

Islamic Democracy or Secular? Some Aspects of Democracy Practiced in Indonesia

Brilliant Windy Khairunnisa

International Relations and Diplomacy, Khazar University, Azerbaijan

Coressponding Email: brilliantwindyk@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0453-8345>

Abstract. Indonesia is one of the largest democratic countries in the world, especially in the way of elections with its unique system. However, Indonesia is notable for its largest population of Islamic society which could influence its policy. In this regard, this study aims to analyse the democratic application in Indonesia with an Islamic democracy or secular democracy by using democracy indicators including the election process, civil liberties, government function, and political culture. This study was conducted with a qualitative explorative method while both primary and secondary data were conceived. This study results illustrate that the Indonesian state does not implement an Islamic democratic system because there is no Islamic constitution that applies in it, however, due to the existence of a majority Muslim society somehow influences some of the policies that apply therefore that it cannot be claimed to be a completely secular democracy. Nevertheless, the future of the democratic system in Indonesia will be determined by the results of the general election in 2024.

Keywords: Democracy, Indonesia, Islamic Democracy, Secular Democracy

1 Introduction

In general, democracy can be defined as the condition of a country where a leader or regulations that apply exist based on a mutual agreement from the community which will eventually be implemented and carried out by the community as well. In other words, from the community, run by the community and will return to the community together [1]. The freedom of opinion or choice within the scope of the state system can also be obtained by society in general with the norms in force. However, in practice, democracy in a country can often be influenced by cultures in certain areas therefore the implementation of a democratic system cannot be carried out thoroughly. In this case, the influence of religion or beliefs held by the local community can also apply where domestic or foreign policies can also be affected.

There are several countries with democratic systems that have a majority of people with adherents of certain religions therefore that their existence can influence local government policies on several occasions, such as Greece, Tunisia, and Indonesia. However, in this case, the State of Indonesia is among the majority of prominent because of the religious tolerance that exists in it where even though the majority of the population is Muslim, people of religions other than Islam still get justice, especially in the system of government and according to state law [2]. In this case, the State of Indonesia may be categorised as a nation with its own distinctive characteristics since, although not being geographically connected to Middle Eastern Islamic nations, Islam is nearly entirely practised there and is well accepted by the populace.

Quantitatively, Indonesia is counted as one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world with a percentage reaching 90% even though the country system is a republic and is not an Islamic country for example the majority of countries in the Middle East region. The state system that is implemented is a democratic country system with general elections which are held every five years and are attended by all Indonesian people who meet the requirements to determine the next state and regional leaders. However, the large Muslim population in society often creates different perspectives among international communities from various parts of the world regarding the system of government implemented in Indonesia, where the application of Islamic democracy or secular democracy in effect is often questioned.

In this context, Islamic democracy and secular democracy can be distinguished by the application of religious teachings or laws of a particular religion in the state system as well as the policies that apply there in where Islamic democracy will apply Islamic law while secular democracy will separate religion from the state

system. As for this study, the author will explore the implementation of democracy in Indonesia by making comparisons between the Islamic democratic system and secular democracy so that it can produce an analysis related to the type of democratic system that applies in that country. On the other hand, there are literature studies that the authors have obtained from previous study as a means to deepen or develop the findings that have been found, especially in the science of democracy itself.

2 Literature Review

There are some reviews conducted by the writer to ensure that this topic has novelty to be discussed. Initially, there was study with quantitative data discussing political parties in Indonesia as a democracy indicator in which by using that indicator Indonesia results as a secular democratic country [3]. Furthermore, since the second president's authority, the Indonesian political system has altered and become moderate Indonesian Islam. That study was conducted by analysing the political parties of Indonesia as its democracy indicator [4]. Another scholar argues that even though Indonesia is a secular country, there are some people who have ambitions to make this country apply Islamic laws through their organisations and movements [5]. The large Muslim population in Indonesia has provided rise to new doctrines to alter the existing system of government into an Islamic state driven by people with personal captivates yet in the name of religion [6]. On the other hand, some circles moreover contemplate that the presence of the Shia religious community can also pose a threat to the Indonesian political system because the majority of the population adheres to Sunni Islam where truth in religion is also based on the Islamic Scholar of Indonesia (MUI) and the ministry of religion in Indonesia [7]. In this case, there has not been any previous study that has discussed the analysis of the democratic system implemented in Indonesia through a comparison of Islamic democracy or secular democracy where the Qur'an and Hadith serve as benchmarks in determining Islamic or secular democracy in force in a country. Thus, the topic discussed by the author in his study has its own novelty from previous studies which can simultaneously expand and enrich the benefits from a scientific point of view. Overall, this study will discuss Islamic democracy by definition that it is based on Islamic two main foundations which are Qur'an and Hadith with the values inside them. In addition, the democratic value written in the Qur'an clearly determined anti-authoritarianism and dictatorship of the leader.

3 Research Method

This study was conducted in the exploration of qualitative methods with a comparative study between Islamic and secular democracies. The data in this study were primary and secondary data gained by interviews with Islamic scholars and Indonesian authorities as primary data while the literature study through the official website of the General Election Commissions, previous reports, and previous study as secondary data. Furthermore, the comparison was conducted with some limitations in which Islamic democracies based on Al-Qur'an and Hadist as the Islamic foundation while secular democracies determinant based on some Western democratic values. Therefore, the result of this study will be full narrations without any numeric data with the democracy concept as a tool.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 Islamic Democracy and Secular Democracy

In this study, the author makes a comparison between Islamic democracy and secular democracy using several benchmarks or several things as tools to limit the scope of study. In terms of Islamic democracy, what is meant in this study is a democratic system that practically refers to the Al-Qur'an and Hadith as the primary guideline for Islamic religious communities as well as legal products, while Islamic histories and Islamic values that are closely related to democracy itself. On the other hand, secular democracy is intended as a democratic system which in practice makes religion a private matter for the people therefore that it will not be able to provide significant benefits or losses to state regulations or policies that will apply. Human rights universally upheld in secular democracy above the demands on religions that apply without exception.

In an Islamic democracy that refers to the Qur'an as the holy book of Muslims, there are countless verses that have democratic values such as the freedom to criticise or submit opinions according to al-Quthubi tafseer in Surah Al-Imran 104, Surah Alhujurat verse 13 which explains that there is no difference between human beings because they were created to know each other, there is freedom of opinion in Surah Annisa verses 59 and 83 and Assyuro verse 38, it is obligatory to have honesty in leading a country as stated in Surah Annisa verse 58, to the importance of deliberation and reaching the joint decision which is contained in the Surah Al Imron verse 159 [8]. Regarding the importance of discussing and reaching joint decisions, it is also strengthened by the

hadith of the Prophet Muhammad which explains the importance of this where from the people and for the people is one of the values that exist in the democracy country system.

In addition to the existence of holy books and the hadith of the apostles which guide Muslims in implementing Islamic democracy, Islamic histories can be a reference for how Islamic democracy is implemented in a state system. Historically, before his death, the Prophet Muhammad never appointed who would be the leader of the Muslim community after his death. In the end, all Muslims held general elections which were part of the democratic action and then held deliberations until Abu Bakar Assiddiq was elected as the first leader after the death of the Prophet or what is commonly referred to as the first caliph of the four *Khulafaurrasyidin*. Basically, Islamic democracy upholds deliberation or discussion because there is a belief that absolute truth belongs only to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, therefore discussion is part of an effort to get to the truth and alleviate the potential for errors to occur in issuing policies or decisions within the state system. Furthermore, the laws that apply in a country with an Islamic democratic system will refer to Islamic law or commonly known as sharia while still referring to the Qur'an and hadith as its primary guidelines.

On the other side, there is a secular democracy that isolates the state system from religion, as well as the laws that govern it. Historically, secularisation emerged from the Western world therefore that it is closely related to western doctrines that are still relevant today where religious traditions must be the result of modern dynamics both from a social, economic and political perspective. As for the existence of religion, it must become a realm of privacy and separate from political life therefore that leaders of countries or regions are not elected based on religion or certain religious teachings with obligations to their people that are only limited to the political, economic and social fields [9]. On the other hand, the laws that apply to countries with a secular democratic system will not refer to certain religious laws therefore the policies that apply are products of the state without involving a particular religion. Regarding its application, each country has a different concept of democracy in its state system. In this case, the concept is also one of the distinctions between democratic and non-democratic nations, and because of the values they uphold, democratic nations will likely experience considerably lower levels of potential conflict than non-democratic nations [10].

In its definition, the secular democratic system will differ between the opinions of democratic countries that implement it directly and non-democratic countries that are only based on analysis or the media. People in nondemocratic nations connect democracy with a prosperous economy and greater social control than people in democratic ones. Inhabitants of democratic nations, on the other hand, equate democracy with gender equality more than inhabitants of non-democratic cultures. People in democratic cultures are less prone than those in nondemocratic societies to link democracy with religious institutions interpreting laws and the military taking over an inept administration [11]. However, in this study, the author limits it by referring to the concept of a secular democratic system based on a state that implements a democratic system as well.

Basically, a secular democratic system will certainly separate religious values from the state or political system therefore that in some cases countries with a secular democratic state system will have a fairly high level of corruption due to the fact that there are no religious norms applied. However, in certain countries, even though a secular democratic system is implemented, in practice, certain religious norms still influence the functioning of the state system, both in terms of applicable laws and policies implemented by the government. This is caused by the existence of an idiosyncratic or personal background of a leader and the state of the country at that time can influence state policies issued by the government as stated in the concept of foreign policy analysis from KJ Holsti [12]. In this case, cases where certain religious norms affect the course of a secular democratic state system often occur in countries where the majority of the population adheres to a particular religion therefore several state policies that will be issued will also refer to the majority religion. On the other hand, there will be protests or rejection from the community if a policy is implemented without taking into account the predominant religion of the populace, as this is deemed to be in violation of the laws of the state, which state that a policy or regulation born from the consent of the people is implemented by the community and will nonetheless return to society.

4.2 Democracy in Indonesia

As a country with a majority of people following a certain religion, Indonesia has become a country with the largest Muslim population in the world even though it is not an Islamic country. In this case, the assessment of the democracy index that is running in Indonesia will be observed through several primary indicators including the general election process, government functions, political participation, civil liberties, as well as the existence of a political culture that is applied and occurs in this country [13]. On the other hand, due to the fact that Indonesia is not an Islamic country, by looking at some of the factors that exist in Indonesia, such as education, advocacy, manifestation, the law that is in effect, and the presence of applied religious regulations like Shari'ah law or Islamic law, it is possible to classify the democratic system there as either a secular democracy or an

Islamic democracy [14]. Hence, these variables may constitute a constraint in analysing Indonesia's democratic system, whether Islamic democracy or secular democracy.

In the process of electing leaders, all Indonesian citizens aged 17 and older, who meet the requirements, have the right to freely select the next candidate for the next leader in a general election system that is implemented in that country and is held every five years. The election's outcome is based on the majority vote of the electorate. As in this case, the general election is one of the ways in which the existence of choices made by public officials that are under the control of the people is put into practice therefore that the sovereignty of the people in deciding their own future may be realised due to the fact that in essence, selecting a leader who reflects the desires of the people is the first step in bringing public policies into existence from the hands of a new leader where they will be implemented by the people as well. Hence, basically, the political system in democracy is based on the recognition that is in the hands of political power therefore that people will endeavour to select the next leader they desire and who they contemplate can provide policies that are in accordance with what they wish for. On the other hand, government decisions in politics have a fairly close relationship with the involvement of the community in a democratic system [1]. In other words, the general election process in Indonesia is one of the main bridges in implementing the existing democratic system.

Conceptually, the government's function in creating a prosperous country is to create well-being in the community first [15]. In this case, the Indonesian people who are predominantly Muslim and carry out their religious guidance influence the government in carrying out its responsibility for the welfare of society. This can be analysed by the existence of a government that provides facilities or other conveniences for the community in carrying out their religious guidance, such as the existence of a special government agency regarding religious matters, the convenience of building places of worship and practising their religion, to the existence of special regulations that food that is traded must bear a halal logo to avoid any concern among the people who are predominantly Muslim. However, previous studies have also assessed that government agencies in Indonesia are too broad to interfere with the functioning of government as well as applicable laws and regulations [16]. This can be analysed from the expansion of government agencies that can also widen the scope of obstacles or policies that are regulated therefore as to alleviate the effectiveness of the government's own function.

In terms of political participation, basically, Indonesia has two types of political parties that can take part in general elections consisting of secular political parties and Islamic political parties where each of these parties has different leadership models and ideologies. As for the upcoming 2024 general election, there are 24 political parties that will be ready to take part in the general election and ten of them are Islamic political parties. Then, of the total political parties, there are 17 national parties and six local Acehese political parties, which means that Islamic political parties in Indonesia are still recognised as national political parties even though they have the same rights and obligations as secular political parties as well as Islamic political parties [17]. On the other hand, Indonesia is analysed as a nation that uses the idea known as The Agreement State of the Agreed Agreement and is also referred to as the State of Pancasila as an official decision [18]. Additionally, according to the state's fundamental constitution, none of the constituent parts of the state may be excluded from the agreement for any reason. This implies that everyone in Indonesia must continue to support Pancasila. However, Pancasila is more than just a dedication to Muhammadiyah.

Furthermore, political culture and civil liberties in Indonesia are also the main indicators in determining the democratic system that applies in this country. In this case, the prevailing political culture in a country can encourage political attitudes and behaviour to be applied and even to the extent that it influences the laws that will apply. Due to the fact that basically, the political culture in a country will far more determine political behaviour than the assumptions of society in general [19]. As a country with a majority Muslim community, the culture of the nation-state in Indonesia is also influenced by Islamic religious norms such as the values of tolerance whenever there is a celebration of another religion among the people. In this case, every time there is a celebration of the six religions that are recognised by Indonesia, the general public will get a day off and follow the regulations that apply to these religious celebrations.

As in Hinduism, where the majority reside on the island of Bali, there is a religious celebration called *Nyepi* where all residents are required to stay at home and not carry out outdoor activities. In the end, all people without exception will comply with these regulations even though these activities are related to the state system such as general elections. In this case, the Indonesian general election will not be held on *Nyepi* day because the regulations include prohibiting demonstrations, or other political activities. As for Islam itself, there is the month of Ramadan which requires Muslims to fast for the entire month. Therefore, due to the fact that the majority of Indonesian society is Muslim, all restaurants or shops that sell food will provide curtains at their shops to respect people who are fasting however still carry out their activities as sellers. In this case, if there are political activities such as meetings, or any other political activities during the month of Ramadan, these activities will be carried out at night when the time for breaking the fast has arrived or they will still be carried out during the day but without food consumption provided during breaks as usually available in normal days out of that holy month. Without exception for other religious celebrations in Indonesia, the culture or norms of that

religion will influence the culture or political actions in this country even though basically it is not a country that adheres to a particular religion.

Even though it is not an Islamic country, there are two of the largest influential Islamic organisations in Indonesia named *Nahdhatul Ulama* or NU and *Muhammadiyah*. In this case, these two organisations are not only active in the broader context of society however also in politics and education, where they are establishing schools from the primary level to lectures by applying a system of mixing Islamic religious teachings with conventional science courses. As for the state system, applicable laws will be based on decisions of the Islamic Scholar Council of Indonesia or MUI to avoid debate or doubts in the community regarding certain laws. There is also the Indonesian Ministry of Religion which moreover contributes to the welfare of society in religion and worship at the same time oversees Islamic education-based schools or institutions throughout Indonesia [20]. However, MUI is not an Islamic court in Indonesia as what exists in an Islamic country such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia.

In terms of advocacy and legal manifestations, Indonesia will generally listen to the majority of people, the bulk of who are Muslims. As a consequence, in the end, advocacy and legal expressions will likely not contravene Islamic religious principles. As happened in 2016 when one of the Indonesian governors named Ahok reaped controversy among the public on the basis of religious blasphemy. In this case, the demonstration known as 212 was recorded as the largest demonstration in Indonesia due to the fact that countless of people took part in the action which conceptually could be associated with populism [21]. Politically, this happened due to in Islamic teachings blasphemy is not permissible, especially in Indonesia, where the majority of its population is Muslim therefore the governor must be detained and punished according to the demands of the community. In this case, it evidences that even though Indonesia is not a secular country, it is also not an Islamic country as applied in other Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. As for other cases, the majority of Indonesian leader candidates will illustrate their obedience in worship, especially during the campaign period before the general election is held. This is done as a tool to attract people to elect him as a leader because the majority of people will be attracted to leaders who are experts in worship. Hence, basically, the existence of populism in a country can also affect existing identity politics.

On the other hand, Indonesia in the application of state law still does not utilise Islamic law as in Islamic countries therefore it cannot be categorised as an Islamic state. However, the majority religion in this country exerts some influence in deciding the applicable policies therefore it cannot also be claimed to be fully adherent to a secular democratic system. As for this matter, during the leadership of President Joko Widodo, Indonesia experienced a decline in its level of democracy because of a new regulation that the public is prohibited from criticising state leaders and public officials, which basically must be allowed in a democratic country [22]. Several new articles in state law have also been issued several times unilaterally by the government, resulting in protests and demonstrations among the public and even attracting international media attention. Thus, as an entire Indonesia can still be claimed to be a country with a secular democratic system due to the fact that there is no valid Shari'ah law however it is not completely secular due to there is a state basis in the form of Belief in One Almighty God.

5 Conclusion

Hence, currently, in light of those evidences, Indonesia cannot be claimed to be a country that implements an Islamic democratic system because of the absence of Islamic law that applies to the state system where this is a benchmark for the existence of Islamic democracy. However, Indonesia also cannot be claimed to be a country that implements a secular democratic system utterly that separates religion and the state because there is a basis for the Indonesian state which begins with belief in the one and only God and there are only six religions which have been formalised in that country therefore that Indonesia cannot be claimed to be a completely secular state. In other words, with all kinds of data and facts available, researcher can express that the democratic system implemented in Indonesia can be claimed to be flawed because it cannot be claimed to be an Islamic or secular democracy as an entirety. On the other hand, Indonesia's democratic system in the future will also be determined by the general elections for state or regional leaders in 2024 where all general elections for both president and regional leaders will be held simultaneously. In this case, at the same time, it can bring political instability to the country therefore that if the soldiers have strong ambitions, what happened during the Suharto era will happen again, namely with a leadership coup. Thus, further research regarding the state of the democratic system in Indonesia after the 2024 general elections will be required because of the possibilities that could occur in the future.

References

- [1] A. Dedi, "Analisis Sistem Pemilihan Umum Serentak," *J. MODERAT*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 213–226, 2019.
- [2] S. Widayati and E. C. Maulidiyah, "Religious Tolerance In Indonesia," *Atl. Press*, vol. 212, pp. 685–688, 2018, doi: 10.2991/icei-18.2018.155.
- [3] S. Mujani and R. W. Liddle, "Muslim Indonesia's Secular Democracy," *Asian Surv.*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 575–590, 2009, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2009.49.4.575>.
- [4] M. Buehler, "Islam and Democracy in Indonesia," *Insight Turkey*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 51–63, 2009, doi: 10.1017/cbo9781316344446.
- [5] S. Schäfer, "Democratic Decline in Indonesia: The Role of Religious Authorities," *Pac. Aff.*, vol. 92, no. 2, pp. 235–255, 2019, doi: 10.5509/2019922235.
- [6] F. Munabari, N. U. Larasati, R. Ihsan, and L. Nurhadiyanto, "Islamic Revivalism in Indonesia: The Caliphate, Sharia, NKRI, Democracy, and the Nation-State," *J. Polit.*, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 281, 2020, doi: 10.7454/jp.v5i2.263.
- [7] B. W. Khairunnisa, "Strategi Baru Penyebaran Pemikiran Politik Syi'ah Melalui Kegiatan Kepemudaan Internasional 'Arbaeen Peace and Justice,'" *J. Syntax Transform.*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 1–17, 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.46799/jst.v2i4.261>.
- [8] D. Darmadi, "Konsep Demokrasi Pancasila dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Qur'an," PTIQ Jakarta, 2022.
- [9] H. Aswar, "Secular Perspective on The Islamic Political Discourses in Indonesia: A Critical Analysis," *J. Kaji. Perad. Islam*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 35–41, 2021, doi: 10.47076/jkpis.v4i2.64.
- [10] M. Wigell, "Hybrid Interference as a Wedge Strategy: A Theory of External Interference in Liberal Democracy," *Int. Aff.*, vol. 95, no. 2, pp. 255–275, 2019, doi: 10.1093/ia/iiz018.
- [11] A. Zagrebina, "Concepts of Democracy in Democratic and Nondemocratic Countries," *Int. Polit. Sci. Rev.*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 174–191, 2020, doi: 10.1177/0192512118820716.
- [12] B. W. Khairunnisa, "BILATERAL RELATIONS OF INDONESIA AND PAKISTAN DURING PRESIDENT JOKO WIDODO ' S OCCUPATION IN THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF KJ HOLSTI," *Int. J. Soc. Serv. Res.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 8–14, 2021.
- [13] fnes, "Democracy Indicators," Helsinki, 2015.
- [14] M. Azhar, A. Sahide, M. Hidayati, and J. Hasse, "A New Perspective on Relations between Islam and Democracy in Indonesia," *Int. J. Innov. Creat. Chang.*, vol. 13, no. 5, pp. 645–664, 2020.
- [15] L. Lismanto and Y. J. Utama, "Membumikan Instrumen Hukum Administrasi Negara Sebagai Alat Mewujudkan Kesejahteraan Sosial dalam Perspektif Negara Demokrasi," *J. Pembang. Huk. Indones.*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 416–433, 2020, doi: 10.14710/jphi.v2i3.416-433.
- [16] M. P. H. Wijaya and M. Z. Ali, "Legislation Impediments in Reorganising Government Bodies in Indonesia," *Bestuur*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 1–12, 2021, doi: 10.20961/bestuur.v9i1.51633.
- [17] KPU, "The Following are 24 Political Parties Participating in the 2024 Election," 2022.
- [18] W. N. Fajar, I. Affandi, K. Suryadi, and D. Kahmad, "The Historicity of Political Thought of Muhammadiyah Regarding the Concept of Pancasila State as Darul Ahdi Wa Syahadah," *Atl. Press*, vol. 418, no. Acec 2019, pp. 361–366, 2020, doi: 10.2991/assehr.k.200320.069.
- [19] D. Fossati, "The Resurgence of Ideology in Indonesia: Political Islam, Aliran and Political Behaviour," *J. Curr. Southeast Asian Aff.*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 119–148, 2019, doi: 10.1177/1868103419868400.
- [20] S. Latief, Y. A. Sari, M. Yusuf, A. Armila, and R. E. Hidayat, "The Development of Islamic Education and Strengthening of National Education System of Indonesia," *Int. J. Adv. Sci. Educ. Relig.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 86–99, 2021, doi: 10.33648/ijoaser.v4i2.105.
- [21] I. Fanany and R. Fanany, "Fourteen: Religion and Populism: the Aksi 212 Movement in Indonesia," *Bristol Univ. Press*, pp. 245–258, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447353867.ch014>.
- [22] W. R. Jati, "The Situation of Declining Indonesian Democracy," *Habibie Cent.*, no. 27, 2021.