

# The Emerging of Islamic Identities, Sarungan vs Cingkrangan under Democratic Regime in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** This study aimed to analyses how the so-called “Islamic Identity(ies)” differences shapes Indonesian social behaviour and Islamic political aspirations and activism. We witnesses that the current Islamization in Indonesia has, among other things, meant an accentuation of religious symbols in public, a rise in forms of personal religiosity, the proliferation of Islamic institutions, and the spread of new religious life-styles. However, the Islamization process has been colored by a contestation between traditionalist Islamic groups (*Sarungan*), and scripturalist and conservative Islamic groups, *Cingkrangan* (influenced by Wahhabi/Salafi interpretations). A long-standing cultural and theological divergence between Sarungan and Cingkrangan groups have now escalated into social life and political domain. As a response to the rise of Cingkrangan group in Indonesia, we witnesses the emerging of defender of traditional Islamic values by Sarungan group that promoting the idea of Islam Nusantara, as a distinctive brand of Islam developed in Nusantara (Indonesia Archipelago) at least since the sixteen century, as a result of interaction, contextualization, indigenization, interpretation and vernacularisation of universal Islamic values, according to socio-cultural reality of Indonesia. This study will analyses the dialectical relationship between Sarungan and Cingkrangan Islamic groups in Indonesia. Drawing from the fields of anthropology, Islamic studies, and political science, this study will focus on the emerging of Islamic identity differences and it's implication to the contemporary of Indonesian Muslim social life Post-Suharto era by focusing on West Sumatra and Central Java as case studies. Beyond this general context, the study focuses comparatively on how Cingkrangan and Sarungan contributes to the political aspirations and religious activism which for certain extent such networks can be activated and mobilized for collective actions.

**Keywords:** Islam, Sarungan, Cingkrangan, Minangkabau, Java, Democracy

## 1 Introduction

Political freedom and democracy have been experienced and interpreted differently by Indonesia Islamic groups. Therefore, the relationship between Islam, democracy and the politics becomes one of the most themes of the discourse of democratic pathway. One of the challenges in understanding the relation between Islam and democracy in Indonesia and elsewhere in the Islamic world is the concept of Islam and democracy means different things to different Islamic groups. A diversity of perspectives has been shown by Indonesian Islamic groups in presenting their political positions in the context of democratization. On one hand, some Islamic groups, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah supported the democratization agendas, such as human right and religious freedom; while some others Islamic groups, against it in the

name of Islam. Even though the Islamic groups that are involved in the debate use the same terms, such as Islam, Democracy, and *Shari'ah*, it has a different meaning for each group. As a result of the differences in the religious interpretation, approaches and perspectives related to religious and political issues, social life has encompassed tension, conflict and even violence within Islam.

Previously, the study of Islam, democracy and politics in Indonesia has always been related to political lineages and power struggles [1][2][3][4][5][6][7][8]. As a result, the role of Islam has been dismissed as simple nominalism to understand the contemporary Indonesian religious life. We cannot deny the fact that Indonesia's democracy has been experienced and interpreted differently by each group, stream and factions within Islamic Indonesia. To understand this phenomenon, this study will focus on the emerging of Islamic identities that are crucially important to understand contemporary life of Indonesian Muslim post-Suharto era. Islam in Indonesia, and elsewhere in the world, cannot be perceived as a single and static, but multiple and changing identities. The term 'Islam' itself is an 'unreliable index' of the phenomena that many scholars have been trying to comprehend for decades [9].

The orientalist' point of view, such as Bryan Turner, who establish a set of binary oppositions between Islam and the West as a theoretical basis will not make any sense to understand the relationship between Islam and democratisation process in Indonesia [10]. Turner perceived the West was contrasted with lack of the Orient; so that the West had rationality, the Orient was irrational; the West had tolerance, the Orient was fanatical; the West was progressive, the Orient was traditional; and so on [10]. The manifestation of Turner's approach can be seen in Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's project in modernizing Turkey. He repeatedly described Islam as 'the symbol of obscurantism'; as 'a purified corpse which poisons our lives'; as 'the enemy of civilization and science'; and soon [11]. This approach, in other words, suggested that Islam the source of radicalism and violence. In contrast, Ronald Lukens-Bull argued "In a very real sense, the best answer to radical Islam is not liberal Islam but conservative classical Islam" [11]. Contrasting the views of western media and policymakers, he suggested that Traditional Islamic School (*Pesantrens*) in Indonesia are not a source of radicalism but a source of counter-radicalism and an ally in efforts to establish peace and harmony in the world [12].

In one hand, Bryan Turner perceives Islam as a source of problem, while Ronald Lukens-Bull, in another hand, suggests that Islam is a source of solution. The questions arise, whether Turner and Lukens-Bull are referring to the same 'Islam'? Based on the aforementioned background, questions to be addressed in this study are: Why do clashes occur among Indonesian Muslims, especially between *Sarungan* and *Cingkrangan* group? What are the main factors influencing the clash? Does the clash between *Sarungan* and *Cingkrangan* significantly have the potential to undermine democracy in Indonesia? In the context of the contestation, then, who has the authority to speak for Islam in Indonesia, especially in the post reformation era? Which groups are dominating the Islamic discourse in the post-Suharto era? Why are *Cingkrangan* and *Sarungan* groups practicing a way of life diametrically different to the others, especially relating to politics and democracy? What are the political consequences of different religious outlooks adopted by *Cingkrangan* and *Sarungan* groups in the political arena?

## 1.1 Our Approaches

According to Hefner, rather than being monolithic, Islam's appearance in the Indonesia's public sphere is dynamic [13]. The further question arises, if Islam in Indonesia is constructed by so many different discourses, can it still be Islam? Of the many spectres that have perplexed for scholars are the polysemic of Islam. The ability of Islam to be used in a variety of contexts

leads some scholars to conclude that there is no such thing as Islam, but that there only Islam [14]. To avoid a trapped in misleading perceptions about Islam and the contemporary Indonesian Muslims and more importantly, the relationship between Islam and politics in the country, we need to define their collective identity as a social category that can be distinguished through two dimension—content and contestation. The content of Islamic identity can be distinguished from their constitutive norm, social purposes, cognitive model, and relational comparisons with other Islamic groups. Meanwhile, the contestation refers to the degree of agreement or disagreement over their world views. By using this approach, we can structurally apprehend what Islam(s) are really means for Indonesian people and how Islam(s) have been deployed in the reproduction of social dominance to confirm, reproduce, legitimate, or challenge power relations in Indonesia.

We are interested in showing how religious identities influence Indonesian Muslim's political attitudes and vice versa. To get this goal, we will explore the constitutive norm, social purposes, cognitive model, and relational comparisons of Cingkrangan and Sarungan groups. We will also explore the contestation between Sarungan and Cingkrangan groups through historical and demographic developments, political, economic, and social factors, and external and internal events that have impacted the subject matter of our study. Our aim is to produce a study that will enhance the existing academic literature, contribute to knowledge accumulation and the development of conceptual paradigms through which developments in contemporary Muslim societies in Southeast Asia can be more accurately interpreted and understood.

## 2 Discussion

In the last decade, we witness the rise of *Cingkrangan* and *Sarungan* Islamic group to push their way into an increasingly democratic public sphere in Indonesia post-Suharto Era. The contestation of the Islamic identities have led to the formation of religious institutions. These institutions and groups struggle to bring about social change, and subsequently turn into social religious movements. However, no specific study has been conducted dealing with the dynamic of identities between Sarungan and Cingkrangan group that influences the Indonesian Muslim's point of view relating to the politics and the democratization process. In this case, the most important aspect to comprehend the contemporary Muslims political and social life in Indonesia is to study the emerging of the Islamic identities in Indonesia post-Suharto colored by the rising of Cingkrangan and Sarungan Islamic group.

From a political and sociological perspective, Islam is the 'pivotal factor' when considering Indonesia's position globally – particularly on issues relating to the role of Islam in politics, inter-communal relations and democracy - considering the fact that Indonesia as the largest Muslim country in the world is a laboratory where Islam interact within a multicultural setting. With a population of approximately 230 million people, where more than 85 per cent of the population embraces Islam, there are almost as many Muslims living in Indonesia as in the entire Arab-speaking world combined [15]. Moreover, we cannot deny the fact that the strong influence of Islam as a cultural identity-marker, its function as an instrument for granting political legitimacy, its role as a rallying point for individual and collective empowerment and its impact on a country's domestic politics. Whatever happens within Muslims community in Indonesia, will determine the country's internal social and political constellation; its development trajectory as a state and nation; and also the evolution of its social community and political construction. In this case, the internal dynamics of Islam will affect Indonesia, either

directly or indirectly, on some scale. In short, the predicate as a 'pivotal factor' can be expressed in either positive or negative manner, with constructive or destructive results [16].

Considering the aforementioned facts, the study of the religious identities are a very precarious exercise in contemporary Indonesia. This study makes its contribution to the academic literature by being the first attempt to explore *Cingkrangan* Muslims constitutive norm, social purposes, cognitive model, and relational comparisons with *Sarungan* Islamic groups and its implications to the process of democratisation in Indonesia. There are several important points to consider in this context. First, from an academic perspective, a study on the religious identity will provide a more comprehensive picture about the involvement of Islamic groups in Indonesia's democratization process. Second, empirically, 'Islam' will be a force shaping post-authoritarian states with large Muslim populations meaning that Indonesia will provide a model of how Islam and democracy interact that will have implications for the modelling of democratization at a global level. In this regard, Indonesia may provide the Islamic world with a model to emulate. Third, the conflict between *Cingkrangan* and *Sarungan* groups caused the differences of their religious identities reciprocally affects the prospects for democratization in Indonesia and similarly to Islamic countries elsewhere.

The study of the religious identities is the most prominent factor to understand the contemporary life of Muslim in Indonesia Post-Suharto regime. Nevertheless, this aspect have never been explored profoundly by scholars. To our knowledge, no comprehensive study has been conducted relating to the religious identities, especially dialectical relationship between *Cingkrangan* and *Sarungan* group and its implication on the Indonesian Muslims point of view towards politics and democracy. Therefore, this study will focus on the religious identities and its implication on current Indonesia politics.

Since the re-emergence of democracy in 1999, a large number of researchers have focused on the democratization process that occurred as an important part of Indonesian social and political changes which has affected the dynamics of Islamic movements in Indonesia. Some scholars have argued that the conflict among Islam groups in Indonesia since early Indonesian Independent is a contestation for political power [17]. They further argue that the tension among Islamic groups in Indonesia post Suharto regime was triggered by the impact of democratization in Indonesia since 1998 and the impact of political decentralization [13]. These are important points since political Islam in Indonesia must be understood though a contextual analysis of political developments in the country by relating the trend to the political dynamics in the process of democratization. However, they have failed to explain the internal factor, namely the differences of religious identities that bring about as a different perception of politics and democracy. As a result, most scholars make a hasty conclusion, especially when they study the relationship of Islam, pluralism and democracy.

In Indonesia post-Suharto regime, large numbers of Islamic groups present great diversity in their political point of views. In some cases, the disagreements among these groups have transformed into a series of tension, conflict and even violence. The phenomenon even occurred from pre-independence conflict between Islamic oriented nationalist parties like Sarekat Islam and Partai Nahdatul Ulama to post independent competition between Masjumi, Nahdatul Ulama and other Islamic parties. Some scholars have argued that the conflicts among these Islamic groups were caused by the absence of consistent common agendas among them [18]. This argument might be true in the context of contestation for political power. However, such studies had failed to explain the problem that was caused by multiple religious identities.

With the ethnography research, this study will focus in West Sumatera and Central Java as our case studies. These areas were chosen due to the increasing of the aspiration among their society to implementation of *shari'ah* laws based on *Cingkrangan* group religious interpretations

in one hand and the emerging of defender of traditional Islamic point of view in the other hand. To gain a wider perspective, we will also supplement this study with insights from the wider literature on interview method, such as, historical method with archival and document-based research in particular. To understand the cognitive model and constitutive norm of the Islamic groups, we have to study the religious texts in the region regions used by the *Cingkrangan* and *Sarungan* groups. Therefore, the approach adopted by this study is to utilise interpretive research paradigm that allow us to gain a better understanding of Islamic trends in Indonesia. In conceptual terms, this will be the first study that aims to bridge both the epistemological and empirical gap through an in-depth analysis of the complexities of the conflict among Islamic groups in the context of democratization and post-authoritarian politics in Indonesia.

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