

# MODERATE MUSLIM IN INDONESIA: VIEWS OF MUSLIM ELITE TOWARD RELIGIOUS AND SOCIO- POLITICAL ISSUES

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**Abstract:** This article explores the views of Muslim elites regarding religious and socio-political issues as a means of explaining moderate Islam in Indonesia. Specifically, its aim is to shed light on this matter by mapping the ideological spectrum of Muslim elites' perspectives on significant religious and political issues. A solid understanding of the socio-political context and the viewpoints of the elite is a crucial step towards comprehending the development of religious and political attitudes among the general population and the resulting impact on the social and political progress of the country. Based on fieldwork, this article argues that the majority of Muslim elites lean towards a moderate stance when it comes to perceiving ideological matters. Nevertheless, some still exhibit a tendency towards conservatism. It is important to note that this study is limited in its geographical scope. Consequently, further research should encompass various regions of Indonesia to provide a more comprehensive and holistic perspective.

**Keywords:** Muslim elite; moderatism; conservatism; liberalism; Islamism.

## Introduction

Today, the study of moderate Muslims in Indonesia comes to the fore especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) unceasingly promotes religious moderation, especially Islamic moderation, or *Islām wasatīyah*.<sup>1</sup> In the country, the discourse of religious moderation is widespread and has become a new vocabulary of “religious politics” run by the Indonesian government during the Jokowi leadership.<sup>2</sup> In addition, religious moderation has become a global phenomenon that some scholars often refer it as the resurgence of religion. Hence, the study of moderate Muslims has not only taken the research site in Indonesia but has also been carried out with various themes in different sites in the global world.<sup>3</sup>

Studies to enrich the discourse of moderate Muslims in Indonesia is urgently needed to be carried out incessantly because Muslim Moderate, as a concept, is not given and taken for granted. It needs to be continuously reconceptualized based on Indonesia’s dynamic socio-political context. Within this goal, this article aimed to explore the ideological spectrum of Muslim elites’ religious and political views. This issue is important to be explained considering the increasing political polarization in Indonesia over the last few years. Political conflicts and competition in the country have been increasingly shaped by identity politics that sharply divide the

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat, Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Trisno S. Sutanto et al., “Menakar Moderasi Beragama: Pembacaan Kritis,” in *Politik Moderasi dan Kebebasan Beragama, Suatu Tinjauan Kritis*, ed. Zainal Abidin Bagir and Jimmy Sormin (Jakarta: Elexmedia Komputindo, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Radzuwan Ab Rashid et al., “Conceptualizing The Characteristics of Moderate Muslims: A Systematic Review,” *Social Identities*, Vol. 26, No. 6, (2020), 829-841; Dilshod Achilov and Sedat Sen, “Got Political Islam? Are Politically Moderate Muslim Really Different From Radicals?” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 38, No. 5, (2017), 608-624; Joshua T. White, “Beyond Moderation: Dynamic of Political Islam in Pakistan,” *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (2012) 179-194; Janine A. Clark, “The Conditions of Islamic Moderation: Unpacking Cross-ideological Cooperation in Jordan,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4, (2006), 539-560; Elmira Akhmetova and Muhammad Izzuddin Jaafar, “Religious Extremism and Radicalisation of Muslims in Malaysia,” *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, Vol. 5, No 1, (2020), 104-123.

society into two broad camps in which religion is often used as the defining boundary.<sup>4</sup>

To date, the definition of moderate Muslims has been understood differently by different groups. There has been a gap between Muslim elites' perspectives and that grassroots society, depending on the contexts, situations, and localities. Moderate Muslims have always been contrasted with radical Muslims. Yet, many contend that most of the study and surveys of radical Muslims rests on instruments of the Western framework such as questions of agreeing or not with democracy or the Islamic state, pluralism, jihad as war, and gender equality.<sup>5</sup> It is important to understand how the term Moderate Islam has been understood by the Muslim elites. Yet, given the important role of religious elites in shaping people's religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, the extent to which the laypeople will adhere the path of being a Moderate Muslim will depend on how the elites define the term.

Who is a moderate Muslim? And what constitutes their moderate, religious views? Indeed, the term "moderate Muslim" is academically challenging and, in fact, contested. Its meaning can vary, depending on who defines such ideas and their preference. In short, there is no consensus on the term of moderate Muslim. Yet, in general, moderate Muslims used to be associated with Muslim society based on the spirit of Islamic moderation or *ummatan wasathan* as stated in the Qur'an (al-Baqarah [2]: 143). Preferably, the notion of *ummatan wasathan* refers to a society which always upholds its balance in life and activity, not falling into extremism, radicalism, and violence action. Yet, classical Islamic thought used to relate to several Arabic terminologies which refer to the ideas of *al-tawassuṭ* (moderation), *al-qisṭ* (justice), *al-i'tidāl* (harmony), *al-tasāmuḥ* (tolerance). In this regard, Muslims are strongly encouraged to implement those spirits in their behavioral life as well as practice a non-violent mode of religiosity.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Edward Aspinall et al., "Elites, Masses, And Democratic Decline in Indonesia," *Democratization*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (2019), 505-526.

<sup>5</sup> Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics, and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Gilles Kepel, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Abdurrohman Kasdi, "Washatiyyah Islam as the Road to Moderatism in Indonesia," *Al Albab*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (2019), 181-182; Masdar Hilmy, "Whiter

Kamali, in his book *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam*, explains the concept of moderation within the framework of Islamic reference. According to Kamali<sup>7</sup>, moderation or *wasatīyah* is related to justice, which implies choosing a middle ground among various extremities. The opposite is *taṭarruf* which means “inclination toward the peripheries” known as “extremism,” “radicalism” and “excess.” Hence, *wasatīyah* is defined as “a recommended posture that occurs to the people of sound nature and intellect, distinguished by its aversion to both extremism and manifest neglect.” In short, *wasatīyah* is an important aspect in Islam that is neglected by some Muslims, even though it is the essence of Islamic teachings.

In defining the “moderate” Islam, some scholars maintain some traits and characters such as accepting democratic government, supporting civil liberties, accommodating Shari‘ah and secular laws, and having an open and tolerant view of alternative perspectives.<sup>8</sup> In general, moderate Muslims are interpreted as not radical, can cooperate with the government and other social and political groups to fight radicalism.<sup>9</sup> Baran argues that moderate Muslims embrace “the compatibility of Islam and democracy and the individual freedoms we all cherish in the West.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar tone, Schmid contends that moderate Muslims are tolerant Muslims, do not use violence and accept democratic values.<sup>11</sup>

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Indonesia’s Islamic Moderatism? A Re-examination on the Moderate Vision of Muhammadiyah and NU,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 7, No.1, (2013), 24-48; Muhamadul Bakir and Khatijah Othman, “A Conceptual analysis of Wasatiyyah (Islamic Moderation-IM) from Islamic Knowledge Management (IKM) Perspective,” *Revelation and Science*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2017), 21-31.

<sup>7</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali and Tariq Ramadan, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur’anic Principle of Wasathiyah* (New York: USA Oxford University Press, 2015), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Achilov and Sen, “Got Political Islam?”

<sup>9</sup> Randa Abdel-Fattah and Mehal Krayem, “Off Script And Indefensible: The Failure of the ‘Moderate Muslim,’” *Continuum*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2018), 429-443.

<sup>10</sup> Zeyno Baran, “Introduction and Overview,” in *The Other Muslims, Moderate and Secular*, ed. Zeyno Baran (US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Alex P. Schmid, “Moderate Muslims and Islamist Terrorism: Between Denial and Resistance,” *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism* (2017), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29432>.

The notion of Moderate Muslim began to be widely developed internationally. For example, the United States, which is often plagued with radicals who encourage religiously inspired violence, needs a program to encourage ideologies that counter extremism networks. In this case, the ideology is built not merely on Western concepts, but refers to “traditions within the Islamic paradigm that are open, tolerant and pluralistic.”<sup>12</sup> When these traditions are brought to life in the Muslim community this will push on grassroots movements for change. However, Mirahmadi in *Navigating Islam in America* states that since the United States government vigorously promotes democracy and freedom, with which scholars find themselves as “moderates.” Here, it requires the ability to judge the writings of scholars aimed at their public, not only on what they present to Western audiences, because there is often a sharp contrast between pseudo-moderates for public consumption and what they produce for the Muslim community.

Meanwhile, several scholars in the country have also used moderate Muslim terms in their studies. For example, Zuhur stated that moderates in this context are more appropriate as secularist Muslims who promote policies and changes in Muslim society that are in accordance with the goals of the US.<sup>13</sup> Najib Burhani explained the meaning of moderate Muslims used by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is more theological than its use in America which is political in the sense of the war on terror.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the Ministry of Religious Affairs defines moderatism as “*cara pandang, sikap, dan perilaku selalu mengambil posisi di tengah-tengah, selalu bertindak adil, dan tidak ekstrem dalam beragama.*”<sup>15</sup> In short, moderate Islam is an understanding or view that looks at Islam is corresponds with democracy, supporting civil liberties, accommodating Shari‘ah and secular laws, and having an open and tolerant view of alternative perspectives. In addition, moderate Muslim apply a mindset, attitude and behaviours that always locate

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<sup>12</sup> Hedieh Mirahmadi, “Navigating Islam in America,” in *The Other Muslims, Moderate and Secular*, ed. Zeyno Baran (US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 31.

<sup>13</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, *Precision in the Global War on Terror: Inciting Muslims Through the War of Ideas* (N.p.: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2008), 63-67, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12057.40>.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Al-Tawassuṭ wa-l Pūidāl: The NU and Moderatism in Indonesian Islam,” *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 40, No. 5/6 (2012), 564-581.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama, *Moderasi Beragama*, 17-18.

his/herself in the middle path, always do justice and do not follow extreme path in embracing religion.

By and large, conservative and radical Islam (CRI) can be defined in various perspectives. Martin van Bruinessen, for instance, defined conservative and radical Islam as a school of thought which reject reinterpretation of Islamic teachings liberally and progressively and maintain a standardized interpretation and social system. Meanwhile, Maghfuri pointed out that conservative lexicon is related to the practice of textual and literal understanding as well as discarding the different interpretation and encouraging a person or group to transform conservative mindset toward Islamic teachings into radical behavior or action.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, liberal Islam is an understanding or view that looks at modernity and all its related aspects such as democracy, economic development, minority rights (including women rights), individual freedom, etc., are not in hostile relationship with Islam.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Islam, properly interpreted, is compatible with modern life. the liberal tradition argues that “Islam, properly understood, is compatible with—or even a precursor to—Western liberalism.”<sup>18</sup> Hence, Liberal Islam concerns with many aspects of modern political life of Muslims particularly in economy, politics (democracy), legal/human rights, women rights and so forth.

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<sup>16</sup> Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013); Martin van Bruinessen, “What Happened to the Smiling Face of Indonesian Islam? Muslim Intellectualism and the Conservative Turn in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” *RSIS Working Paper*, No. 222 (6 January 2011); Amin Maghfuri, “Peran Lembaga Pendidijan Dalam Pengarusutamaan Islam Moderat sebagai Upaya Melawan Paham Konservatif Radikal,” *Tafsir Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (2019), 247-260. Hasse Jubba, Jaffari Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, “The Challenge of Islamic Organization in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia,” *Wawasan*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2021), 44-54.

<sup>17</sup> M. Syafii Anwar, *The Clash of Religio-Political Thought: The Contest Between Radical Conservative Islam and Progressive Liberal Islam in Post Soeharto Indonesia* (Oxford: University Press, 2007); Suoriyanto Abdi, “Islam and (Political) Liberalism: A Note on An Evolving Debate in Indonesia,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2009), 370-389. Muhammad Mumtaz Ali, “Liberal Islam: An Analysis,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2007), 44-70.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Kurzman (ed.), *Liberal Islam: A Source Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.

Religious Moderation is an uncompleted business. Therefore, making moderate Muslims is needed because the challenges and dynamics of each region differ from each other. According to Rashid, “Moderate Islam or Moderate Muslims is an on-going process of identity construction, in particular, an Islamic identity that could be a blueprint for moral, social, economic, and political reforms based on the teachings of the Islamic faith.”<sup>19</sup> One way of defining moderate Muslims comes from the Muslim political elite’s view of Islamism, something that has not been explored in the studies of Muslim moderates in Indonesia in the past. We define Muslim elites as key or important figures that have been considered as having religious authority in society. In contemporary Indonesia, such figures can be religious leaders or leaders of religious organizations. Some of them may work in the government bureaucracy or political party.

Thus, this article attempted to better understand this problem by configuring the differences in the views of Muslim religious elites over key religious and political issues that face our contemporary society. In practice, it examined moderate Muslims in the post-Suharto era by elucidating the views of the Muslim elite in Jakarta, Indonesia, towards ideological issues. Our argument is Most Muslim political elites in Jakarta embrace the moderate path in perceiving ideological issues.

This study used the qualitative method with informants<sup>20</sup> and document data sources. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty Muslim elites in Jakarta in the middle of 2022. Data were also taken from secondary sources including articles, books, newspaper coverage and interviews, and other relevant sources of information.

To carry out the analysis, the researchers made descriptions, categorizations, conceptualizations, and comparisons. The cyclical process of data collection and analysis was performed ensure that the process of data collection and data analysis is done in a reciprocal way. In short, after collecting the data, the researchers analyzed and reflected on the data; based on the analysis and

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<sup>19</sup> Rashid et al., “Conceptualizing the Characteristics of Moderate Muslims.”

<sup>20</sup> There were anonymous informants during the interviews. However, the names of the people quoted in this article are camouflaged due to their preferences to remain anonymous.

reflections, data were revisited to ensure the validity of the findings.

### **Views of Muslim Elite toward Shari'ah Law, Democracy and Governance**

Regarding the social, economic, and political condition of post-Soeharto, Conservative and Radical Islam Group (CRI) groups consider that Shari'ah could be a panacea that will be able to resolve Indonesia's multi-dimensional crisis. In this context, the CRI groups agenda of imposing Shari'ah is related to a strong belief that the purpose of Indonesian society is to uphold "the law of God." Indeed, the RCI groups can be defined as having a "Shari'ah minded" orientation due to their strong commitment to Shari'ah as the solution to any human problem.

Based on research findings, moderate informants expressed moderate views on religious and socio-political issues. Nonetheless, there was one informant who showed a tendency toward conservatism as explored below.

They agreed with these issues and emphasized how they are implemented in the context of policy and governance. Almost all informants discuss the principles and indicators of good government. According to RA (29 years old), good governance must always be based on democracy.<sup>21</sup> In WFL (38)'s view, democracy is acceptable to improve this nation.<sup>22</sup> MMA (49) agrees on democracy in government management, but he notices that democracy must be fair, because in many ways democracy becomes a political instrument, and it depends on what and how interests exist.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, according to MMA, the practice and nature of democracy have procedural and substantive. However, in Indonesia, there are paradoxes, including Shari'ah Bylaws and money politics. For example, the process of enacting Shari'ah Bylaws by the legislative body is democratic. But the citizens examine the results and substance are considered contrary to democracy even though they have been passed by the legislative body. In MMA's view this condition is not fair, adding that

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with RA, July 21, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with WFL, July 23, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with MMA, July 28, 2022.

democracy is not a good system, but it is better than communism and capitalism.

According to FN (48), contrasting the global system with Islamic issues is less productive. He added that:

We cannot take an anti-democratic stance just because it is campaigned by the West, for example, while the joints we practice are always in solidarity with democracy. Let us not forget that in a democracy there are parts that somehow relate to Islam: justice, transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. They are all also brought by Islam.<sup>24</sup>

In MCA (48)'s view, democracy is the best for the Indonesian context. He adds, if anyone carries an ideology based on Islam (an Islamic state) or questions the existence of the Republic of Indonesia, it is okay as democracy guarantees. As a thought, it is needed to be appreciated, due to it would be a wealth in the debate.

Not all informants are in response to Shari'ah law and secular law. FN agreed both laws exist and can be juxtaposed and need to be accommodated because they are formations of applicable parts of life. However, if there is a 'collision' it is necessary to find a solution. Nevertheless, there should not be a dichotomy between the two laws.<sup>25</sup> According to MCA, "...The categorization considers that there are state institutions and religious institutions (Islam) that cannot intersect and have different laws. Though our perspective in seeing it does not have to be dualistic. Because religion is something private. It does not have to be banged up...."<sup>26</sup>

Informants discussed Islamic law in depth and their views on this topic vary. AS (59) questions 'Why is Islamic law in Indonesia not developing, not parallel to the development of conventional law (positive law), including criminal law?' AS maintained that this is happening because Islamic law is prevented from becoming a discourse by the colonizers. Hence, Muslims forget Islamic law. Before the colonial period, Islamic law was an ever-changing and dynamic discourse. This can be seen in the history of the

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with FN, July 26, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with MCA, July 25, 2022.

application of Islamic law in Aceh. Then, what should be tested is whether Islamic law is in violation or not.<sup>27</sup>

In RA's view, how Islamic law in Indonesia is accepted and applied become a long-standing debate. This happens because Indonesia has chosen Pancasila as an ideology that it also values taught by Islam. RA added that the law is the rule that governs humankind. Islamic law is sourced from the Qur'an and ḥadīth. So far, the values of Pancasila have never come out of the Qur'an and ḥadīth.<sup>28</sup> While for MMA there is nothing wrong when Islamic law is applied in Indonesia. It is wrong to say that Islamic law should not be applied in Indonesia, while not bumping into the basic principles of statehood. He preferred to discuss *Pancasila* as a foothold in assessing anything, including Islamic law.<sup>29</sup>

FN agreed that Islamic law and conventional law exist in Indonesia if they become positive laws. Both can go hand in hand because they contain the formation of applicable parts of life. The application of 'Islamic law' in Aceh, for example, is unique. Because in its history since long time ago Aceh was oriented towards Islamic law.<sup>30</sup> More specifically, MCA stated that the current Islamic law is intended for followers of the Islamic religion, not for other religions.<sup>31</sup> For WFL, Islamic law is very broad in scope, and it regulates all aspects of human life. She explained that Islamic law, which has become a positive law in Indonesia must be adhered to together. What about Islamic law that has not been made positive law? It still must return to positive law. Because Indonesia is based on *Pancasila*, not based on any religion. The application of Islamic law that has not yet become a positive law returns to society, the sanctions that apply are social sanctions. While positive law, including Islamic law, has become positive law, the sanctions that apply are sanctions from the state.<sup>32</sup>

It is not surprising that liberal Muslims view the importance of good governance and democracy. In the words of H (57): "Good

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with AS, July 25, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with RA, July 21, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with MMA, July 28, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with FN, July 26, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with MCA, July 25, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with WFL, July 23, 2022.

governance has been a universal value, so it is a must.”<sup>33</sup> Two principles, among others, of good governance, in his view, are very important. They are transparency and legal certainty. These two principles, according to H enable the predictability of the practice of governance and democracy. Predictability and certainty are very essential in social and political life, otherwise citizens will be difficult to make commitments and contract arrangements which are two common characteristics of modern life.

One issue of contemporary Muslim society that is heatedly debated is the Islamic caliphate. All informants are against this idea. H interestingly observed that the salience of this issue is due to the lack of information among Muslims both at the elite as well as the common people levels. In his understanding, promoting a caliphate is promoting old and outdated political regimes of monarchy or dynasty. He believed that Islamic caliphates like Muawiya are all despotic and in stark contradiction with contemporary democracy practiced in the world today. Only one good historical example can be derived from the history of the Islamic caliphate (apart from the four-caliphate succeeding the prophet), that is the caliphate of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Other than that, according to H, no good examples of the so-called Islamic caliphate. For N (42), the Islamic caliphate should be denied simply because Indonesia is not only a secular country but also a religiously pluralistic country. Islamic caliphate simply has no basis to be applied in the country.<sup>34</sup>

For I (54), the Islamic caliphate is basically putting religion and politics inseparable, like in Iran and some Sunni-Muslim countries. He disagreed if this political concept is applied to Indonesia. He reasoned: “For Indonesia, I disagree because it is not democratic. That concept limits that only religious leaders can be political leaders, while in democracy, everybody has the right to be selected as leaders, including religious leaders. Therefore, I do not agree with the caliphate system.”<sup>35</sup> While disagreeing with the Islamic caliphate system, L (57) believed that as a discourse or idea, the caliphate system should be allowed to be discussed, along with whatever other ideas like the one from left or right, including the

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with H, July 21, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with N, July 22, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with I, July 26, 2022.

radical groups. This seems to confirm the belief of L in the principle of democracy and freedom.<sup>36</sup>

Liberal Muslims tend to see elections positively both as part of democracy and how it is practiced in Indonesia. They all believe that elections in democratized Indonesia since 1999 have been moving on the right track and bringing Indonesian democracy better. The election is also considered an effective conflict political mechanism resolution. As stated by N, parties competing in elections had fought hard to the extent that election participants and their supporters become polarized. However, all competing parties seem to be able to reconcile in the end and accept the legality and legitimacy of the results, particularly after utilizing all available complaints and appeal mechanisms. These positive views on elections seem to be shared among all informants of liberal Muslims.

However, there are at least two concerns that also seem to be shared among liberal Muslims. First is the concern related to the so-called money politics which seems to be disturbing the commitment of liberal Muslims to equality and non-discriminations. The pervasiveness of money politics will enable only certain groups (some called them oligarchy) to dominate the political landscape. This in the end can create a lot of consequences including problems with minority groups like women or others. Connected to this concern is the rise of the political dynasty within the end also will have ramifications for the practice of democracy, civil liberty, and human rights. The second concern is about the rise of identity politics particularly when it is motivated by Islam as a religion. Not only this can violate the principle of rationality of politics but also as implied by I those areas where the majority is not Muslim will also apply the same rules in elections and in politics in general. Identity politics can strengthen the principle of majoritarian which can be harmful to women's rights and minority rights.

### **Views of Muslim Elites toward Gender Equality and Human Rights**

The sections are the principle of non-discrimination, all people are the same, and respect for individual rights, including women's

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with L, July 27, 2022.

public leadership. As a result, the opinions expressed by informants are general, while linking them to Islamic issues. Furthermore, it is also crucial to understand the issue of gender bias and the reduced roles of women in society. In this regard, it is clear that CRI groups also adopt a conservative view. They mostly refer to literal and textual interpretations of Qur'anic verses (*al-Nisā'* [4]: 34), which declare that “men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance].” For CRI groups, this is considered as a fundamental and God-given position for men over women.

In general, many CRI groups tend to designate women's primary role as wives who are obliged to obey their husbands and mothers who nurture and educate their children. The public sphere is believed to belong to men, and the role of women is domesticated and segregated merely into private and family relations. In this regard, although women have social roles, it is not surprising that radical Islamists reject the notion that women can be elected leaders of nations. In this context, patriarchy specifically refers to giving privilege to men and masculinity in social and political activities, placing men into the higher position than women in the society. Sociologically speaking, such paradigm is basically rooted in patriarchy ideology and culture, which is historically rooted in Roman concepts. However, patriarchal ideology is not only related to the existing men-dominated Western society. Rather, it is also rooted in the historical development of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) in Islamic history.

To discuss the above-stated issues, H and A (52) have different perspectives. For H, in the Islamic concept, women are determined as wives and they have custody. Moreover, women have the obligation to be obedient to their husband. He pointed out that in the history of Islam, there is no opinion that considers that the family leader is a woman, but rather a man and he maintained this conception. “This is not a subordination of woman, because in Islam man and woman are to be placed on their nature as human beings. The big mistake is that if a woman is becoming a housewife and be active at home, educating children, and is committed to obedience and respect to her husband, then

she is judged as being domesticated because she would not be able to commit to social life,”<sup>37</sup> he said.

Furthermore, H also criticized the conception of gender equality, particularly in Indonesia’s political life. For instance, it is suggested that women should obtain 30% for political parties and parliament memberships. According to H, this is a compulsion for women because they are determined to be inactive in their families, so they will be more active in public life. “I disagree with that proposed gender equality in politics because it is transformed from the Western culture. If woman want to be a leader, in Islam she must be getting approval from her husband. This is a requirement, and it is a just and principle of Islamic teaching,”<sup>38</sup> he said.

Similarly, A suggested that Islam highly respects to women. However, women are not to be placed as leaders in Islam. Women are placed to be the wife and their main obligation is to maintain the family, but not to manage the state. Thus, women have a lot of duties, which cannot be done by men. So, why women are forced to be so active in public life? “In fact, women who are too active in public life are vulnerable to commit love affairs and illicit sexual relations. So, it is not good if women are too active in social and public life.”<sup>39</sup>

Evidence shows that the ideas of conservative and radical mindsets have been spreading among the young generation, including girls and women. Not surprisingly that certain women and girls are involved in various radical actions, including terrorist activities such as accompanying their husbands and families to do suicide bombings, attacking police offices, and other destructive activities.

In AS view, Islamic principles of equality and justice must be viewed and unearthed from discourse or reality within society, because Islam sees reality. So, it is not understood textually. Equality should be viewed in a multicultural way, not like a liberal concept that sees equality only as individuals. MMA maintained that the Islamic perspective upholds equality, including gender equality, equality for all, and so forth. In regulating equality, the state must play a role. In this regard, MCA believed the state is

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with H, July 21, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with A, July 24, 2022.

capable of regulating. On the other hand, religions also strongly speak of equality.

RA revealed another problem regarding equality in relation to electoral politics, namely whether the discourse developed in democracy can be easily implemented in society, while in the context of majority-minority relations amid the strengthening of identity politics based on religion and tribalism. This is a considerable challenge for Indonesia today. He agreed that all human beings are equal without any discrimination, either based on race or religion. According to FN, the state needs to pay attention to the involvement of women and minority groups in the context of public policymaking. Everyone should be given an equal and fair opportunity to be able to access public services. It needs to be well-regulated by the state. Religion also affirms the concept of equality between women and men. According to MCA, to avoid discrimination women must be given the same and equal space as men to engage in public space. Hence, existing systems and cultures also need to be encouraged to provide equal space and opportunities for women and men.

WFL shows a conservative view when it comes to women's rights. She contended that from a religious perspective, women are indeed created differently from men, even though they are both creations of God. There are rights, there are also obligations. Speaking of the equality of women and men, WFL maintained, "... I see this is as a bit conservative. There are things that women should return to their nature (*fitriah*) as God's creations that do have boundaries. She stood on those boundaries, to me, making the existence of women even more valuable."<sup>40</sup>

FN reminded that Indonesia is built on the principles of equality and justice. Whether justice is gender-based or for non-Muslim minorities. The coordination in understanding women's leadership must be well understood.<sup>41</sup> MMA explained that:

... this must also be understood because of the context at that time the leader had to descend on the battlefield because physically God created men stronger than women. So, it is only natural when most males are leaders. The Islamic thinkers of the classical era also called

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with WFL, July 23, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with FN, July 26, 2022.

the leader must be male because the leader was involved in the battlefield.<sup>42</sup>

In the MCA formulation, women can be leaders because leadership is broad. Leaders can be everywhere, from households, companies, neighborhoods (RT/RW), to the state level. Above the country, there are also regional and international. So, our perspective on leadership must be very broad.<sup>43</sup>

In Islam, according to RA, leadership by men is advocated. But that does not mean that in Indonesia women should not become a public leader, if they have given the same opportunities and rights or if it is indeed possible and desired by the community. Of course, with all the advantages and disadvantages that are possessed. Where rules permit, men and women have the same right to be leaders.<sup>44</sup>

WFL has different perspective. She maintained women's leadership is important. Without exemplifying what is meant by 'the important ones only.' But if women are already leading men, it becomes a problem. Because in terms of thinking, it is different. WFL assess the way men think far ahead of women, by continuing her explanation,

... Although that does not mean women cannot think ahead. Women are much more explosive for a moment if men can be calmer. Such is the perspective of religion, departing from the verse of the Quran: *al-rijāl qanwāmūn 'alā al-nisā'*. We are all created by God, meaning that it is impossible for the All-Creating not to understand what was created. Indeed, the fact is that men are more powerful than women.<sup>45</sup>

Liberal Muslims also view that human rights are one of the most important issues in socio-religious and political life. The basis of human rights is humanity. As humans, there are alienable rights that cannot be denied by others or by the state for whatever reasons. One informant Y (53) believed that Islamic teachings can be also a good source of human rights spirit. In her view, the principle of anti-racism has been practiced during the time of the

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with MMA, July 28, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with MCA, July 25, 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with RA, July 21, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with WFL, July 23, 2022.

prophet.<sup>46</sup> While H viewed that humanity dictates that all humans are equal, therefore, should be treated equally. He said: “As humans, all of us are equal. We must assume that because there is no authority that can view one human is above another. So, humans should be assumed as identically equal, as human.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, I said: “As humans, they were born with equal rights. Therefore, I do not believe that certain people were born with a higher level of rights than others.”<sup>48</sup> One informant L relates equality with democracy. According to him, since democracy is based on freedom, which is the right of everyone, then all citizens are equal and should be treated equal. Equality is a must in a democratic country.<sup>49</sup> Discrimination, according to N is one big problem in practicing equality. One source of the problem in her view is the term minority and majority. Another source of the problem is discriminated regulations or laws which should be abolished if we want to practice equality.<sup>50</sup>

Women and minority rights are two issues that seem to be one of the most important issues for liberal Muslims. One of the challenges on this for Y is the politics of patriarchy where women are dominated by men and the minority is dominated by the majority. In elections, women are discriminated against because of the systematic discrimination resulting from the practice of oligarchic politics where only certain individuals (including women) have connections to political dynasties and or who have financial resources. Racism and minority rights violations are still big problems, particularly after the most polarized and divisive gubernatorial election in Jakarta in 2017. For I, women’s rights are not only a must but also have been prescribed in Islam. On this, he said:

I think women’s rights are not only allowed in Islam but even a must. A lot of Qur’anic verses instruct these rights. And all interpretations of modernist Muslims like Fazlur Rahman or Aminah Wadud interpret that women-related verses in the scriptures are mostly about women’s emancipation.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Y, July 22, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with H, July 21, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with I, July 26, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with L, July 27, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with N, July 22, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with I, July 26, 2022.

Meanwhile, for L, women and minority rights are part of the package of rights for citizens in a modern and democratic country.<sup>52</sup> Constitutionally speaking, the guarantee of equal rights of citizens including between men and women is fundamental. Similarly, while acknowledging that there is still a lot of work to do on women's rights, H believed that we can make progress on this issue. For him:

So, discrimination against women cannot be accepted. But we must understand that patriarchal culture and structure around the world are still persistent. In Islam for instance, most of the jurists are men, which means that bias against women in elaborating Islamic teachings is unavoidable. This should be our concern. Equality for women, also for LGBT is a basic principle. So, we have to continuously fight for this equality, because humanity dictates that we are equal.<sup>53</sup>

This is echoed by N who also views that the practice of patriarchy is still persistent everywhere. Part of the issues that need to be tackled is the discrimination law and regulations as well as its practices against women and minorities.

### **Views of Muslim Elites toward Pluralism**

The CRI groups have a strong tendency to reject pluralism, considering that Islam is the truest religion and other religions are untruthful and against the Islamic faith and even be judged as infidelities. In this regard, CRI groups tend to use a literal interpretation of Qur'anic verse, particularly al-Baqarah [2]: 120, and neglect the context of this verse substantively. For them, God has made a clear distinction between "Muslim" and "*kāfir*." Consequently, they tend to strictly define who is a friend and who is a foe, making a very distinct demarcation between "us" (*minnā*, in-groups) and "them" (*minhum*, out-groups). Out-groups are treated differently. Their claim of absolute truth negates not only non-Muslims but also Muslims with different religious perceptions.

However, a bit different from his previous written opinion related to textual-scriptural interpretation toward non-Muslims several years ago, it is surprising that H has a relatively a positive

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with L, July 27, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with H, July 21, 2022.

perception toward the practices of pluralism and religious tolerance in Indonesia. In terms of pluralism, he still insisted that he is committed to supporting the edict of MUI (The Indonesian Ulama Council) in 2005, which decries that secularism, pluralism, and liberalism are harmful to Muslims. To H, this edict is based on the truest Islamic theological underpinning. Accordingly, he supported the MUI's edict because he considers that it is natural for Muslims to claim that Islam is the truest religion and that the mission of Islam is *da'wab*—No doubt about that. Hence, H also pointed out that when he was writing a book on the Islamic perspective on pluralism, he came and met with Father Franz Magnis Suseno, a noted Catholic scholar to discuss religious pluralism. “Father Magnis told me that he also wrote a book about the Mission Document of Vatican Concilium, which insisted that all Catholic adherents have the obligation to conduct missionary. That is the way of Catholic principles. I have no problem with that principle as well,”<sup>54</sup> he said.

Surprisingly, in terms of religious tolerance in Indonesia, H pointed out that so far it is running well. According to H, generally Indonesian Muslims are tolerant toward their fellow non-Muslims. He gave the example that in areas in which non-Muslims are the majority group, Muslims never complain if the governors or regents are non-Muslims. Meanwhile, non-Muslims are also tolerant of Muslims. They know and understand that Muslims are the majority of the Indonesian populace, so non-Muslims also respect the elected Muslim leaders who lead the local administration and region.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise, A claimed that he has no problem with non-Muslims. For him, non-Muslims are also the servant of God. “I have also no problem with pluralism. Muslims and non-Muslims can be living peacefully. In Islamic history, under Prophet Muhammad the Jews and Christians were able to live together peacefully with their fellow Muslims. They can be practicing their religious ritual peacefully,”<sup>56</sup> he insisted. In this context, A claimed that non-Muslims are more highly respected under an Islamic ruling government rather than living in a democratic system.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with A, July 24, 2022.

In fact, the above-stated perspectives are not only practiced by CRI groups, but rather it is also to be implemented by some local administrations and municipalities in certain Indonesian provinces and cities, particularly by implementing Shari'ah by law (Perda Shari'ah during the period of 2001-2008). In this regard, the local administration and parliament disseminated a proposal of Shari'ah bylaw regulations such as not allowing women to go outside their residence after 12.00 am without being accompanied by their *mahram*, segregating sitting rooms between student boys and girls, dividing public swimming pools between men and women, and other restrictive policies of limiting women activities. Although such Shari'ah by law has been waning since 2008, the agenda of implementing conservative and radical Islamist mindset and ideology are still exist and to be manifested into various tools and activities, particularly through social media.

Informants responded to pluralism variously. All informants agreed with pluralism and religious tolerance, but they gave a critical note, that pluralism and tolerance are given in Indonesia. Also, the issue of pluralism and tolerance should not only be jargon that is not practiced, nor should it be ignored. Another keyword that informants encourage is mutual respect between one group and another different group.<sup>57</sup>

According to RA, first, we must inevitably recognize pluralism and multi-culture in Indonesia. Second, most Muslims inevitably must compromise with adherents of other religions.<sup>58</sup> This compromise is important for the stability of the country. If it is unstable, the country cannot move, and the people will be at a disadvantage. Meanwhile, MMA considered Indonesia to be the most tolerant country. Talking about tolerance should be in the same spirit. MMA asserted that,

So, we will never connect talking about tolerance to people who are intolerant, we will never connect talking about pluralism to people who are anti-pluralism. ...I cannot possibly talk about tolerance with intolerant non-Muslims. ...nor is it possible to talk to an intolerant

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<sup>57</sup> Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025).

<sup>58</sup> Interview with RA, July 21, 2022.

NU person, it will never be connected. If we want to talk about tolerance, the spirit must also be the same.<sup>59</sup>

Speaking of tolerance, FN explained that tolerance is not a matter of debate when accommodations to differences are given in full. That is, one must agree on the thing that one disagrees with. Different and unequal people are okay, the arguments must be constructed. The important thing is that democracy provides a ‘channel’ so that different ones can respect each other. Regarding whether to say Merry Christmas for example, FN questioned why Muslims are encouraged to say Christmas when it is irrelevant.<sup>60</sup> MCA asserted that pluralism and tolerance need not be used as jargon too much. Because if it is used as jargon, it will become a new ‘crystallization’ which eventually in the name of pluralism itself denies plurality. MCA illustrated that making pluralism and tolerance as jargon the same as *Pancasila*. For example, religious people devoutly, often go to mosques, people with long beards down, or wear *cingkrang* pants are accused of not being *Pancasilais*. MCA also added, “... So, the same I think is precisely plurality, and so on. Tolerance is a natural situation in this nation. We were born already different so do not worry about it anymore.”<sup>61</sup>

According to the WFL, tolerance is mutual respect (reciprocity), but does not go *into* the sense of being ignorant: joining into activities of other religions’ rituals. What is needed is how to respect each other’s activities without having to participate in their activities, and vice versa. In this case, WFL stated that people already understand tolerance, but the packaging on social media sometimes provokes things that do not have to happen, eventually happening. This is worrying.<sup>62</sup>

As expected, liberal Muslims express the views that are most consistent with conceptualization. Their views in general imply the compatibility of secular modern and political life with Islamic teachings. The problems between the two are mostly because of either the lack of knowledge about Islam and modernity or

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with MMA, July 28, 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with FN, July 26, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with MCA, July 25, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with WFL, July 23, 2022.

because of the need for reinterpretation of Islam in contemporary world.

However, they also express a kind of nuances in their views, particularly related to the source of their interpretation. Some of them use Islamic teachings as the point of departure, while others use a secularistic point of view as a departure. Therefore, if examine deeper, we can find that some liberal Muslims see modern socio-political life and religious life as two separate things that have different domains. Consequently, there should not be problems in relationships. We can also find that some liberal Muslims see elements and interpretations of Islamic teachings are simply compatible with modernity and political life. Therefore, Muslims should find modern socio-religious and political interpretations of Islam to live in this modern world.

In general, liberal Muslims agree that Islam and politics should be separated. But they have some disagreements on the role of Islam in political life. For some religions like Islam can be a source of inspiration, while for others both are separate and different and both are not a hostile relationship, provided that modern principles of life like pluralism, human rights, non-discrimination, and democracy are practiced properly.

On political leadership for instance, one informant N said that leadership has universal qualifications, but some Islamic teachings can be an inspiration. She stated: “to me, characteristics of leadership are universal. However, Islamic leadership criteria are also good, right. Criteria like truthfulness, trustworthy, smart (capable), and delivered (getting things done) are all good and can be used although not necessarily called Islamic.”<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile when asked about political leadership based on Islam, one informant H said: “of course, I do not support it. There is no relationship between the religion of someone with him being a political leader like a Regent (*Bupati*) or others. Leadership is about managerial capacity and has nothing to do with religion.”<sup>64</sup> Another informant I said that what we need is a good political leader, and a good leader is not necessarily Muslim.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with N, July 22, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with H, July 21, 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with I, July 26, 2022.

Religious pluralism and or pluralism in general, not surprisingly, have been the two most crucial issues, inter alia, among all liberal Muslims. According to I pluralism should be the inherent character of Indonesia. It should be in our DNA, to borrow his terminology. In doing this, tolerance should be at the center of pluralism. On this, I observe that Islam or Muslims as a majority has been the main source of problems although in areas where Islam is not the majority, minority rights are also in trouble.<sup>66</sup> For N and Y, pluralism should not be preached but practiced even from the smallest level (family) or lowest level of the community.<sup>67</sup> For I pluralism and tolerance are not necessarily related to religion, particularly Islam. But surely Islamic tolerance toward other groups, religious based or non-religious based is very important element in upholding the principle of pluralism in Indonesia.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

Most Muslim political elites in Jakarta embrace the moderate path in perceiving ideological issues. However, some of them are still showing a tendency towards conservatism. These findings justify the previous studies that some Muslim elites still embrace and apply conservative ideas in their mindset and behavior. This study is limited because of its site and scope. Hence, further research can be conducted on most regions of Indonesia to get a broader perspective.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with N and Y, July 22, 2022.

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