

“Socially Conservative, But Politically Liberal:” A New Trend in Muslim Political Elites’ View in Indonesia

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Abstract:

A substantial number of literature on conservative, liberal, and moderate views in Indonesia has been flooded with qualitative case studies. In contrast, this article discusses how Muslim political elites view Islam, democracy, and modernization in Indonesia by dichotomizing their socio-religious and political views divergently. Socio-religiously, it could be attributed to how they respond and practice their religious beliefs, such as prayer, performing five-time worship, reading the holy Qur’an, rejecting homosexuality, and interfaith marriage. Politically, it can be observed by how they respond to democratic citizenship equality, minority leadership, economic liberalism, Israeli-Palestinian issues, interfaith marriage rights, and the protection of LGBT. This article employed a qualitative study, conducted in-depth interviews with five Muslim political elites in Indonesia, and consulted secondary data sources. In light of the convergence of Islam, democracy, and modernization, Muslim political elites in Indonesia hold a socially conservative but politically liberal viewpoint since they have to moderate their positions to please Islamic and nationalist voters within political liberalization. It causes them to rely not only on religious issues but also on good governance matters. This new trend in Muslim political elites’ views could impact people’s perceptions by constructing a culture of liberal democratic models that are constantly changing and modifying, particularly in the Muslim world. This article could be beneficial for further research at the local and national levels or even be advanced to a quantitative study to contribute to the development of the modernization theory thesis in the Muslim world.

Keywords: Muslim political elites, socially conservative but politically liberal views, Islam and democracy, modernization, Indonesia

Introduction

How do Muslim political elites in Indonesia view Islam, democracy, and modernization? This question leads us to the variety of polarizing views of contemporary political ideology in Indonesia, which are often mapped out in the form of conservative and liberal Islam, especially since the post-Soeharto regime (1998). So far, the literature related to the phenomena of conservative and progressive liberal Islam in Indonesia has flooded qualitative case studies (e.g., Sebastian et al., 2020; Burhani 2016; Bruinessen

2013; Ibrahim 2011; Qodir 2010; Solihin 2009; Anwar 2007). Many other scholars have also discussed and linked to moderate Muslim views (e.g., Jubba et al., 2022; Ridwan, 2021; Menchik, 2019; Sirait, 2016; Al-Rasyid, 2014; Hilmy, 2013). Given such trends, it is very intriguing to map the ideological spectrum of Muslim political elites in terms of conservative, moderate, and liberal Muslims. However, this article does not cover such increasing political polarization over the last few years in the country. Instead, this article aims to understand the emergence of a new trend in

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Muslim political elites' views in Democratic Indonesia, which is then categorized as socially conservative but politically liberal, and why they are socially conservative but politically liberal.

Indonesia, as a nation-state with the largest Muslim population and a unique historical development of Islam in the country, has been portrayed as the home of tolerant Muslims. Unsurprisingly, many scholars have often cited the Indonesian case as a model to disprove the thesis that Islam is incompatible with democracy and modernization – albeit somewhat debatable (see Hefner, 2019; Buehler, 2009; Mujani, 2007; Elisabeth, 2007; Bican, 2006; Esposito & Voll, 2000; Madjid, 1994). Specifically, in some politically sensitive areas of democratic value implementation, such as civil liberties and human rights (e.g., LGBT and interfaith marriage), equality (e.g., majority and minority, women's and non-Muslim leadership), and economy (e.g., Sharia economy and the global capitalist economy), Muslim political elites, particularly those who are in strategic positions within political parties, remain a vital source of influence on state policy.

It should be noted that the fusion of Islamic and democratic politics in Indonesia is inseparable from the various roles of Muslim political elites, who also make post-Soeharto Islamic political party organizations such as the United Development Party (PPP), the National Awakening Party (PKB), People's Mandate Party (PAN), and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) still exist to the present. In the meantime, several other Muslim political actors have emerged in secular nationalist parties, such as Golongan Karya (Golkar) and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP). As such, there have been some unique findings on how Muslim political elites in Indonesia express their knowledge, attitude, and practice socially¹ and politically in modern Indonesia.

I, therefore, focus on Muslim political elites who have strategic positions within their respective political parties, considering them as Muslims who can constitute most of the population in the country. Given the vital role of Muslim political elites, at least one

significant role has had an impact in the form of a unique trend of Muslim political elites' views in Indonesia. In this article, the term "socially conservative but politically liberal" has to be understood in terms of how Muslim political elites express social and political views differently.

Socially, they may be categorized as conservative and religiously observant individuals who believe in the values of Islamic teachings. In contrast, politically, they have liberal political views, which is not disputing the ideals of a democratic Indonesia side by side with modernity. A Muslim political elite, for example, may reject LGBT people religiously, but they do not want to discriminate against their rights as equal citizens. In other words, the personal political views of a Muslim cannot be identified simply through the religious symbols they express in the public sphere. In some micro-cases, a Muslim may be perceived as religiously conservative, upholding traditional values such as wearing a headscarf, worshiping in mosques during all prayer times, and abstaining from alcoholic beverages. However, when it comes to politics, they oppose the discriminatory treatment of minorities such as LGBT in equal access to public facilities such as health, decent work, and education because Islam teaches that differences in identity do not prevent Muslims from doing justice to their fellow humans, which is similar to the concept of equality in democratic citizenship.

In this respect, this article aims to shed some light on this phenomenon by examining important religious and political issues in Indonesia. A good understanding of Muslim political elite views can be the first important step to better understanding the development of social and political views. I recognize that religious and political views could significantly impact socio-religious and political development outcomes, especially in a democracy with a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia. For example, just as LGBT is also considered a complex form of transnational activism, religious values constructed as a social norm and liberal political system can shape or direct the actions of individuals or groups. Nevertheless, Muslim political

elites' socio-religious and political views can be socially constructed. I realize that events and political configurations in Indonesia can influence shaping people's ideas or thoughts, especially Muslims in general.

In this article, I argue that Muslim political elites view the principles of religion and state in different contexts to present the image of Islam, democracy, and modernization as going hand in hand. Meanwhile, Indonesia's liberal political system has encouraged Muslim political elites to moderate their political views in a liberal direction for the resilience of their party's institutions to engage in electoral competition, even though they also hold a social belief in conservative religious values.

Research Method

Since I define Muslim political elites who are associated with political parties as key or essential figures, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the main instrument to collect data on the views of Muslim political elites. I have interviewed five Muslim political elites in Indonesia, each occupying strategic positions in the management of the PKB, PPP, PKS, PPP, and Golkar parties.²

I could reach out to appropriate and relevant informants in July 2022 when I became a research assistant for three researchers, namely Ridwan, Ph.D., M. Syafi'i Anwar, Ph.D., and Djayadi Hanan, Ph.D., in a research project at Universitas Islam International Indonesia (UIII).³ We attempted to cover as many variations in the religious and political views of Muslim political elites as possible.

Other than in-depth interviews with Muslim political elites, I also consult secondary sources, including books, journal articles, newspapers, and other relevant sources of information that enable me to explain the study empirically. It is imperative to do, given that Muslim political elites may hide their true faces with pious believer masks at the interview for electoral gain.

Furthermore, I use thematic analysis to encode qualitative information by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data in interpretive schemes (see

Boyatzis, 1998). Hence, thematic analysis can be fruitful in examining collected data on religious and political views. It can allow me to define how Muslim political elites express their standpoints of Islam, democracy, and modernization in Indonesia, as well as why they are socially conservative but politically liberal.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. In the next section, I discussed the latest developments in social conservatism and liberal politics in Indonesia to find several indicators defining the emergence of a new trend of Muslim political elites' views, that is, "socially conservative, but politically liberal." Then, I elucidated Muslim political elites' views on social values that they believe in and followed with the liberal political perceptions of Muslim political elites. In the final section, I then highlight the implications of the arguments and raise the scope of further study.

Results and Discussions

Religious Social Conservatism and Liberal Politics in Indonesia

The entry of Indonesia as an industrial country still seems to contradict the predictions of the leading social thinkers of the 19th century—Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Auguste Comte, and Max Weber—that it would be followed by religious social values that would slowly fade and play a minor role in the social community. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center, "The Global God Divide" (2020), found that Indonesia is at the top of the rankings as the most religious country (Greenwood, 2020). Ninety-six percent of respondents in Indonesia stated that a person has to believe in God and have moral values, and ninety-eight percent consider religion to be significant in their lives. It has surpassed the trend of religiosity in the Middle East. The trend of high religiosity in Indonesia can also be proven by the strengthening of religious conservatism in society. According to a poll released by ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute researchers, 82% of Indonesians support the notion that women should wear headscarves as part of the implementation of Islamic law (*Survey*, n.d.). Thus, Islam, the single religious

religion in Indonesia, is often associated with religious conservatism.

Azyumardi Azra considers that many Islamic observers in Indonesia always attribute the symptoms of religious conservatism (Islam) to the rampant wearing of a headscarf (Azra, 2020). However, traditional Islamic values, such as wearing a headscarf, can be attributed ideologically and fashionably. Therefore, socio-religious conservatism can also be thought of as an attitude that does not want modernity to grow. In comparison, Norris and Inglehart (2011) posited that the election results strongly reflected the differences in public opinion and values between conservatives and liberals in the United States on religious issues such as acceptance of homosexual marriage, prayer beliefs in schools, and the prohibition of abortion, which can revive religious values in the public sphere. Furthermore, the authors (2011) also attempted to compare the modernization thesis by looking at social value indicators, such as divorce approval, gender equality, and homosexuality (see also Norris & Inglehart, 2002). They discovered strong and statistically significant differences in all social values between the Western versus Muslim worlds. However, it is different in the case I will discuss, where the public in the United States and Indonesia have sufficiently similar values, owing to the debate between political cultures on democratic and religious social values.

If this is reflected in social and political issues in Indonesia, social and political understanding can be multidimensional and thus require the study of certain indicators that operate at some specific levels between social and political values. Here, I decide on several indicators to categorize whether an individual is a socially conservative Muslim, adapted to the last few debates regarding the values and principles of the Islamic religion in Indonesia. It can be seen from the Muslim beliefs political elites have in prayer, performing five-time worship, frequently reading the holy Qur'an, and rejecting LGBT people and interfaith marriage in a religious context. Contrary to the main idea of modernization theory, I find that informants stick to the beliefs and values

of Islamic teachings, even though they are educated and have a high level of economic security.

However, will the continued strengthening of religious conservatism also lead to religiopolitical conservatism in Indonesia? In fact, it is not that simply expected. So far, the proliferation of liberal political views in Indonesia is familiar to scholars. That Indonesia adheres to a secular, liberal, and democratic constitution agreed upon as a social contract is accurate. Many scholars also consider that Islam, democracy, and modernization are compatible. The compatibility between Islam and democracy in Indonesia is evident through diverse endeavors aimed at disseminating the principles of tolerance, pluralism, and the rule of law, notably secularism, which are progressively gaining momentum (Hefner, 2020; Abdi, 2007; Na'īm, 2008; Hefner, 2011; Zoelva, 2022). This trend is further strengthened by voting behavior in Indonesia, where Islamic political parties have never emerged victorious in elections since democratization (1999–2014). Mujani et al. (2018) have shown how voters in Indonesia, where the majority of 88% of voters are Muslims, tend to be more rational in electing political parties, candidates, and presidents. Religious reasoning is not a determinant for voters to decide which political parties or actors are mandated to lead them.

Indeed, the shifts in the trend of Muslim society in Indonesia could not be isolated from the significant influence of Muslim democrats such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Syafi'i Ma'arif, Nurcholis Madjid, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, along with NU and Muhammadiyah, that had been at the front of efforts to reform their country under the iron muscle of Soeharto. They persistently advocated the new idea of the importance of a politically and religiously pluralist system and popularized an agenda around notions of equality, civil liberties, human rights, and democracy throughout the 1980s and 1990s. They were using the approach of religious teachings and traditions to convince that Islam and democracy are compatible. Before long, It had a significant impact on the declining role of '*Politik aliran*'

(political streams, known as social cleavages), as Geertz (1960) put it, particularly the Muslim 'santri' who supported Islamic parties in the 1955 election, which is no longer a major influence on Muslim voters in the post-New Order general elections. Therefore, Islamist parties were less popular than nationalist-secular.⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that Indonesia's Muslim population is more inclined towards "substantive Islam" than "formalistic Islam," where they separate their ritual beliefs or piety from a more Islamic political orientation (see Fealy, 2019, pp. 117; Liddle & Mujani, (2007); Assyaukanie, 2004; Azra, 2000; Syamsuddin, 1995, pp. 58–61).

In addition, a recent survey by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) revealed that although 84% of respondents stated that they always or often consider religion to make important decisions in life to be considerable, this public frequency does not have a significant influence in electoral political contestation (Madrim, 2022). Interestingly, in some cases of specific political issues, such as LGBT rights as citizens that must be protected, most Indonesians view it negatively. However, they also accept the right to an LGBT life in Indonesia and need to get security protection from the government ("Mayoritas rakyat Indonesia menerima hak hidup LGBT," n.d.). Thus, it implies that the social and political perspectives of Indonesian society show different variations.

Against this backdrop, obviously, it can also be assumed that, for the resilience of Islamic political parties competing with other national-secular political parties, Muslim political elites have to moderate their political ideologies in a pluralist, nationalist, or even liberal direction.⁵ Aside from the conservative socio-religious perceptions, it is also interesting to investigate how Muslim political elites are confronted with a modern perspective on the concept of democracy as part of their political view and how they influence the existing Muslim mass base, which also prioritizes rationality and good governance.

In this regard, I will examine the political knowledge, attitude, and practice of Muslim elites in relation to the principles of liberal

politics and modern issues that intersect with religious principles. Here, I delve into their responses to various issues, including the tension between the caliphate and democracy, democratic citizenship equality, minority leadership, economic liberalism, Israeli-Palestinian issues, interfaith marriage rights, and the protection of LGBT individuals' right to life. Those issues will be used to differentiate between the liberal and conservative political stances of the Muslim elites in question.

Defining Socially Conservative but Politically Liberal View among Muslim Political Elites

In Indonesia, constitutive history and political liberalization have resulted in how conservative social values, as well as liberal and modern democratic political principles, can be expressed in a multidimensional space. In this article, Muslim political elites' statements can be coded with socially conservative but politically liberal views as measured from predetermined indicators. It continues to fuel the debate about how the state and religion are mutually related.

Socially, all informants acknowledged that they routinely perform mandatory worship five times a day. They stated that the five daily prayers, which contain hope and tranquility, can positively affect the ease of daily activities (In-person and Zoom interviews with five Muslim political elites, 21-28 July 2022). Praying all the time is customary, and even that is also stated by a Muslim political elite sitting in a strategic position in the secular-nationalist party (Golkar), who constantly prays since it is strongly believed that besides the strength of man, there is the power of God (In-person interview with Ace Hasan Syadzily, 25 July 2022). Furthermore, prayer is ingrained in the sense that everything done is part of prayer (In-person interview with Hasanuddin Wahid, 28 July 2022). Prayer has been believed to be a routine performed for comfort (Zoom interview on 22 July 2022 with Arsul Sani, 22 July 2022). While belief in prayer, according to the PKS Muslim political elites, is crucial, it can be simplified, "*if the prayer is not believed, then there are no voters of the PKS.*" (Zoom interview on 27 July 2022

with Nabil Ahmad Fauzi, 27 July 2022).

Moreover, the traditional Muslim culture of Indonesia of reading the Quran has also become routine among Muslim political elites. Even amid overcrowding activities as politicians, they still attempt to be able to read the Quran every day (Zoom interview with Abdul Hakam Naja, 21 July 2022). Even some Muslim political elites claim that they read two to three times a day and/or have a target to read the Quran in its entirety two to three times a year. The elite of politicians who grew up in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization, at the very least, read the Quran in the routine "*Tahlilan*" or "*Yasinan*."

Meanwhile, LGBT issues have faced many challenges in obtaining their rights in Indonesia. This is inextricably linked to the socio-religious dominance of opposing views on LGBT identity in Indonesia. It is no alien that Islamic identity-based mass organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah issue a "*haram*" fatwa on LGBT relationships and marriages in Indonesia (*Resmi, PBNU Sikapi Perilaku Seksual Menyimpang LGBT*, n.d.).

In a public debate on a television show, the deputy steering secretary of the NU Jakarta Branch, Taufik Damas, also gave his views on LGBT socio-religiously and politically on the plan to criminalize LGBT in the draft bill of the criminal code (RKUHP) in Indonesia. As a representation of Islamic figures, Taufik decisively stated that, religiously, LGBT behavior and actions are "*haram*" and that they will have punitive consequences in the afterlife someday. However, Taufik stated that under state law, LGBT should not be criminalized as long as it falls into private territory, does not violate laws that lead to immoral acts, does not use force or coercion, does not involve minors, and does not record and disseminate content that violates pornographic laws. Furthermore, LGBT people also do not deserve to be discriminated against since, in fact, a Muslim must emulate the attitude of the Prophet Muhammad, who preached with love, affection, and peace. Even if an LGBT person does not want to repent and still violates religious values, then the attitude of a Muslim needs to be manned or leave the affairs to *Allah* instead of judging

their fellow human beings. Taufiq added that LGBT campaigns that seek to get someone to be part of the LGBT community should be clearly rejected, which is different from LGBT campaigns that invite people to respect LGBT rights, which should be respected in democratic countries ("*Debat Keras: Layakkah LGBT Dipenjarakan?!*," 2022).

Meanwhile, it is impossible to separate Muslim political elites in Indonesia from social networks with religious figures. Then, how do they address LGBT issues in Indonesia? This is aligned with what a Muslim political elite from PKS has stated, that based on their religious and social beliefs, they can be considered to hold conservative views and completely reject LGBT behavior. However, when it comes to the public sphere, it can be linked to its approval of civil liberties as the fundamental essence of democracy and respect for human rights. In the context of public issues, they will apply public logic, where as long as the constitution considers LGBT individuals as citizens, then all their rights must be fulfilled. Then, as with the pros and cons in the Draft Criminal Code, these issues will find their dynamics on the ground, where the state must have the courage to define them so that there would be no wild trials in society (Zoom interview with Nabil Ahmad Fauzi, 27 July 2022).

From their socially conservative perspective, it can be concluded that Muslim political elites reject LGBT behavior. Politically, however, Muslim political elites believe they still have to protect the rights of LGBT people as citizens and accept the plurality of identities existing in society (Zoom interview with Arsul Sani, 22 July 2022). On the other hand, the planned criminalization of LGBT individuals under the RKUHP in Indonesia is ambiguous. It was confirmed by a senior PPP politician, Arsul Sani, that in the context of LGBT behavior, people could not be prohibited, and whether this is given or not is still being debated. In principle, one cannot force another person to be a woman or a man. Meanwhile, the community's understanding of RKUHP as a law criminalizing LGBT was incorrect. The context of obscenity in LGBT can be equated with obscenity between men

and women, which violates the law, so there is no discrimination as the law applies between men, women, and LGBT (Zoom interview with Arsul Sani, 22 July 2022).

However, clear counterarguments against gender equality for same-sex married LGBT people cannot be granted since certain things cannot be done based on social values. However, if the country goes blind, banning everything also becomes impossible (Zoom interview with Arsul Sani, 22 July 2022). This is in line with what a Muslim political elite from PKB said, that although basically, the state must protect the rights of LGBT people as citizens and we must not exclude them, campaigning for LGBT or inviting someone to become LGBT must be banned. Hasan emphasized that the LGBT community is not rejected in Indonesia but is still automatically rejected by society, borrowing a statement from the Vice President of Indonesia, Ma'ruf Amin (In-person interview with Hasanuddin Wahid, 28 July 2022 in Jakarta).

From the vantage points above, Muslim political elites hold a socially conservative view of LGBT as something forbidden by religious beliefs. In contrast, they hold politically liberal views in a context where LGBT citizens' rights must still be protected. If we observe today's reality, there has been no specific action taken by the government to criminalize or prevent social movement groups on the ground or social media platforms advocating publicly for LGBT rights to break down boundaries and various stigmatizations occurring in society. It differs from democracy in Malaysia, where the government used its power and coercion to clamp down on anything related to LGBT promotion (Christiastuti, n.d.).

LGBT issues have always arisen and subsided in society, and the government has thus far been successfully dampening these upheavals. Likewise, marriage between people of different religions continues to be a polemic in Indonesia. So far, interfaith marriages have not only faced social and cultural friction but have also had to go through a complicated bureaucratic process. It is not surprising that many Indonesian people had to perform interfaith marriages abroad (see Wahyuni, 2017). Nonetheless, the

state also provides an alternative for those who wish to carry out interfaith marriages through a civil registration institution, with the rationale that civil registration only has the authority to register, not to certify sacredly. In addition, couples who are going to hold interfaith marriages still have to find religious leaders willing to marry them off, albeit rarely found.

Muslim elite politicians clearly have multidimensional views, socially and politically, in this regard. They admit that, socially, they agree that society should comply with the marriage law in force in Indonesia to enter into a legal marriage, in which two people as a married couple must adhere to the same religion (In-person and Zoom interviews with five Muslim political elites, 21-28 July 2020). However, they also realize they cannot escape the social reality that many Indonesian people secretly practice interfaith marriages. It prompted them to declare their political position, in which it was part of their individual rights as citizens for the state not to interfere with religious beliefs, including interfaith marriages or related to religious freedom (In-person interview with Hasanuddin Wahid, 28 July 2022). Therefore, interfaith marriage can be categorized as a human right that needs to be respected and upheld (Zoom interview with Nabil Ahmad Fauzi, 27 July 2022). The state has to accommodate its position, even if it is just to provide a record or register that they are married. Whether or not a marriage is legally sacred according to their religion is grounded in their respective beliefs, which must also be respected (In-person interview with Ace Hasan Syadzily, 25 July 2022).

Bearing all those perspectives in mind, the internalization of socio-religious values instilled in society is no less important than the instilled principles and cultures of democracy, nationalism, and multiculturalism in Indonesia, which should be further studied with a modernity approach given that Indonesia is known as a religious country as stated in the first precept "believe in God" in Pancasila. It has also been shown how the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of Muslim elites respond to state issues that

can be categorized as politically liberal, which supports democracy (including civil liberties and human rights), freedom of the press, freedom of speech, market economic policies, and other modernity issues explicitly.

Currently, Muslim political elites in Indonesia concur that democracy is the only game in town. This viewpoint is supported by their assertion that good governance is also required to organize accountable and transparent governance, as there must be a system of checks and balances in internal and external mechanisms. The supreme law must serve as a foundation that needs to be formulated to implement good governance. Meanwhile, Muslim political elites believe that the system based on the concept of the Islamic caliphate is not a compatible system to be installed in the current dynamics and context of a pluralistic Indonesian society that has agreed on the formation of a nation-state. In addition, they agreed to restrictions on executive and legislative powers, under which elections must be held every five years (In-person and Zoom interviews with five Muslim political elites, 21-28 July 2020).

In the concept of liberalism, which carries the values of equality, Muslim political elites decisively agree that every individual has equal citizenship rights under the rule of law and the constitution, regardless of the racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and geographical background of groups or individuals in society. As a consequence, regardless of Islamic or non-Islamic identity, a leader must act fairly toward the community; in fact, this has been exemplified by the exemplary attitude of one of the caliphs, Ali bin Abi Talib, when his case had to be defeated by a judge on the lawsuits of a Jew. In other words, there are no second-class citizens in Indonesia.⁶ This aligns with the definition of "what is a nation?" as Ernest Renan (2018) stated, that all people are basically free and equal. It also leads us to the process of recognizing that man is a slave neither to his religion, nor to his race, nor his language, nor the direction of mountain chains, nor the course of rivers. Nevertheless, from a socio-religious point of view, they also mentioned that what distinguishes a human from other human beings is only at the level

of "piety and good deeds." (In-person and Zoom interviews with five Muslim political elites, 21-28 July 2020).

In capturing the issues of modernization in the Indonesian democracy, such as women's equality and leadership, Muslim political elites demonstrate how the role of women in the public sphere must also be encouraged and fought for. It is recognized that the female population in Indonesia is not far from the percentage of the male population. Therefore, Indonesia will lose half of its national identity if it allows discrimination against women's rights in the public sphere (Zoom interview with Abdul Hakam Naja, 21 July 2022). However, this does not rule out the possibility that, at a certain level, women's rights need to be affirmed since some individuals place women in an unequal context, such as regarding leadership (In-person interview with Ace Hasan Syadzily, 25 July 2022). However, this circumstance can also be witnessed in the political developments in Indonesia, where women have filled many strategic political positions, both in political parties and in the state bureaucracy.⁷ Essentially, women and men have the same right to lead and be led (In-person interview with Ace Hasan Syadzily, 25 July 2022). Nonetheless, in the social context of Muslim societies, which advocates women or parents as the first educators for their children, they also still have a conservative tendency that needs to be contextualized in terms of family responsibilities. For example, there must be a division of responsibilities where women play a role in the external sphere, and a man plays a role in the domestic sphere instead. Furthermore, belief in good family conditions, socially and religiously, can also contribute to good social conditions. For example, someone needs to wake up their children for the Fajr prayer or school; otherwise, it will create a fragile family (Zoom interview on 21 July 2022 with Abdul Hakam Naja). In addition, women's equality should also be adjusted to the changing era and local needs that cannot be confronted politically (Zoom interview on 22 July 2022 with Arsul Sani).

Despite various conservative social views regarding family, Muslim political elites also

recognize the political approval of women's leadership for those capable of leadership. In fact, this applies not only to the women's minority but also to non-Muslim minorities in Indonesia. The emphasis is on how they choose candidates who are considered potential leaders in Indonesia. They may disregard religious identity, whether the candidate is Muslim or non-Muslim because Islam teaches to appoint leaders who are close to the substantive traits taught by the Prophet Muhammad, namely *Shiddiq* (honest), *Amanah* (trustworthy), *Tabligh* (conveying), and *Fathanah* (intelligent) as a logical reason if there were no Muslim candidates who are close to those qualities.⁸ Even so, this can still collide with the sociological conditions that existed on the ground during the election procession; religious or political identity is still coloring the electoral process in Indonesia. Even though there are some areas with non-Muslim majorities, Islamic political parties are still competing to support non-Muslim candidates.

Besides that, insights into liberal economic perceptions in Indonesia can also be seen as an important factor in mapping the views of socially conservative but politically liberal Muslim political elites. It is inextricable from the widespread opinions of Islamist groups, which regard the economic system as an infidel, and the usury practices carried out by conventional banks as prohibited in Islamic law. Nonetheless, Muslim political elites have their own perspective on this matter. Since Indonesia adheres to a democratic system, they only respect the opinions and beliefs of such people. On the other hand, the state's position has to facilitate people who reject conventional banking practices by promoting banks based on Sharia (In-person and Zoom interviews with five Muslim political elites, 21-28 July 2022). Socially, the strong criticism leveled by Islamists based on their religious beliefs, Muslim political elites who still use conventional bank services acknowledges that it can also serve as a reminder to those considered by Islamists as usury eaters. Then they can set aside the bank interest in their account to not use for food shopping but for alms (Zoom interview on 22 July 2022

with Arsul Sani). However, Muslim political elites are politically concerned that the problem would arise if the state or a person forced a citizen to use a Sharia bank, thereby interfering with other people's beliefs and inciting anarchist behavior.

Concerning the global economy, which is considered an infidel system by Islamist groups, Muslim political elites believe that it is still the best system that can be implemented because it is built in tandem with or as a result of international politics (Zoom interview on 27 July 2022 with Nabil Ahmad Fauzi). Nabil also added that, in terms of an ideological perspective, the global capitalistic system is indeed not ideal. It may still be rejected within the realm of belief. However, even if PKS were to become Minister of Finance or even President of the Republic of Indonesia, they could not run away from the established global economic system. As such, this is recognized as a perspective of political elites in PKS in the party, which is different from PKS constituents in the ranks of Islamist mass organizations, who consider it in black and white (*Fidel or infidel*) (Zoom interview on 27 July 2022 with Nabil Ahmad Fauzi). Meanwhile, other Muslim political elites more emphasize how the current global economic system is already governed in principle by economic and trade laws whose goal is to increase welfare, prioritize justice principles, and be measurable, which should be advanced regardless of whether the capitalist, socialist or even Islamic system is employed (In-person and zoom interviews with Muslim political elites of PAN, PPP, Golkar, and PKB 21-28 July 2022).

For another, international political conditions, which are constantly escalating between Israel and Palestine, can also be utilized to determine whether Muslim political elites are politically conservative or liberal. Since its independence, Indonesia has always been eager to defend the right to independence for the Palestinian people. Is this defense used solely on behalf of Muslim '*ummah*,' or is it the other way around on the basis of human values? Muslim political elites in Indonesia share this view. Apart from believing that the conflict between Israel

and Palestine has been agreed upon since the time of the facts of scripture, Muslim political elites agree that the advocacy of Palestinian independence is a constitutional order in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution: *"That the independence is the right of all nations, and thus, colonialism in the world must be abolished because it is not in accordance with humanity and justice."* (In-person interview with Hasanuddin Wahid, 28 July 2022). In addition, I also found an interesting code regarding the liberal views expressed by Muslim political elites that they are pushing for a peaceful way with a two-state solution for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (In-person and Zoom interviews with four Muslim political elites of PAN, Golkar, PKS, and PKB, 21-28 July 2022). Interestingly, PKS, a well-known Islamic populist political party, also emphasized the two-state solution.

Conclusion

Based on five interviews with Muslim political elites in Indonesia, I have found that even though Muslim political elites have socially conservative views amidst the rapid-paced modernization issues, this does not prevent them from maintaining their politically liberal views. Even this viewpoint is supported by Muslim political elites who hold strategic positions within a secular nationalist party. Indeed, it could not be separated from the high-profile Muslim figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Syafi'i Ma'arif, and Nur Cholis Madjid, who persistently advocated the new idea of the importance of a politically and religiously pluralist system and popularized an agenda around notions of civil liberties, human rights, equality, and democracy, along with NU and Muhammadiyah throughout the 1980s and 1990s. They greatly influenced Muslim voting behavior to separate religious piety from Islamic-oriented politics. Before long, it has led to a new trend of "socially conservative but politically liberal" standpoints, showing that Islam and democracy are compatible.

More importantly, the situation is influenced Muslim political elites to moderate the platforms of Islamic political parties and themselves to rely not only on religious

politicization but also on good governance issues for electoral gain, which means they cannot rely solely on conservative Muslim voters but also on Muslims in general who are increasingly rational in choosing the candidates. It is also evidenced by the fact that Islamic political parties have never won an election since the fall of the New Order regime, making them more flexible in forming coalitions with other non-Islamic parties. As a result, consociational democracy works well in Indonesia.

Second, the development of democracy and liberal politics has thus far been based on the framework of the Western system. Nonetheless, we have to bear in mind that the democratic system is not static but instead gradually developing and changing. Therefore, the substance and implementation of political liberalization are highly conditioned by the context of critical junctures in each country's history and will continue to face domestic social and political dynamics on the ground. Thus, democratization will lead to changes and modifications, especially in the Muslim world. While in the Indonesian context, the author sympathizes with the development of Indonesia's liberal democracy in the debate over the forms of nationalism and multiculturalism, in which Muslim political elites strive to uphold liberal political principles amidst the friction between social conservatism and the rapidly advancing trend of modernization.

Third, this article is expected to serve as a starting point for analyzing the new trend of socially conservative but politically liberal perspectives since the data in this study are still limited. Therefore, further research is required to derive more accurate conclusions. Furthermore, it has to be understood that Muslim political elites' perspectives at the national and local levels can also differ. Ultimately, upholding a liberal political view may face challenges on the ground.

Finally, the author expects that this study can be enhanced with a qualitative or quantitative approach using Muslim groups or individuals as the unit of analysis. It will also contribute to the development of the modernization theory thesis. Furthermore,

research into the dichotomy of views on religious values in conservative social and liberal politics will significantly benefit the Muslim world's social and political development, which is undergoing democratization.

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Notes

1. In this article, the term 'social/socially' refers to the socio-religious in the Muslim world, where the social values of the majority religious teachings are constructed as basic norms in society.
2. Through the interviews conducted with the five informants who hold significant positions in the national-level management of political parties, it can be deemed that the sample is representative enough. These individuals hold influential positions in their respective political parties and thus can be considered indicative figures of their political parties. However, to ensure the maximum accuracy of the data for further research, it is imperative to increase the number of informants for future research.
3. The author had been granted permission to access interview data for writing this article.
4. Tanuwidjaja (2010) read that the decline of Islamic parties was not because the Muslim electorate has become more "rational," and thus, religion no longer influences electoral behavior. Instead, the author contended that religion was still a significant force since nationalist-secular parties also accommodated religious aspirations and shied away from criticizing controversial religious issues.
5. See (Fox & Menchik, 2022) in discussing how Islamic political parties moderate to support democracy and pluralism.
6. During informant interviews, Muslim political elites frequently emphasized the importance of emulating behavior, citing the exemplary behavior of Islamic leaders in the past when administering justice without regard to an individual's religion.
7. Several informants also said that women in Indonesia hold many strategic positions in the government and are more numerous than in other advanced democracies like the United States.
8. Informants confirmed that they chose leaders not based on the religion they believed in. Instead, they choose leaders based on their competence and capacity, which may be measured by the values in Pancasila.

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Interviews

In-person interview with Ace Hasan Syadzily, A General Chairman of the Regional Representative Council (DPD) of Golkar and A Member of Parliament, Republic of Indonesia (RI), 25 July 2022.

In-person interview with Hasanuddin Wahid, General Secretary of PKB and a Member of Parliament of RI, 28 July 2022.

Zoom interview with Abdul Hakam Naja, a Former Chairman of DPP of PAN (2005-2010), 21 July 2022.

Zoom interview with Arsul Sani, a Vice Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly and a Vice Chairman of Dewan Pengurus Pusat (DPP) of PPP, 22 July 2022.

Zoom interview with Nabil Ahmad Fauzi, a Chairman of the Political Department of DPP of PKS, 27 July 2022.