

Islam and Politics in Indonesia

By Shiraishi Takashi

MUSLIMS account for 87% of Indonesia's population or a total of 180 million adherents, and this majority makes it the world's largest "Islamic" nation. While it is a trend within Islam throughout the world, Muslims in Indonesia are becoming more devout than ever. Whereas it was hardly seen in the 1970s, for example, the *jilbab* worn by Muslim women has become a common sight, and increasing numbers of believers are attending Friday services at mosques.

Accompanying this "Islamic revival," in the political world in recent years, those advocating the establishment of Islamic states ruled by the increasing influence of Islam and Islamic law (Sharia) have come to the fore. For example, when one visits the city of Surakarta in central Java, where Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) was founded, one sees posters of Osama bin Laden on the walls. Islamist Yusril Ihza Mahendra, chairman of the Crescent Moon and Star Party (PBB¹) and the Minister of Justice, has been mentioned as a candidate for the presidency. In the national parliament are such Islamist political parties as United Development Party (PPP², whose chairman is Hamzah Haz, the current Vice President), the Welfare Justice Party (PKS³) and the PBB. The JI, which engineered a series of terrorist attacks such as the Bali bombing and the bombing of Jakarta's Marriott Hotel, continues to be influential.

How potent are the Islamist influences within the government, and will Islamist strength grow larger than what it is at present? To answer these questions, let us examine the results of the survey carried out by Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI) in August of 2003.

According to the results, some 87% of Indonesia's population are adherents to Islam. Of these Muslims, the devout who pray five times each day, fast to the the very end of Ramadan, chant the Koran daily, pray additionally on a daily

basis and regularly attend religious lectures account for 49.8% of adherents. The remaining 50.2% are less devout and fall in the category of what might be called "statistical" Muslim. The degree to which devout Muslims (43.3% of the entire population), statistical Muslims (43.7%) and non-Muslims (13%) support political parties is shown in the table. (Table 1)

In Indonesia, the term "Islamic parties" is used to refer to five particular political parties. These are the three Islamist political parties (the PPP, the PKS and the PBB) which advocate the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Islamic law, the National Awakening Party (PKB⁴, headed by former president Abdurrahman Wahid, former chairman of the orthodox Islamic social and educational association Nahdlatul Ulama [NU]) and the National Mandate Party (PAN⁵, headed by current MPR⁶ Speaker Amien Rais, former head of the modernist social and educational association Muhammadiyah). It is generally held that devout Muslims overwhelmingly support these five parties.

However, when one looks at the results of the survey, this does not seem to be the case. As one might guess, non-Muslims do not support the Islamic parties at all, and statistical Muslims are conspicuously low in their rate of sup-

port for Islamic parties (28.3%) as well. As a result, one can say that the major support base of the Islamic parties is made of devout Muslims. This does not mean, however, that devout Muslims unanimously support the Islamic parties. As one can see in Table 1, the party receiving the largest degree of support from devout Muslims is Golkar, and close to half of devout Muslims (48.6%) support either Golkar or the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP⁷).

Other points of interest come from comparisons with the 1955 election. In Indonesia's electoral history, the elections of 1955 and 1999 stand out as reasonably free and fair elections. In the 1955 election, four Islamist parties collected 43.5% of the total vote. These included the modernist Masyumi⁸ (20.9%) which advocated the introduction of rule by Islamic law, the orthodox Nahdlatul Ulama (18.4%), the Indonesia-Islam Alliance party (2.9%) and the Islamist Education Association (1.3%).

In comparison, according to the August 2003 survey, of those who said they had voted in the 1999 election, 10.7% cast votes for the PPP, 1.9% for the PBB and 1.4% for the PKS, or a total of 14% of those surveyed. Asked which party they would vote for if an election were held immediately, the responses

Table 1 Political party support among devout Muslims, statistical Muslims and non-Muslims

	Devout Muslims	Statistical Muslims	Non-Muslims
Democratic Party of Struggle	14.0%	30.5%	46.3%
Golkar	34.6%	38.9%	50.5%
National Awakening Party	22.1%	7.8%	0.0%
United Development Party	14.6%	11.2%	0.0%
National Mandate Party	7.4%	6.1%	0.0%
Welfare Justice Party	3.4%	3.2%	1.1%
Crescent Moon and Star Party	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%

were 9.8% for the PPP, 1.9% for the PBB and 2.3% for the PKS, also making a total of 14% of those surveyed. In short, during the past 45 years the ratio of support for Islamist political parties has plummeted from 43.5% to a mere 14%.

From the above, it may be said that over the past 20 years, within the context of world-wide trends, expansion of educational opportunities and the rise of the middle class, Indonesia's Muslims have become more devout. However, this has not meant that Indonesian Muslims are now supporting or will in the near future support the introduction of Islamic law or the establishment of a state based on Islam. The PDIP and Golkar have already established themselves as national political parties and virtually half of devout Muslims support one of the two. In contrast, the ratio of support for Islamist political parties even among devout Muslims is no more than 21.8%. Moreover, the PKB and the PAN, which together receive 29.5% of the support of devout Muslims, oppose the introduction of Islamic laws.

The possibility that in the near future Islamist forces will become a major influence in the national parliament is extremely small. This is not to say that Islamist influence is not significant. To illustrate one need only look at the activities of "militant" Islamist organizations such as the JI. Such forces will not be able to take political control, but their activities do pose various challenges both domestically and regionally. Similar Islamist organizations have existed in Indonesia since the 1920s. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Darul Islam movement, which sought the establishment of an Islamic state, carried out armed resistance against the republican government. Islamist groups like the JI emerged from this radical lineage that has continued for several generations. What makes the JI different from its forebears, however, is its international



Photo: Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia

Muslim women wearing the jilbab at a wedding ceremony in Indonesia

character, specifically the fact that several thousand members are thought to have received military training in Afghanistan and on Mindanao. One of the reasons this kind of force has become stronger in recent years is that the political elite – out of a variety of motivations – is supporting them. A second reason is that, since the crisis of 1997-1998, amidst the continuing social crisis, poor devout Muslims from rural communities, who have received only Islamic education from primary through secondary levels, perceive the conflict in Ambon and Poso in central Sulawesi as a confrontation between Islam and Christianity and are becoming radicalized.

Such radical Islamist groups are not particularly large in membership, but all the government can do is to abandon the policies of appeasement and, with the cooperation of prominent social and educational associations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, seek to contain them. Since the Bali bombing, this has become the basis of government policy in Indonesia. However, within the government, there

is no small number of politicians such as Yusril Ihza Mahendra and others who are driven by either opportunism or conviction to pursue the appeasement of radical Islamist forces. As a consequence, one cannot expect that the government will, at least in the short-term future, suppress such groups. It is probably safe to assume that the current state of affairs will continue for some time to come. **J S**

Abbreviations

- 1) PBB: Partai Bulan Bintang
- 2) PPP: Partai Persatuan Pembangunan
- 3) PKS: Partai Keadilan Sejahtera
- 4) PKB: Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa
- 5) PAN: Partai Amanat Nasional
- 6) MAR: Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, or National Assembly
- 7) PDIP: Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan
- 8) Masyumi: Majelis Syura Muslimin Indonesia

Shiraishi Takashi is a professor at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. He specializes in Asian studies and international relations.