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Islam and Democracy: The Case of the Early Reform Era

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ABSTRACT

Almost all ulama and Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia accept the term "democracy" and support it as a system that must be implemented in Indonesia. The emergence of the "reform era" following the fall of authoritarian Soeharto's government in 1998 was marked as the starting point of the transition to substantive democracy. The political reform took the form of conducting free elections, developing a multiparty system, and guaranteeing more freedom for the press and citizens to express their opinions and criticism, and the amendments to the 1945 Constitution. This ran well, so the democratic transition was considered successful. The political parties and civil society organizations, including those with an Islamic background, played an important role in this transition. To develop a civilized democracy in Indonesia, the government, political parties, and civil societies, especially religious organizations, made efforts to strengthen ethics and moral education as well as civic education, conveying values in a democratic system, such as tolerance, trust, responsibility, law consciousness, and others. This research was done through qualitative approach, based on library documents.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although almost all governments in the Muslim World characterize their political systems as democratic or are moving toward democratization, most do not implement democracy substantively. Some maintain their monarchic system and even reject it, arguing that it is unsuitable for their cultures. Many of them practiced for a long time or maintained their authoritarian system to continue their power by restricting any political activity of the citizens that can influence reducing their power. This condition led to anti-authoritarian demonstrations, protests, and riots in several Middle Eastern countries. In 2010-2011, they succeeded in demanding Tunisia's President Zine Al Abidin Ben Ali and Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi to step down. The events were then regarded as the emergence of the Arab Spring, although they did not run well, and some of them are still facing serious problems up to now as they occur in Syria and Libya.

Indonesia is one of the Muslim countries that is moving to substantive democracy today. Since its independence, the Indonesian government has introduced democracy as a proper political system, although each has introduced various concepts and practices (Hosen, 2015). Meanwhile, political and civil societies have also struggled for democratic systems, although the government threatened them in certain eras. The position of independent and autonomous groups or associations in democratization is very important because building democracy concerns the development of political institutions, human attitudes, and the relationship between government and citizens.

According to Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, a completed *transition* has occurred when four requirements are met: there is sufficient agreement about procedures to hold a democratic election; a government has been directly elected in a free popular vote; that government has authority to formulate policies; and there is no power-sharing outside the executive, legislative, and judicial branches (Garreton-Merlno, 1999). Meanwhile, a *consolidated democracy* has three characteristics: when democracy becomes internalized behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally. Behaviorally, a democracy is consolidated when no significant institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a non-democratic regime or by seceding from the state. Attitudinally, a democracy is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life, and when support for anti-system alternatives is quite small or isolated from pro-democratic forces (Brahm, 2022). Constitutionally, a democracy is consolidated when governmental and non-governmental forces alike become subject to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process.

The emergence of the "reform era" following the fall of authoritarian Soeharto's government in 1998 was the starting point of the transition to a substantive democracy. According to Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, democratization consists of a two-stage process, namely democratic transition and democratic consolidation (Linz & Stepan, 1996). The democratic transition in Indonesia took place relatively quickly because it ended when the government succeeded in conducting the first direct elections in 2004. Then, the democratization process continued up to 2014 in the stage of democratic consolidation. Although the democratization process was considered successful, certain problems in

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democratic consolidation can be challenges to developing a true civilized democracy. In this case, Muslims, as the majority group of the population, had an important role in the process besides the political will of the government.

Based on the description above, the problem formulation in this study is how is the affinity between Islam and democracy, the political will of the government on the democratic transition and consolidation (from 1998 to 2014), and the role of political parties and civil society in the democratization process? The aim is to describe the concept of democracy from an Islamic perspective, to describe the government policy on the democratization process, to analyze the process and its problems and challenges, and to analyze the role of political parties and civil society. This study uses the method of content analysis to describe the affinity between Islam and democracy as well as the theory of political sociology, especially the theory of the democratization process put forward by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan.

2. METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach with content analysis methods to investigate the relationship between Islam and democracy in the context of democratic transition and consolidation in Indonesia during the 1998-2014 Reformasi period. The aim of this analysis is to describe and interpret the concept of democracy from an Islamic perspective, government policies in the democratization process, and the role of political parties and civil society organizations in supporting democracy. Additionally, the theoretical framework of political theory, particularly the theories of democratic transition and consolidation proposed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, is used to assess the successes and challenges in the democratization process in Indonesia.

This approach also involves historical analysis to understand the political dynamics since the fall of the authoritarian regime of Soeharto to the efforts of building a more substantive democracy. The study integrates a political sociology perspective to explore the interaction between the state, civil society, and religious institutions in building a civilized democracy. The data used comes from policy documents, election reports, and relevant literature, which are critically analyzed to identify challenges such as radicalism, religious conflict, and unethical political practices. This approach aims to provide a deep understanding of the relationship between Islam and democracy in the context of social, cultural, and religious pluralism in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Discourses on Islam and Democracy

In line with modernization, many *ulamas,* Muslim leaders, and governments also introduced modern state and political development. The involvement of Islam in the process of modern political development is especially influenced by the ideas of Islamic modernism, firstly introduced by Jamâl al-Dîn al-Afghânî (1838-1897) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905). One of the modern political systems frequently discussed in Muslim countries is the term “democracy.” The term and concept of democracy are influenced by Western political thought and practice. Almost all governments in the world have accepted this term; even authoritarian governments use the attribute “democratic” to characterize their regimes and their aspirations. A

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result has been a proliferation of terms using the word "democracy" and a corresponding change in the word's original meaning, such as "liberal democracy," "guided democracy," "popular democracy," "socialist democracy," and so on (Grolier, 1994). Such altered usages are partly intended to bring the concept of democracy closer to certain societies' cultures and partly intended to justify a political system promoted by certain governments. Of course, there remains a basic concept of democracy and certain minimal conditions that must be fulfilled by the democratic system, especially majority rule, popular vote, free elections, and accountability.

Modern democratic ideas were largely shaped by the ideas and institutions of the Enlightenment tradition, which began in the sixteenth century; among them are the ideas of secularism initiated by Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) (Apter, 2017). Hence, there are various responses or opinions among *ulama* and Muslim intellectuals and activists on the term and concept of democracy, classified into three responses. Firstly, those who support democracy as a political system compatible with Islam, although some respects of democracy should be adjusted to Islamic teachings. Secondly, those who reject democracy and consider it as being incompatible with Islam because it is based on secularism that separates Islam and the state as well as negates the sovereignty of God. Thirdly, those who fully support democracy based on secularism without any adjustment to Islamic teachings.

Muhammad 'Abduh, inspired by Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani, was the first Islamic scholar who promoted Islamic modernism, including Islamic political thought that supported democracy (Esposito, 1995). Ali Abd al-Raziq, for his part, was the first Islamic scholar who supported the separation of religion and state, which implies supporting democracy based on secularism. At the same time, Sayyid Qutb was considered the first Islamic scholar who strongly opposed the un-Islamic political system to be implemented in an Islamic society. In accordance with Qutb, most "Islamic fundamentalists" or "Islamists" oppose the term and concept of democracy. So do Salafis such as Hafiz Salih, who forbids using the term and concept of democracy because this concept means the negation of Allah's sovereignty over men (Salih, 1988). Yet many moderate Islamists, such as Abula'la Maududi and Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, do not refuse democracy out of hand. Maududi distinguished between the philosophical concepts of democracy and its organizational form (Maududi, 1960), while Al-Qaradawi considered the substance of democracy to be compatible with Islam (Voll, 2007).

Some observers thought that both the religion of Islam and the realities of Muslim politics demonstrate that Islam is incompatible with democracy (Esposito, 2019). They consider the involvement of Islamic movements in the democratic process as a temporary strategy, meaning they do not support democracy in the true sense. Judith Miller, for example, argues that despite their rhetorical commitment to democracy and pluralism, virtually all militant Islamists oppose both (Miller, n.d.). Yet some others, such as John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, thought "that Islam is not inherently incompatible with democracy. 'Political Islam' is sometimes a program for religious democracy and not primarily an agenda for holy war or terrorism" (Esposito & Voll, 2001). The emergence of the Arab Spring in 2011 showed this, so French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe argued: "Islam and democracy are not incompatible, insisting that the Arab Spring, which has already toppled three dictators, should open the way to political pluralism (Juppe, 2011)." Unfortunately, the Arab Spring did not run smoothly, as happened in Egypt, Libya, and Syria, and this may have strengthened the opinion that Islam is incompatible with democracy.

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In Indonesia, as a Muslim country, most ulama and Muslim intellectuals accept the term "democracy" and support it as a system that must be implemented. The SI (Sarikat Islam, Islamic Association) even supported democratic ideas formulated in a Declaration of Principles and an Action Program approved by its second congress in 1917 (Celarent, 2013). Generally, their support for democracy is based on two factors. Firstly, its values are in accordance with the Islamic values of society, especially the concept of *shûrâ* (mutual consultation). Secondly, it is an appropriate way of articulating Muslims' aspirations and interests because the Muslim community in Indonesia constitutes the majority. Nevertheless, their concept of democracy and its principles, such as freedom, equality, and pluralism, is not fully the same as the liberal's concept from which democracy originated.

Besides, there exist certain differences of opinion among *ulamas* and Muslim intellectuals concerning the idea of popular sovereignty. Some deny such sovereignty because absolute sovereignty, according to them, is vested in God. However, most have no problem with popular sovereignty because they differentiate between God's absolute sovereignty and a certain state's political sovereignty. The latter translates the idea of popular sovereignty into a democratic system. Almost all of them, however, recognize the supremacy of God's injunction *(shari'ah)* as the basic standard of Muslims' life in society and nation, although there are various opinions among them on its implementation as national law (Perry, 2024).

The two biggest Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah support democracy and consider it to be in accordance with Islamic teachings. Only a few Muslim activists or groups rejected democracy, including elections during the reform era conducted in 1999, 2004, and 2009. They are conservative and radical in thought and attitude, but various actions exist. In 2010, they published a book entitled *Ilusi Negara Democracy* (*Illusion of Democratic State*), supported by Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, an Islamic organization established by Taqiyy al-Din al-Nabhani in 1953 in Palestine (Wadjdi & Al-Jawi, 2009). In 2013, Hizbut Tahrir's magazine, *Al-Wa'ie*, came under the title *Demokrasi Sistem Kufur* (*Democracy is Unbeliever's System*) (Siyasah Dakwah, 2020). Such a rejection was also expressed by other radical "Islamist" groups, such as the Council of Indonesian Mujahidin (Majlis Mujahidin Indonesia) and Jama'ah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT). The open rejection of democracy is a new phenomenon in Indonesia, influenced by radical Ikhwani (Muslim Brotherhood) or Salafi (Wahhabi) ideas that considered democracy as being *jahiliyyah* or *tâghût* (un-Islamic or evil) system, a terminology originally introduced by Sayyid Qutb.

3.2. Concept of Indonesian Democracy

Since its independence in 1945, Indonesia has practiced four forms of democracy, i.e. "Parliamentary Democracy" (1950-1959), "Guided Democracy" (1959-1965), "Pancasila Democracy" (1966-1998), and democracy without any adjective (1998-present). Each made Pancasila state philosophy, but there are differences in practice.[1] The period of Parliamentary

[1] Preparing for Indonesian independence in 1945, the founding fathers promoted *Pancasila* (five principles) as a common platform, making it the basis of the state. Consequently, Indonesia is neither a secular nor a religious state. The state clearly recognizes the existence of religion in the life of the state, as stipulated in Article 29 of the Indonesian Constitution. The principles of Pancasila are: (1) believe in God, (2) just and civilized humanitarianism, (3) the unity of Indonesia, (4) democracy guided by the inner wisdom of deliberation among representatives, and (5) social justice for all of Indonesian people.

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Democracy was manifested in liberal democracy. In contrast, Guided Democracy was manifested as a socialist democracy in which the power was centralized and held by one person. The period of Pancasila Democracy during the New Order government (1966-1998) was manifested in the form of "formalistic democracy" or "procedural democracy," which was contrary to a substantive democracy. Many Indonesian political elites in the New Order consider that the collapse of Parliamentary Democracy was because it was based on the values of liberalism, which are not appropriate for Indonesia and its national characteristics. Yet some observers, such as Herbert Feith, argue that the collapse was because the Third World at that time was not yet ready to implement such democracy. Meanwhile, the collapse of Guided Democracy was because of the abortive Communist (PKI) coup (Feith, 2007).

The term Pancasila Democracy, promoted by the New Order government, emerged formally in 1968 by the Decree of People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*) Number XXXVII the year 1968. This Decree does not explain the essence and mechanism of Pancasila Democracy in detail. It just explains the decision-making mechanism through the method of *musyawarah mufakat* (mutual deliberation to reach consensus). The operational concept of Pancasila democracy has officially never been fully explained. In the Guidelines of State Policy *(Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara, GBHN)* of 1993, Pancasila Democracy is determined as one of the guiding principles behind national development. Besides, there are also some semi-official explanations of Pancasila Democracy published by governmental institutes, such as the explanation described in the textbook for "P4 training" published by BP-7. Pancasila Democracy is defined thus:

> a democracy based on the idea of family-like ethics *(kekeluargaan)* and cooperation (*gotong royong)* to realize people's prosperity, which consists of (1) elements based on religious consciousness and the refusal of atheism, (2) truth, love, lofty morality, and Indonesian characteristics, (3) equilibrium between individual and social interests, between human and Divine relations, between material and spiritual aspects (Ismakum, 1996).

Most *ulamas* and Muslim intellectuals considered the basic concept of Pancasila Democracy introduced by the New Order government as being in line with Islamic doctrines. The similarity between them takes the form of limitation of popular will, which cannot be contrary to the principle of belief in God, and all decisions must be accountable to the electorate and God. Moreover, both Pancasila and Islam emphasize rights and duties, the equilibrium between individual and collective rights, and material and spiritual interests. Although there was a conceptual similarity between Pancasila Democracy and Islamic doctrines, operational differences existed between the governments and the Muslim intellectuals' interpretations of Pancasila Democracy (S. Rochmat, 2018). Unlike its concept, considered to be compatible with Islam and Indonesian culture, its practice was rejected by the people because it was then aimed to justify the government policy and attitude, which are authoritarian in nature. Such a condition led to anti-government protests conducted by reform movements that succeeded in demanding the fall of Soeharto in May 1998.

Although there was no official term for democracy in the reform era, characterizing democracy practiced in Indonesia is still relevant because Indonesian people's social and cultural background is different from that of Western people, from where the concept of democracy originated. There are sometimes debates about the characteristics of Indonesian democracy, whether it is secular or religious. Many secular leaders support liberal democracy

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based on secularism, and therefore, religion should be separated from the state. On the contrary, most Islamic leaders and organizations support democracy based on Pancasila, which recognizes religious values and Indonesian culture. Such a debate is not new because the founding fathers had already discussed it during the preparation sessions for Indonesian independence in 1945 (Madinier, 2022). Characterizing democracy based on Indonesian philosophy and culture is not only supported by Muslim leaders but also by nationalist leaders, who mostly oppose liberal democracy based on secularism.

Obviously, Indonesian democracy is secular in terms of political institutions. Yet, state philosophy (Pancasila) is not secular because it recognizes the existence of religion in society and the state.[2] This means that Indonesian democracy is based on or adjusted to Indonesia's own ideology and constitution, as well as belief system and culture, which do not contradict the fundamental concept of democracy. Such a characteristic was first expressed by Mohammad Hatta, arguing that Indonesian democracy is based on (1) Western socialism based on humanity, (2) Islamic teachings that stress the Divine truth as well as justice and brotherhood, and (3) collectivism practiced by communal groups in Indonesia (Swasono & Ridjal, 2006). Hence, many Indonesian intellectuals characterize the concept of Indonesian democracy as "theistic democracy" (Fatwa & Maarif, 2001) or "religious-based democracy". However, this adjective is not necessarily mentioned in official or daily use.

The concept implies that public policy is not merely decided by popular will as a manifestation of popular sovereignty but also by considering religions and cultures in Indonesia. Such a consideration can also be seen in the context of the limitation of freedom, as stipulated in Article 28 (J) of the Indonesian Constitution. The religion here is Islam, the religion of most Indonesian people, and Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Although the majority of Indonesian people are Muslims, Islam is not mentioned in the Indonesian Constitution (Assyaukanue, 2009). The use of religion rather than culture characterizes Indonesian democracy because democracy is originally based on secularism, which demands the separation of religion and state. In contrast, Indonesian society is religious, and religion has a significant role in this country. Consequently, Indonesian democracy can accommodate certain religious institutions and laws as national institutions and laws.

The full separation of religion and state required by liberal democracy is not possible for Indonesia and other countries whose majority of the population is Muslims because Islam cannot fully separate religion and state. In fact, strict secularism exists in France and the United States, while secularism is generally not too tight in other European countries. Hence, the state is also involved in religious affairs in certain cases, such as religious parties, religious education, church tax, etc. Several European countries have an official religion (Christianity) and recognize established churches: the United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Greece (Stepan, 2001). This means that the inclusion of religion into the state is merely typical of Muslim countries but also practiced by several European countries.

[2] The state policy toward religion is: (1) establishing the Ministry of Religious Affairs for serving and facilitating religious adherents. (2) adopting religious holidays of the six religions as official holidays, (3) delivering religious education in the schools for six religions.

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Indeed, there are sometimes problems of integrating religion and democracy, but such problems also occur in integrating democracy and non-Western culture. There is no serious problem in practicing substantive democracy, which promotes political freedom and tolerance. The problem arises only if a religious group's radical or extreme attitudes claim their group the only truth. In contrast, the others are wrong and, therefore, considered enemies. Obviously, religion will contribute to democratization if it is understood moderately. It is also not taken as extremely conservative and not extremely liberal either because in a Muslim country, both ways will create social tensions or conflicts. Such an understanding requires paying attention to the contexts of a diverse Indonesia, which is multicultural, multi-faith, and multiethnic in nature.

3.3. Political Reform

The long presidential period of Soeharto's New Order that had begun in 1966 made him practice an authoritarian system, which was conducive to practices of corruption, collusion, and nepotism (*korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme* or KKN). He extended his presidential power, controlling legislative and judicial bodies and restricting press freedom, criticism, and citizen's political rights. This condition then led to the emergence of the reform movement that transformed into anti-authoritarian protests and demonstrations, especially when the Indonesian people faced a monetary crisis leading to an economic crisis. Among the leaders of the reform movement were leaders of two Islamic organizations, namely Amin Rais, Chairman of Muhammadiyah, and Abdurrahman Wahid, Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The fall of Soeharto's government in 1998 has been marked as the emergence of the "reform era" and the starting point of the transition to substantive democratization in Indonesia (Devlin, 2010).

Not long after the fall of Soeharto's regime, B.J. Habibie, who replaced him as president, immediately formed a cabinet and tried to overcome riots, political instability, economic crisis, and national integration problems. He made efforts to conduct an economic recovery program, released political prisoners, and promoted freedom of opinion and press as demanded by the reform movement. Habibie, supported by the Parliament (DPR), began to conduct political reform, proclaimed immediate free elections in 1999, and supported the Act on Political Parties amendment that made the emergence of new political parties based on various ideological backgrounds possible (Amirrachman et al., 2008).

Many political leaders established new political parties, including two Islamic leaders, Abdurrahman Wahid and Amin Rais, who respectively established the People's Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, PKB) and National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional*, PAN) in 1998. The establishment of these Islamic political parties was then followed by other Muslim leaders, such as Deliar Noer, who established the Muslim Community Party (*Partai Umat Islam*, PUI), and Yusril Ihza Mahendra, who established Crescent Moon Party (*Partai Bulan Bintang*, PBB).[3] Yet, after verification, only 48 parties could participate in the elections. The political party plays a role in competing and winning elections, acting as intermediaries between their members and the government, as training grounds for political

[3] The Islamic parties meant here are: (1) those which make word "Islam" in their name, (2) those which make Islamic symbols in their party symbol, (3) those which make "Islam" their foundation, (4) those which include Islamic values in their objectives, and (5) those which identify their major constituents are Muslim community (members of Islamic organizations).

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leaders, and as demand aggregation (Dickerson et al., 2009). In the democratic transition, the political parties played an important role. They were very enthusiastic about participating in free elections, fighting for their constituents' aspirations in public policy making, and encouraging their members of parliament to exercise control over government policies.

As the successor of Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, in his presidential term (1999-2001), continued political reform by conducting the second and third amendments of the 1945 Constitution, respectively, in 2000 and 2001. He also conducted military reform by removing its dual function (*dwi fungsi*) and improving its professionalism. The military could no longer be involved in political affairs as in the New Order period. Under Megawati's presidency (2001-2004), political reform continued by enacting the fourth amendment of the 1945 Constitution in 2002. An important step in the transition to democracy was the amendment of the 1945 Constitution in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002 to promote a more democratic system. The significant aspects are reducing presidential power, strengthening legislative and judicial bodies, establishing a Constitutional Court, supporting decentralization, and strengthening human rights protection and law enforcement.

One of the most crucial points in the amendments was the debate about implementing *shari'ah* (Islamic law) in Indonesia. Certain Islamic parties and organizations, such as the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP), Crescent Moon Party (*Partai Bulan Bintang*, PBB) and Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan*, PK) that was then changed to Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* or PKS), Hizbut Tahrir and Council of Indonesian Mujahidin (*Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*) even demanded stipulating the implementation of the Islamic *sharî'ah* in Article 29, without changing the name of Republic of Indonesia to be Islamic state.(Alfitri, 2018) Realizing that debates about giving official status to the *shari'ah* could lead to national disintegration, the two biggest Islamic mass organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, asserted to maintain the existing formulation of Article 29.

Most members of the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, MPR) disagreed with the demand. Islamic aspirations or interests could be accommodated in the existing formulation, such as legislation of Islamic law on marriage, zakat, waqf, and economy. Yet many devout Muslims considered the existing condition as not yet the ideal one, especially concerning religious practices that are personal in nature, such as worship, wearing Muslim clothes, reading the holy Quran as well as avoiding any practice of sin (violation of God's orders) such as drug abuse, alcoholic drinking, and prostitution (Hosen, 2007). Hence, several provinces and districts made efforts to set up local regulations (*Peraturan Daerah, Perda*) that support the implementation of certain Islamic teachings, such as West Sumatra, Gorontalo, Cianjur, Tasik Malaya, Solok, Tangerang, and others.[4] However, the local regulation cannot be called a Shariah regulation but rather a Shariah nuanced regulation because its provisions are not exactly the same as those of Shariah law.

[4] In 2007, three residents of Tangerang, Lilis Maemudah, Tuti Rahmawati, and Hesti Prabowo, brought Tangerang's Local Regulation on Anti-Prostitution/Sinn to the Supreme Court requesting a judicial review, but the Supreme Court rejected the request.

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Besides supporting the fourth amendment in 2002, Megawati also continued to conduct political reform by supporting the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (*Komisi Pembarantasan Korupsi*, KPK) in 2003 as well as the direct presidential election in 2004, which was the first event in Indonesian political history. The success of the parliamentary and direct presidential elections in 2004 was considered the end of the transition to democracy. The reform continued under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2009 and 2009-present) in the consolidation stage of democracy. He consolidated the political system, bureaucracy, and military reform toward good governance and directed local elections and national integration for this objective. He also set programs to improve the level and quality of people's education and the level of income as conditions conducive to the consolidation of democracy.

Observers of political development in Indonesia consider the democratic transition to be successful and the democratization process to run well. Indonesia's successful democratization has dispelled various myths and false assumptions that have previously influenced the literature on democratization in developing and Muslim-majority countries (Abdulbaki, 2008). This can be evidenced by the fact that political reform, especially through amendments to the 1945 Constitution, resulted in the limitation of presidential power, conducting free elections, and strengthening multiparty system, removing the dual function of the military, strengthening civil society, guaranteeing more freedom for press and citizens to express their opinion and criticism, and others. In the reform era, elections in 1999, 2004, and 2009 were conducted fairly and peacefully, although in some cases of elections, the political participation of citizens has decreased. In some cases, there were money politics as well as conflicts and tensions among supporters of political parties/groups, especially in local elections.

Several factors were conducive to the success of the democratic transition, namely: (1) the strong commitment of all components of the nation to practice democracy, (2) the strong commitment of the military group to support a democratic transition, (3) political will of the presidents in the reform era to share their power with all political and social groups, and (4) the existence of strong civil society organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which support democracy oriented to the national interests more than their particular interests, especially concerning the implementation of *sharî*'ah (Islamic law) (Staquf & Holland, 2022). In some cases, several political parties and civil society organizations supported demonstrations and protests on certain government policies considered as not in line with popular interests. Yet most of them and the military group did not support demonstrations that demanded the president to step down. They supported power shifts only through democratic processes, namely elections or impeachment, in certain conditions (Lowenthal & Bitar, 2015).

Nevertheless, in certain aspects, there were weaknesses in the practical level of the existing system, such as a multi-party system that brought about the emergence of many political parties. However, there is a 2.5 (or 3.5 for 2014 elections) percent of the electoral threshold for the national level. In certain cases, this condition made it ineffective in making public decisions. It led to the ambiguity of the presidential system with the parliamentary system, which somewhat reduced the president's authority on legislation and political appointees. There were also certain weaknesses in law enforcement in upholding the rule of law and reforming bureaucracy towards good governance, although the government had strongly encouraged both. Conversely, there were constraints concerning improving people's prosperity,

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although economic growth has significantly increased.[5] These problems were understandable because simultaneous reform in all aspects is more problematic than reform in only one or two.

Apart from those above, there were certain changes in political preferences in the Reform Era compared to those in previous times because of the change in political orientation and behavior of constituents and politicians. In the 1999 and 2004 elections, devout Muslims and Islamic leaders mostly supported Islamic parties, namely PKB, PPP, PAN, PKS, and PBB. Yet, in the 2009 elections, many supported nationalist parties, especially the Democrat Party (*Partai Demokrat*, PD) or Functional Group Party (*Partai Golkar*) (Pacific, 2024). This caused Islamic parties in the 2009 election to suffer declining support from their constituents.[6] This is because many of them thought that nationalist parties could also accommodate Muslims' interests and aspirations, including in religious matters. Besides, the national parties also accommodated some Muslim leaders in their party's leadership and legislative bodies. Indeed, part of political preferences is not influenced by the party's programs or the individual capacity of candidates but by money politics that could harm political culture and ethics (Nuraniyah et al., 2024).

3.4. The Role of Civil Society

The existence of authoritarian governments in many countries led to the revitalization of the concept of civil society and the strengthening of its movements at the end of the 1980s as the main alternatives to the democratization process. This was first conducted in East European countries to make the citizens more independent and autonomous from improper state control. It was also aimed to support their participation in watching state officials, especially when political parties did not properly function as part of democratic infrastructures. Yet this does not mean that civil society is needed only in such conditions, for the existence of both political and civil societies is required in a democratic system. There are various modern definitions of civil society, but it is basically understood as voluntary and autonomous associations of society. Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato define civil society as "a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication" (Cohen & Arato, 1994).

[5] According to the Badan Pusat Statistik (Central Bureau of Statistic), the number of poor people has slightly decreased. In 2009, their number was 32 million people (32 percent); in 2010, their number decreased to 31.02 million people (13.3 percent); and in 2011, their number was 29.89 million people. See *Republika*, January 10, 2012.

[6] In the 1999 election, Islamist parties gained enough support from the peoples, namely the PKB gained 12.61 percent of the vote, the PPP10.71 percent, PAN 7.12 percent, the PK 1.94 percent, and the PBB 1.36 percent, while the nationalist parties gained slightly larger than the Islamic party, namely the PDI-P gained 33.74 percent of the vote and the Golkar 22.44 percent. In the 2004 election, the PKB obtained 10.67 percent of the vote, the PPP 8.15 percent, the PKS 7.34 percent, the PAN 6.44 percent, and the PBB 2.62 percent; while the nationalist parties obtained more votes than Islamic parties, namely the Golkar obtained 21.58 percent of the votes, the PDIP with 18.53 percent, and the PD with 7.45 percent. In the 2009 elections, the support of Islamic parties decreased, namely the PKS gained 7.88 percent of the vote, the PAN 6.01 percent, the PPP 5.3 percent, and the PKB 4.94 percent, while the nationalist parties obtained huge support from the constituents, namely the PD gained 20.35 percent of the vote, the Golkar 14.45 percent, the PDI-P 14.03 percent, the Gerindra 4.46 percent and the Hanura 3.77 percent.

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Civil society necessitates the existence of certain values that indicate civility, such as freedom, equality, pluralism, and tolerance. As an interest group, it could express its interests or aspirations, watch the state officials, and execute state policy on public welfare (Spicker, 2023). Hence, it has the following roles: Firstly, civil society watches how state officials use their power by criticizing policies not in line with the public interests or any corruption they commit. This role should also be carried out by civil society even if the political society has played it in the democratic system because, in certain respects, the interests of political society are different from those of civil society (Parto, 2017). Of course, the control carried out by civil society is complementary to the control conducted by the parliament and political societies.

Secondly, civil society becomes an interest or pressure group in the political process by giving input or expressing its aspiration to make public policy. Even if there are political parties that function to aggregate their constituents, civil society still needs to do this. This is because the political party, in many cases, did not struggle with people's interests but rather sought political power. Thirdly, civil society conducts community development through various efforts to improve the citizens' quality of life. Fourthly, civil society advocates for people who are under pressure or cannot express their rights and interests, such as poor farmers, poor laborers, and others. This means that civil society's role is not only vis a vis the state but also as a partner of the state in empowering citizens and implementing state policies for the prosperity of the people (Edwards, 2011).

As in Eastern European countries, Latin America, and other developing countries, civil society strengthening was also carried out in Indonesia in the late 1980s. This was intended to develop a society that was independent and free from excessive state intervention and could participate in exercising control over the state. The civil society organizations in Indonesia can be classified into three groups, namely (1) mass organizations, especially religious organizations; (2) professional organizations, especially trade unions and journalist organizations; and (3) non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The first groups are concerned with their national interests, while the second groups are concerned with their own interests. The third group is concerned with certain issues of national interests, such as corruption watch, human rights watch, environment watch, democracy education, community development, and others. However, the New Order government restricted the role of civil society organizations under the pretext of maintaining national stability and unity.

Among the civil society organizations that played important roles in the democratization process were the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's biggest Islamic mass organizations. The NU and Muhammadiyah, as well as other Muslim leaders, intellectuals, and ulama in Indonesia, promoted civil society and legitimized their support through Islamic teachings and history. The NU and the Muhammadiyah had been conducting those roles since their establishment, respectively, in 1912 and 1926. During the New Order, civil society organizations played an important role when political parties in general did not play their role properly, especially in terms of criticizing government policies that did not side with the people's interests. The role continued until the emergence of the reform era when the government gave more freedom to civil society activities as an important component of the democratization process besides political society (Coffe & Bolzendhal, 2012).

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One of their important roles in the early reform era is their stance on keeping the existing formulation of Article 29 in the amendment of the 1945 Constitution to maintain social and national integration. As mentioned above, certain Islamic parties and organizations proposed stipulating the implementation of the *sharî'ah* in Article 29, which had sparked heated debate and could lead to national disintegration. Nevertheless, they were still committed to keeping the state from becoming secular and adopting certain Islamic laws as national laws. Besides, they also educated people to promote democracy, human rights protection, tolerance, and social harmony through religious approaches. In the context of democracy education, many civil society organizations and universities conducted training on democracy, including for preachers and local religious leaders, through a religious approach. This approach is very important in Indonesian society because religion still has an important role in society and the state.

Indonesian Muslims are naturally moderate, represented by the two largest Islamic organizations, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. They recognize the diversity of Indonesian society and support tolerant attitudes among various groups. Hence, the NU and Muhammadiyah are also involved in efforts to prevent and counter religious radicalism and extremism considered un-Islamic and anti-democratic. They have spread a moderate understanding of Islamic teachings, which promote peace and harmony in accordance with their mission of "*rahmat li al-'alamin*" (blessing for the universe).[7] They also clarified that the struggle for aspiration or protest against deviation should be conducted legally, constitutionally, and wisely. They condemned violence and terrors in the name of religion and considered them as desecrating Islam and humanity.

3.5. Problem and Challenges

Although democracy is considered an ideal political system, in practice, it also has potential weaknesses, such as freedom of expression without limits that could cause euphoria or even chaotic conditions. One of the important things related to this problem is the fact that the political orientation of many politicians to "get power" is more than that to "use the power" (Roth, 2020). This means that many, if not most, of them are not committed to their promise in their campaigns to create people's justice and prosperity, and many of them make their position to collect their wealth and other interests. Besides, many of them, in certain cases of elections, even use unfair ways in competition, such as money politics, black campaigns, manipulation of votes, and others (Kelly, 2024). This evokes disputes and protests conducted by supporters of other candidates, especially in local elections. There is a judicial mechanism for solving such disputes through the Constitutional Court, but in some cases, the disputes transform into violence, although their number has significantly reduced.

Moreover, the Indonesian government declared its commitment to eradicate corruption. Meanwhile, political participation increased, partly expressed through impolite criticism, protests, and violent or destructive actions. In some cases, violence was committed in the name of religion, namely *amr ma'ruf nahy munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). Part of the

[7] The campaign on "*Islam rahmat li al-alamin*" is addressed not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims aimed to avoid misunderstanding of Islam, especially after the WTC attack in 2001. The NU, for example, conducted several international conferences on upholding Islam as blessing for the universe in period 2003-2010.

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religiously motivated violence even manifested in the form of terrorism, such as the Bali blast in 2002 as well as the JW Marriot bombing in 2006 and 2009. This means that although the transition to democracy in Indonesia is considered successful, there are certain problems and challenges to developing a true civilized democracy.

Such practices were mainly caused by a lack of political and social ethics, national awareness, and a distortive understanding of religious teachings. On the other hand, there were weaknesses in certain regulations and law enforcement, such as in the cases of combating corruption, vote manipulation, and money politics, as well as violent radicalism and terrorism. This was worsened by the existing level of people's education and income, which is generally still low, as well as the growing religious radicalism, which threatens freedom and tolerance as the pillars of democracy. The citizens' lack of political or social ethics, morality, and law consciousness is contrary to the noble values of Indonesian nations and the religions they follow, especially trust, harmony, brotherhood, mutual help, politeness, and others (Umam, 2024).

Hence, religious leaders and intellectuals called for strengthening national ethics and character to avoid power abuse, conflict, and violence among various social groups and others.[8] Other components of civil society, such as the Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW), also expressed this task. Ethics and morality were also required to avoid any formalistic thought, especially towards the grey areas, which were contrary to them but not to formal regulations (Koeswardani & Trisnaningsih, 2024). In this case, religion can strengthen Indonesian ethics and morality because all religions promote ethics and morality in society and the state. From the Islamic perspective, for example, the mission of this religion is upholding glorious ethics (*al-akhlâq al-karîmah*).

The strong ethics and morality will be a foundation for developing a new political culture that is more democratic in nature, replacing the existing political culture partly influenced by the New Order period. This is important because the political culture frequently influences the Indonesian's orientation, behavior, or activity within the government, political parties, or society. Indonesian political culture is still in a formative stage shaped by the interaction of various political ideologies, sub-cultures, and religions. Six decades ago, Herbert Feith considered the most dominant sub-culture and religion to be that of the "Javanese aristocracy" and of "Islamic entrepreneurship," respectively (Feith, 2007). In the New Order period, the Javanese aristocracy became more dominant than Islamic entrepreneurship. Yet, in the reform era, the interaction among subcultures and religions and even between them and Western culture is still ongoing. Strong ethics and morality are required not only for political activities but also for bureaucracy, law enforcement, business, journalism, and others. This means that ethics and morality are preconditions for developing civilized democracy.

[8] In 2010, some prominent interreligious leaders even established an interreligious forum for watching and criticizing any moral violation or "public lies" committed by certain government officers, members of Parliament and other state officers. They represented the main religious organizations, namely Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Din Syamsuddin (Muhammadiyah), Salahuddin Wahid (Nahdlatul Ulama), Andreas Yewangoe (Christian Protestant), Martinus Sitomurang and Franz Magnis Suseno (Roman Catholic).

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Among the challenges of democratization is freedom of expression and its relationship with tolerance. Unlike the New Order government, which restricted freedom, the government in the early reform era strongly supported freedom as part of respecting human rights. This can be evidenced by the legislation of the Act on Human Rights in 1999 and including them in the 1945 Constitution amended in 2001. The government also guaranteed freedom of expression, including criticism, opposition, demonstrations, and protests directed at the government. Unfortunately, in some cases, freedom was expressed using violence. Besides, the expression of freedom in certain cases led to "the euphoria of freedom," including in understanding religious doctrines, namely liberal, conservative, or radical ways, and even those considered as religious deviations.[9] These excess evoked reactions from certain groups to counter such freedom, and some of the reactions were not in line with democracy and even threatened freedom itself.

There have been debates about the notion of freedom and its borders, whether it can be expressed without limit or it should be expressed with limitation. The liberal group argues that the limitation is unjustifiable,[10] but the 1945 Constitution recognizes the limitation, as stipulated in Article 28 (J) of the 1945 Constitution. The limitation is aimed merely to ensure recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and to fulfill just demand by considering morality, religious values, security, and public order. Such a limitation is also justified by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the DPR in 2005, as stipulated in Article 18 (3). Moreover, such limitations do not contradict democracy because democracy balances freedom and order based on the rule of law. This means that there are borders or limitations to expressing freedom, which is compatible with Indonesian society, and this is a kind of adjustment of universal human rights to conditions.

The expression of freedom requires tolerance among the various groups of society. There are more tolerance challenges if a country consists of a multicultural society because democracy implies free competition –besides cooperation– among the members of citizens. The competition as a part of the political participation of the citizens would be greater if there were a huge number of social groups. There are, in fact, problems of tolerance even in modern society, which arise frequently in connection with racial, ethnic, and religious matters. In the context of Indonesian society, which is plural in nature, racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance are

[9] It is true that there are problems of freedom in term of differences of opinion within the same religion, especially Islam, concerning the fundamental doctrines, namely the pillars of Islam and the pillars of belief (*iman*). The difference from the fundamental doctrines is considered as deviation of Islam, and counter against this is a part of *amr ma'rûf nahy munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), such as the case of protest against Ahmadiyah. In the Islamic perspective, maintaining and protecting the true religious doctrines is an obligation for every Muslim, while in the constitutional perspective, Muslims claim that it is a part of citizens' rights legitimized by the constitution. Yet there were sometimes problems in its counter because several protests were conducted by means of violence, which is actually a kind of criminal act and even violates Islam itself. This means that there is generally no problem of freedom of religious opinion and practices concerning non-fundamental matters (*masalah furu'iyyah*), because such differences have occurred since the early period of Islamic history.

[10] Concerning the regulation of religious life requested to maintain and strengthen religious harmony, certain minority groups argue that establishing houses of worship and religious proselytizing constitute an expression of freedom of religion which is a non-derogable, yet the state and the majority groups argue that freedom of religion in public sphere is a non-derogable right, and this is legitimized by the 1945 Constitution, namely article 28 (J) of the Constitution.

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sometimes coupled and manifest in the form of communal conflicts. Yet, in most cases, the conflicts were caused by economic and political factors legitimized by religious emotion. Part of the conflicts was indeed caused by the emergence of religious radicalism and extremism, especially within the Islamic community, which had grown since the beginning of the reform era. They had taken advantage of the existing freedom to express and propagate their radical and extremist ideology (Mufid, 2009).[11]

Indonesian people have been recognized as tolerant, but in the reform era, some cases indicated intolerant attitudes as the excess of freedom of expression. There were several cases of communal conflicts, namely (a) pure communal caused by political, economic, and natural resources factors, (b) communal conflicts or violence pushed to be religious conflicts as occurred in Ambon (Maluku and Poso (Central Sulawesi) between Muslim and Christian groups that began in 1999 and ceased in 2002. The number of religiously motivated conflicts was only about one percent of the total communal conflicts in Indonesia, yet such conflicts are interesting for the media and the public. The growing intolerant attitudes towards other religious communities in recent years were not only in Indonesia but also anywhere in the world, especially because globalization has led to the emergence of religious plurality in almost all countries in the world (A. M. Rochmat, 2017).

There are two kinds of religious-motivated conflicts: disputes and violence. The first is interfaith conflicts, which are generally not purely caused by religious factors but rather by economic, political, and social factors, as well as the global policy of certain countries. The conflicts are then connected to religion to get greater support or solidarity from fellow believers because religion in Indonesia is still becoming a sensitive issue. Sometimes, interfaith disputes are caused mostly by improper construction of houses of worship and active religious proselytizing that are not in line with the existing regulations. The second is intra-faith conflicts or tension, which mainly occur as protests on deviation or defamation of religious teachings, such as violence against Ahmadiyah followers who recognize Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet after the Prophet Muhammad.[12] The religiously motivated conflicts were also caused by the emergence of religious radicalism and extremism, especially within the Islamic community, which had grown since the beginning of the reform era. They took advantage of the existing freedom to express and propagate their radical and extremist ideology.

[11] Most of them behaved intolerantly and even committed violence and terror against other groups considered enemies. In many ways, they are influenced by transnational Islamic movements in the Middle East, especially the Qutbiyyah faction of the Muslim Brotherhood movement (including the Jama'ah Islamiyah and the Tanzim al-Jihad) and the jihadist faction of the *Salafi* (Wahhabi) movement. Certain Indonesian extremist groups were even influenced by al-Qaeda, an extremist organization based on the ideology of both radical Ikhwan and Salafi Jihadists founded by Osama Bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, and Abdullah Azzam in Afghanistan in the 1990s.

[12] Some Islamic organizations, especially some *ulamas* at the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI), demanded the banning of Ahmadiyah as religious blasphemy based on the PNPS Law of 1965 on Religious Defamation. Yet the president did not want to ban it, although this is possible according to the regulation because such a ban does not align with the principle of democracy. Instead, the government issued a Joint Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs, Minister of Home Affairs, and Attorney General in 2008.

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The parliament and the government made efforts to maintain social harmony and national integration, especially by strengthening Pancasila as the philosophy of state that implies social harmony and national integration. In the context of religious harmony, the government had a policy of empowering religious communities to maintain religious harmony through theological, cultural, political, and legal frames. The government also issued Joint Regulations 9/2006 and 8/2006, passed between the Minster of Religious Affairs and the Minster of Home Affairs, to revise the Joint Decree 1969.[13] The regulation stipulates the management of religious harmony, which contains government responsibility, the establishment of a Forum of Harmony among Religious Communities (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*, FKUB) at provincial and district/city levels as well as the mechanism of constructing houses of worship.[14]

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that almost all ulama and Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia accept the term "democracy" and support it as a system that must be implemented in Indonesia. They also support democracy based on Pancasila, recognizing religious values and Indonesian culture in the state, although most do not introduce the term "Pancasila Democracy". Most of them struggled for substantive democracy even in the New Order period (1966-1998) that practiced authoritarianism and supported procedural democracy. The emergence of the "reform era" following the fall of authoritarian Soeharto's government in 1998 had been marked as the starting point of the transition to substantive democracy in Indonesia. The reform political reform took the form of conducting free elections, developing a multiparty system, and guaranteeing more freedom for the press and citizens to express their opinions and criticism, and the amendments to the 1945 Constitution had resulted especially in the form of limitation of presidential power.

[13] Before issuing the regulation, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Maftuh Basyuni, invited religious organizations representing the officially recognized religions in Indonesia to discuss its draft. Hence, the regulation constitutes a consensus of five religious councils in Indonesia, namely (1) Mejelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Council of Indonesian Ulama), (2) Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja Indonesia (PGI, Communion of Indonesian Churches), (3) Konferensi Waligereja Indonesia (KWI, Bishops' Conference of Indonesia), (4) Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (Parisada, Indonesian Hindu Council), (5) Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia and (Walubi, Indonesian Buddhist Council).

[14] The existing regulations are not yet effective because of a lack of understanding of state apparatus, especially mayors and heads of district, and the lack of consciousness of certain religious communities to the regulations. Some religious leaders and observers even argue that the regulation is not binding because the Regulation of the Minister is not mentioned in the hierarchy of Indonesian legislation stipulated in Act No. 10/2004. Hence, Islamic organizations demanded the state to transform the existing Minister's Regulation to be an Act on Religious Life or Religious Harmony. In 2011, the House of Representatives (DPR) took the initiative to prepare the Bill of Religious Harmony (or Religious Life). The Act is expected to force all citizens, especially regional governments, law enforcement officers, and religious leaders, to understand and implement the regulation. Security forces, as part of law enforcement officers, are demanded to be more professional in providing protection to those who are at risk, as well as making efforts to prevent violence among religious groups.

The political reform was running well, so the democratic transition was considered successful. The political parties and civil society organizations, including those with an Islamic background, have an important role in this transition. Nevertheless, there were certain problems and challenges in the democratic consolidation, such as the existence of corruption and legal mafia, although their number decreased, violent protests on certain government policies, and communal conflicts. This was mainly caused by the lack of ethics and morality of society, politicians, and bureaucrats and the distortion of understanding religious teachings. This condition was worsened by the existing level of people's education and income, which was generally still low, as well as the growing religious radicalism, which threatened freedom and tolerance as the pillars of democracy.

To solve those problems and challenges, the state was obliged to develop civilized democracy, especially through strengthening law enforcement and bureaucracy reform. In line with this, the government, political parties, and civil societies, especially religious organizations, were recommended to set programs of ethics and moral education as well as civic education conveying values in a democratic system, such as tolerance, trust, responsibility, law consciousness, and others. Meanwhile, religious leaders and organizations should disseminate a proper understanding of Islam as "*rahmat li al-âlamîn*" (blessing for the universe) that promotes peace and harmony. Of course, the government should also improve people's education and income, especially for poor and under-educated people.

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