Piety and Public Opinion: Understanding Indonesian Islam

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Oxford University Press (Forthcoming)
2017
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Introduction

Islam and Democracy

John Esposito and John Voll's signature book *Islam and Democracy* opens with a stark observation: "Religious resurgence and democratization are two of the most important developments of the final decades of the twentieth century" (Esposito and Voll 1996: 3). Nearly twenty years later the same observation holds true. Across the Muslim world, religion plays an increasingly prominent role in both the private and public lives of over a billion people. Observers of these changes, in turn, struggle to understand the consequences of an Islamic resurgence in a democratizing world. Will democratic political participation by an increasingly religious population lead to victories by Islamists at the ballot box? Will more conspicuously pious Muslims participate in politics and markets in a fundamentally different way than they had previously? Will a renewed attention to Islam lead Muslim democracies to reevaluate their place in the global community of states, turning away from alignments with West or the Global South and towards an Islamic civilizational identity?

The answers to all of these questions depend, at least in part, on what ordinary Muslims think and do. For example, do Muslims actually care about the religious platforms of political parties, and is this concern more pronounced among more pious Muslims? Are more pious Muslims less tolerant of democracy, more tolerant of Islamic law, more likely to demand that their
Conceptualizing
and Measuring Piety

Introduction
This chapter presents an overview of piety among Indonesian Muslims, beginning with a conceptual discussion of what piety means before describing how we operationalize piety in our survey. Our conceptual treatment of piety as an individual-level phenomenon is a unique contribution to a growing literature on comparative public opinion in the Muslim world that has produced a range of useful empirical findings (Blaydes and Linzer 2008, 2012; Fish 2011; Furia and Lucas 2008; Jamal 2006; Pepinsky and Welborne 2011; Tessler 2002, 2008; Tessler, Jamal, and Robbins 2012), but which is nevertheless marked by a lack of attention to the conceptual foundations of what it means to be pious and how that might be captured in public opinion data. We then use the original measure of piety that we develop out of this conceptual discussion to provide a fresh perspective on questions that have long animated scholars of religion in Indonesia, from the relationship between piety and aliran (Geertz 1960) to support for democracy and sharia among Indonesian Muslims.

Some portions of our discussion in this chapter are technical in nature. While we have endeavored to minimize these discussions, we view devoting attention to the statistical assumptions that underlie our measure of piety as simply unavoidable given
Islam and Party Politics

Introduction

In Chapter 2, we showed that there is a relatively weak relationship between individual piety and beliefs about the importance of Islam in Indonesian politics, either in terms of Islam playing a greater role or in terms of implementing sharia law on a regional or national scale. But these individual-level insights about how piety correlates with political beliefs only scratch the surface of a broader analysis of Islam and democracy. In this chapter, we ask if political parties that espouse Islamist party ideologies enjoy an electoral advantage over non-Islamist parties when they compete in free and open democratic elections.

This question has a long pedigree in the scholarship Islam and democracy, motivated by a common belief among many observers of Islamist opposition movements in authoritarian states that Islamists would win any election in which they were able to compete. While the causal logic for such a belief is rarely articulated, presumably the reason that Islamist parties are held have an inherent advantage over other parties in attracting Muslim voters is Islam’s scriptural focus on economic justice, or alternatively because of Muslim voters’ association of Islam with other normatively good outcomes. As Evans and Phillips (2007: 131) write on Algerian politics in Anger of the Dispossessed,
Islam and the Market

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we showed that piety plays a highly circumscribed role in explaining support for Islamist parties. The key issue that we confronted is that many Islamist parties also campaign on populist and reformist platforms, which makes it hard to disentangle religion from reformism as determinants of party support. In this chapter we shift our attention to Islamic banking, in order to examine whether individual piety shapes the way that Indonesian Muslims participate in the contemporary market economy.

At first glance, the switch from Islamist party support to Islamic banking may seem almost jarring. Yet there are useful parallels between the two. Each is an individual choice (to support an Islamist party or not; to choose Islamic financial products or not); each occupies a contested space among Muslim thinkers, in which there is consensus neither on the theological propriety of using Islamic financial products nor of the imperative to support Islamic law; and the many similarities between the “Islamic” choice and the “non-Islamic” counterpart make it difficult to ascribe motivations to individuals who choose one or the other. Most importantly, each is a salient aspect of modern life among Muslims in contemporary Indonesia, one in which casual observers frequently assume that piety must play an important role in individuals’ beliefs and behaviors.
Islam and Global Engagement

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we showed that the orientation of Indonesian Muslims towards the Muslim world is a powerful predictor of their use of Islamic financial products. We interpreted this result as indicating that Muslims with a more cosmopolitan, globalized Muslim identity are more likely to act in ways that are consistent with the maintenance of that identity. That conclusion rests on an implicit assumption that the relevant global community with whom Indonesian Muslims identify is the Muslim world. Yet we are well aware that throughout Indonesian history, relations with other global communities—for example, with the Western world, or with China—have been just as important as relations with the Muslim world.

In this chapter we set our sights on Indonesia’s place within the world, and ask how Islamic revivalism and ethnic identity are related to Indonesians’ preferences for engagement with other kinds of communities. Indonesia is a particularly useful case in this regard because it is difficult to classify in the “civilizational” framework that scholars from Huntington (1996) to Katzenstein (2009) have used to understand how communities of states relate to one another. Moreover, public opinion analyses of these issues remain scarce. Recent contributions have deepened our under-
Conclusion

Our Findings and Our Contributions

This book has used the Indonesian case to probe a series of foundational questions about piety and politics in Muslim democracies. Our analysis rests on a basic assumption that the actions and choices of mass publics constitute the core of democratic politics, which means that understanding mass public opinion is essential for making sense of how religious revitalization matters for the trajectory of Muslim democracies. Moreover, the answers to many questions about how piety matters for Muslim political life depend on the beliefs, actions, and preferences of ordinary Muslims. Does support for Islamist political parties depend on their other policy platforms? Do pious Muslims prefer Islamic financial products? Is religious revivalism associated with cosmopolitan worldviews, or with a distinct favoritism for the Middle East at the expense of the West and other regions or civilizations? Using an unusually rich source of survey data from Indonesia, we have shown not only how to answer these questions, but also how to ask them appropriately in the first place.

In Chapter 1, we described the collection of results in this book as a “null finding.” By this we mean that individual level piety among Indonesian Muslims does not explain any of the phenomena that we set out to explain: social identity by aliran, support for Islamic law or political Islam, support for Islamist parties,
PIETY AND PUBLIC OPINION
UNDERSTANDING INDONESIAN ISLAM

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The resurgence of Islam in private and public life, in Indonesia and elsewhere, is one of the most important phenomena of our time. As we show in this book, its implications for politics and society are also widely misunderstood. Piety among Indonesian Muslims is essentially unrelated to most of the basic problems of political and economic life that analysts of religion and public life have addressed. We find, instead, that the social and economic transformations that are co-occurring alongside the resurgence of Islam in Indonesia are the best predictors of how Muslims think and behave. On a purely descriptive level, these findings should give pause to those who believe that the resurgence of Islam will transform politics and society in the Muslim world. Where our claim stands apart, as it does in the case of the highly conditionally party platform—they show why it is so important to account the power of reform and study of political Islam.

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