

RELIGION AND THE POLITICS OF NATIONALIST THOUGHT: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HINDU NATIONALISM IN INDIA AND MUSLIM NATIONALISM IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: *The rise of religious nationalism in recent decades in developing countries has sparked attention among scholars. This article seeks to explore the political and cultural dynamics of the contemporary resurgence of religious nationalism, many of them reflected in Hindu nationalist in India and Muslim nationalist in Indonesia. We address the following question: What are the likely factors for religious-nationalist movements coming to the center stage of nation-state politics? Using the historical-institutional approach to religious politics, we argue that the forces that have driven the resurgence of religious nationalist were the interaction between the institutional design of the nation-state and the considerable opportunities for change – in a certain period of political crisis. Embedded in the issues of the institutional challenge is another series of questions that this article will address. There are variations in how and when religious-nationalist politics emerged. Why, for example, did the rise of religious politics occur in such varying ways, for instance, through a political party in India and civil society movements in Indonesia? Why did regimes or governments that promoted secular ideologies in India and Indonesia lose their hegemonic position? The answers to these questions are also largely historical-institutional. By focusing on how political institutions shape political dynamics, we suggest that institutions shape social and political outcomes, they necessarily affect people's behavior as reflected in the politics of religious nationalism.*

Keywords: *Religious nationalism; institution; Hindu in India; Islam in Indonesia.*

Abstrak: Kebangkitan nasionalisme religius dalam beberapa dekade terakhir di negara-negara berkembang telah menarik perhatian para sarjana. Artikel ini berusaha mengeksplorasi dinamika politik dan budaya dari kebangkitan nasionalisme religius kontemporer, termasuk kebangkitan nasionalisme Hindu di India dan nasionalisme Muslim di Indonesia. Artikel ini akan menjawab pertanyaan berikut: Apa saja faktor yang memungkinkan gerakan nasionalis-religius menjadi pusat perhatian politik negara-bangsa? Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis-institusional terhadap politik agama, kami berpendapat bahwa kekuatan yang mendorong kebangkitan nasionalis religius adalah interaksi antara desain institusional negara-bangsa dan peluang besar untuk perubahan, terutama dalam periode krisis politik tertentu. Isu-isu tantangan institusional yang melekat adalah rangkaian pertanyaan lain yang akan dibahas dalam artikel ini. Ada variasi tentang bagaimana dan kapan politik nasionalis-religius muncul. Mengapa, misalnya, kebangkitan politik agama terjadi dengan cara yang begitu beragam, misalnya melalui partai politik di India dan gerakan sosial kemasyarakatan di Indonesia? Mengapa rezim atau pemerintahan yang mempromosikan ideologi sekuler di India dan Indonesia kehilangan posisi hegemoniknya? Jawaban atas pertanyaan-pertanyaan ini sebagian besar bersifat historis-institusional. Dengan berfokus pada bagaimana institusi politik membentuk dinamika politik, kami menyarankan agar institusi memperkuat produk sosial dan politik, dengan cara itu hal-hal tersebut pasti akan mempengaruhi perilaku masyarakat sebagaimana tercermin dalam politik nasionalisme religius.

Kata kunci: Nasionalisme Religius; institusi; Hindu di India; Islam di Indonesia.

Introduction

Recent trends in the rise of religious nationalism in developing countries— whether Islamic, Hindu, Catholic, or Buddhist — have sparked attention among scholars in social sciences and religious studies. This concern has particularly emerged since the sudden rise of religious politics in modern, secularizing world politics may produce certain threats in which religious nationalism is perceived as the breeding ground for contemporary religious violence. This trend has produced growing confusion in explaining its origins, ideas, and networks, and in categorizing its various components. In this article we explore the political and cultural origins of the contemporary resurgence of religious nationalism, many of them reflected in Hindu nationalist in India and Muslim nationalisms in Indonesia.

From the early 1990s to the middle 2010s, religious nationalism has challenged the very foundations of nation-states. Since the late 1980s, India has witnessed an unprecedented rise in Hindu politics, with the resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a powerful force in Indian elections. In Indonesia, social and political movements based on Islamic ideology flourished rapidly after the fall of the Suharto authoritarian

regime. Although Muslim political parties fared poorly in the subsequent democratic elections from 1999 until 2019, (as they are predicted to do in the coming 2024 elections) Islamic movements representing a large segment of civil society organizations have demonstrated a powerful force in inspiring the struggle to implement Islamic law in the modern, non-theocratic state of Indonesia. In many cases, such movements use street demonstrations, civil social protests, social-economic services, and public discourse engagement to express their religio-political interests.¹

This phenomenon is remarkable, not only in the fact that such a political rise of those movements signals the end of long standings ruling secular nationalist parties of India and Indonesia (i.e., the Congress Party that has governed India since independence and the Golkar-Nationalist Party that has served as the single dominant party in Indonesia since 1970) but also because of their religious-nationalist character. While secularism is an ideological hallmark of the Indian state, Hindu nationalism is of course not a new force in Indian politics. Its political assertion that India is a fundamentally Hindu nation is the central tenet of Hindu nationalism and has its origins in the 19th century. But never before has a party espousing such religious-nationalist ideology matched the BJP's current level of popular support. In the Indonesian case, the spread of social movements based on Islam gave signals of the strong demands to bring Indonesia to be more religious or more Islamic. The following question may then be raised: What are the likely factors for religio-nationalist movements coming to the center stage of nation-state politics?

This article aims to explain two remarkable phenomena: 1) the resurgence of a powerful Hindu political party in India, and 2) the growing expansion of Islamic social movements in Indonesia. We seek to argue that the force that seems to have driven these processes in the two countries was the interaction between the institutional design of the nation-states and the considerable expansion of opportunities for change – in particular political crises. That is to say, the challenge of secular regimes and the nation-state were both abrupt and long in the making, and both sets of events spoke to the power regimes' institutions even as these regimes were in crisis. Democratic elections—as one of the most important institutions guaranteeing the political legitimacy of ruling regimes in nation-states—become a window of opportunity that may be capitalized by both religious and political elites to uphold political mobilization defined in the framework of the nations' religious markers.

Embedded in the issues of the regime and institutional challenge, however, is another series of important questions that this research will

also address. Observing the resurgence of religious nationalism in India and Indonesia, one may see that there are variations in how and when religious-nationalist politics emerged. Why, for example, did the process in Indonesia generally begin in the late 1990s and after the collapse of Suharto's military regime in particular? Why did a Hindu party such as the BJP grow rapidly and emerged as a powerful political force in democratic India at the end of the 1980s? Similarly, why did the revitalization of religious politics occur in such varying ways; for instance, through a political party in India and civil, and social movements in Indonesia? This leads to a final question that speaks of similarities rather than variances: Why did regimes or governments that promoted secular ideologies in India and Indonesia—despite their differences in political learning and opportunities—lose their hegemonic position in those countries?

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Religious Politics and Historical Institutionalism: The Cases of India and Indonesia

Scholarly studies on religious politics most commonly treated Hindu and Islamic nationalism as identity politics. The existing literature on the study of identity largely favors a cultural approach to the phenomenon.² The literature has established frameworks for understanding and managing multi-ethnic and multi-religious states that stress the inherent strength and meaning of culture. As such, theories on identity politics favor an interpretation of the meaning of cultural identities and suggest strategies to deal with their claims rather than explaining how identity politics are created and made politically relevant. We argue that research on identity politics should begin with questions concerning their creation, transformation, and mobilization. Gaining insight into these questions requires one to adopt a political approach, and, more specifically, to focus on political institutions. That is to say, if political institutions shape social and political outcomes, they necessarily affect people's behavior as reflected in the politics of religious identity.

Scholars of identity politics³ have explained the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India by emphasizing the role of a general rise in communal politics in the country and the political transition created by the declining popularity of the Congress party. As the sole dominant party governing India since independence, the Congress party exercised a commanding influence on Indian politics with substantial majorities in the central parliament as well as continuous control of all federal states of India. Hansen (1999) observed that the Congress's long period of political domination has been accompanied by an effective role in interest articulation and social conflict resolution in the Indian political system. The Congress has built a hegemonic system of politics with influential men in villages, towns, and districts throughout India. When this Congress system collapsed, the BJP emerged as a new force for the Indian electorate. The consolidation of the party since the end of the 1980s has rapidly brought the BJP to gain a significant number of votes. Its parliamentary strength increased more than forty-fold in 1986 and moved to gain the majority of votes in the 1989 and 1991 elections.⁴

However, when tracing the evolution of Hindu nationalist politics, one may find interrelated aspects of particular aspirations between the mission of political liberation and socio-religious problems among the Indians. Hansen (1999), for instance, noted that the inception of Hindu nationalist organizations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the early 19th century and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, or World Hindu Council) in 1965 marked two important political developments. Firstly, an indication that Hindu revivalism found its principal expression in reaction to external threats within British-Indian society (in the form of communal animosity between Hindus and Muslims), and secondly, massive and systematic proselytization by Christian missionaries during the colonial period of India.⁵

Such an expression implied a defensive stigmatization of the others, but it also represented a strategic emulation. This development redefined Hindu identity in opposition to these "threatening others". After independence, this strategy of identity-building served as the basis for an instrumentalist strategy consisting of political mobilization and campaigning through Hindu religious symbols. One of the most important of these symbols was the birthplace of Lord Ram in Ayodhya and the exploitation of communal issues such as the forced exodus of Hindus from Pakistan in 1950.⁶ However, Hindu nationalists still failed to form a powerful Hindu-based party immediately after independence.⁷

Nehru's Congress government successfully countered the attempts

of religious mobilization by Hindu nationalist organizations during the 1950s and the 1960s.⁸ It was, therefore, Nehru's concept – based upon the secular, liberal, and humanistic values of nationalism – that became the dominant trait of the political culture of India's ruling elites. Hindu nationalists' ideas and values, which were somehow rooted in the so-called Vedic Golden Age,⁹ became peripheral in the context of India's political culture. This Indian elite culture consisted of what James Manor has called “the liberal Nehruvian virtues – a commitment to secularism, open discussion, tolerance of diversity, probity, the need for reform to promote greater social justice, and so forth”.¹⁰

Hindu nationalists' struggle for power eventually became more apparent, although most RSS leaders like Golwarkar himself wanted to keep the organization outside Indian political processes.¹¹ The first political front of Hindu nationalism, Jana Sangh, was established in 1951, only a few months before the 1952 *Lok Sabha* (federal) elections.¹² At this stage, the Hindu nationalists focused on a party-based struggle and implemented a strategy to translate base-level activist networks (developed by RSS cadres) into ones with the mass electoral appeal. The party-building strategy in this phase also proved incapable of bringing Hindu nationalist politics to deconstruct Indian political culture. The Jana Sangh won only three seats in the *Lok Sabha* and, thanks to the influence of its leader, Mookerjee, gained thirty-five in the *Vidhan Sabha* (state) election.¹³ Up to the 1980s, the Hindu nationalist movement remained a minor political force compared to its Indian National Congress counterpart. The latter succeeded in marginalizing the Jana Sangh not only because of Nehru's firm secularism at the Center but also because its local cadres often manifested Hindu traditionalist attitudes which deprived the Hindu nationalists of a part of their *raison d'être*.¹⁴

Founded in 1980 and intended to be a successor to the Jana Sangh before its merger with the Janata Party in 1977, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) served as a new political front for Hindu nationalists. The BJP adopted a new constitution and a new electoral symbol and tried to distance itself from Jana Sangh by giving up the name of the latter and the party flag.¹⁵ While BJP leaders consolidated their strategies in the larger structure of the Indian electorate, the wider political landscape was changing. A major cause of this change was the periodic debacles suffered by the Indian National Congress since the end of the 1960s, followed by the erosion of Indian political institutions.

As secularism and socio-economic development were supplanted by entirely different values of the nation's political discourse, the Congress

itself appealed to ethnoreligious sentiments,¹⁶ especially in the Jammu and Kashmir elections of 1983 when Mrs. Gandhi won electoral victories by appealing to the sentiment of Hindu nationalism. Subsequently, in Punjab in 1984, she used Operation Blue Star against the Sikh militants hiding in the Golden Temple of Amritsar to rally Hindu support in the crucial Hindi-speaking states of North India. These institutional changes largely account for the Hindu nationalist movement's decision to strengthen its combined strategies in elections, bringing its activist network to the forefront and implementing its strategy of ethnoreligious mobilization by taking up the Ayodhya Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Mosque issue; a political issue that has been controversial since Indian independence. These strategies were a major reason for the rise of the BJP in the 1989 and 1991 *Lok Sabha* elections.¹⁷

In the same way, the rise of Islamic nationalism in Indonesia is interpreted as the revitalization of Muslim cultural identities shaped by the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998.¹⁸ As the Indonesian state adopted a democratic political system after three decades of authoritarianism, Islamic symbols, sentiment, and identity have been instrumental in the mobilization of political parties to maximize votes. Even though Islamic parties have fared poorly in the subsequent electoral contest since 1999 – and have been predicted to do so in the 2024 election – Islamic cultural identity in general (and Islamic social organizations in particular) will still dominate the Indonesian political scene. Hefner suggested that by spreading through the civic association activities of such influential social organizations as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah (two influential organizations representing traditionalist and modernist Muslims), Indonesian Muslim politics can build up a wide-ranging social presence.¹⁹ Based on this explanation, Indonesian Islamic cultural identity is treated as flowing instrumentally as well as spontaneously from its religious markers as political opportunities shifted.

This paper argues that the political institutions developed by Suharto's "New Order" regime by the end of his presidential years facilitated the flourishing trend of Islamic nationalist movements. Their political origins date back to the early 1990s when Suharto's political sources decreased and he mobilized Islamic symbols and identity as a political instrument to maintain his legitimacy in power.²⁰ The centerpieces of this step are some important policies he made favoring Muslim political interests. Such a political maneuver has structured a political opportunity for Muslims to uphold the Islamization process in a new stratum of Indonesian political institutions and bureaucracy. In 1991 Suharto opened Bank Muamalat,

a no-interest bank replicating a model of Islamic banks in the Middle East; in 1989 he began to build legal institutions dealing with Muslim women and family affairs; and in 1991 he sponsored the formation of ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia, the All-Indonesia Association of Muslim Intellectuals); and in 1994 Suharto supported an International Islamic Festival gathering important leaders of Islamic movements in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.²¹ From Suharto's point of view, ICMI was conceived primarily as a means of gaining support from *Santri* (Muslim) intellectuals and social activists before the general elections of 1992 and the presidential election of 1993.²² Its chairman is Minister of Research B. J. Habibie, a German-trained engineer personally tied to Suharto, with no background in Islamic or any other partisan or organizational politics. Measures were taken to ensure that ICMI would be controlled by Habibie's staff.

The response from the Muslim community (including modernists, traditionalists, and even radical Muslim factions) regarding the establishment of an Islamic bank and the reception of ICMI was almost overwhelmingly enthusiastic.²³ To many, it looked as though the government, after many years of keeping Islamic scholars outside the corridors of Suharto's power, was finally willing to admit them. Perhaps the largest number were interested more in networking than in promoting any specific agenda, but virtually all of the major Muslim-nationalist figures who *do* have an agenda, joined – as did several individuals previously considered to be opponents of the regime.²⁴ ICMI especially was then noted as one of Suharto's gestures towards Islam, since his basic posture of opposition to autonomous and powerful Muslim parties – not to mention an Islamic state – remained unaltered. The main message of this development was, rather, that as his power diminished with age, Suharto was looking around for support outside his principal base in the armed forces (and, during the 1970s, Javanese-*Abangan*-Catholic circles), and finding it rather easily in the *santri* community.²⁵

As the Suharto regime collapsed, Indonesian political institutions changed. On June 1, 1998, Habibie – Suharto's successor – promised in long television speeches to hold honest and democratic elections in 1999; a promise that he called “a transition to genuine democracy”.²⁶ This change helped to reactivate all of Indonesia's opposition movements during the Suharto era. Most of the opposition movements, from the leftist PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik/Democratic People Party) to the right-wing PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), had no long tradition in the electoral contest. No political party was more intimately involved

in popular mobilization than the Golkar, which had both strategic and organizational advantages with its political presence during Suharto's rule.²⁷

As a result, based on the 1999 elections' outcomes, the Islamic political parties – parties with distinct ideological bases in Islam – failed to gain a significant seat in the parliament. Of the total of 700 seats, the composition of the new parliament was drawn from the PDI-P (Nationalists led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, and the largest party) which controlled 185 seats (27 percent); Golkar (Nationalists associated with Suharto's political machine, which controlled 182 seats (26 percent); and the PKB (an NU-affiliated political party), which controlled 57 seats (8 percent). The PAN (a Muhammadiyah-affiliated party), built a coalition with a small Islamic party, the PK, and together they controlled 49 seats (7 percent).²⁸

In these political constraints, Islamic-based political aspirations were then maintained in civil society networks and organizations that developed shortly before the fall of Suharto. The consequence of the formation of ICMI went beyond Suharto's primary agenda. Such political opportunity enabled the Islamist movement in Indonesia to assure its social presence and attract its members from virtually all sectors of the population. By the early 2000s, its primary strength lay among the urban self-employed (merchants and property owners), teachers, and middle-class professional circles, with some scattered support in Muslim figures and regional chiefs.²⁹ ICMI, of course, is no longer a powerful social organization, since it lost its political patronage with Suharto. However, in small villages and towns, farmers, teachers, and merchants remained the most prominent groups joining Islamist organizations.

In the cities of Sumatera, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi, a relatively large proportion of the movement's members were former or current Muslim bureaucrats. This reveals that although most opposition movements and critical intellectuals in Indonesia suffered from the regime's repression for decades, the Islamists had, through ICMI, been more effective in maintaining their internal coherence and organizational presence in civil society.³⁰ Given its long experience with religious operation – an activity that has been allowed by the New Order regime – as well as its hierarchical discipline and cellular structure, the Islamists have been able to maintain a cohesive authority structure and the functioning of the base, intermediate-level organizations. The extent to which the mobilization of the movements will be transformed into a single political party is also still in question.

Our description of the rise of religious-nationalist politics in India and Indonesia highlights a framework for the role of institutions – mostly

developed by ruling regimes – in structuring relations of conflict and cooperation between political actors in a certain period of institutional changes. Different from what most analyst claim, cultural identities such as religious belief or ethnic affiliation is neither mutually exclusive nor primordial. In this perspective, the rise of identity politics in India and Indonesia and how it emerged cannot be regarded as naturally or inherently translated from its primordial markers. It is rather created, transformed, and politicized by particular social and cultural elites embedded in political institutions.³¹ In this sense, the emergence of religious politics in India and Indonesia is facilitated by the forces lying behind the nations' cultural identities, and clearly by the interaction between the political actors and the institutions they created.

The emphasis on comparative historical institutional analysis brings us to argue that the emergence of identity politics is “path dependent.” We certainly hope to show that the political outcomes of India's BJP and Indonesia's Muslim politics are shaped by contextual factors, many of which are institutional. Path dependency is the idea that institutions, once created, take “a life of their own” and may generate social processes not intended, nor foreseen, by their creators (Paul Pierson, 1996: 219-231). It seems that such an approach to the development of identity politics in India and Indonesia is important because it helps us to understand the role of institutions in the formation, mobilization, and politicization of identities. Path dependency proves the discrete yet long-lasting and critical importance of institutional variables in producing social and political changes.

Variation in Mobilization: Political Party *versus* Social Movement

We will describe the forms of political mobilization of the two trends of religious nationalists that developed in India and Indonesia during the period of institutional change. In both cases, mobilization developed out of attempts by elites to maintain their control over religious groups: Muslims in Indonesia, and Hindus in India. The movements can be classified as – to use Tilly's term – a reactive type of mobilization, i.e. religious mobilization as an elite attempt to protect established claims.³²

In this perspective, the mobilization of religious identity developed in response to political change that encouraged the religious elite in both countries to exploit religious symbols as a source of maximizing votes (in India), and as a means of establishing public discourse (in Indonesia). In the Indonesian case, because of its poor performance in the electoral contest, the Muslim elite relied on mobilizing its institutions through

civil, and social movements developed across the country since the 1999 elections. Central to this different outcome of political mobilization is the role played by regimes in driving the nature of political struggle among such competing religious communities, especially between the religious majority and minorities. However, the organizational forms of mobilization share similar patterns: they are led by elites, organized on a hierarchical basis, and include a social network among young cadres long established before the opportunity for mobilization takes place.

Democratic India provides an example of a religious-nationalist party with a strong tradition of cultural mobilization in politics. The emergence of the BJP as a powerful political group in Indian politics has been facilitated by its ability to attract a following among virtually all groups and strata of Indian society,³³ even though the caste problem prevailed, contributing to the party's internal friction. In this sense, the democratic system³⁴ and institutions have enabled the Hindu nationalist movements to build up a wide-ranging social presence reaching far beyond the temple – but also far beyond the parliament. All of this serves as a ready-to-use political source to be exploited whenever elections and democratic competition are contested.

The following story on the maximization of Hindu sentiment and identity for elections prevailed. Since the mid-1980 the BJP's campaign has relied more on a strategy of ethno-religious mobilization.³⁵ As applied in the 1989 elections campaign, the strategy of mobilization involved, primarily, revitalizing the Ramjanmabhoomi-Ayodhya issue. In many cases, not only did this mobilization theme continue to use Hindu religious symbols, but also introduced a new interpretation of those symbols. For example, newly invented rituals and new versions of old Indian myths have been made.³⁶ On the surface, it appeared that this strategy entailed an appeal to religious sentiment, which was similar to the 'nationalist devotionals of *Ekatmata Yatra* (ideological devotion). This is because the emphasis is given to the worship of Ram in the rituals of the *Ram Shila Pujans* movement and associated iconography. Several of these images focused on the innocent child Ram, who served as an object of intense and uncomplicated religious emotion and devotion.

In the epic of the Ramayana, Ram was associated with Vaishnavism and was depicted as a Northern king. Yet, in the BJP's campaign, Hindu nationalists concentrated on presenting him as a hero of significance to Hindus of all sects and as the ruler of the whole of India. New interpretations of these symbols were also made by adapting the story of Ram to its political meaning. The BJP and Hindu religious elites attempted to create a national

Hinduism by sponsoring the broadcast of the Ramayana on national television in 78 weekly episodes in 1988. Commenting on this ‘Ramayana syndrome’, Jafferlot noted, “these adaptations ignored the other version of the Ramayana and substituted a national for a large variety of regional and local versions”.³⁷ The BJP’s national campaign of this ethnic-religious symbol ‘played a leading role in creating a national Hindu identity, a form of group consciousness that has not hitherto existed’.³⁸

While the revitalization of Ram displayed some features of nationalist devotionals initiated by *Ekatmata Yatra*, more aggressive discourse and icons also appeared during the election campaign. In many cases, Ram was presented in the role of the ‘angry Hindu’.³⁹ Large advertising boards displayed Ram as a symbol of strength and power. The usual image was that of a muscular Ram drawing his bow. Ram was often juxtaposed with the model of the temple that the BJP was planning to build in Ayodhya.⁴⁰ This reinterpretation of a mythological character was intended to express the spirit of a Hindu nationalist movement, proclaiming that ‘Hindus had to be aware of their vulnerability and they have to act aggressively to defend their nation’.⁴¹

In contrast to the Indian experience, Indonesian Muslim politics, and movements grew under severe political control and suppression for almost three decades.⁴² Muslim leaders and ulama clashed many times with Indonesian authorities during Suharto in power. Three of the confrontations were detrimental to its power and organizing capabilities: Firstly in 1973, when the government arranged ‘a fusion’ between influential Islamic parties to be led by government-backed up figures and, as a result, produced long-lasting internal conflict in the party. Secondly, in the early 1980s, when a number of Muslim leaders were arrested and discredited for their involvement in social protest to the implementation of Pancasila as a sole ideology for all social-political organizations, known as Tanjung Priok Tragedy. Thirdly, by the end of the 1980s, when was accused of running an underground movement dedicated to violent political change.⁴³ Hence, there was one respect in which the Indonesian politicians and leaders’ and Indian Hindus’ relationship with the political institutions in their respective countries differed very significantly.

The political strategies and cultural mobilization that characterized the Hindu movement’s activities in India were relatively weak amongst Indonesian Muslim nationalists. Although the Islamists did take part occasionally in various protest demonstrations during the Suharto era – especially concerning Muslim political interests such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or demanding the government ban gambling activities

– they invariably displayed a great deal of self-restraint.⁴⁴ This was not only indicative of the relative weakness of the Islamist movements in Indonesia and its loose organizational structure – as we shall see later – but also a clear sign of their unwillingness to embark upon any united action to transform themselves into a single, encompassing political party. It can be argued, therefore, that the Islamic mobilization developed by political parties in post-authoritarian Indonesia was relatively a failure. Several parties such as the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, or Development United Party), the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PK, or Justice Party), and the Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB, or Crescent and Star Party) have tried to uphold the strategy of promoting the implementation of Islamic *Shari`ah*, unity between religion and state, and the establishment of a civil, religious state in their campaign; but they fared poorly in almost all general elections.⁴⁵

In Indonesia, a more important institution that defined the character of Muslim nationalism was its civil associations. The population was mobilized by such organizations around Islamic symbols, threats from secularism and other religions, and anti-Western/American economic imperialism. Urban and educated communities were linked together and glorified as the main thrust of Islamization for the nation. Liddle (2001) and Sukma (2003) have noted that the mobilization capacity of the Islamic social movements, while perhaps still falling short of its peak in the 1950s, had, by the early 2000s, produced one of the most formidable political forces in Indonesia. In the 2010s, an Islamic movement such as the FPI was estimated to have one to two million members within its networks – known in Indonesian as “brothers” (*Ikhwan*) – in Indonesian districts, urban mosques, campuses, and the villages outside the island of Java (Liddle, 2000: 161). This particular Islamist movement is the main actor in the struggle for an Islamic state in Indonesia with its *Salafi-oriented* group sent to conflicting regions across the country. Circulation of the *Salafi* paper, *Sabily* (My Path), reached between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand. The Front Pembela Islam (FPI, or Islamic Defender Front), operating in urban areas, commanded around one million members and the allegiance of one-fifth to one-third of the student body, allowing them to dominate student unions.⁴⁶ Hizbu Tahrir (Party of Liberation) organized one hundred thousand members centered on campuses and youth organizations.⁴⁷

The most prominent and long-standing Islamist movement is Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah (DDI, or Islamic Preaching Council), a Jakarta-based national private organization, founded in 1967. This organization is associated with former Masyumi politicians who favored the establishment

of an Islamic state through religious mobilization in media, preaching activities, and social networks. Although the organized strength of the Islamist organizations concentrated on campuses and other urban centers, its appeal spilled over into the general populace of the city, rural towns, and even villages, where its leaders organized around mosques and religious schools. In some places, the movement developed its clinics, cooperatives, and small industries.⁴⁸ The DDI's intellectuals and preachers have been engaged in a continued debate about the relationship between religion and the state with secular-nationalist leaders, including those moderate-modernist Muslim thinkers. Liddle labeled this group as an Islamic scripturalist, as its main intellectual position within the debate was committed to the implementation of Islamic *Shari'ah*. Interestingly, during Suharto's political accommodation through ICMI, the DDI has become one of the main proponents of Suharto's Islamic policies claiming that there is no longer a significant group of Indonesian Muslims who favor an Islamic state – as the term used in the 1950's – yet asserting that a new political Islam would be like the Christian democratic parties of Europe.⁴⁹

However, the role played by social networks in strengthening the two religious nationalist movements is central. Both India's BJP and Indonesia's Islamists share similar patterns. For the BJP, a strategy of activist networks stood at the forefront of winning the elections. This strategy adopted the same pattern of party-building in the 1950s when Jana Sangh, the earliest Hindu nationalist political party, based its campaign primarily on a hierarchy of RSS-trained cadres.⁵⁰ A network of *sangathan mantris* or organizing centers and secretaries of the BJP (formerly of the Jan Sangh) was in place for implanting party branches at the local level. This strategy was developed by the BJP to communicate the party doctrine to (and maintain social ties with) the largest number of people. Through such a *modus operandi*, the BJP was able to transform itself from the narrow method of a religious party into a party with principles of political mobilization to contest the elections.

The BJP's strategy in the 1989 and 1991 elections is a case in point. Most of the notables and princes nominated by the BJP to represent the party in Madhya Pradesh were militant Hindu nationalists, among them veterans such as P. Khandelwal, S. Jatiya, P.C. Verma, L.N. Pandey, Baburao Paranjpe and Sukhendra Singh.⁵¹ All of these victorious candidates were the local cadres of the RSS. The situation was very much the same related to the seat adjustment made between the BJP and the Janata Dal. At this particular point, the BJP put up 268 candidates and faced the Congress in straight contests in 205 constituencies, which Janata Dal did not contest.

Of its Member Legislative Assembly (MLA) candidates, 219 were elected. Their bio-data reveals an exceptionally clear picture of the socialization in RSS cadres. The most remarkable feature was the massive presence (44 candidates) of acknowledged *swayamsevaks* – the RSS volunteers –and members of organizations affiliated to the RSS, such as the VHP, the BMS, the VKA, the former Jana Sangh, and the BJM (137 candidates).⁵² Briefly speaking, the typical profile of the BJP candidate, and hence the person elected, was a young Hindu nationalist activist, generally born and bred in a town, relatively well trained in *swayamsevak* cadre networks.

In Indonesia, during Suharto's control of Islamic-based civic opposition, many base-level militants had retreated to the somewhat less risky social terrain, working patiently to rebuild labor, student, and urban middle-class associations. These organizations often operated under the protective umbrella of influential preachers, especially those who graduate from Islamic Studies at Ummul Qura University in Mecca or Al-Azhar in Cairo. This period also witnessed the proliferation of so-called Islamic investment companies and law firms, many of which had ties to the Islamists. This provided the Indonesian Islamists with a network of strategically located activists to catalyze civic opposition movement *vis-à-vis* the Suharto regime.⁵³ These social networks had never disappeared, even during the era of institutional change after the fall of Suharto. Such changes even facilitated the increasing trends of Islamic mobilization pursued by new and rising strata, especially the educated bureaucrats, in a significant number of Indonesian provinces during the era of political liberalization.

Another feature of the Islamist social network is that it is built upon an educational background, which is generally linked to Middle Eastern learning centers; in particular Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. Historically speaking, networks among Muslim traders and Sufis in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago were instrumental in the spread of Islam.⁵⁴ During Dutch colonial times, Muslim *ulama* who returned from the learning centers of the Arabian peninsula developed intellectual networks responsible for the rise of Islamic reformism and the establishment of Muslim learning institutions, oriented toward the purification and intellectualization of Islam.⁵⁵ It is such an educational-religious network that dominates the features of Islamist movements in current Indonesian political changes: linked to the Middle Eastern graduates, oriented to *shari'ah*-minded thinking in religious outlook, with a preferred agenda for the establishment of an Islamic state through the Islamization of society.

It has been clear so far that the BJP's emergence in Indian politics and the spread of Islamist movements in current Indonesian political

developments were facilitated by the instrumentalization of the symbols of cultural identity and the support from the movements' activist networks to win over constituencies. One may find that such a strategy of cultural mobilization has been adopted by Hindu nationalists in India and Islamists in Indonesia since the countries' independence, but has never enabled those movements to expand their political bases. However, the context became more favorable and enabled the BJP and the Islamist leaders to implement religious mobilization more successfully. The implementation of the strategy thus depended on its political structure, i.e. the presence of political opportunity and the ability to facilitate it was meaningful for identity mobilization.

What is likely to be an issue is political commitment. The policy shift of ruling regimes that facilitated the rapid growth of the Indian BJP in the 1980s, and the relative success of Indonesian-Muslim civic organizations in the post-Suharto era, is best explained by a commitment problem operating between the ruling elites in both countries. As the central ideological concept of India and Indonesia is a secular, i.e. non-theocratic, state, to promote policies favoring particular religious communities may be seen as a definite break of the political contract of the nation.

Conclusion

As this paper aims to explain the rise of religious politics in India and Indonesia, our examination of the BJP and Islamist movements has offered several answers that illustrate a direction opposite to that which most religious studies have claimed. It is the interaction between institutional changes and opportunities for mobilization that explain why such a politics of religious identity rose, and in what way that identity was mobilized and politicized in the two countries.

In this article, we have illustrated that historical institutionalism provides more illumination in regard to the contrast between Hindu nationalist politics in India and Muslim political movements in Indonesia. In India, the long-established democratic political system was something advantageous: competitive multiparty elections allowed no such pattern of political development for the Hindu nationalists. The emergence of Hindu-nationalist politics in the 1980s was far from inevitable. The dramatic decline of the popularity of the Congress in the early 1980s – especially during Narashima Rao's leadership – was instrumental for the BJP leaders to mobilize Hindus demanding change. Principal political mobilizers, the role played by political elites and politicians (especially the RSS, the VHP, and Hindu Mahasabha networks) are critical in the containment

and activation of religio-ethnic cleavage. Through the program of Hindu nationalism, the party aspired to overcome intra-religious cleavage and build a broadly defined Hindu vote bank by filling a perceived leadership vacuum among the Hindu population.

In Indonesia, what follows is the idea of unintended consequences accompanying the second aspect of the state's institutional development favoring a non-political path to the emergence of Islamist movements: the weight of the authoritarian state under Suharto. Suharto's repression of political pluralism, especially severe and brutal to any Islamic aspiration during the 1970s and 1980s, and subsequent political accommodation in the early 1990s through ICMI and other Islamic policies, led the Islamist leaders to conflate the ideas of a society-based struggle for political Islam. Consequently, Suharto's authoritarianism unintentionally legitimized a society-based Islamism, although it delimited political Islam. The third aspect includes features contemporary to Indonesia's new political society provided by the political opportunities after the collapse of Suharto. Most of the new political parties were far from institutionalized. In the case of Islamist groups, political parties were unable to offer differentiated programs or develop networks of organizational links to establish control over the majority vote. As religious cleavage no longer dominates the nation's politics, no Islamic parties that emerged in the post-New Order regime have distinctive capabilities, with profound expertise and area of specialty, to assure their social presence amongst the Indonesian masses. Under such conditions, it is difficult to relay mobilization to the party system.

India's democratic system enabled the BJP to build up a wide-ranging social presence through its Hindu-based political networks, with organizational structures defined and functioning on a translation of its mission into electoral appeal. In many cases, the BJP state leaders exercised their control of the electorate by capitalizing on the Hindu nationalist activist network. This includes support of notables, populist propaganda, socio-economic services, and long-term work by the Sangathanist network in an effort to win over constituencies. Moreover, the BJP's strategy to put up several candidates from the ranks of Hindu nationalist activists as party candidates played a leading role in the BJP's mass electoral appeal.[]

Endnotes

1. John T. Sidel, *Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).
2. This tendency is represented by most works on India, such as in Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethno Nationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University

- of California, 1996); David Ludden, *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movements in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
3. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*; Zoya Hasan, "Communal Mobilization and Changing Majorities in Uttar Pradesh," in David Ludden, *Contesting the Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*; Greg Bailey, "Whither the BJP: A Political Movement or Just a Group of Revivalists." *South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies* vol. XVII (1994): 31-56.
 4. K. Yogendra Malik and V. B. Singh, *Hindu Nationalists in India: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party* (Boulder: Westview, 1994).
 5. Thomas B. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: University Press, 1999), 89.
 6. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 112; Bruce D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 65.
 7. There are plenty of organizations affiliated to the RSS and to the VHP mentioned above, with their own members and structures. They include The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarti Parishad (Student Congress), Janata Yuva Morcha (Young People), the Vidya Bharati (Indian Education), The Hindu Seva Pratinchthana (Hindu Misionaries), the Dhama Sansad (Parliament of Holy practices), and so on. Most of those organizations serve as a generating body for Hindu nationalist politics and, consequently, have become front line political elements for the Hindu party. See, Suranjit Kumar Saha, "Nationalism and the RSS," in Arthur Bonner et al., *Democracy in India*, (Washington D.C.: American University Press, 1994).
 8. Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 31-46.
 9. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 138; Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*, 89.
 10. James Manor, "Anomie in Indian Politics: Origins and Potential Wider Impact", in
 11. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 18, No. 19/21, (1983), 725.
 12. Walter Andersen, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Shamyasevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder: Westview, 1987), 148-153.
 13. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 61; Andersen, *The Brotherhood*, 158; Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*, 41.
 14. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 177.
 15. Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*, 49.
 16. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 112.
 17. Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*.
 18. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*.
 19. Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam* (Princeton: University Press, 2000); Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia's search for Stability* (Boulder: Westview, 2001).
 20. Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 63; R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani. "The Triumph of Leadership: Explaining the Indonesian Voter." Paper Presented at the 2000 Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D. C. 2000.
 21. William Liddle, *Leadership and Culture in Indonesian Politics* (Sydney: Ullen-Unwin, 1996), 226-234.
 22. Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, 317; Arif Budiman, "Indonesia: Trials of President Wahid." *ISEAS: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (2001): 152.
 23. Bahtiar Effendy, "Islam and the State: The Transformation of Political Thought and Practice in Indonesia." Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1995), 182-188.
 24. There were oppositions to this Suharto's political maneuver. The most important Islamic

- social and political leader who has not joined ICMI is Abdurrahman Wahid, who, since 1984, has been the head of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – Indonesia’s largest Islamic social organization. Wahid condemned ICMI as sectarian, and as a step backwards toward political segmentation based on religion. See, Edward Schiller, *Indonesian Political Culture: asking the right question* (Athens: University of Ohio, 2001): 44.
25. Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, 327; Budiman, “Indonesia...”, 151.
 26. William Liddle, “Indonesia’s Democratic Past and Future.” *Comparative Politics* 4 (1992): 448. In terms of religion, Indonesia is a largely (about 85 percent) Muslim society, though it does contain well-educated Protestant and Catholic minorities (about 3 percent each) whose political influence has been greater than their size. The most important religion-based conflict has been within the Muslim community, however, between a self-consciously devout group of Muslims and a Java-centered religious tradition that is a blend of Islamic, Hindu, and animistic beliefs and practices; Modernist Muslims representing an urban-educated populace affiliated to Muhammadiyah; and traditionalist Muslims representing villagers and remaining loyal to the *Shafi’i* school of legal thought affiliated to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). See Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, (Chicago: University Press, 1984).
 27. Andrew Rosser, *The Politics of Economic Liberalization in Indonesia* (London: Corzon Press, 2001), 198.
 28. Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting*, 317; Budiman, “Indonesia..”, 157.
 29. Budiman, “Indonesia...”, 155.
 30. Rizal Sukma, “Conflict Management In Post-authoritarian Indonesia”, in Damien Kingsbury, ed. *Autonomy and Disintegration in Indonesia* (London: Routledge- Cruzon, 2003), 117; Liddle, “The Triumph of Leadership”, 1-23.
 31. Harry and Kingsbury, Damien (ed.), Avelling, *Autonomy and Disintegration in Indonesia* (London and New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), xii.
 32. Sven Steinmo and Katheleen Thelen, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Perspective.” in Steinmo et al. *Structuring Politics, Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 487-89.
 33. Hudson Meadwell, “Forms of Cultural Mobilization in Quebec and Britany”, 1870-1914, in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (1983): 405.
 34. Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*; Jaffrelot, 1993: 346-48.
 35. It is important to note that since the beginning, the Hindu nationalist movement was characterized as an organization representing the ethnic-upper castes among Hindu communities. Indeed its ideology was originally involved by high-caste socio-religious reformers anxious to preserve a Hindu culture by imitating some of the more robust features of the West and otherwise stigmatized ‘Semitic religions’. This ideological formulation has become a major obstacle for the Jan Sangh in building a larger Indian constituency. However, the decline of popular support for the Congress created an opening for the BJP to enter the political arena as a legitimate contender for power at the center. As this process continued, the BJP then became increasingly representative of a Hindu society that crosscut caste differences. See Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent*, 87.
 36. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*; Bailey, “Whither The BJP”.
 37. Richard H. Davis, Iconography of Rama’s Chariots, in David Luden, *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 28.
 38. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*, 385.
 39. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*, 386.
 40. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*.
 41. Davis Luden, *Contesting the Nation*, 38.
 42. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*, 391.
 43. William Liddle, *Leadership and Culture*, 268.

44. Effendy, *Islam and the State*, 78-110.
45. Mark Woodward and James Rush, eds., *Intellectual development in Indonesian Islam*. Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 1995), 148; Schwarz, 1999:54-60.
46. Budiman, "Indonesia..." 157.
47. Liddle, "The Triumph of Leadership", 182; Sukma, "Conflict Management", 12-13.
48. Sukma, "Conflict Management", 17.
49. Liddle, "The Triumph of Leadership", 170.
50. Liddle, *Leadership and Culture*, 43-47.
51. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist* 1993: 386-88, 398. The BJP's strategy developed in states such as Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, for example, reveals that the RSS activist networks enabled the BJP state leaders to exercise their control of the electorate. The 1989 elections allowed the BJP to secure 27 out of 40 seats contested in Madhya Pradesh, and 13 out of 25 seats in Rajasthan, even though a number of factors contributed to the BJP's success in those two states. This refers to the fact that by the end of 1988 the Congress of Madhya Pradesh was badly driven by factionalism, so its regional leaders failed to work together during the election campaign. Another possibility is that the electoral pact made between the Janata Dal and the BJP enabled the latter to eclipse the Congress in certain states. Nevertheless, the BJP's decision to put up several candidates from the ranks of Hindu nationalist activists played a leading role in the BJP's mass electoral appeal.
52. Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*: 144; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*, 386-88.
53. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist*, 355; Malik and Singh, *Hindu Nationalist*, 187-88.
54. Liddle, *Leadership and Culture*, 423-431.
55. Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of the Malay-Indonesian and Middle East Ulama in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2004), 15-47.
56. James Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Deliar Noer, *Modern Islamic Movements: 1900-1942*, Monograph Series of Modern Indonesian Project (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980), 52-69
57. William Liddle, "Suharto's Indonesia: Personal Rule and Political Institutions", *Pacific Affairs* 58, 1 (1985): 68-90.

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