelined during the Soeharto’s regime now have the freedom and venues to express their agenda. Bruinessen (2013) also argued that the spread of Wahhabi, as well as other transnational Islamic ideologies and movements, has been largely unchallenged, weakening the prominence of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah as the two largest and most influential moderate Islamic organizations.

Ricklefs (2012) agrees with Bruinessen (2013), describing this conservative turn as a threat to Indonesian democracy because the rise of conservatism has increased the cooperation and collusion between powerful politicians and conservative Islamic groups. The erosion of democracy is attributable to the discourses of the conservatives and the radicals that share many similar interpretations of Islam in Indonesia. The difference is that the radicals tend to engage in disruptive or violent actions. In contrast, conservatives tend to engage in discursive campaigns such as fatwas and other public statements that play essential roles in the Indonesian public sphere. This influences the belief system of the society and inspires their leaders’ speeches and even the radical groups’ actions.

Ricklefs (2012) thinks that conservative Islamic discourse has penetrated Indonesian society deeply, shaping the public

sphere that is now difficult to reverse. Minority groups “cannot hope for a secular public space but must hope for a religiously neutral one, in which all beliefs can take part on equal terms” (Ricklefs 2012, 212). Unfortunately, the discourses of Indonesian Muslims have been unequally represented by religious vocal leaders and preachers with unchallenged sectarian messages.

While Islamic discourse has been increasingly prominent since the time of the reform era, Ricklefs (2012) saw the government of Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) gave Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, the Council Indonesian Ulama) more power to assert on Islamic issues as the beginning of a significant conservative turn. Although SBY did it for political support due to the increasing popularity of Islamic conservatism, it had a significant impact on the discursive power of the Islamists. Religious discourses have significantly shaped Indonesian politics, such that competing candidates felt pressed to show how much more Islamic they were than the other candidates.

Kersten (2015) and Menchik (2016) agreed with Ricklefs (2012) that the ramification of the MUI’s authority given by SBY had empowered the already conservative council in their issuing of fatwas. With conservative Islam as a central political theme, the moderate, pluralist, progressive versions of Islam were marginalized, filling the public sphere with faith-based coercive discourses that tend to be non-emancipative, discouraging critical debates and public reasons necessary for fostering participative democracy.

Coercion Versus Persuasion: the Use Fear Appeals in Indonesian Discursive Contestation

Coercion is commonly defined as any compliance-gaining efforts, verbal or behavioral, that use any form of intimidation, threats and fear of punishment or retaliation (Feinberg 1998). This practice usually uses some forms of pressures that result in

compelling other individuals or groups to act involuntarily. The term “involuntary”, meaning free to choose or reject, is essential, because, as Wertheimer (1987, 14) argued, people’s legitimate action, behavior, and speech were founded on free will or “voluntariness principle.”

Frequently contrasted to the term “coercion” is “persuasion,” commonly defined as “the act of addressing arguments or appeals to a person to induce cooperation, submission, or agreement” (Oxford 2009). It is the process of influencing others free of threats or fear. Kenneth Burke (1969, 50), confirms that “persuasion involves choice, will,” and the freedom to express any motives for any goals. Dahl (1989) describes “rational persuasion,” as the ideal way of convincing others by relying on explanation of truth and “coercion” as the worse undemocratic strategy.

Associated with coercion and persuasion is the use of fear appeals to gain compliance. As rhetorical strategy of manipulating the audience’s emotion, fear appeal can either be coercive or persuasive (Foa and Kozak 1986; Pfau 2007). Pfau (2007) suggested “civic fear” as the appropriate and civil way of using fear appeals which is basically the same as rational persuasion that gives room for critical debates.

Scholars of discursive argumentation describe fear appeals as coercion using the term “*argumentum ad baculum*,” which literally means “an argument on a stick”, i.e. an argument that “turns on a threat or reference to dire consequences” (Woods 1998, 493). The fear appeals as coercion in the *ad baculum* creates a deceptive argumentative means because a speaker asserts truth of a proposition based on fear, threat, and force or “fear of force (leading to) acceptance of a conclusion” (Carney 1980, 390) and the “abandonment of reason” (Copi 1990, 130). This suggests that religious discourses that frequently avoid the pub-

lic reason and critical debates can be labeled coercion since they rely on an appeal of fear (e.g. of afterlife punishments) and “abandonment of reason” (divine truth that can’t be wrong).

Andrews (1969, 10) believes that persuasion and coercion are both rhetorical processes in a continuum, and that “rhetoric becomes less persuasive and more coercive to the extent that it limits the viable alternatives open to the receivers of communication.” Similarly, Smith (1982) stresses the role of perception of the existence of threat, fear, and choice determines degrees of persuasiveness or coerciveness. Each discourse must be assessed whether or not and how much it signifies or contains fear and/or threat (coercive) or choice and freedom to accept or reject (persuasive). To do this, one must look closely at the contexts, including the speakers’ motives and the audience as well as the situation of the speech event. Thus, important questions to ask to evaluate any discourse include: Does the text/speech contain any form of threat? Does it create fear? Does the audience have any opportunity and freedom to disagree or refuse? Does the text/speech allow critical debates that might change/modify the mind of both the proponents or the audience? If the answer to the first two questions is positive, this is an example of a coercive discourse, while if the answer of the last two question is positive, this is an example of persuasion.

Examples of Islamic Fear Appeals as Coercive Versus Persuasive Discourses

There are numerous examples of coercive and persuasive Islamic discourses in Indonesia, with or without fear appeals. An excellent example of the coercive nature of fear appeals applies to the abundant use of afterlife images of torment in hell, backed by holy texts believed and portrayed to contain absolute truths that are rarely debatable. Images of torments of hell used in reli-

gious discourses, is not unique to Islamic discourses. Fundamentalist Christians have employed the same scare tactics (Walton 2000), at least since the famous Jonathan Edwards' description of hell house in the 1740s when he created fear invoking psychosomatic reactions among his audience using ghastly images of hell (Jackson 2007).

The same images and their effects are ample in different Indonesian Islamic discourses creating not only fear of death and hell, but also "culture of fear" (Glassner 1999).⁴ This is depicted in the widespread images in comics and religious speeches, as well as in television programs containing not only "*siksa neraka*" (torment of hell), but also "*siksa kubur*" (torment in graves) (Ishadi 2011). The Indonesian people have been continuously bombarded with graphic punishments such that there is a culture of fear of torments during the afterlife (Tim CNN Indonesia 2019a; 2019b). With no significant critical debates or public reasons, but based only on doctrines and religious texts, such Islamic discourses can lead to submission without questions and, thus, can be classified as coercion.

There are Islamic speeches and publication on specific type of punishments for certain behaviors, including, among many others, torments for: not doing the five-times-a-day prayers,⁵ not fasting during the month of Ramadhan,⁶ wives refusing husbands' desire for sex,⁷ women not wearing the *hijab* (veil),⁸ and consuming *haram* (forbidden, not kosher) foods.⁹ Depiction of

⁴ The excessive use of fear appeals in today's communication has created, what Barry Glassner (1999) calls massive "culture of fear" created by different agents for various purposes, including religious, political and economic interests.

⁵ See for example Mutiara Islami (2018) and Sahroji (2017).

⁶ See for example PortalMadura.com (2018)

⁷ See for example Syukri (2018) and Alhaddad (2019).

⁸ See for example Galipat (2015) and Tuasikal (2017).

⁹ See for example Benih Iman Islam (2019) and Rosalia (2016).

torments is abundant in comics as well as some books, such as the one titled *1001 Siksa Kubur: Berdasarkan Al-Quran dan As-Sunnah* (1001 Torments of graves: Based on the Quran and Islamic traditions & practices) which contain some rewards but mostly punishments based on each type of wrongs or sins.¹⁰ These types of coercive discourses have compelled many to submit and follow the directions of preachers and clerics not only religiously, but politically, preventing participative argumentation using public reasons.

Some of the most powerful Islamic discourses throughout the development of Indonesian politics and democracy are the fatwas by the MUI. The fact that MUI's fatwas tend to stir controversies and debates is not necessarily non-coercive since many are against democratic principles, such as those against pluralism, secularism, and liberalism.¹¹ With the fatwas supported by ultra-conservative intimidating Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islamic Defender Front) and GNPf-MUI¹² As well as other sharia and caliphate supporter groups, MUI fatwas become powerfully coercive.

This is true concerning fatwas that have created fear among minority groups, since these kinds of edicts can spark intimidation and violent actions. For example, since the issuance of the MUI edict declaring that the Ahmadiyah group deviated from Qur'anic teachings reconfirmed in 2005, Islamic vigilante militants have launched violent attacks against the Ahmadiyah in different parts of Indonesia. This creates tremendous fear and a

¹⁰ The book by Abdul Rahman (2014) is not a scholarly publication. The third chapter is all about different types of specific torments in graves.

¹¹ See for example, the MUI's fatwa opposing pluralism, secularism, and liberalism, in Hasyim (2015).

¹² Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia (GNPF-MUI, National Movement to Safeguard the Council Indonesian Ulama's Fatwa).

sense of insecurity among law-abiding citizens, Ahmadiyah followers as well as other minority religious groups. Unfortunately, the government of Indonesia created the nationwide anti-Ahmadiyah decree issued in 2008, banning the Ahmadiyah from evangelizing their faith. To reduce violent actions, in most cases, the government blamed the victims rather than punishing and stopping the attackers. This is why law-abiding minority groups, are the ones that are not only unable to freely express their interests, issues and concerns, but also in fear of their life and future.

Another example is when on December 14th, 2016, MUI issued an edict, stating that it is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims to wear or use any non-Islamic objects, i.e. Christmas paraphernalia during the Christmas season. The consequences of these type of edicts are that several merchants were threatened by some Islamic extremists, such as GPNF-MUI, accusing the merchants of forcing their employees to wear Christmas-related gear. No merchants who feel threatened by this fatwa dared to reject and argue against the fatwa; thus, it gives no choice nor freedom for expressing different opinions. The fear effect of the powerful coercive fatwa continues throughout recent Christmas seasons.¹³

The power and coerciveness of MUI's fatwas are due to MUI's religious, political, and legal authority, regardless of numerous criticisms against it. Its political-religious charisma has helped it gained official regulatory authority giving it more power and opportunities to set Islamic political agenda as well as to mobilize mass rally or even create threats of violence (Menchik 2019).

One of the most popular Islamic discourses by conservative leaders and preachers is by Habib Rizieq leader of FPI who, in

¹³ In fear of sweeping by some Islamic groups, Malang Mall management advised tenants against displaying Christmas accessories. See The Jakarta Post (2019).

his sermon during the December 2, 2016 mass rally in Jakarta, stated: “... *hukum Allah di atas segalanya. Tidak ada hukum yang paling adil dan lebih baik daripada hukum Allah,*” “God’s law is above all laws. There is no law that is better and more just than God’s law”) (Pratiwi and Gumilang 2016). This proposition has become the foundation of many speeches put forward by conservative Islamic preachers, leaders and caliphate or sharia supporters on various occasions. This coercive discourse, frequently realized in the form of sharia laws, uses the power of God with the absolute truthfulness and supremacy of divine laws as a direct attack against the audience’s submission to the state law.

The effect “conservative turn” is also enhanced by the popularity of sharia and sharia-inspired laws in various Indonesian municipalities, constituting coercive discourses frequently exploited by secular leaders for political gains. As Buehler (2016) explains, there is no significant criticism against the secular leaders supporting sharia law to expand their constituency and accumulate power. The effectiveness of sharia-based discourses is due to the fact that, grounded on Islamic doctrines and faith, it is exclusive, creating fear and threats among the critics and minority groups, because any criticism against sharia laws is deemed an attack against the divine supremacy of Islamic teachings. The secular state leaders’ support for this type of coercive religious discourse for political power (Buehler 2016) only further diminishes rational and equal participative debates which are essential for a democracy.

Another example is a rampant coercive discourse with discrimination and hatred that took place around the time of the run-off election of the governor of Jakarta on April 19, 2017. This popular discourse cited a Qur’anic verse literally interpreted to forbid Muslims from electing a non-Muslim as their lead-

er. This stirred other preachers and Muslim leaders' discourses against the election of the only Christian and Chinese candidate, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (Ahok). In contrast, there are some Islamic persuasive discourses, e.g. by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Chairman, Said Aqil Siroj, who stated that Muslims are allowed to choose or vote for non-Muslim leaders, suggesting that Ahok could become governor of Jakarta (Alhafiz 2016). This persuasive discourse did not create a threat, it gave freedom of choice, and anyone can disagree or critically debate the issue with practically no consequences.

The coercive discourses were especially widespread during the campaigns, there were threats and fear appeals in various forms, including several mosques putting up banners stating: "*Masjid ini tidak mensolatkan jenazah pendukung dan pembela penista agama*" (this mosque will not hold a funeral prayer for the bodies of the supporters and defenders of a blasphemer) (Hidayat 2017). Those that did not comply would not receive the mosque funeral prayer—an essential ritual for a Muslim.

The controversial blasphemy case against Ahok was exploited to mobilize a series of mass demonstrations, that went on even after his election defeat. Amin Rais made a widely-published statement during the final phase of Ahok's trial: "*Jika Ahok dihukum ringan, Jokowi jangan berharap presiden lagi*" (if Ahok received only a light punishment, Jokowi can't expect to be a president any longer) (Portal Islam 2017). This coercive discourse did not give any freedom to the judges while the legal case is still in process. This threat was real as it could have been enforced through a mass rally, potentially bringing down the Jokowi government (Fealy 2016). The discourses created fear among the Indonesian people, the judges, and the president that some dreadful events might take place if Ahok were not severely punished.

The following mass rallies of the 2-December Alumni Association Movement (known as 212 Movement)¹⁴ held since 2016 constitutes a powerful discourse using fear appeals with prevailing political impacts. It constitutes a threat to Jokowi's political power leading in his political move of accommodating more conservative Islamic leaders into his government¹⁵ as well as Jokowi's other policies of "authoritarian turn" (Power 2018).

A similar fear and threat characterize the discourses surrounding the conviction and 18-month imprisonment in August 2018 of Meliana, a Buddhist woman who was convicted of religious blasphemy for complaining about a mosque's loudspeaker volume near her house in Tanjungbalai, North Sumatera. Many offended Muslims staged the worst anti-Chinese riot in Indonesia since 1998, burning or ransacking Buddhist temples, stoking more fear among Indonesian minorities.¹⁶

That said, there were a number of persuasive, non-coercive discourses that invited critical debates. A classic example of this is a controversial article entitled "*Menyegarkan kembali pemahaman Islam*" (Rejuvenating the Islamic Understanding), written by a Muslim liberalist, Ulil Abshar Abdalla (known as Ulil), which appeared in Kompas, 18 September, 2002. This article was not only a criticism of the literal interpretation of Islamic absolute truthfulness and supremacy, but also was an invitation to contextualize interpretations as well as to think, discuss, and even debate. However, this persuasive discourse that invites

¹⁴ Similar to FPI, 212 is a militant Movement that successfully brought down Ahok. See a description and discussion of 212 Movement in Sheany (2018).

¹⁵ Jokowi felt compelled to choose Ma'ruf Amin, the chairman of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) and a very conservative supreme leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as his running mate due to the coercive discourses against him by the Islamist hardliners. See The Asean Post (2019).

¹⁶ See for example, Greg Fealy' essay (2018) on the troubled of Indonesian minority living in fear.

debates, commonly practiced in democratic countries, created fury from various conservative groups and a few months later in 2003, a group of Indonesian Islamic clerics from Forum Ulama Umat Islam (FUUI, Forum of Scholars of the Indonesian *Ummah*) issued a death fatwa against Ulil. Discourses containing the popular idiom of “*halal darahnya*” (someone’s blood is permitted to be shed) is clearly a coercive discourse.

Others have fatwas about Islam that invited a debate and provided a choice with no threats but created controversy. For example, a prominent Islamic scholar, Quraish Shihab, who stated that there is no guarantee of entering paradise for anyone, including the Prophet Muhammad. This statement emphasizing the importance of God’s mercy constitutes persuasive, a non-threatening discourse that encourages critical debates but not fear,¹⁷ yet led to much controversy, forcing him to clarify (Agama Menjawab 2018). This proves that Islamic coercive discourse tends to overpower the persuasive and critical one.

Not all of MUI’s edicts are coercive. For example, the edict issued on January 22, 2014, which required all Indonesia Muslims to actively participate in protecting endangered species such as rhinos, tigers, orangutans, and elephants. This first fatwa has no direct reference to specific Islamic teachings followed by education awareness programs. This persuasive discourse creates no fear and has been part of the principle embraced by the majority of the planet’s population.

There are a large number of persuasive, non-coercive Islamic discourses launched by various moderate and progressive Islamic groups and individuals. However, since they do not create fear, Islamic persuasive discourses lack public attention, stir no controversy and, thus, do not have a significant social-political effect.

¹⁷ See Quraish Shihab’s arguments in Rosidi (2014).

The Dominance of Islamic Discourses in the Indonesian Democracy

Habermas' (1989) and Rawls (1997) agreed that there should be room for religious discourses in the public sphere, but those religiously-based principles should be translated into public language and values accessible to the general public for emancipative and critical debates. This is important because: 1) the rational truthfulness of religions is mostly based on faith and not reason, 2) criticism and critical studies of religious doctrines are usually not acceptable in religious discussion, and 3) consensus is practically impossible when the rational arguments of different religions contradict the each other.

Crowley (2006) "properties": {"formattedCitation": "(2006 also confirmed that arguing against religious discourses in communities filled with passionate religious commitment, even in democratic nations, tends to be complicated. This creates hegemonic discourses in the public sphere, which goes against the tenets of democracy. This is also true in the Indonesian public sphere, where Islamic discourses tend to be dominant in the socio-political arena and the public sphere in general, especially since and due to the "conservative turn" period. This dominance is inevitable because most Islamic organizations have tremendous socio-political power and influence, such that most Indonesian minority groups (ethnic or religious) are reluctant or afraid of criticizing or debating this situation.

In most cases, the major contestations are among Muslims themselves, i.e. the very conservatives versus the moderates. This is so, because many minority groups, who are often the subjects of the contention itself, are playing it safe by not participating. The debates, for examples, on whether Muslims are allowed to say, "Merry Christmas" to Christians, are among Muslims themselves. Many of the coercive Islamic discourses are directed

against minority religious, cultural, and political groups, such as Ahmadiyah, Shia, Christians, LGBTs, and the alleged Communist Party sympathizers. This is one of the reasons why Islam is often viewed as incompatible with democracy because one of the fundamental principles of democracy is participative communication involving exchanges of ideas and critical debates between and among equal and plural members of the societies and/or their representatives. This democratic principle is difficult to put into practice when the discourses are religiously based, coercive and not rationally persuasive, such as the implementation of undebatable religious law. What makes it even more challenging is that the conservatives and hardliners tend to interpret religious texts literally resulting in its truthfulness solely based on faith and not on critical historical arguments or public reasons, thus, limiting critical debates by those who are outside of the faith.

Unfortunately, the uninformed Muslims tend to accept uncritically any religious discourse, despite showing sectarian and unfair arguments, defying the principle of civil discourse in a democracy. Opinions accepted by the majority is more important than the strength of the arguments. Even those who are educated enough tend to be sidelined due to the campaign that only selected experts in Islamic fields are allowed to propose any interpretation critically.¹⁸ In addition, with the blasphemy law, alternative interpretation can be viewed as criticism of the religious doctrines, that in turn can be perceived as an attack on the faith and religion itself, thus, blasphemous.

Menchik (2016) argues that the “conservative turn” does not necessarily lead to the decline of Indonesia’s democracy, viewing this phenomenon as a dynamic of a democracy of a majority Muslim country filled with contention between the re-

¹⁸ There has been agreement among Muslims that only some faithful experts can interpret the holy texts. See, for example, an article in Fauzi (2016).

religious militants and the moderates. This is in line with Habermas' (1989) and Rawls' (1997) arguments that religious politics such as this does not necessarily threaten democracy as long as they are channelled through a democratic process, relying on public reasons. The problem is that these religious politics are under the direct control of the outspoken clerics and preachers, whose influential coercive discourses discourage critical argumentation.

The 2017 Jakarta's governor election proves that relying on procedural democracy does not guarantee the continuance of a democracy. The election went well, but the events leading to the voting day were full of numerous verbal and behavioral coercion in the form of speeches and banners loaded with hatred and threat.¹⁹ With no fair and plain playing field for the competing candidates, it is challenging to consider this a democracy, because, based on Dahl's (1989) and Habermas' (1989) democratic theories, there is no equal rights and freedom of choice or expressions, but much fear and threats.

Power (2018) argues that the decline in the Indonesian democracy is due to Jokowi's "authoritarian turn," pointing to his government's policy of curtailing the power and influence of his political opposition, most of whom are Muslim conservatives and hardliners. However, Jokowi's "authoritarian turn", at least partly, is attributable to the Islamic "conservative turn," with its consequent coercive discourses that created fear among the people and the president himself, compelling the government to conform.

To fight these dominant, coercive, and undemocratic discourses, Jokowi cannot rely only on democratic persuasive discourses. Instead, Jokowi must employ coercive discourses, using

¹⁹ An example of reports on hate speeches and threats during the campaign is Chew (2017).

the founding principles of the state, which is relatively undebatable and guarantees plurality in terms of SARA. For this, Jokowi revives the state discourse of Pancasila that has been key in Jokowi's effort to maintain national unity. Under the banner of Pancasila, however, Jokowi has sidelined voices of Islamic radicalism, including among others, the banning of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization that promotes international caliphate, and not extending the permit of FPI,²⁰ an organization that promotes sharia law. These constitute a state coercive discourse, creating some apprehensions among the supporters of sharia law and the caliphate. While in a democracy, a state has the right to compel all citizens to abide by the country's principles and the law, Jokowi also dismissed his political opponents in different ways (Power 2018). Even after winning the election for his second term, Jokowi continues to show his "authoritarian turn" by, among other things, strengthening the enforcement of de-radicalization efforts,²¹ Especially by cracking down the alleged rise of Islamic radicalization among the civil servants.²²

Criticism against Jokowi's policies as being undemocratic ignores the challenges of fighting undemocratic religious coercive discourses by using only democratic means. In this era of the "conservative turn," the Indonesian government has limited

²⁰ See debates on extending the organizational permit of FPI in Tim CNN Indonesia (2019c).

²¹ After the October 2002 Bali bombings by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Indonesian government established a deradicalization program under Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Teroris (BNPT, the National Counter-terrorism Agency).

²² In response to surveys showing signs of increased radicalism among Indonesian civil servants, the government urges reporting of their communication containing radicalism, using eleven criteria, the first two of which are: a) giving oral or written opinions containing hate speech against Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, principle of diversity, united Indonesia, and the government, b) giving oral or written opinions containing hate speech against certain ethnic, race, religion, or groups. See Da Costa (2019).

choices but implements the state's coercive policies, including limiting free speech especially against the Pancasila State ideology, the 1945 Constitutions, and the government. In other words, Jokowi is fighting the "conservative turn" (Bruinessen 2013) with an "authoritarian turn" (Power 2018) or challenging faith-based coercive Islamic discourses with the Pancasila-based coercive state discourses. This may have led to the decline of the quality of Indonesian democracy for the sake of stability of a complexly plural society. One can only hope that the social, religious, and political conditions will allow more critical arguments, public reasons, and equal participation in emancipatory debates, fostering a more democratic Indonesia.

Conclusion

This paper describes the type of public sphere that supports democracy and suggests the necessity of rational persuasive instead of coercive discourses to augment citizens' equal participation. In this Muslim majority country, Islam has become increasingly conservative since the beginning of the reform era, as shown in the growing use and visibility of coercive discourses that frequently lead to intimidation and, in some cases, violent actions.

The dominance of conservative Islamic discourses and their tendency to be coercive is due not only to the "conservative turn," but also to the fact that religiously-based principles are difficult to challenge in communities with strong beliefs in the supremacy and truthfulness of divine principles. Coercive discourses based on fear of exclusion, threat of the afterlife torments, or of being punished for blasphemy have been enhanced by the politically dominant groups of sharia and caliphate supporters as well as secular leaders who exploited these discourses for political gains. Facing the challenges of dealing with these coercive discourses that can endanger his government, Jokowi has used an "authoritarian turns" to fight the "conservative turns," creating

state coercive discourses and policies that can lead to a further decline in the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

Only a small sample of Islamic discourses, both coercive and persuasive, are presented in this paper; more should be done to obtain a better understanding of various Islamic discourses in Indonesia. However, the small sample suggests that the conservatives and hardliners tend to produce most of the coercive discourses. In contrast, the discourses of the moderates and progressives tend to be critical, persuasive, and non-coercive. The success of the pursuit of democracy in Muslim majority Indonesia will mostly depend on whether the Islamic persuasive and emancipative discourses will dominate the Indonesian public sphere.

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