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Nahdlatul Ulama-State Alliance? State Patronage, Extractive Industry, and Religious Civil Society in Indonesia

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Abstract

In studies of the relationship between Islamic thought and the Indonesian state, focus has largely been brought to the nation's two largest civil society organizations: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. With robust networks of universities, schools, and hospitals, both Islamic organizations are deeply embedded into the social and political fabric of Indonesian national life. Most recently, the two organizations have come under scrutiny for accepting mining concessions from the government of Joko Widodo, a policy maintained by current president Prabowo Subianto. This paper begins by providing a review of existing scholarship to analyze how academics have understood the political and social formations of Indonesian Islam. To address more recent developments, Indonesian news sites are incorporated as sources alongside scholastic literature to examine changes in the relationships between NU and Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian state. Amid concerns of democratic backsliding, I advance the concept of ulama-state alliance in the Indonesian context and argue that the changing nature and scale of financial ties between the Indonesian government and its two largest civil society organizations risks a narrowing of civil society and a decline in the dynamism of Islamic thought in Indonesia.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, ulama-state alliance, mining concessions

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I. INTRODUCTION

It has become something of a cliche among Western observers to begin papers or chapters on Indonesia by counterposing the size of its population with the attention it has been paid both in popular imagination and within academia. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country and that its major Islamic civil society organisations are also the world's first and second-largest—Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah.[1] With memberships of around 90 million[2] and 40 million[3] respectively, NU and Muhammadiyah play a major role in the lives of Indonesians. Significantly, this influence extends far beyond their official memberships as both organizations are essential pieces of the larger Indonesian social and political fabric through their operation of universities, schools, hospitals, and agricultural groups as well as the affiliation of many government officials with one organization or the other. Neither is their influence confined within Indonesian borders, as Muhammadiyah has branches in Malaysia and the United States and provides disaster relief assistance internationally, [4] while Nahdlatul Ulama has developed its unique brand of "Humanitarian Islam" as a "global strategy to recontextualize the teachings of orthodox, authoritative Islam."[5]

As Indonesia's most culturally significant civil society organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah's Islamic scholars are influential not only at the local level but also play a major role in national governance, particularly through the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) and through cultivated relationships with political figures. NU has received particular attention for its close relationship to the Indonesian state, with academic Greg Fealy noting that leaders from NU worked in tandem with former Indonesian president Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi) throughout his tenure. As Fealy writes in an opinion piece for Australian National University's New Mandala, Widodo's relationship with NU, both as an organization and with specific scholars, contributes to an "increasingly blurred boundary between the state and civil society."[6]

The present article will explore this "blurred boundary" in the context of the controversial transition between Widodo and his successor, Prabowo Subianto. To do

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[1] Gustav Brown, "Civic Islam: Muhammadiyah, NU and the Organisational Logic of Consensus-Making in Indonesia." *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 03 (2019): 14, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1626802

[2] The Religious Freedom Institute, *2020 Indonesia Religious Freedom Landscape Report*, (Washington DC: The Religious Freedom Institute, 2020), 16, https://www.baytarrahmah.org/media/2020/RFI_Indonesia+Landscape+Report+ONLINE.pdf

[3] Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, "Sejarah Muhammadiyah: Perjuangan Ulama Besar K.H Ahmad Dahlan Mendirikan Muhammadiyah," Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, 2025, https://muhammadiyah.or.id/sejarah-muhammadiyah/#:~:text=Ideologi%20Muhammadiyah%20adalah%20Islam%20Berkemajuan,awal%20mula%20Muhammadiyah%20berdiri%2C%20KH.

[4] Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, "Assets to Muhammadiyah Internationalization," Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, 2023, https://en.muhammadiyah.or.id/assets-to-muhammadiyah-internationalization/

[5] "Humanitarian Islam," Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da'wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-'Alamin, 2025, https://baytarrahmah.org/

[6] Greg Fealy, "Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics Trap," New Mandala, July 11, 2018, https://www.newmandala.org/nahdlatul-ulama-politics-trap/

so, the relationship between Indonesia and its two most significant Islamic organizations is analyzed using Ahmet T. Kuru's ulama-state alliance model to argue that increased financial partnership between NU and Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian state risks a decline in the dynamism of Indonesian Islamic thought and scholarship.

In order to carry out the analysis described above, this paper is divided into three major sections. The first is a literature review which outlines the most common theoretical frameworks through which scholars have engaged with Indonesian Islam at large and the relationship between ulama and the Indonesian state in specific. The second is a history of the relationship between NU and Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian state, which provides an overview of Islamic organization during Dutch colonization, the eras of Sukarno and Suharto, and since democratization in 1998 in order to elucidate the throughlines in Indonesian politics and economics which influence organizational behavior. The third section will engage not only with previous scholarship but with Indonesian news sources in order to elaborate on the state's contemporary material conditions, highlighting the economic foundation of rentierism and the ways in which NU and Muhammadiyah benefit from and offer support to the politico-business oligarchy.[7] Analysis will focus particularly on the mining concessions granted by Widodo to NU and Muhammadiyah and the continuation of this policy by current president Prabowo Subianto. By applying the ulama-state alliance model and advocating its application in the Indonesian context, this final section hopes to elucidate the consequences of extensive relationships between Islamic civil society and the state to Islamic thought as an independent space of inquiry.

II. METHODOLOGY

This article utilizes historical process tracing and secondary analysis of selected case studies to make a theoretical case for the potential emergence of an Indonesian ulama-state alliance. Analysis largely relies on academic articles, books, and chapters, though news articles were also cited in order to incorporate more recent developments. This article aims to address two research questions: *How has the historical and economic development of the Indonesian state produced the conditions necessary for a potential ulama-state alliance*? and *Does the acceptance of mining concessions by NU and Muhammadiyah constitute a risk to ideological independence*?

This study was fundamentally limited by its author's lack of fluency in Indonesian. The analysis therefore relies upon English-language sources, potentially affecting the scope and theoretical depth. Where it was necessary to use Indonesian-language sources, text was translated through DeepL. Future research by Indonesian scholars is thus necessary in order to develop a richer understanding of the effect of state patronage on the independence of Indonesian ulama.

[7] See Section V.2.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The predominant mode of analysis regarding Islam in Indonesia has been typological classifications. This precedent was set with Clifford Geertz's *santri-abangen-priyayi* trichotomy, which divided Javanese Muslims between the orthodox Muslims concerned with issues of Islamic doctrine (*santri*), followers of a syncretic blend between Islam and pre-Islamic Javanese beliefs (*abangan*), and Javanese gentry or nobility influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism (*priyayi)*. The *santri* were further divided into traditionalists, largely rural Muslims who maintained traditional Islamic practices, and modernists, a product of the Islamic reform movement and the spread of Wahhabism.[8] Known as the *aliran* (stream) model, the central thesis of Geertz's argument was that these divisions could be used to predict and analyze political behavior: the *priyayi* were associated with the nationalist party, Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), *abangan* with the communist party, Parti Komunis Indonesia (PKI), traditionalists with NU, and modernists with the Muhammadiyah-dominated Masyumi Party.[9]

As Geertz's trichotomy fell out of favor with the dissolution of the *priyayi* as a class, many academics argued that *aliran* politics as a whole no longer functioned as an analytical tool.[10] This was further supported by the emergence in the late 20th century of neo-modernism as an Islamic movement, a term which originated from the writings of scholar Fazlur Rahman.[11] In Indonesia, prominent neo-modernists came from both NU and Muhammadiyah, a phenomenon which scholar Greg Barton argued represented "the resolution of half a century of antagonism between modernists and traditionalists."[12] Barton's contemporaries similarly argued that new dichotomies had taken the place of *aliran* politics—William Liddle, for instance, argued that the new division in Indonesian Islam was between moderate Islam and militant Islam, which separated "non-Muslims, syncretist, traditionalist and liberal modernist Muslims" from "conservative modernist Muslims."[13] Most recently, Robert Hefner's *Civil Islam* developed a dichotomy between Muslims who supported Suharto and those who formed the largest constituency in the 1990 protests which led to his removal. The latter form a democratic, humanitarian and

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[8] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: The Free Press, 1960; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976), 130. Citations refer to the University of Chicago edition.

[9] Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Geertz's Trichotomy of *Abangan*, *Santri*, and *Priyayi*: Controversy and Continuity," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 02 (2017): 339. https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.2.329-350

[10] Burhani, "Geert's Trichotomy," 330.

[11] Greg Barton, "Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis of Traditionalist and Modernist Islamic Thought in Indonesia," *Studio Islamika Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 2, no. 03 (1995): 6. https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika/article/view/827/704

[12] Barton, "Neo-Modernism," 7.

[13] Robin Bush, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 13.

eponymous "civil Islam," while the former, created by Suharto to suppress Muslim dissent, form "regimist Islam."[14]

In contrast to this trend of typology, Luthfi Assyaukanie has argued that the relationship of Muslims with the Indonesian state has shifted based on their attachment to the three different ideal forms of democracy: the Islamic Democratic State, the Religious Democratic State, and the Liberal (Secular) Democratic State.[15] Assyaukanie argues that these three models roughly correspond to three respective generations of Indonesian Muslims, with each emerging after the failure of the former in response to the political realities of each period in Indonesian history. According to Assyaukanie, the value of this approach is that it avoids a static understanding of ideological tendencies. Supplanting political ideology with visions of political utopia instead allows for the inclusion of argumentation and development within the analytical model.[16]

Studies regarding Indonesian ulama in specific have largely focused on the MUI as the official forum for state employment of Islamic scholars.[17] Analysis of the relationship between ulama and the Indonesian state has thus tended to exclude state patronage of nominally independent ulama, including those associated with NU and Muhammadiyah. Conversely, studies on NU and Muhammadiyah ulama are often limited to a certain regional context or leverage local case studies in order to draw larger conclusions about organizational behavior.[18] The present study thus utilizes the ulama-state alliance concept as an analytical framework to fill a gap in the literature regarding how the Indonesian state's material conditions affect the scholarship of nominally independent ulama. This emphasis on the interrelation between dominant ideas and modes of production further distinguishes the ulama-state alliance framework from both ideological typology and political utopia, allowing for an analysis which is broader in its scope and draws inspiration from the historical development of other Muslim-majority states.

In *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison*, Kuru argues that the intellectual and economic development of Muslim states was constrained by an "alliance between orthodox Islamic scholars (the ulema) and military states."[19] Kuru argues that this ulama-state alliance grew out of the material conditions

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[14] Luthfi Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 19.
[15] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12.
[16] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 8.
[17] Norshahril Saat, *The State, Ulama, and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Syafiq Hasyim, "The Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) and Religious Freedom," *Irasec's Discussion Papers*, no. 12 (December 2011). www.irasec.com
[18] M. Khusna Amal, Uun Yusufa, and Muhammad Faiz, "Towards a More Illiberal Pluralism? Reexamination of the Nahdlatul Ulama's Turn Against Islamic Fundamentalist Groups in Contemporary Indonesia," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 12, no. 01 (June 2024), https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v21i1; Musawar Musawar and Gatot Suhirman, "Khilāfah in the View of Nahdhatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdhatul Wathan (NW) Ulema in Lombok," *Al-Jami'ah Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 02 (2021), https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.592.317-346
[19] Ahmet T. Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), xvi..

of the 11th century Seljuk Empire, as an independent intelligentsia supported by a thriving bourgeois class was supplanted by military-dominated political economy and the state sponsorship of scholarship.[20] Kuru further argues that the modern prevalence of authoritarianism and underdevelopment in Muslim-majority countries can be attributed to the institutionalization of this alliance, as neither secular nor Islamist leaders have had an interest in promoting an independent bourgeois and intelligentsia which could counteract rentierism, militarism, corruption, and poor educational policy.[21]

The first condition which contributed to the ulama-state alliance in the Seljuk empire was the *iqta* system, which brought agricultural and tax revenue under military control. For Kuru, the increased militarization of the economy and concomitant marginalization of independent merchants wrought by this system was a key factor in reducing the number of independent Islamic scholars, as they were forced to seek patronage by the government rather than receiving support from an independent bourgeois class. The second condition was the state sponsorship of *madrasas* (Islamic schools) with the explicit goal of homogenizing Islamic faith, which in the case of the Seljuk empire meant the production of Sunni ulama who could predominate over opposing thinkers such as Shiis, rationalist theologians, and philosophers.[22] This ulama-state alliance model spread throughout the Islamic world in subsequent centuries, which Kuru argues "left a legacy of authoritarianism and socioeconomic underdevelopment" which has been impossible to supplant due to the sustained marginalization of intellectuals and the bourgeoisie.[23]

Importantly, this lack of recovery and continued intellectual and economic stagnation is evident both in countries which maintained an Islamic political and legal system, such as Saudi Arabia, and those which developed secular models after colonization, such as Turkey. Kuru argues that this consistency is due to the specific characteristics of the secularism which emerged in postcolonial Muslim states; namely, rule by former military officers and policies of state control over the economy. This "authoritarian secularis[m],"[24] as well as the Islamic resurgence in the 1980s which bolstered the public influence of ulama, maintained state systems which were anti-intellectual and anti-bourgeois.[25] The potential emergence of an ulama-state alliance in Indonesia is thus predicated on the accommodative behavior of NU and Muhammadiyah with secular, authoritarian state systems, in addition to increased government control over Islamic education and ideology.

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[20] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 227.
[21] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 61-63.
[22] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 4.
[23] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 229.
[24] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 8.
[25] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 8.

As one of the Muslim world's few democracies,[26] Indonesia largely falls outside the scope of Kuru's original study. The unique development of Islam within the archipelago, as well as Indonesia's recognition of five official religions in addition to Islam, means that its cultural and legal landscape resists easy categorization. Its geographic location outside of the MENA region also means that it does not share the same history or contemporary diffusion of policy upon which Kuru rests his analysis. Indonesia, however, has undergone its own political and religious development which has the potential for the institutionalization of an ulama-state alliance. The first and most important factor in this development is Indonesia's material conditions, as an entrenched politico-business oligarchy and the predominance of extractive industry in Indonesia's economy have prevented the emergence of a bourgeois class which can function independently from the state.[27] The second factor is the development and subsequent mitigation of the traditionalist-modernist divide on an elite level—a divide which scholars such as Robin Bush argue has driven the political behavior of ulama throughout Indonesia's history. [28] With the emergence of neo-modernism and direct state involvement in promoting the ideology of "religious moderation,"[29] ulama from NU and Muhammadiyah have become an integral component of state legitimacy on both an international and domestic stage. This paper thus does not put forth a new form of typology nor expand on Assyaukanie's models, but rather presents the case that the very process of argumentation which is necessary to the progressive development of political ideology and utopia is being increasingly tied to and directed by the material interests of the Indonesian government.

IV. INDONESIAN ISLAM

A. Pre-independence

In his summary of the development of Islam on Java, Clifford Geertz highlights the founding of Muhammadiyah in 1912 as the beginning of "the time of organizations."[30] Muhammadiyah, he writes, was a "vigorously modernist Islamic society," [31] and its establishment led to the flourishing of orthodox Islamic faith throughout the island of Java, which had been previously dominated by a system of traditional Islamic schools (*pesantren*) organized around the authority of traditional scholars (ulama/*kyai*). Around

[26] "Data Page: Democracy index", part of the following publication: Bastian Herre, Lucas Rodés-Guirao and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "Democracy," *Global Change Data Lab*, 2024, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/democracy-index-eiu

[27] Richard Robison and Vedi R. Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in An Age of Markets*, (London: Routledge Corzen, 2004).

[28] Bush, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power*, 14.

[29] Sekar Ayu Aryani et al., "Synergy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah in Driving Religious Moderation to Achieve Indonesia's SDGs Targets,"*Profetika Journal Studi Islam* 25, no. 02 (2024): 450.

[30] Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 124.

[31] Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, 124.

the same time as the founding of Muhammadiyah, Sarekat Islam (SI) was established as Indonesia's first mass political party. Schisms in each of these groups defined the ideological divisions of Indonesian society: discontent with Muhammadiyah's modernist reforms led to the 1926 establishment of NU as an traditional, *pesantren*-based Islamic organization,[32] while SI collapsed in the mid-1920s due to conflict between Islamic nationalists and the coalition of Marxists and secular nationalists.[33] The traditionalist–modernist divide, as well as the animosity between Islamic organizations and communism, shaped Islam's relationship to the state. Furthermore, the organizations' discordance meant that secular nationalists, organized under the PNI, presented a far more unified front against the Dutch and later Japanese occupation.[34]

Unlike the Dutch, the Japanese were quick to draw Muslims into governance structures, founding Masyumi as an umbrella Islamic political organization and embedding it into the government through the establishment of the Office for Religious Affairs, eventually the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA).[35] As Jeremy Menchik writes, "control over MORA and its penetration into every level of government have allowed [Islamic organizations] to shape the meaning of religion and its place in public life."[36] In addition to its powerful influence on ideology through the management of religious education, law, and policy, MORA was from the outset a source of material benefit to NU and Muhammadiyah. Holding official posts in the government ministry allowed for "patronage, funding, and contracts" which could be used to benefit organization members,[37] a system which drives the potential consolidation of an ulama-state alliance to this day.

B. The Sukarno Era

On August 17, 1948, Sukarno and vice-president Mohammad Hatta declared independence in Jakarta. In November, Masyumi declared itself as an official Islamic party, encompassing both NU and Muhammadiyah. During Sukarno's presidency, the Muslim organizations were driven by the ideal of the Islamic Democratic State, advocating for a state founded on Islamic principles and for the adoption of *shariah*.[38] By 1952, however, the traditionalist–modernist divide proved insurmountable, and NU withdrew from Masyumi to form its own independent party. The precipitating event was conflict over which organization would hold the minister position in MORA, underscoring the importance of this source of patronage to organizational stability. Bush argues, however, that the more fundamental cause was a perceived lack of respect for NU

[32] Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance Without Liberalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 49.
[33] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 38.
[34] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 38.
[35] Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, 77.
[36] Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, 77.
[37] Bush, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power*, 47
[38] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 71.

ulama from Muhammadiyah, and NU began to pursue a close relationship with the state primarily as a method of asserting dominance over Masyumi.

In 1959, separatist movements outside of Java and the party system's inability to reconcile the question of how Islam should be incorporated into the state prompted Sukarno to dissolve the body and institute his executive-heavy "Guided Democracy."[39] For proponents of an Islamic Democratic State, Guided Democracy represented "the twin evils of Soekarno's dictatorship and communist totalitarianism."[40] During this period, Masyumi was outlawed and the influence of NU heavily suppressed.[41] Greg Fealy has observed that NU displays two types of behaviors—accommodative and militant—and that its accommodative behavior during Guided Democracy served to maintain state patronage for the *pesantren* system as well as the employment of NU members as bureaucrats.[42]

Guided Democracy came to an end with the ousting of Sukarno in 1965 and the subsequent installation of Suharto. Crucially for the landscape of Indonesian politics, this usurpation took place through the massacre of communists — not only members of the PKI but also members of allied parties, trade unions, youth organizations, and the left-leaning intelligentsia.[43] The animosity between the PKI and the Muslim parties which had grown out of the SI schism and further entrenched throughout Sukarno's rule produced "extraordinary fervor"[44] amidst the Muslim parties, particularly NU, which stretched "down to its grade schools."[45] When violence began in October 1965, it was the NU's regional militias (Banser) and youth militias (Ansor) which carried out many of the massacres with military orchestration and assistance.[46] This period in Indonesian history has had fundamental repercussions for its Islamic organizations and for the state at large. As Jeremy Menchik writes, "intolerance and nation building are part of a mutually constitutive process."[47] By allying themselves with the military and against the Indonesian communists, NU and Muhammadiyah helped to establish the boundaries of the Indonesian nation and NU defined itself as a militant ally of the state, a role which it continues to play against modern leftist or opposition movements.[48]

C. The Suharto Era

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[39] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 44.
[40] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 76.
[41] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 46.
[42] Greg Fealy, *Ijtihad Politik Ulama: Sejarah NU 1952-1967* (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial, 2003) as cited in Anang Gunaifi Alfian, "Capitalism and Religious Behavior: The Case of Tumpang Pitu Gold Mining in Banyuwangi," *Al-Albab* 8, no. 01 (2019), 25. https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v8i1.1207
[43] John Roosa, *Buried Histories: The Anticommunist Massacres of 1965-1966 in Indonesia* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 88.
[44] Theodore Friend, *Indonesian Destinies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 100.
[45] Friend, *Indonesian Destinies*, 100.
[46] Roosa, *Buried Histories*, 249.
[47] Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, 68.
[48] Amal, Yusufa, and Faiz, "Towards a More Illiberal Pluralism."

Although the 1967 ascension of Suharto took place amidst the devastation of Indonesian communism, he did not immediately elevate Islamism or the Islamic parties in its place. In the interest of further depoliticizing Islam on the national stage, Suharto mandated that all mass organizations adopt the principles of Pancasila as their "sole foundation,"[49] and merged all Islamic parties into the Parti Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP).[50] The founding of the MUI, an umbrella organization for ulama from NU, Muhammadiyah, and several smaller Islamic organizations and a national body for the issuing of fatwas, similarly served to promote Pancasila among organizational leadership and to constrain NU, which Suharto perceived as a potential political challenger.[51] It was during this period that Indonesian Muslims began to advance Assyaukanie's second ideal model of polity; the "Religious Democratic State."[52] Assyaukanie characterizes its proponents as the "new *santri*,"[53] leaders of which were largely affiliated with Muhammadiyah and devised the model in concert with Suharto's Pancasila thought to "justify the model of polity built by the New Order regime."[54]

In spite of these efforts to marginalize Islam's influence in politics, Suharto's New Order collaborated significantly with NU, Muhammadiyah, and other Islamic organizations in the public sphere, both as concession to significant Muslim coalitions and as a counterbalance to growing secular modernist criticism. Religious instruction was made compulsory in every level of public and private schooling, and regions which had held particularly significant PKI influence were targeted for Islamic outreach programs by the civil society organizations with construction of new mosques and Islamic schools sponsored by MORA.[55] In the armed forces, meanwhile, Suharto elevated "regimist" Muslims to positions of high command, including his son-in-law Prabowo Subianto.[56] Suharto's developmentalist agenda produced drastic economic growth across the country and the consequent emergence of an educated middle class, resulting in the flourishing of Islamic print media and a "burgeoning new class of literate Indonesian Muslims who were keen on mainstream religious revitalization."[57]

As in other secular authoritarian countries during this time, this Islamic resurgence reignited public support for ulama and for the Islamization of public life. In countries with an existing ulama-state alliance, this entrenched the marginalization of creative intellectuals and the bourgeoisie.[58] In Indonesia, it did so in addition to reinforcing the traditionalist-modernist divide. NU withdrew from the PPP and reverted

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[49] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 75.
[50] Norshahril Saat, *The State, Ulama, and Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 111.
[51] Saat, *The State, Ulama, and Islam*, 113.
[52] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 98.
[53] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 99.
[54] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 98.
[55] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 80.
[56] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 151.
[57] Feener, *Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107.
[58] Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, 8.

its organizational focus from party politics to social and religious welfare,[59] envisioned by its leaders as a "vehicle of grass-roots development and pluralist tolerance."[60] The modernist Masyumi coalition was left as the most dominant Muslim representation in politics, but its ideological orientation had vastly shifted from its origins as a project of "merchants and small industrialists,"[61] a group which underwent economic collapse during the last years of Sukarno. Instead, the new *santri* which formed the Muslim middle class in the 1980s and 1990s were not an independent bourgeois but rather employed in "education, bureaucracy, and government-dependent business" [62] and resultantly hesitant to engage in politics that would endanger their relationship to the state. This convergence of cultural revival with the dependence of Muslim elites on the state marks the beginning of a potential ulama-state alliance in Indonesia, as Islamic participation in government became tied to legitimizing Suharto's authoritarian secularist rule at the same time as MORA began to exert more direct influence on Islamic education and organization.

D. Democratization/Reformasi

In 1997, the Asian Financial Crisis sent shockwaves through the global economy. In Indonesia, the downturn was the swiftest and the deepest, resulting in economic devastation which was compounded by the widespread corruption and cronyism which had taken hold throughout the New Order.[63] Mass protests following the crash led to Suharto's resignation in May 1998 and the appointment of his vice-president and protégé, BJ Habibie.[64] Multiple observers have highlighted the role of Islamic organizations in Suharto's removal and Indonesia's democratization process. As Menchik writes, "NU and Muhammadiyah are a key reason why Indonesia is a democratic overachiever…The organizations' commitment to tolerance has been vital during the transition from authoritarianism."[65] Significantly, however, the lack of revolutionary change meant that many Suharto-era characteristics were not eradicated from Indonesia's political landscape. Most importantly, reformers were unable to completely dismantle the military dominance over politics and the economy which had been fostered throughout the New Order due to the monopolization of resources under oligarchical "politico-business families."[66] As Eve Warburton and Edward Aspinall write, democratization

[59] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 121.
[60] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 162.
[61] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 105.
[62] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 205.
[63] Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists With Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 258.
[64] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 209.
[65] Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, 15.
[66] Robison and Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia*, 11.

produced an "'elite-biased democracy,' in which the interests of authoritarian-era economic and political elites are structurally protected."[67]

As part of *Reformasi*, NU and Muhammadiyah began to restore their political influence through the establishment of new political parties. Though members of NU and Muhammadiyah are free to vote for any party, the National Awakening Party (PKB) was founded by NU leadership and retains close ties with the organization, while Muhammadiyah is associated with the National Mandate Party (PAN).[68] In 1999, elections led to PKB's success and the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia's preeminent neo-modernist thinker, chairman of NU, and longtime challenger of both Suharto and Habibie.[69] Wahid for Assyaukanie was the prototypical adherent of the third model of utopia, the "Liberal Democratic State,"[70] a staunch defender of pluralism and opponent of the government regulation of religion which is required for the Religious Democratic State.[71] For Hefner, he was the visionary behind civil Islam and the greatest challenger of regimist Islam.[72] Wahid, however, would prove unable to enact reforms which could address ongoing economic instability, corruption, and the rise in Islamic separatist movements during this period.[73] Meanwhile, in response to his championship of neo-modernism, NU and Muhammadiyah ulama associated with MUI reestablished the council as a "guardian of Islamic morals and orthodoxy" and in 2005 issued a *fatwa* which "denounced 'liberalism, secularism, and religious pluralism.'"[74]

The 10-year presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former Suharto-era general, further entrenched the influence of ulama and MUI's advisory role in government. Early in his tenure, Yudhoyono appointed Ma'ruf Amin as an advisor, an NU scholar who had been an architect of MUI's 2005 *fatwa* and would later be chosen as Widodo's vice president. Yudhoyono's cabinet also contained multiple NU and Muhammadiyah-affiliated ministers.[75] Yudhoyono's presidency reinvigorated the ideal of the Religious Democratic State and expanded the state's regulation of religion to include "prosecutorial vigilance against those who deviate from state-sanctioned religious norms"[76] As Warburton and Aspinell argue, Yudhoyono's presidency marked

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[67] Eve Warburton and Edward Aspinall, "Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression: Structure, Agency and Popular Opinion," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41, no. 2 (2019): 257, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26798854

[68] Abdullah M. Al-Ansi and Rinikso Kartono, "The Role of Islamic Organizations 'Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama' in Forming National Politics in Indonesia," *Polit Journal: Scientific Journal of Politics* 3, no. 02 (2023): 90-92. https://doi.org/10.33258/polit.v3i2.895

[69] Amy L. Freedman, "Political Viability, Contestation, and Power: Islam and Politics in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Politics and Religion* 2, no. 01 (2009): 116. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048309000054

[70] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 143.

[71] Assyaukanie, *Islam and the Secular State*, 157.

[72] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 162.

[73] Freedman, "Political Viability, Contestation, and Power," 116.

[74] Robert W. Hefner, *Islam and Citizenship in Indonesia: Democracy and the Quest for an Inclusive Public Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 147.

[75] Alexander R. Arifianto, "From Ideological to Political Sectarianism: Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the State in Indonesia," *Religion, State & Society*, (2021): 7. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2021.1902247

[76] Hefner, *Islam and Citizenship in Indonesia*, 153.

the "stagnation" of Indonesia's democratization process as a result of the "change-within-continuity" which had characterized the *Reformasi* period. It was only with the 2014 election of Widodo, however, that Indonesia transitioned from stagnation to regression.[77]

In the 2014 and 2019 elections, Widodo was understood as the pro-democracy candidate when compared to his opponent, Prabowo Subianto. Throughout his time in office, however, his developmentalist agenda and expansion of military power began to prompt comparisons to the New Order.[78] Increasing polarization between pluralist and Islamic groups prompted repressive measures by Widodo's administration, while Islamic political opposition pushed the president even closer to NU, Muhammadiyah, and the MUI.[79] In 2019, Widodo formalized this relationship with the adoption of religious moderation as a formal government initiative, a program which has seen both NU and Muhammadiyah work closely with MORA to organize religious education programs.[80] Widodo formed a particularly close relationship with NU, endorsing its ideology of "Islam Nusantara" (archipelagic Islam) as the model for religious moderation over Muhammadiyah's "Islam Berkemajuan" (progressive Islam), which reinvigorated sectarian tensions between NU and Muhammadiyah.[81] NU's Ansor groups once again served as militant state allies, clashing with more conservative Islamic groups on the street, while Muhammadiyah took actions to ally itself with these state opponents and generally took a more critical approach to Widodo's administration. In response, Widodo granted NU a disproportionate amount of ministerships in his 2014 and 2019 cabinets, in addition to providing direct support to the organization through microcredit programs and the redistribution of state land to NU's Islamic schools.[82]

Prior to leaving office in 2024, Widodo amended Indonesia's law governing mining to allow religious organizations to hold mining licenses, and subsequently granted concessions to both NU and Muhammadiyah. Also in 2024, Widodo endorsed his former political opponent in Subianto's third bid for president. With Subianto's overwhelming victory and the alteration of election age limitations to allow Widodo's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, to serve as vice-president, concerns over rising authoritarianism prompted both street protests within Indonesia and critical analyses from outside observers.[83] Since his election, Subianto's continuation of Widodo's policies have produced the moniker "Jokowi dynasty" for the two administrations. Although Subianto's history as a "regimist Muslim" during the new *santri* movement in the 1990s has produced much closer relationships with the scholars and political leadership of Muhammadiyah, the president has maintained an enmeshed relationship

[77] Warburton and Aspinall, "Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression," 269-70.
[78] Warburton and Aspinall, "Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression," 276.
[79] Warburton and Aspinal, "Explaining Indonesia's Democratic Regression," 270.
[80] Sekar Ayu Aryani et al., "Synergy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah in Driving Religious Moderation to Achieve Indonesia's SDGs Targets," *Profetika Journal Studi Islam* 25, no. 02 (2024), 450. https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v25i02.8536
[81] Arifianto, "From Ideological to Political Sectarianism," 8.
[82] Arifianto, "From Ideological to Political Sectarianism," 10.
[83] See for instance Dan Slater, "Indonesia's High-Stakes Handover," *Journal of Democracy* 35, no. 02 (2024).

with both religious organizations. One example of this enmeshment is Subianto's inclusion of NU and Muhammadiyah leaders as supervisors of Indonesia's new sovereign wealth fund Danantara, which will manage over 900 billion U.S. dollars in state-owned assets.[84] With this development coming on the heels of acceptance of the mining concessions by both organizations, it is imperative to investigate the role which religious civil society plays in Indonesia's democratic backsliding and the potential for a stronger alliance between the government and Islamic scholars.

V. AN ALLIANCE IN PROGRESS

A. Economic Foundations and Political Ramifications

In the early 1970s, rentier state theory emerged to explain the political characteristics of oil-rich states, first in Iran and then largely in the Arabian peninsula.[85] Originated by Hossein Mahdavy in his article "The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: the Case of Iran," a rentier state is defined as a country which "receive[s] on a regular basis substantial mounts of external rent…defined as rentals paid by foreign individuals, concerns or governments to individuals, concerns or governments of a given country."[86] In the case of Indonesia, most studies utilizing this framework place its rentierism period during the oil boom of the 1970s, with patronage and rent distribution behaviors resulting in stronger authoritarian rule and greater state capacity under Suharto.[87] In the post-Suharto era, analysis of the Indonesian economy rarely categorizes the state as rentier or semi-rentier at all.[88] Although Indonesia does receive a great amount of income from rents on oil, coal, and natural gas, the proportion of revenue from the extractive sector has declined since the oil boom. Rentier state theory has, however, been adapted to new contexts through the the inclusion of different types of rents (such as literature interrogating the emergence of "immigration rentier states"[89]) and renewed theoretical dynamism as classical rentier states transition into "post-rentier

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[84] "Prabowo Minta NU hingga Muhammadiyah Ikut Awasi BPI Danantara," [Prabowo Asks NU and Muhammadiyah to Supervise BPI Danantara], *Tempo*, February 15, 2025. https://www.tempo.co/politik/prabowo-minta-nu-hingga-muhammadiyah-ikut-awasi-bpi-danantara-1207511

[85] Scott Walker, "Rentier State Theory 50 Years On: New Developments," *Frontiers in Political Science* 5, (2023), 1. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2023.1120439

[86] Hossein Mahdavy, "The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, ed. M. A. Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970; New York: Routledge, 2014), 428. Citations refer to the 2014 edition.

[87] Tenny Widya Kristiana, "The Rentier State, Authoritarian Regime, and Mass Media: Indonesia Under Suharto During the Oil Boom Period," *Malaysian Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 01 (2020): 52-54, https://doi.org/10.22452/mjir.vol8no1.4; Benjamin Smith, "The Oil Booms and Beyond: Two Exporting States Confront Crisis," in *Hard Times in the Lands of Plenty: Oil Politics in Iran and Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 132–37.

[88] Ahmet T. Kuru, "Authoritarianism and Democracy in Muslim Countries: Rentier States and Regional Diffusion," *Political Science Quarterly* 129, no. 03 (2014), 415, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43828435

[89] Hélène Thiollet, "Immigration Rentier States," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 03 (2023), 3-4.

states."[90] Within this broader movement towards a reconceptualization of rentierism, Diana Suhardiman has argued that post-Reformation Indonesia functions as a rentier state through its dependence on foreign loans and the predominance of a project approach towards development, which encourages bureaucratic rent-seeking around project funding.[91]

Similarly, Olle Törnquist has argued that an analysis of rentierism in Indonesia is best predicated on the "appropriation of rent based on the monopolisation of public administration and resources."[92] In Indonesia, Törnquist writes, the very transition to a capitalist mode of production was based upon "political rent and finance capitalists who [cooperated] with private capitalists,"[93] a condition he counterposes with both rational, state-led development and the ideal transition to capitalism in which producers develop from feudal control into capitalists largely independent from the state.[94] In other words, rent-seeking practices and their connection to political authoritarianism and corruption can be seen as the bedrock of Indonesian development, rather than as the product of specific income ratios or tax burdens. Rentierism thus encompasses not only external patronage but also political rents, which are observable in the oligarchic dominance over the economy which emerged during the Suharto era and retained significance post-democratization through patron-client relations between business oligarchs and political candidates.

Following Suhardiman and Törnquist, the conceptualization of Indonesia as a rentier state is useful for resisting narratives of change, which posit that post-Suharto Indonesia transitioned from autocracy to either a democratic state or to a "criminal and crony" state.[95] Rentier state theory instead allows for focus on historical continuities, particularly the preservation of New Order systems and levers of power. Given the entwinement of Islamic organizations with Indonesian state-building and political machinations, it is these very continuities which allow for the potential emergence of an ulama-state alliance. This section will address the rentierist practices which have predominated in the Indonesian economy since democratization, outlining the significance of patron-client relationships in modern Indonesian politics and presenting an overview of how the dynamic between decentralization and central government control encourages corruption and rent-seeking behavior.

As multiple scholars of Indonesian politics have argued, democratic backsliding since the 2010s has been driven by a political system built upon oligarchic control and

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[90]Andrew Kirkpatrick, "After the Resource Curse: The Unexplored Possibility of the Post-Rentier State," *International Studies Perspectives* 19, no. 2 (2018), 190. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26491187.

[91] Diana Suhardiman, "The Indonesian State in Transition" in *Bureaucracy and Development: Reflections from the Indonesia Water Sector* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), 37.

[92] Olle Törnquist, W*hat's Wrong With Marxism? On Capitalists and State in India and Indonesia*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1989): 102.

[93] Törnquist, W*hat's Wrong With Marxism?*, 104.

[94] Törnquist, W*hat's Wrong With Marxism?*, 79.

[95] Suhardiman, "The Indonesian State in Transition," 10.

elite collusion.[96] The roots of this condition stretch back to the Suharto era, during which the state operated under "administrative patrimonialism," a system in which the political class extracts rents from a politically disorganized business class.[97] After democratization, however, it became increasingly clear that the business class had entrenched itself as a part of the preexisting political organization through the formation of conglomerates and the development of "politico-business families" who held high-level positions both in government and in industry.[98] Although subsequent reformers Habibie and Wahid placed the eradication of political corruption high on their agendas, and indeed presided over the prosecution of multiple high-level corruptors including some from the Suharto family, a lack of comprehensive institutional reform meant that political corruption, rather than being eradicated, simply took a less centralized form.[99] As independent political parties emerged, the campaign financing system became a key avenue for business oligarchs to exert influence over political figures. With the increasingly high costs of political campaigns, business oligarchs have gained senior leadership positions in national parties from which they can orchestrate policies beneficial to their interests.[100]

Corruption and rent-seeking practices have also been exacerbated by the political decentralization process, with observers noting that economic and political influence shifted from "a big bandit to a small bandit."[101] As Suhardiman explains, the Regional Autonomy Act Number 22 of 1999 and the Fiscal Decentralization Act Number 25 of 1999 formally allowed regions to undertake their own development projects, and yet failed to decentralize tax revenue or develop equitable funding schemes between research-rich and research-poor regions. In practice, this meant that less wealthy regional governments remained dependent on project-based funding from the central government[102] while resource-rich regions became hotbeds for patron-client dynamics within lucrative sectors.[103] The increase in political power now held by regional governments also resulted in the emergence of corrupt practices on a local level which had previously been concentrated at the national level. With local parliament members in charge of approving development project proposals, bureaucratic rent-seeking and

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[96] Prawira Yudha Pratama, Budiman, and Mia Sarmiasih, "A Comparative Political Analysis Between the New Order Regime and The Reformed Era in Indonesia: A Case Study of Oligarchy Politics in the Mining Industry of East Kalimantan," *Jurnal Studi Pemerintahan* 10, no. 03 (2019): 195, https://doi.org/10.18196/jgp.103105; Marcus Mietzner, "Elite Collusion in Indonesia: How It Has Both Enabled and Limited Executive Aggrandizement," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 712, no. 01 (2025), https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162241309436

[97] Robison and Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia*, 42.

[98] Robison and Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia*, 190.

[99] Robison and Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia*, 214.

[100] Marcus Mietzner, "Dysfunction by Design: Political Finance and Corruption in Indonesia," *Critical Asian Studies* 47, no. 04, (2015): 592, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2015.1079991

[101] Pratama, Budiman, and Sarmiasih,"A Comparative Political Analysis Between the New Order Regime and The Reformed Era in Indonesia," 196.

[102] Suhardiman, "The Indonesian State in Transition," 22-23.

[103] Greenpeace et al., "Coalruption: Shedding Light on Political Corruption in Indonesia's Coal Mining Sector," Bersihkan Indonesia, 2015, 7-8. https://auriga.or.id/resources/reports/24/coalruption-shedding-light-on-political-corruption-in-indonesia-s-coal-mining-sector

embezzlement of project funding became widespread as the parliament members received benefits such as luxury cars and trips abroad in exchange for approving inflated budget proposals.[104]

The inclusion of religious civil society within systems of elite collusion and patron-client relations has been instrumental for the development of a potential ulama-state alliance. On a local level, Gandung Ismanto and Idris Thaha have found that political candidates from PKB and PAN pursued political positions for the sole purpose of channeling development funds back into the organizations.[105] On a national level, the embrace of NU and Muhammadiyah by Widodo has been tied to a specific ideological project; legitimizing the state's anti-religious extremism policies and advancing religious moderation in its place. The political career of Ma'ruf Amin is particularly indicative of this trend, as Amin collaborated with Widodo to produce 12 separate policies dedicated to increasing government support of and regulation over Indonesia's traditional *pesantren*, which had previously operated independently from government oversight.[106] The further reduction of NU and Muhammadiyah's organizational independence through their acceptance of mining concessions thus bears examination within the context of the mining sector's economic significance and the resultant rampancy of political corruption and rent-seeking practices. The granting of these concessions marks the potential institutionalization of an Indonesian ulama-state alliance, in which Islamic organizations advance a hegemonic form of moderate religious thought in order to legitimize the Indonesian state against its domestic Islamist opposition, in exchange for direct financial concessions and access to resources controlled by the politico-business oligarchy.

B. The Case of Mining

Extractive industries are a significant sector in the Indonesian economy, with coal in particular having seen massive growth throughout the 2000s. In 2005, coal production stood around 154 million tonnes(Mt), tripling to 474 Mt by 2013.[107] Growth again took off in 2017, with production increasing from 461 Mt to 775 Mt in 2023.[108] In 2023, coal briquettes were Indonesia's the single largest export commodity, making up 13% of the country's total exports with a value of 38.8 billion dollars.[109] To a large degree, this explosive growth has been driven by extensive government subsidies including the

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[104] Suhardiman, "The Indonesian State in Transition," 25.

[105] Gandung Ismanto and Idris Thaha, "Banten: Islamic Parties, Networks and Patronage," in *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots*, ed. Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati (NUS Press, 2016), 143.

[106] Muhammad Saifulloh, "Pesantren as a Political Object Law era of President Joko Widodo,"(paper presented at the International Collaboration Conference on "Law, Sharia and Society: Toward a Peaceful and Justice Society (The Role of Islam in Humanitarian Law)," Solo, June 26-28 2024): 324-339.

[107] Aaron Atteridge, May Thazin Aung, and Agus Nugroho, "Contemporary Coal Dynamics In Indonesia," Working paper no. 2018-04 (Stockholm Environmental Institute, April 2018), 9. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.27690.29128

[108] "Indonesia Coal Production," CEIC Data, accessed April 24, 2025, https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/indonesia/coal-production

[109] "Indonesia," Observatory of Economic Complexity, accessed April 24, 2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/country/idn

transfer of liabilities, goods and services provided below market value, income or price support, and government revenue foregone.[110] Atteridge, Aung, and Nugroho have determined two factors which incentivize this expansion and the political support of mining on a local level: First, the relationship between political decentralization and the allocation of mining rents and second, the "the intertwined nature of coal mining and Indonesian politics"[111] as exemplified by the funding of electoral campaigns by mine owners. Both of these factors also influence the behavior of religious organizations as they engage with the politics of the mining industry, producing changes in religious behavior and elite-level alliance between organizational leadership and mining corporations. This section will first explain the significance of the mining industry as a venue through which the tension between central government authority and decentralization is expressed. It will then present a case study of the localized influence of mining projects on religious organizations and examine how the overlap of NU and Muhammadiyah national elites with the mining sector contributes to an emerging ulama-state alliance. Finally, NU and Muhammadiyah's mining concessions will be analyzed with a focus on the difference between each organization's emerging relationship with the state.

Given the economic significance of extractive industry, the mining sector is a particularly contentious forum through which the tension between regional autonomy and the central government is addressed. With regards to extractive industry, the most significant decentralization occurred with Law Number 4 of 2009 on Mineral and Coal Mining, which allowed district governments to issue Mining Business Licenses (IUPs) within district borders, provided that the land had been approved for mining activity by the central government.[112] After this legislation was passed, corruption seemed to increase in the mining sector, with local politicians now building "web[s] of patronage" in which mining companies supported their election campaigns in exchange for land rents.[113] In 2020, however, President Widodo reversed this decentralization with the Law Number 3 of 2020 Concerning Mineral and Coal Mining, which returned nearly all licensing power to the central government.[114] Not only is this rollback of regional autonomy indicative of the central government's resistance to decentralization in the interest of maintaining financial dependence regarding development projects and state control over resources,[115] but it is also a case study in the influence of politico-business oligarchy. In the new law, criminal sanctions on corruption in the issuing of permits have been removed, while sanctions have been added against individuals who "disturb"

[110] Greenpeace et al., "Coalruption," 21.
[111] Atteridge, Aung, and Nugroho, "Contemporary Coal Dynamics In Indonesia," 10.
[112] Atteridge, Aung, and Nugroho, "Contemporary Coal Dynamics In Indonesia," 11.
[113] Greenpeace et al., "Coalruption," 8.
[114] Marpi Yapitar et al., "Legal Consequences of Takeover of Authority in Mineral and Coal Mining by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources of the Republic of Indonesia," (paper presented at the International Conference on "Changing of Law: Business Law, Local Wisdom and Tourism Industry," Warmadewa University, Bali, Indonesia, July 26, 2023), 1539-1541. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-180-7_158
[115] Suhardiman, "The Indonesian State in Transition," 24.

mining activities.[116] Licensing power is now held by the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources. Current minister Bahlil Lahadalia is himself a major shareholder in several mining companies and was previously investigated by the Indonesian news site Tempo for privileging his companies in the license cancellation process as Minister of Investment.[117] By accepting mining concessions from the central government, NU and Muhammadiyah are thus entering into a direct patron-client dynamic within a system of politico-business oligarchy, and acting as privileged partners of the Indonesian state in its consolidation and defense of capital.

There is little pre-existing scholarly work on the interaction between religious organizations and coal mining in particular, although several studies do exist on the response of NU to gold mining activities within the Banyuwangi regency in East Java. Anang Alfian has argued that the mining project served as a forum through which a global capitalist entity shaped religious behavior, with traditionalist leaders responding to capitalism as an ethical problem. Formal opposition by the local NU organization and by its grassroots membership was undermined by its own elite, some of whom personally benefited from the mine.[118] Alkatiri and Kuwang have shown that religious civil society organizations in Banyuwangi, particularly NU, have suppressed the anti-mining movement and manufactured consent for the mine through coercion and the inclusion of pro-mining rhetoric within religious teaching at mosques and *pesantrens*. Similarly to Alfian, Alkatiri and Kuwang found that many *kyai* received political and financial support in return for supporting the mining project. Given the obligation for members of NU to follow the teachings of *kyai*, these "organic intellectual arrangement[s]" [119] have marginalized NU's anti-mining contingent. The anti-mining movement has also been particularly hamstrung by their association with communism. After the leaders of the anti-mining movement were labelled as communist subversives, NU elites spearheaded an anti-communist movement which resulted in the construction of Ansor-managed security posts, the arrest of multiple protest leaders, and a reinvigoration of anti-communist rhetoric among NU affiliates.[120]

On a national level, NU elites have been installed in senior leadership positions within mining conglomerates in order to manufacture consent for mining projects. In one such case, the mining conglomerate PT. Merdeka Copper Gold invited the daughter of Abdurrahman Wahid to serve as the company's director. When she resigned, her position was filled by another member of the Wahid family. In another case, an

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[116] Yapitar et al., "Legal Consequences of Takeover of Authority," 1540.
[117] "Daftar Kontroversi Bahlil Lahadalia, Dugaan Jual-Beli Izin Tambang hingga Studi S3 Kilat," [List of Bahlil Lahadalia's Controversies, Allegations of Buying and Selling Mining Permits to Fast Doctoral Studies], *Tempo*, October 18, 2024, https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/daftar-kontroversi-bahlil-lahadalia-dugaan-jual-beli-izin-tambang-hingga-studi-s3-kilat--431967
[118] Alfian, "Capitalism and Religious Behavior," 31.
[119] Farid Abud Alkatiri and Amir Syarifudin Kiwang, "The Roles of Religious Organizations in the Decline of the Anti-mining Movement in Banyuwangi, East Java," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 179 (2023): 25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48719556
[120] Alkatiri and Kiwang, "The Roles of Religious Organizations," 29.

influential NU branch head was appointed to an important position in the community relations department of one of Merdeka Copper Gold's subsidiary companies. In addition to fostering support from NU affiliates in the regions in which these companies undertake mining operations, the increased overlap between the mining industry and NU's elite membership has reduced the willingness of central leadership to engage with anti-mining advocates.[121] This overlap between elite members of NU and mining conglomerates is a key contributor to the development of an ulama-state alliance, as it not only provides the organization with access to resources controlled by the politico-business oligarchy but embeds some of its highest ranking and most well-known members into the oligarchical system directly, encouraging accommodative behavior with regards to government control of mining rents and giving NU a personal stake in protecting the interests of mining companies.

With Government Regulation No. 25 of 2024, Joko Widodo's amendment to Law Number 3 of 2020 Concerning Mineral and Coal Mining, religious civil society organizations can now be granted "Special Mining Business Permit Areas," giving the organizations legal rights to extract, mine, and sell natural resources.[122] The involvement of religious organizations in this sector was first proposed in 2021, when Widodo "promised" coal and nickel concessions to NU at the organization's annual congress.[123] NU was also the first organization to accept the official offering of mining concessions in June 2024, with Muhammadiyah following suit one month later after a meeting of the group's senior religious scholars.[124] NU's General Chairman KH Yahya Cholil Staquf has stated that NU's reasons for accepting the mining concessions are largely financial, although Staquf also highlighted the ability of religious organizations to overcome the unequal distribution of resources which has predominated in the mining sector and to utilize resources for the common good which had previously been underutilized due to inactive permits.[125] Muhammadiyah, meanwhile, has presented its acceptance of the mining concessions as having environmental benefits. The Chairman of Muhammadiyah's Environmental Council has stated that Muhammadiyah will initiate a "green mining" program, which will include reforesting mined land, empowering

[121] Alkatiri and Kiwang, "The Roles of Religious Organizations," 26.
[122] Dewi Masitoh, "'New Dilemma': Controversy on Granting Permits for Religious Mass Organizations to Manage Mining Businesses," *Institute for Global and Strategic Studies*, May 1, 2024. https://igss.uii.ac.id/new-dilemma-controversy-on-granting-permits-for-religious-mass-organizations-to-manage-mining-businesses/
[123] Syafiq Hasyim, "Indonesia's Islam-based Mass Organisations and the Mining Industry Vortex," *Fulcrum*, July 2, 2024. https://fulcrum.sg/indonesias-islam-based-mass-organisations-and-the-mining-industry-vortex/
[124] Falahi Mubarok and Irfan Maulana, "Muhammadiyah latest faith group to join Indonesia religious coal rush," *Mongabay*, August 1, 2024. https://news.mongabay.com/2024/08/muhammadiyah-latest-faith-group-to-join-indonesia-religious-coal-rush/
[125] Bambang Trismawan, "NU Merasa Sudah Lama Melarat..." [NU Feels It Has Been Poor for a Long Time...], *Rakyat Merdeka*, June 12, 2024. https://rm.id/baca-berita/nasional/223978/terima-konsesi-tambang-karena-butuh-nu-merasa-sudah-lama-melarat#google_vignette

communities in mined areas, and investing in energy transition to reduce coal dependency.[126]

Despite each organization's theological and social justifications for accepting the concessions, news outlets including Mongabay, Fulcrum, Tempo, CNN Indonesia, and New Mandala have reported that the elite in both NU and Muhammadiyah understand the concessions as a form of direct political patronage, most specifically for supporting Widodo and Subianto's political coalitions in the 2019 and 2024 elections. For NU, this patronage can be seen as related to the organization's broadly accommodative behavior vis-à-vis the Indonesian state, further entrenching the patron-client relationship which has existed between NU and the state throughout their histories but which gained particular strength during Widodo's presidency. Acceptance of the concessions by Muhammadiyah has been a greater source of public conjecture, as the organization was not as closely allied with Widodo's administration. According to reporting by Alex Arifianto, Muhammadiyah faced pressure from the central government to accept the mining concessions, with a message from Widodo directly stating that the organization would not receive any state patronage under Subianto if the concessions were refused. The religious moderation program was also reportedly highlighted in these negotiations, with the organizations expected to accept the offer due to Widodo's support of the Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan programs.[127]

As Barton argued in his paper on Indonesian neo-modernism, the fusion of liberal ideals with Islamic faith and scholarship transcended the traditionalist–modernist divide, drawing elite ulama from both organizations into a new movement concerned not only with the progressive development of Indonesian Islam, but with the progression of Islam as a whole.[128] Indonesia's religious moderation program functions similarly in this regard, as both NU and Muhammadiyah have produced scholarship which is aligned in its outlook towards tolerance, pluralism, and, most importantly, nationalism.[129] The difference between the two movements is that neo-modernism developed independently of the Indonesian state apparatus and was often opposed to the more mainstream Islamic scholarship emerging from the MUI and other ulama within NU and Muhammadiyah. Religious moderation, on the other hand, is explicitly directed by the Indonesian state as a method of defining and restricting Indonesian Islam on the domestic front, while also falling in line with the international concern over religious extremism and the promotion of religious moderation through the United Nations.[130] The institutionalization of patron-client dynamics between NU, Muhammadiyah, and Indonesia's politico-business

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[126] "Alasan Muhammadiyah Setuju Terima Izin Tambang dari Pemerintah," [Reasons Muhammadiyah Agrees to Receive Mining Permits from the Government], *CNN Indonesia*, July 26, 2024. https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240726125315-20-1125830/alasan-muhammadiyah-setuju-terima-izin-tambang-dari-pemerintah

[127] Alex Arifianto, "Clerics to coal miners: the decline of Indonesia's Islamic civil society," *New Mandala*, Sept. 4, 2024, https://www.newmandala.org/clerics-to-coal-miners-the-decline-of-indonesias-islamic-civil-society/

[128] Barton, "Neo-Modernism," 6.

[129] Sekar Ayu Aryani et al., "Synergy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs," 452.

[130] Sekar Ayu Aryani et al., "Synergy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs," 452.

oligarchy thus comes at a time when the organizations are also allying with the state ideologically, producing a uniquely Indonesian ulama-state alliance.

As a closing note, it is important to identify the discrepancies between NU and Muhammadiyah within this potential ulama-state alliance. Given NU's long-standing accommodative relationship with political leadership and militant defense of the Indonesian state against its Islamist and communist opponents, it is the elite of this organization which have currently formed the stronger alliance with the state. NU is also predisposed to the development of an ulama-state alliance through its ideology and governance structure, as fealty to the *kyai* and NU's dependence on the *pesantren* system allow the organization to more effectively disseminate new teachings and manufacture consent for state policy. Muhammadiyah, though it similarly depends on patronage from the state for its programming and ideological projects, has generally maintained a greater degree of ideological independence. The two organizations also define the boundaries of the Indonesian state differently: where NU opposes Islamist parties in addition to communists and fringe Islamic sects like Ahmadiyah, Muhammadiyah has often expressed support for more conservative Islamist parties in the face of state repression.[131] If an ulama-state alliance is indeed taking shape within Indonesia, it is imperative that scholars of Indonesian Islam take note of heightened convergence between Muhammadiyah and NU elites on issues of religious ideology and national belonging.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout Indonesian history, the rise and fall of authoritarianism has been based upon the state's material conditions. Political development since democratization has been constrained by economic foundations of rentierism and oligarchy, restricting accumulation of capital to an elite class which is allied with—and indeed often forms—the state apparatus. Nationhood, however, is not merely material. Indonesia's development has also been tied fundamentally to its Islamic organizations, which apply their influence in government and civil society to shape religion's place in public life. The dominant religious organizations have defined the boundaries of Indonesian national belonging, acting in concert with the state to repress opposition movements and to promote a pluralist vision of Islam which is underlain by Pancasila thought.

With the inclusion of NU and Muhammadiyah into dependent, patron-client dynamics with the Indonesian state, the religious moderation program takes on new significance as a state project to further define and limit Indonesian Islam. The involvement of the organizations in coal mining, an economic sector particularly notorious for political rent-seeking and oligarchic dominance, raises further questions regarding their ability to maintain independence and resist the subjugation of Islamic scholarship to state interests. Most importantly, this entwining of religious organizations with the state has the potential to reduce the adaptability of Indonesian ulama with regards to new political ideologies and forms of utopia, restricting dynamic scholarship which can respond to social issues such as environmental degradation and unequal resource distribution. As the relationships between NU, Muhammadiyah, and the Subianto administration continue to take shape, scholarship on Indonesian Islam should strongly

[131] Arifianto, "Clerics to coal miners."

consider the possibility that Indonesia is undergoing the development of its own ulama-state alliance.

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