

# **INDONESIAN ISLAMISTS AND POST-ELECTION PROTESTS IN JAKARTA**

**23 July 2019**

**IPAC Report No. 58**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Islamist protests after the April 2019 presidential elections in Indonesia were far smaller than organisers hoped for or police feared. Organisational disarray, personal rivalries, government obstruction, fear of arrest, general risk avoidance and uncertainty about the religious value of protests kept many Islamists home.

The low turnout stood in stark contrast to the massive participation in the 2016 campaign to bring down the then governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, better known as Ahok, whom the Islamists accused of blasphemy. It suggests that Islamists were not as potent a political power as sometimes portrayed or at the very least that there were limits to their willingness to be used by politicians.

It also indicated how much the relationship between Islamists and the state had changed in the nearly three years since the anti-Ahok campaign produced the largest street demonstrations in modern Indonesian history on 2 December 2016 (hence the name “212 Movement” for the activists involved). The government of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) was taken by surprise by the massive mobilisation and appeared to have no strategy for handling it. By mid-2019, however, police had decided that radical Islam constituted the biggest existential threat to state security and poured huge resources into discouraging mobilisation, including through intimidation and arrest. The new confrontational approach changed the risk calculus for many Islamists – it was not worth putting their schools, businesses and other activities in jeopardy on behalf of sordid political concerns.

The alliance that brought down Ahok is in disarray, but Islamism, with its majoritarian views and preoccupations with morality and orthodoxy, is far from being a spent force in Indonesia. Managing it may end up being a central concern of President Jokowi in his second term. Islamists dislike Jokowi intensely and that animosity will persist regardless of what might happen with a Jokowi-Prabowo reconciliation. They see him as a standard-bearer of secularism, a closet Communist as evidenced by his reliance on China for development projects, and a promoter of immorality through his party’s support of a bill to protect victims of sexual violence. The repressive turn of the police only reinforces the antipathy.

It will be important for the new Jokowi government to reach out to the rank-and-file of two important components of the Islamist movement, the hardline traditionalists and the Salafis, but without pandering to their ultra-conservative leaders or adopting elements of their agenda.<sup>1</sup> This means among other things that Jokowi must avoid seeming to rely exclusively on Nahdlatul Ulama, the huge Java-centered moderate Muslim organisation that helped power him to victory. (NU is also seen as being largely ethnic Javanese, so reaching out to Muslim constituencies off Java that voted for Prabowo in huge numbers is also important.) He could usefully focus on reducing economic inequality in a way that will undercut some of the professed Islamist grievances, backed by a good communications strategy that can promote genuine achievements. He should encourage the police to reverse the legacy of hostility left by the long campaign and its aftermath – this will require sustained police attention to improving community relations and ensuring that the culture of violence and meting out instant justice begins to change. Finally, as the new Jokowi team tries to grapple with extremist use of social media, it needs ensure that it does not end up penalising legitimate criticism and dissent.

1 Traditionalist Muslims accommodate longstanding cultural practices such as visiting graves and veneration of saints but imbue them with Islamic prayers and rituals, whereas modernists and Salafis are committed to purifying Islam from what they call unwarranted innovations (*bid’ah*) and superstitions.

## II. THE END OF THE “SPIRITUAL PICNIC”

At the 2 December 2016 rally against Ahok, there had been an almost festive mood, an atmosphere that some participants described as a “spiritual picnic” where families could bring their children from all over the country to defend Islam and have a once-in-a-lifetime experience.<sup>2</sup> Mainstream Muslims took part in large numbers: it was arguably the first nation-wide mobilisation that systematically combined mosque-based agitation and social media campaigning, powered by the resources of major political parties, local business patrons and the charisma of popular Muslim preachers.<sup>3</sup> That mood was gone by May 2019.

After months of a deeply polarising campaign, there was no sense of spirituality left. Identity politics and hate speech so heavily coloured the campaign that at the end of it, both camps were left with feelings of mutual hostility and even a belief that each was committed to the other’s destruction. As one protestor from a pro-Prabowo women’s volunteer group put it in May:

We want Jokowi to be disqualified now. We can’t wait until 2024 because by then it will be too late: the Chinese will have totally conquered Indonesia, Islam will have been wiped out, the call to prayer will be finished, LGBT will roam around freely. [...] I don’t care about the risks [of protest]; I don’t care if it would create instability. Maybe Indonesia has to crumble so we can build it again from scratch.<sup>4</sup>

As 22 May approached, the Islamist alliance was also seriously weakened. Gone were many of the pious Muslims who supported Prabowo but did not want to get involved in what they thought could become a chaotic protest. Gone were the ideological hardliners like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) who had always been dubious about democracy and now were beset with internal problems. Gone were many of the Salafi-modernist activists whose interest was more in Islamising Indonesia from the grassroots up than in backing a particular candidate.<sup>5</sup> The Salafi-modernists belatedly supported Prabowo but refrained from taking part in post-election protests, concerned about the impact on their schools and businesses. The Islamist elements that remained to join non-Islamist Prabowo supporters were the more hardline groups that were more accustomed to confrontations. They included the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), whose members mostly came from traditionalist background – but even FPI was split this time around; Forum Umat Islam (FUI), a motley coalition of conservative but politically pragmatic activists; and some members of the non-violent extremist fringe, such as Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI).

### A. *The Anti-Ahok Mobilisation as a One-Off Phenomenon*

Even had the alliance stayed united and the government had not come to see Islamism as such a threat, the Prabowo camp had little chance of reproducing the numbers that poured into the Jakarta streets on 2 December 2016 – an estimated 750,000 by more conservative estimates. Jokowi simply did not generate the visceral loathing that Ahok did. That loathing was based on two key factors:

2 IPAC interview with participants of the 2 December rally, Jakarta, 2 December 2016.

3 For a comprehensive background of the anti-Ahok movement and the Islamist coalition behind it, see Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), “After Ahok: Islamist Agenda in Indonesia”, Report No. 44, 6 April 2018.

4 IPAC interview with a female participant of the 21-22 May protests, Jakarta, 27 May 2019.

5 The term Salafi-modernists refers to a particular strain of less ideological Salafism as represented by the networks around Bachtar Nasir and Zaitun Rasmin. They both came from modernist Muhammadiyah backgrounds but became inspired by Salafi teachings and political activism while studying in Medina, Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, at the height of the Salafi-led Awakening Movement (Sahwa). They share the purist Salafi view that democracy is un-Islamic but are willing to participate in democratic elections as an instrument to Islamise the state and society. Salafi-modernists are also more open-minded than the purist Salafis, for example in terms of women’s professional roles outside the house, though they still disagree with gender equality. See IPAC, op. cit., “After Ahok”, pp. 4-7.

- Ahok was a double minority, Christian and ethnic Chinese. Islamists campaigned on the majoritarian premise that only Muslims should govern other Muslims, citing a Qur'anic reference for support. They also linked his ethnicity to support for ethnic Chinese tycoons at the expense of indigenous Muslim entrepreneurs.
- By challenging the Qur'anic reference in a speech that went viral on social media, Ahok gave the Islamists an excuse for accusing him of blasphemy, turning the campaign against him into a much more broadly-based mobilisation to “defend Islam.” The 2 December rally was packaged as a “mass prayer” rather than a political protest; some even compared it to the *hajj*.<sup>6</sup> It was this packaging that drew families and mainstream Muslims.

In addition, some of Ahok's policies antagonised Islamist constituencies. His land reclamation projects in North Jakarta led to forced evictions of thousands of urban poor Muslims, feeding the narrative that he was anti-Muslim.<sup>7</sup> It was FPI that came to their defence.<sup>8</sup> Islamists used his evictions of slum dwellers and street vendors elsewhere in the capital to ease traffic congestion as evidence that he was increasing income inequality, disadvantaging the poor to serve the rich. His ban on religious activities in public roads and around Jakarta's National Monument alienated the traditionalist Muslims who had engaged in these practices for decades. The fact that it was a Christian behind these policies added to the outrage. However much the Islamists disliked Jokowi, it was harder to persuade the Muslim mainstream that he was an enemy of Islam as he was a practicing Muslim who enjoyed broad popular support.

The anti-Ahok campaign also benefited from the lack of any sense of fear or risk on the part of those who flooded into Jakarta. Islamist organisers and the police held a joint press conference a week before the 2 December rally, telling people that they would work together to ensure it would run peacefully.<sup>9</sup> Many of the thousands who came from Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and further afield had never been to the capital before. For many, it was a free spiritual tour, with various Islamic organisations and politicians providing transport, food and accommodation.<sup>10</sup> The National Movement to Safeguard the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulama Council (GNPF-MUI), the Islamist coalition behind it, raised over \$7 million in donations and disbursed some of those to numerous mosques in Jakarta to provide for the participants.<sup>11</sup>

### B. *Why the Movement Declined*

The 212 Movement was a victim of its own success. The first sign of its decline appeared in January 2017, as soon as Ahok was on trial for blasphemy. With the common enemy gone, friction and rivalries came to the surface. The traditionalist and Salafi factions fought over the GNPF-MUI leadership. As the presidential election loomed, they disagreed over which presidential candidate to nominate. By September 2018, GNPF-MUI – which had changed its name to GNPF-Ulama following the leadership battle – declared support for Prabowo as he officially became the sole opponent to incumbent Jokowi in the presidential race. The decision was taken by the pragmatists, particularly from FPI and FUI, and alienated the Salafis and other

6 Greg Fealy, “Bigger than Ahok: Explaining the 2 December Mass Rally”, indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au, 7 December 2016.

7 “More than 100,000 Evicted for Land Reclamation: Report”, thejakartapost.com, 10 January 2017.

8 “Rapat Terbuka di Luar Batang, FPI Ingatkan Peristiwa Mbah Priok”, liputan.com, 20 April 2016.

9 On 28 November 2016, GNPF-MUI and the police worked out a deal that the former could organise a grand protest on some conditions, including that it took the form of “mass prayer” rather than political oration. See “Ini Lima Poin Kesepakatan GNPF-MUI dan Polri Soal Aksi 2 Desember”, merdeka.com, 28 November 2016.

10 For instance, it was evident that some Gerindra politicians from West Kalimantan facilitated the travel of local FPI members and other Muslims to Jakarta to join the rallies. See IPAC, “The West Kalimantan Election and the Impact of the Anti-Ahok Movement”, Report No. 43, 1 February 2018, p. 8.

11 “Untuk Demo Ahok, GNPF MUI Mengaku Disubsidi 100 Miliar Lebih”, tribunnews.com, 2 November 2016.

Islamists who wanted to nominate an Islamic scholar or at least a pious figure, which Prabowo clearly was not.<sup>12</sup> The Salafis eventually came around, albeit reluctantly, because in their view, anyone was preferable to Jokowi. The political ground, however, had shifted.

There was no longer consensus on a common enemy. Jokowi was not another Ahok. From 2017 onwards, the president had completely detached himself from his former ally; revamped his image to appear more pious; relentlessly courted Muslim organisations and made a point of initiating new policy measures to address socio-economic inequality.<sup>13</sup> His subsequent alliance with Nahdlatul Ulama, one of Indonesia's strongest Islamic mass organisations, helped him fight against the persistent rumours, spread over social media, that he was a covert Communist of Chinese descent. These measures made little difference in Islamist support for Prabowo. It did make it harder for them to paint a stark contrast between a supposedly Islamic and anti-Islamic leader.

The call by veteran politician Amien Rais on 31 March 2019 – two weeks before voting day – to overturn the election results through “people power” (i.e. a massive turnout in the streets) if Prabowo lost drew little Islamist support.<sup>14</sup> Amien's controversial statement created a rift within Prabowo's campaign team between the nationalists and pragmatist Islamists on the one hand and the “non-structural” Islamists on the other. The term “people power” carried a much more negative connotation than “defend Islam”. The latter merely called on Muslims to vote only for fellow Muslims based on a literalist reading of the Qur'an. “People power”, as promoted by some Prabowo political allies, was essentially a call to undermine the legitimacy of Indonesia's election system and bring Prabowo to power through sheer force of numbers. As such, there was much greater risk that the Jokowi government, and especially the increasingly politicised police force, could portray any mass protests as unconstitutional and even treasonous.

Two other factors dramatically raised the danger level of the post-election demonstrations: the claim by the president's chief of staff, Gen. (Ret.) Moeldoko, that certain “invisible hands” were planning to turn “people power” into a 1998-like riot; and police discovery of terrorism plots by two separate and unrelated pro-ISIS cells that were planning to target the 22 May protestors and police respectively. Both of these points will be elaborated further below but it was clear that this time around, the protests would be no “picnic”.

### III. ISLAMIST INTERNAL DISPUTES IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE 2019 ELECTION

Islamist doubts over Prabowo's merits and depth of religious commitment contributed to declining unity before and during most of the election campaign. Because of those reservations – and other tactical and ideological differences – they could not agree on how much and what kind of support they should give him. Salafi-modernists and non-FPI traditionalist groups thought that merely voting for him was sufficient; FPI and FUI wanted to go all-out and join the official campaign team. Some elements in HTI did not even want to vote because of their strong ideological objections to democracy.

But another debate emerged towards the end of the campaign that caused far more division: in the event that Prabowo lost in what most of his supporters believed was going to be a fraudulent election, should they accept the inevitable and go back to their daily activities or do whatever they could to get the results overturned? Each of the Islamist groups had its own analysis of costs

12 One pro-Jokowi group developed a large twitter following with the hashtag “Where did Prabowo pray on Friday” (PrabowSholatJumatDiMana), implying that he did not attend Friday prayers. See Margaret Scott, “Indonesia's New Islamist Politics”, *New York Review of Books*, 18 April 2019.

13 IPAC, “Anti-Ahok to Anti-Jokowi: Islamist Influence on Indonesia's 2019 Election Campaign”, Report No. 55, 15 March 2019, pp. 6-8.

14 “Amin Rais Siapkan ‘People Power’ Hadapi Kecurangan Pemilu”, *cnnindonesia.com*, 31 March 2019.

and benefits. The Salafi-modernists and conservative Jakarta-based traditionalists had most to lose from a police crackdown; FPI had most to lose from a Prabowo defeat.

### A. *High vs. Low Politics*

Islamist support for Prabowo had always been half-hearted because he came from a mixed-faith family (his mother and brother were Christians) and had a secular education. Islamists initially also doubted his ability to win, as he had lost two elections before, for the vice-presidency in 2009 and for the presidency in 2014. In June 2018, GNPf included Prabowo's name on a list of acceptable candidates, but the list included other politicians with stronger Islamic credentials, such as Ahmad Herwayan of the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) and Anies Baswedan, the Muslim intellectual who defeated Ahok in the 2017 election for Jakarta governor – after Ahok was already on trial. By August 2018, it became clear that only Jokowi and Prabowo were qualified to join the presidential race, so GNPf pressured Prabowo to at least accept an Islamic scholar to be his running mate. But after some bargaining with Gerindra, GNPf capitulated and announced full support for Prabowo and his choice for vice-president, Muslim businessman Sandiaga Uno, who was also a Gerindra official and deputy governor of Jakarta. By September 2018, the more pragmatic Islamists, including GNPf leader Yusuf Martak and FPI's Slamet Ma'arif, officially joined Prabowo's campaign team (*tim sukses*).

The Salafi-modernists, however, took a more cautious approach. Bachtiar Nasir, the influential Salafi leader, believed that respectable ulama should focus on “high politics” – Islamising the community through religious outreach (*dakwah*) – rather than engaging in “dirty” electoral politics. There was another reason for his shying away from politics. In 2017, the police had investigated him on charges of money laundering and terrorism financing, part of a systematic effort to criminally prosecute the leaders of the 212 Movement. In Bachtiar's case, the charges were not backed by strong evidence, so he walked free.<sup>15</sup> But they so affected his professional activities – among other things, he was banned from giving sermons on national television where he had developed a huge audience – that he laid low through 2018. His colleague Zaitun Rasmin, leader of Indonesia's largest Salafi organisation, Wahdah Islamiyah, publicly supported Prabowo – although other Wahdah leaders stopped him from getting too close to the campaign team.<sup>16</sup> The only member of an ultra-conservative preacher network led by Bachtiar who officially joined Prabowo's campaign team was Haikal Hassan.<sup>17</sup> Salafis for the most part were interested in moral and social transformation that would meet their standards of doctrinal purity. To them, the best strategy to achieve this long-term agenda was through expanding Salafi schools and businesses that ranged from Muslim fashion to pilgrimage travel agencies to property development.

15 In February 2017, police questioned Bachtiar over two allegations. One was diverting Rp 3 billion (\$ 212,000) of the funds raised by GNPf for the anti-Ahok rallies. It turned out that he had used the bank account of another charitable foundation owned by his colleague to receive some donations for GNPf, which was a breach of the Social Organisation Law but did not necessarily constitute money laundering. By late February, the head of the foundation was declared a suspect while Bachtiar walked free. The second allegation concerned terrorism financing. Bachtiar apparently took Rp 1 billion (\$ 70,500) out of the funds raised by GNPf and donated it to Syria conflict victims through the Turkish Islamic relief organisation, IHH, which is conservative but not violent. The scrutiny did not hold up and he was released. Then on 7 May 2019, the police suddenly announced that they found new evidence that implicated Bachtiar in the money laundering case. IPAC, op. cit. “After Ahok”, p. 18.

16 There was a disagreement between Wahdah's Jakarta branch and its main leadership in Makassar, South Sulawesi. The latter was concerned that Zaitun's involvement in national politics would divert the organisation's attention and resources away from its main stronghold in South Sulawesi. See Chris Chaplin, “From South Sulawesi to Jakarta (and back again): The *Aksi Bela Islam* in Makassar”, paper presented at the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) Conference, Sydney, 3-5 July 2018.

17 This network was the Indonesian Council for Young Intellectuals and Islamic Scholars (Majelis Intelektual dan Ulama Muda Indonesia, MIUMI). Established in 2012, its members consisted of clerics and activists drawn from Salafi groups, Muhammadiyah and the Gontor network. It also included a few men close to non-violent extremist organisations. For more on MIUMI, see IPAC, “AfterAhok”, op.cit., p. 6

The Salafi position changed on 1 April 2019, when Bachtiar Nasir announced his long-awaited pledge to support Prabowo.<sup>18</sup> Bachtiar apparently came to believe that the election campaign had developed into an all-out war between Islam and “secular-communist” forces and therefore he had to take sides. The “secular-communist” forces in the Salafis’ view were led by Jokowi. The president had long been dogged by rumours that his father was an ethnic Chinese and member of the long-gone Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). But what Islamists meant by “secular-communist forces” also included Nahdlatul Ulama, the Liberal Islam Network (JIL), the Shi’a minority and LGBT rights activists – all of which were said to be represented in Jokowi’s camp. They saw the NU chairman Said Aqil Siradj as an enemy for his hostility to “Wahhabism” (“Wahhabi” is used in Indonesia as a pejorative term for Salafi) and his openness to the Shi’a community. They called NU liberal because it promoted an Islam rooted in local history and culture (Islam Nusantara) which, in their view, deviated from “pure”, literalist Islam. At the same time, they labelled NU “pro-communist” for receiving grants from the Chinese embassy in Jakarta and for regularly welcoming Chinese diplomats to its office. Some Liberal Islam activists had joined a new progressive political organisation, the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), that joined Jokowi’s coalition and spoke strongly against any formal application of Islamic law. On top of it all, some women activists in Jokowi’s camp – including some from an NU background – expressed support for LGBT rights. The Islamist perception that NU was part of this dangerously leftwing alliance persisted even after the conservative NU leader, Ma’ruf Amien, became Jokowi’s running mate. Despite the fact that it was Ma’ruf’s testimony that sent Ahok to jail, Islamists did not see his appointment as an effort to appease the Islamic right (as many disappointed Jokowi backers did).<sup>19</sup> They saw it more as a declaration of war because it signalled NU’s full entry into Jokowi’s coalition.

Bachtiar had come to accept that the battle against Jokowi and the “secular communist forces” needed his support. But his backing for Prabowo was probably a more calculated move as well. First, he may have felt it was safe to resume political activities, since the police seemed to have stopped the criminal investigation into his activities. Second, by joining the campaign at a critical time, Bachtiar may also have wanted to prove that his charisma could tip the odds in Prabowo’s favour. He boasted that unlike other preachers who enjoyed formal positions in Prabowo’s campaign and gained material rewards, he had no political or material interest whatsoever. His only interest, he said, was “to become the successor of Muhammad Natsir”, i.e. to popularise the concept of Islamic integration with nationalism and Pancasila.<sup>20</sup> He claimed it was urgent because Prabowo’s opponents were accusing the Islamists of having a hidden agenda to turn the democratic republic of Indonesia into a caliphate. Instead of joining Prabowo’s *tim sukses*, the Salafis used as their campaign platform the Council of Indonesia Servants (Majelis Pelayan Indonesia, MPI), an organisation of anti-Jokowi ulama that Bachtiar helped found. Thus, even as they joined the political campaign, Salafis still tried to frame their activity as a noble cause rather than pure pragmatism.

### B. Concerns over Muslim Polarisation

Like the Salafi-modernists, other conservative Muslim groups chose to support Prabowo only to a limited extent. This included the traditionalist Majelis Rasulullah, which boasts a few million

18 “Dukung Prabowo Sandi, Bachtiar Nasir: Tuduhan Khilafah Itu Tolol”, *viva.co.id*, 2 April 2019.

19 Ma’ruf Amin was also the chairman of MUI when it issued a fatwa on Ahok’s blasphemy on 11 October 2016. IPAC, *op. cit.*, “After Ahok”, p. 2.

20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pc9X9PZ-8>. Muhammad Natsir was a former Prime Minister (1950-1951) during Indonesia’s brief experiment with parliamentary system. He was also the leader of Masyumi, the modernist-dominated Islamist party (1945-1960) that was banned by President Sukarno and then metamorphosed into Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII), a conservative Islamic propagation organisation.



members nationally, and the modernist Pesantren Gontor, one of Indonesia's oldest and most prestigious Islamic boarding schools that has a vast franchise and influential alumni network.

The top leader of Majelis Rasulullah, Habib Nabil Musawa, was a politician from the political party PKS, Gerindra's coalition partner. But the *habaib* (plural of *habib*, indicating descent from the Prophet) of Majelis Rasulullah were not as unified against Jokowi as they had been against Ahok. Some were worried by increasing factionalism among Muslims themselves and wished to restore Majelis Rasulullah to its true nature as an inclusive spiritual community.<sup>21</sup> Throughout 2018, Majelis Rasulullah invited both Prabowo-Sandi and Ma'ruf Amien (but not Jokowi) to its events, but co-founder Habib Jindan bin Novel bin Salim Jindan moved closer to the Jokowi camp.<sup>22</sup> The desire to maintain unity appears to have decreased their militancy in backing Prabowo.

Another traditionalist group that was involved in 2016 but less so in 2019 was FUHAB, the umbrella group of Betawi ulama that controls thousands of pesantrens, mosques and *majelis taklim* in the Greater Jakarta area.<sup>23</sup> While they generally did back Prabowo and encouraged their community to vote for him, Jokowi did not pose as much of an immediate threat to their way of life as they thought Ahok had. They thus did not feel any obligation to bring him down through non-electoral means.

Like FUHAB, Pesantren Gontor played a critical mobilising role in the 212 Movement – its alumni groups sent large contingents and donations to the anti-Ahok rallies.<sup>24</sup> However in January 2019, Gontor *kyais* announced that the pesantren would take a neutral position in the presidential election and also prohibited their alumni to use Gontor's name in political rallies.<sup>25</sup> The statement came after a group of Gontor alumni pledged support for Jokowi, which prompted a counter-movement from pro-Prabowo graduates. It is worth noting that Gontor alumni were represented at the top levels of both Jokowi and Prabowo camps. Religious Affairs Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin was in Jokowi's team while Hidayat Nur Wahid of PKS and Muhammadiyah's Din Syamsudin were aligned with Prabowo. As with Majelis Rasulullah, Gontor may have been worried that too much involvement in politics could worsen Muslim polarisation, especially within its alumni networks.

### C. *The Ambiguity of Hizbut Tahrir*

As with Gontor, HTI was officially neutral in the election but for a different reason: it rejected democracy as a system that values man-made over God-given law. At the same time, the organisation needed powerful allies to lift the ban that Jokowi's government had imposed on it in 2017. It therefore had to carefully thread its way through the politics of the 2019 election. Leaders like Ismail Yusanto, the group's spokesman, and Felix Siaw, a popular preacher, actively criticised the Jokowi government on social media and in offline sermons, but they were never directly involved in Prabowo's campaign. Yusanto said that HTI members were free to decide whether to vote or abstain.<sup>26</sup>

Since 2016, HTI had been pursuing a dual strategy. Internally, leaders told the cadres to abide by the organisation's doctrine that democracy is *haram* and any democratically-elected

21 Ahmad Syarif Syechbubakar, "Meet the Habibs: the Yemen Connection in Jakarta Politics", indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au, 14 December 2017.

22 Habib Jindan accepted Jokowi's invitation to a Maulid celebration at the Presidential Palace in December 2017. He has also spoken up against FPI and HTI at seminars organised by NU.

23 Syukron Makmun graduated from Pesantren Sidogiri, which is known as the source of NU's hardline faction known as Garis Lurus (Straight Path).

24 IPAC, op. cit. "After Ahok", p. 7.

25 "Alumni Diimbau Tak Pakai Nama Gontor di Pilpres", republika.co.id, 29 January 2019.

26 "Eks-HTI Tak Akan Pilih Capres yang Dzalim, Dukung Prabowo?", akurat.co, 13 September 2018.

government should be considered an illegitimate oppressor (*thaghut*), though some apparently allowed voting for individual candidates committed to formal application of Islamic law.<sup>27</sup> Externally however, they joined other Islamists to argue that Islam prohibits non-Muslims as leaders. During the anti-Ahok campaign in 2016, HTI led some of the biggest protests to demand Ahok's imprisonment but refrained from supporting his rivals in the gubernatorial race.

The reluctance of many HTI members to cast their votes became a sore point with other Islamist groups. On 9 April 2017, when Jakartans went to the polls to elect a governor, an online portal run by Bachtiar Nasir's network published an article that criticised the HTI stance. The author noted:

I asked a HTI leader I knew about HTI's position [in the gubernatorial election], his answer remained the same. [HTI] would abstain [...] You don't want candidate A to win, but you won't vote for candidate B [...] it won't help candidate B get more votes, whereas all supporters of candidate A likely will turn up. Then who will win? Where's your logic? [...] Let's temporarily tone down your belief that democracy is an idolatrous system [...] There will be time for that, but not today [...] not this election.<sup>28</sup>

In the lead-up to the April 2019 presidential election, HTI's Felix Siauw was careful to not participate in Prabowo's rallies and only expressed his approval in subtle terms. For example, on 7 April he posted on social media a picture of Prabowo's Great Rally (Kampanye Akbar) and praised it as "The Rise of the Ummah" – although he did not attend. On 16 April, a day before the election, Felix tweeted:

Some people asked, which one is preferable? The first, a leader who personally might be pious but is surrounded by unjust tyrants. Or the second, someone who personally might be unjust but is surrounded by pious people? It will be answered: For the first one, his devotion is between himself and God. His own weakness and the people around him [would bring] harm to humankind. As for the second one, his unjustness is between himself and God. The good people around him [would bring] joy to humankind [...] A leader does not have to be ideal, he just has to open his heart to the advice of *ulama*.<sup>29</sup>

The post, which deliberately omitted the candidates' names, was cheered by his fans who had already committed themselves to Prabowo. But many other HTI members decided not to vote on 17 April.<sup>30</sup>

#### D. FPI: The Group with the Most to Lose

FPI's role in the Islamist coalition was the most complicated. Of all components, it was most committed to a Prabowo victory. Habib Rizieq, catapulted to a position of national influence as a result of the anti-Ahok campaign, had positioned himself as the spiritual leader of the anti-Jokowi forces, but his rhetoric went beyond what he was able to deliver – including his call to

27 IPAC communication with a HTI recruiter, 23 April 2019. See also Felix Siauw, "Fatwa Golput Isyarat Gagalnya Demokrasi", [felixsiauw.com](http://felixsiauw.com), 16 February 2012.

28 "Ajakan kepada HTI Agar Gunakan Hak Pilih dan Jawaban HTI", [wartapilihan.com](http://wartapilihan.com), 19 April 2017.

29 <https://twitter.com/felixsiauw/status/1118282121796182016?lang=en>

30 IPAC communication with a HTI recruiter, 23 April 2019.

overturn the election results by force.<sup>31</sup>

FPI also had the most to lose from a Prabowo defeat, and its main aim in helping organise the election protests was self-protection. Its members believed that the Jokowi government was determined to dissolve them institutionally. Not only had Rizieq been forced into exile but there was now concern that the Ministry of Home Affairs might not renew FPI's registration as a mass organisation. The last registration expired on 20 June 2019, and FPI had submitted a request for an extension. As of 25 June, the Ministry said FPI's application was still incomplete. If it failed to get its registration renewed, FPI would effectively become an illegal organisation.<sup>32</sup>

FPI therefore not only became an integral part of Prabowo's campaign but also supported Gerindra's plan to organise the post-election protests, together with its frequent collaborator, Forum Umat Islam (FUI), under the leadership of Muhammad al-Khaththath. FPI's Munarman and FUI spokesman Bernard Abdul Jabbar were appointed as field coordinators for the 21-22 May election protests.<sup>33</sup> Both were known for campaigns against religious minorities, with Munarman more the political operator and Bernard the rabble-rouser.<sup>34</sup> While Prabowo's team and volunteer groups did the heavy lifting of mass mobilisation, they may have chosen Munarman and Bernard as the on-site operatives due to their extensive experience in organising orderly rallies and their proven negotiating skills with the police.

#### *E. The "Non-Violent" Salafi Jihadists*

FPI was aided in the presidential campaign and post-election protests by some former jihadists, all of whom were staunchly anti-ISIS. These included Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) and Jamaah Ansharus Syariah (JAS), former jihadist groups that had moved to above-ground non-violent shari'ah advocacy. The involvement of some of these groups helped the police build a case, on shaky evidence, of the supposed operational links between Islamist and violent extremist groups.

Both MMI and JAS had been active in the 212 Movement and later in the presidential campaign. Some MMI members in Yogyakarta and Central Java also worked for Prabowo's volunteer group, Koppasandi.<sup>35</sup> In Solo, Central Java, both MMI and JAS had worked together under the umbrella group the Shari'a Council of Surakarta (Dewan Syariah Kota Surakarta, DSKS) to organise anti-Ahok rallies in 2016-2017. JAS had sent hundreds of people from Solo and the surrounding area to Jakarta on 2 December 2016 and the subsequent 212 Reunion rallies in December 2017 and 2018.

Police had particular concerns about one DSKS leader: Ust Muinudinillah Basri, the older brother of a prominent Indonesian ISIS fighter, Muhammad Saifuddin alias Abu Walid, who

31 On 22 April 2019, a video of Rizieq appeared on FPI's YouTube channel saying that in 2014, Prabowo had refused his advice to mobilise a people power movement to protest what he and others saw as a stolen election and instead challenged Jokowi's victory through the Constitutional Court. In 2019, however, Rizieq said that Prabowo finally gained the confidence to choose people power over legal appeal because "the spirit of 212 Movement" meant that millions of people would turn up for him. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyFjIH0shJU>. See also Ian Wilson, "Between Throwing Rocks and a Hard Place: FPI and the Jakarta Riots," [www.newmandala.org](http://www.newmandala.org), June 2019.

32 "Izin Habis dan Persyaratan Belum Lengkap, Status FPI Ilegal?" [tirto.co.id](http://tirto.co.id), 25 June 2019.

33 "Umat Islam di Persimpangan Kerusuhan 21-22 Mei 2019," [jurnalislam.com](http://jurnalislam.com), 24 May 2019.

34 Bernard Abdul Jabbar is a former Catholic missionary who converted to Islam while studying Arabic at the Saudi-funded LIPIA in late 1990s. He was involved in inciting violence against Ahmadi community between 2005 and 2008. Having been active in the conservative Islamic missionary group, Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII), in 2018 he stood as a candidate for the Jakarta legislature from PBB (an Islamist party close to DDII) but withdrew because PBB switched to the Jokowi side. Munarman is a former human rights lawyer who turned militant after befriending members of FPI and HTI. In 2008 he was imprisoned for assaulting pro-Ahmadiyah protesters. As of 2019, he served as FPI's spokesperson and Secretary General of GNPF.

35 Koppasandi stands for Korps Ulama Pendukung Prabowo Sandi (The Islamic Scholars' Corps for Prabowo-Sandi). Launched in November 2018, its members include Muslim activists from FPI, FUI, MMI and DDII.

was killed in Syria in early 2019.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Muinudinillah was on the campaign team for Prabowo-Sandi in Solo led police and the State Intelligence Agency (Badan Intelijen Negara, BIN) to believe that the Prabowo campaign was backed by violent extremists or at least by individuals who favoured a caliphate over the Indonesian republic.<sup>37</sup>

Intra-Islamist differences ran deep and left their alliance in disarray through 2018 and early 2019. They reunited just in time for the 17 April election but soon had a much more urgent matter on their hands – whether to try and force disqualification of Jokowi and if so, how.

#### IV. PEOPLE POWER AND THE THIRD ULAMA CONGRESS

The calls from pro-Prabowo politicians for “people power” scared many Islamists away. After Amien Rais made the first appeal on 31 March, other politicians followed suit, including Eggi Sudjana, a lawyer and politician with longstanding connections to Prabowo. In a video that instantly went viral, Eggi addressed a crowd in front of Prabowo’s residence on 17 April, a few hours after the election, saying: “When people power happens, we won’t need to follow the legal procedures anymore, because it already reflects people’s sovereignty. The people can inaugurate Prabowo directly, no need to wait until 20 October [the official date for presidential inauguration].”<sup>38</sup>

These calls came as Islamist leaders were still debating about what to do next. On 1 May, they held the third Ulama Convention (Ijtima Ulama III) to discuss the alleged electoral fraud and how to respond to it. The first two conventions, in July 2018 and September 2018 respectively, were overtly pro-Prabowo gatherings where the 212 Islamist leaders bargained with their political patrons to produce important political decisions that would be presented to the public as the “ulama’s command” (*komando ulama*) that all true Muslims should obey.<sup>39</sup>

Ijtima Ulama III took place in Sentul, south of Jakarta, and was attended by 1,000 preachers from across the country, including Bachtiar Nasir. They met under a large banner that featured the face of FPI leader Habib Rizieq Shihab as if appearing out of the clouds – an indication of who the acknowledged leader of the gathering was, even if in his self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia, he could not be present.<sup>40</sup> This image of Rizieq as *deus ex machina* also appeared on many posters supporting Gerindra candidates, as if to acknowledge his role as the de facto religious force behind the Prabowo camp.<sup>41</sup>

The Ijtima issued a five-point statement, saying the ulama:

1. Conclude that various forms of irregularities and crimes occurred during the 2019 election in a way that was structured, systematic and massive.
2. Urge and request the team of Prabowo-Sandi to submit their objections via a legal mechanism and legal procedures.

36 Ust Muinudinillah Basri was once active in the Islamist party PKS but has never been involved in terrorism. His brother, Abu Walid, had a long record of transnational terrorist activities. See IPAC, “Marawi, the ‘East Asia Wilayah’ and Indonesia”, Report No. 38, 21 July 2017.

37 Ust Muinudinillah notably spoke at the big Prabowo rally in Solo held by the Brotherhood of 212 Alumni (PA 212) on 13 January 2019. “Politik Identitas Kembali Digarap PA 212, Tabligh Akbar di Solo Terbuka Dukung Prabowo”, inibenar.com, 13 January 2019.

38 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7otixdTGHuo>

39 Conservative Muslim leaders who attended Ijtima Ulama I and II included Yusuf Martak, the GNPf chairman; Betawi cleric KH Abdul Rasyid Abdullah Syafi’ie; Slamet Ma’arif, leader of the Brotherhood of 212 Alumni (Persatuan Alumni 212, PA212); Muhammad al-Khaththath, leader of Islamic Ummah Forum (Forum Umat Islam, FUI) and Zaitun Rasmin, head of Salafi-modernist group Wahdah Islamiyah. For more on Ijtima Ulama I and II, see “Anti-Ahok to Anti-Jokowi: Islamist Influence on Indonesia’s 2019 Election Campaign”, Report No. 55, 15 March 2019, pp. 6-8.

40 On the incidents that led to Rizieq’s exile, see IPAC, op. cit., “After Ahok”, pp. 17-18.

41 Wilson, op. cit.

3. Urge the General Elections Commission (KPU) and Election Oversight Body (Bawaslu) to decide to nullify the results or disqualify Slate No.1 [Jokowi and Ma'ruf were listed as No.1 on the ballot, Prabowo-Sandi as No.2].
4. Urge the ummah and all Indonesians to safeguard and accompany this struggle to uphold the law in a manner that is legal, constitutional and in keeping with Islamic law.
5. Decide that opposing the fraud, crimes and injustice is in keeping with God's order to "enjoin good and forbid evil" (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*) and is a legal and constitutional way to preserve the unity of the NKRI and the sovereignty of the people.<sup>42</sup>

The last point was effectively a religious justification for the protests. Behind closed doors, FPI branch leaders from Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan who attended the Ijtima were reportedly instructed to organise their followers to go to Jakarta on 22 May, when the KPU was set to announce the official results and declare the victor of the presidential race. Local branches of FPI and GNPF also planned to hold similar rallies at the local offices of Bawaslu.<sup>43</sup>

Media reports, however, suggested major differences were apparent at the Ijtima between the ulama on Prabowo's campaign team, who stressed the goal of disqualifying Jokowi, and Bachtiar Nasir, the Salafi leader, who stressed the need for everything to be done via constitutional means. Bachtiar and his colleague Zaitun Rasmin had carefully built up an image as "the polite Islamists" and they did not want to see it ruined.<sup>44</sup> But there was much more at stake: if the election protests got out of hand and the Salafis were tarred by association, then their schools and businesses could be seriously hurt.

Their fears became reality. On 7 May, the police suddenly declared Bachtiar Nasir to be a suspect in the old money laundering case; they claimed to have found new evidence against him.<sup>45</sup> Bachtiar immediately left for Saudi Arabia on 10 May – apparently on Prabowo's suggestion. His colleague, Haikal Hassan, also fled to Mecca on 14 May after he was charged with hate speech.<sup>46</sup> Bachtiar's absence immediately decreased Salafi participation in Ramadhan events (the fasting month is normally a time of heightened religious activities) and fundraising activities organised by his lucrative "religious firm", the Arrahman Qur'anic Learning (AQL) Islamic Centre. On 21 May, Zaitun Rasmin gave a lecture at AQL in which he told people to stay calm. He likened the electoral failure to Prophet Muhammad's defeat in the Battle of Uhud, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise for it motivated Muslims to conduct introspection, solidified their faith and unity and eventually helped them conquer Mecca. The younger Islamic teachers at AQL refrained from any mention of politics throughout Ramadhan (5 May – 4 June 2019) due to fear of losing livelihood sources.

To make up for the Salafis' withdrawal, FPI and FUI pulled in "celebrity" preachers with huge social media followings who made frequent appearances on national television. One of them was the traditionalist Ust Abdul Somad who by June 2019 had 9.6 million followers on Instagram. In the lead-up to the election, Somad was courted by both Jokowi and Prabowo. After taking a wait-and-see approach, he eventually declared support for Prabowo, in a televised show where he symbolically gifted his prayer beads to Prabowo – whom most of his conservative Muslim fans were already backing.

42 "Ijtima Ulama Jilid III Hasilkan 5 Keputusan, TKN 01 Bilang Terserah Aja", *jawapos.com*, 1 May 2019.

43 Information from FPI-Solo, May 2019.

44 For a comprehensive background on Wahdah Islamiyah, see Chris Chaplin, "Imagining the Land of the Two Holy Mosques: The social and doctrinal importance of Saudi Arabia in Indonesian Salafi discourse", *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 2014, Vol. 7, Issue 2, pp. 217-236.

45 "Bachtiar Nasir Sebarkan Video 'Korban Politisasi', Polisi Beberkan Bukti-Bukti", *bbc.com*, 8 May 2019.

46 An audio recording of Haikal Hassan was circulated on Twitter, in which he claimed that Prabowo suggested the prosecuted preachers flee to Mecca. See [https://twitter.com/billray\\_/status/1127598745938485249?lang=en](https://twitter.com/billray_/status/1127598745938485249?lang=en). See also "Mendapat Tekanan, Ustadz Haikal Hassan Bertolak ke Mekkah", *eramuslim.com*, 14 May 2019.

On 11 May, Somad, accompanied by FPI and FUI leaders, appealed to all Muslims to follow the “ulama command” under the leadership of Rizieq Shihab. In a video statement shared on YouTube and viewed by millions, Somad told fellow Muslims to stand behind FPI because “the wolves only eat sheep that get separated from the flock”.<sup>47</sup> He also told them to not be afraid of getting arrested and cited a Qur’anic verse “God is with us”, invoking a dangerous us vs. them narrative. While he did not explicitly refer to 22 May, some social media users who circulated the video on WhatsApp groups and social media added tendentious titles such as “Ust Somad’s Message Regarding 22 May 2019”.<sup>48</sup>

This type of messaging by FPI and its partners, however, never succeeded in rekindling the kind of grassroots enthusiasm that fuelled the anti-Ahok campaign. Gerindra politician Fadli Zon had to intervene and go around to several mosques in Jakarta to ask that pro-Prabowo protestors be allowed to stay there for the May protests.<sup>49</sup> Rizieq’s absence was one reason why FPI increasingly lost touch with its rank-and-file followers. As FPI took on a bigger national role, it also neglected its urban-poor grassroots base in Jakarta, which also became a factor in its inability to turn out the masses that the Gerindra people and its own leaders expected.<sup>50</sup>

To back up FPI, MMI issued a written statement on 17 May 2019 that instructed its own Lashkar to “galvanise [the people] to struggle against [electoral] fraud”, though it is unclear how many people they managed to mobilise.<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Jibriel, the son of MMI founder and owner of Islamist website arramah.com, took part in the 21-22 May protests at Bawaslu with other MMI members.<sup>52</sup> The plan of JAS and MMI in Solo to provide buses for supporters to go to Jakarta on 21 May failed because the police prohibited all bus companies to facilitate pro-Prabowo protestors. Still, many travelled in private cars.<sup>53</sup> This included five members of JAS from Garut who were arrested on suspicion of terrorism on 21 May by an overzealous local police team that did not realise that JAS was an anti-ISIS organisation that had never been involved in violence.<sup>54</sup>

## V. POLICE ACTION AND THE CHANGING POLITICAL CALCULUS

The willingness of the police to step up the use of criminal charges against Islamists and other opposition leaders was part of a broader government strategy aimed at discouraging involvement in the protests.<sup>55</sup> It included stepped-up monitoring of – and later crackdown on – social media; stricter than usual enforcement of permits for public gatherings; a concerted campaign to stop the “politicisation of mosques”, in partnership with local religious agencies such as the Inter-religious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, FKUB) and the Indonesian

47 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNWL\\_H41A-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNWL_H41A-U)

48 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRzQQEMXMFY>

49 “Fadli Zon Minta Izin Masjid Tangkuban Perahu untuk Singgah Massa 22 Mei”, tempo.co, 21 May 2019.

50 Ibid.

51 “Sikap Majelis Mujahidin Terhadap Kejahatan Kemanusiaan dan Kecurangan Pemilu”, majelismujahidin.com, 18 May 2019.

52 Jibril posted a live video of the protests on his Facebook page.

53 “Ikut Aksi 22 Mei di KPU Ratusan Orang dari Berbagai Elemen di Solo Berangkat ke Jakarta”, solo.tribunnews.com, 20 May 2019.

54 They were released without charge after a few days in custody. See “Terduga Teroris Ditangkap di Garut Saat Hendak ke Jakarta”, detik.com, 21 May 2019. JAS had split from Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT), an organisation founded by Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, in 2014 after Ba’asyir declared his support for ISIS.

55 Police arrested several opposition leaders prior to 22 May on charges ranging from rebellion (*makar*) to spreading hatred. On 14 May, they arrested Eggi Sudjana for alleged rebellion, using his 17 April speech as evidence. Gerindra politician Permadi Satrio Wiwoho was questioned by police on 17 May for alleged hate speech against the police and General Election Commission (KPU); he apparently said on a viral YouTube video that both institutions were biased towards Jokowi and therefore should not be trusted. Lieus Sungkharisma, a Prabowo campaign spokesperson, was also charged with rebellion. See “Klaim Minim Bukti”, *Tempo*, 20-26 May 2019, pp. 34-35.

Mosque Council (Dewan Masjid Indonesia, DMI); and raids on bus stations, harbours and highways to prevent people from coming to Jakarta.<sup>56</sup>

Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law and Security Wiranto added a New Order-like element to a growing atmosphere of repression by forming a legal experts' team to monitor and evaluate "the statements, behaviours or thoughts of certain public figures" that might "stir the public" or create disorder in the post-election context.<sup>57</sup>

Police also raised the terrorism alarm, arresting dozens of suspects whom they said were planning to use the planned protests as cover to mount attacks. That claim was greeted with widespread scepticism because it seemed too convenient.<sup>58</sup> After using so many other tactics to discourage participation in the protests, why not throw in some alarmism about terrorist attacks as well? The threats, however, were real, even if police spokesmen occasionally glossed over how many of those arrested had a genuine link to the plots.

#### A. *The Terrorism Suspects*

From 2 to 21 May 2019, Detachment 88, the counter-terrorism unit of the police, arrested 41 suspected terrorists, including fifteen who were involved in planning violence linked to the protests. Police were worried that some of the others would try to exploit 22 May protests as well, and there was a precedent for their concern. At the anti-Ahok rally on 4 November 2016, a pro-ISIS group from Jakarta, led by a cleric named Abu Nusaibah, tried to provoke violence so that its members could seize guns from police in the subsequent chaos.<sup>59</sup> The effort failed and Abu Nusaibah and eleven others were arrested, but the police were wary of another attempt.

The fifteen linked to actual plots belonged to two separate and unrelated pro-ISIS cells that were not in communication with each other. One consisted of former members of Jamaah Anshorud Daulah (JAD) from Bekasi and Lampung led by Dede Yusuf alias Bondan. JAD is Indonesia's largest pro-ISIS alliance. The second was a non-JAD group that called itself Partisans of Islamic State – Depok Circle, led by Benny Gunawan alias Bowie alias Abu Nafla.

Both groups were inspired by the April 2018 exhortation of ISIS spokesman Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir to supporters in Iraq to attack polling places when elections took place there in May. Al-Muhajir suggested that anyone who took part in the vote would be considered an apostate and become a legitimate target of jihad.<sup>60</sup> His speech, which was widely circulated on social media, encouraged Indonesian ISIS supporters to plan attacks at the time of the Indonesian

56 FKUB operates under the auspices of local governments and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. DMI was first established by Soeharto in 1972 as a means to control mosques and was originally an affiliate group of Soeharto's Golkar party, though its status later changed to a government-funded mass organisation (much like the Indonesian Ulama Council, MUI). Like FKUB, DMI's structures stretch from the national down to the provincial and district levels. Vice President Jusuf Kalla has been the chairman of DMI's central board from 2012. In 2018, Budi Gunawan, the head of the State Intelligence Agency and the former National Police Deputy Chief, joined DMI's council of experts. This coincided with BIN's decision to vet employees at government agencies, public universities and state enterprises for possible extremist links, following a research finding that 41 mosques at those institutions had been "radicalised". Closer to May 2019, police intensified its raids on bus terminals and ports to physically stop protestors. On 20 May 2019, they stopped five FPI members in Sumedang, West Java before they could catch a bus to Jakarta. In East Java, the local police stopped 1,200 alleged protestors – including from FPI's base in Kalimantan – who were headed to Jakarta. See "Polda Jawa Timur Pulangkan 1200 Calon Peserta Aksi 22 Mei", *tempo.co*, 20 May 2019.

57 "Wiranto: Pemerintah Bentuk Tim Pengkaji Ucapan Tokoh yang Langgar Hukum", *kompas.tv*, 7 May 2019. See also "Tim Hukum Bentukkan Wiranto Mulai Bekerja, Pemerintah Makin Mantap Tindak Perilaku Inkonstitusional", *kompas.com*, 10 May 2019.

58 "Polisi Ungkap Potensi Teror di Aksi 22 Mei, BPN: Narasi Teroris Politik", *detik.com*, 18 May 2019.

59 "Polisi: Demo 4 November Ditunggangi Kelompok Abu Nusaibah", *tirto.id*, 28 November 2016.

60 "Iraq elections: ISIS threatens to target polling stations," *thenational.ae*, 23 April 2018.

election.<sup>61</sup>

### 1. *The Dede Yusuf Cell*

Dede Yusuf alias Bondan, who led the Bekasi cell, was a former member of the greater Jakarta branch of Darul Islam-Negara Islam Indonesia (DI-NII). He had graduated from the Jemaah Islamiyah-affiliated boarding school, Pesantren Al-Mutaqin in Jepara, Central Java and with NII's encouragement, became a preacher after he graduated. In 2017, he became fascinated by ISIS and its success in establishing an Islamic state in Syria and Iraq. He decided to swear an oath of loyalty to Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi and subsequently joined a JAD group in Bekasi. In 2018, however, JAD was seriously weakened, first by a court ruling that JAD was a banned organisation (meaning that even taking part in meetings was a crime) and then by a series of arrests. This included the arrest of JAD Bekasi *amir*, Iswahyudi, in August 2018 on terrorism-financing charges.

Dede gathered up the remaining members of JAD Bekasi, formed a new independent cell with the aim of undertaking violent jihad operations and began recruiting new members. Among his recruits was Eki Yudistira Wijayanto alias Rafli. Rafli owned a cell phone shop called Wanky Cell; he also had previously studied pharmacy in college, meaning he had basic knowledge of chemicals. Dede decided that the best time for an attack would be around the elections, first because of al-Muhajir's speech urging such actions, and second because Dede was convinced there would be clashes between supporters of the two candidates, regardless of who won. In such an environment, an act of terrorism could be the trigger for turning a small disturbance into a major riot that would open the door for jihad.

The group was reluctant to use a suicide bombing because they needed all the human resources they could muster and because they did not want to do a one-off operation. They wanted to undertake a continuous series of attacks, for which they would need more people. So Dede began to form a second cell, drawing in some former JAD Lampung members including the former *amir*, Solihin.<sup>62</sup> Dede then asked Rafli to study how to make remotely-detonated TATP bombs, using his chemical knowledge and some basic skills in electronics acquired from repairing cell phones. By April 2019, all the ingredients were in place for a bomb that could be detonated by Wifi.

Dede Yusuf then began discussions with his members about when and where to attack. They saw the planned 22 May protests as the perfect time and place because idolatrous supporters of democracy – even if they were the losers – would be gathering in front of the Election Oversight Body (Bawaslu).<sup>63</sup> Detachment 88, however, got wind of their plans, and between 4 and 14 May, arrested members Solihin, Rafli and Dede. It was Dede Yusuf who appeared in a video shown at a police press conference on 17 May, acknowledging his role.

61 They were not the first to be inspired by al-Muhajir's speech. There had been an earlier failed effort by a JAD group in Pasuruan to undertake a bombing at the time of the local elections in East Java in June 2018. There was also a cell in Karawang of former JAD members who planned an attack on the April 2019 election, but they were arrested in early April.

62 The link to the Lampung was through Tarafudin, a JAD-Lampung member who had once lived in Bekasi and knew Dede because he had taken part in a religious study group with JAD Bekasi. The Lampung members had been under the command of Ust. Ujang Saepurohman, *amir* of JAD-Lampung. Ujang was arrested on 3 June 2018, shortly after the riot involving terrorist suspects held at the headquarters of the mobile police brigade, Brimob, in Kelapa Dua, Depok, outside Jakarta. After Ujang's arrest, four members, including Solihin, fled to Papua where they joined five men from Bekasi. As the 2019 election approached, they split into two groups. A few went to Sulawesi, to try to join Ali Kalora and Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) in Poso, while the others decided to concentrate on attacks in the Jakarta area.

63 "Incar Momen 22 Mei. Terduga Teroris Ini Sebut Pemilu Syirik Akbar", tempo.co, 17 May 2019.



## 2. *The Bowie Jihad Cell*

Dede Yusuf's cell was not the only one planning attacks on 22 May. Between 17 and 20 May, Detachment 88 also arrested three members of a different cell that was separately planning an attack on the Bawaslu on 22 May.

The group was led by Benny Gunawan alias Bowie alias Abu Nafla, a well-paid site manager for a construction firm. Bowie was a longtime student of Abdullah Sunata, a recidivist serving his second terrorism sentence for his role in 2010 in setting up a terrorist training camp in Aceh. After the first pro-ISIS study group (*pengajian*) he was involved in was broken up by police, Bowie looked for another to join.<sup>64</sup> In late 2016, he and an ISIS supporter from Depok put together a new study group (*pengajian*) under Bowie's leadership. Some former members of Firqah Abu Hamzah (FAH) joined, including Endang alias Rafi alias Pak Jenggot.<sup>65</sup> The *pengajian* group, which began calling itself Ansharul Daulah Holoqoh Depok, initially focused on religious study and quasi-military training including archery, swimming and hiking. None of the members had previously been involved in terrorism.

Only at the end of 2018 did Bowie raise the subject of jihad attacks. He became interested after he learned that Endang, through a series of secret experiments using the manuals posted by the Indonesian ISIS operative Bahrun Naim and the Egyptian Midhat Mursi, had succeeded in making a TATP bomb.<sup>66</sup> He also learned how to make bombs from nitroglycerine. Bowie asked Endang and another friend, Muhammad Sahdi to plan an attack around the election -- which like Dede Yusuf, they considered an idolatrous celebration of democracy. They decided on a suicide attack on 22 May, but their target was the General Election Commission (KPU), which they saw as an icon of the democratic system. Bowie offered Sahdi and Endang the opportunity to become martyrs but they both decided they were not brave enough, so Bowie himself decided to do the deed. The bomb was prepared in May, but again, Detachment 88 detected their plans, and on 17 May, they arrested Endang. Bowie and Sahdi were arrested two days later.

### B. *Warnings About Possible Violence*

Police and other government officials not only used the scenario of terrorist attacks to appeal to the public to not go to the 22 May demonstration, but they also suggested that a sniper could be planning to spark violence. The basis for this concern was the arrest on 21 May of Major General (Ret.) Soenarko, a retired army general close to Prabowo who had arranged for a gun to be brought to Jakarta illegally from Aceh.<sup>67</sup> Prabowo's team, however, accused the government of fear-mongering.<sup>68</sup> The team further criticised the deployment of 30,000 police and military forces to Jakarta to guard the May protests as a form of overreaction that could trigger excessive use of force.<sup>69</sup>

All the talk of violence convinced die-hard Prabowo supporters (but not necessarily the Islamists) that chaos was inevitable and therefore they should go to the rally fully prepared. On 20 May, Prabowo supporters sent around warning messages on Telegram and WhatsApp

64 Since ISIS first emerged in 2013, Sunata's students, including Bowie, had been supporters. They set up a pro-ISIS study group in Cipayung led by a man named Donal alias Muri Akbar. This group lasted until mid-2014 when Donal was arrested by Detachment 88 for planning a bomb attack.

65 FAH is a group previously linked to Katibah Nusantara, the Indonesian military unit in ISIS-Syria. The group's founder, Muhammad Agus Supriadi alias Abu Hamzah, was from Depok and had left for Syria with his family in 2014. Abu Hamzah had been widely disliked in extremist circles for his cult-like practices but he achieved respectability not only by joining ISIS but by taking Bahrumisyah, the Katibah Nusantara commander, as his son-in-law.

66 Midhat Mursi alias Abu Khahab al-Masri was a bomb-maker for the Egyptian group Islamic Jihad who became a close associate of Osama bin Laden in al-Qaeda. He was killed in Waziristan, Pakistan in 2008.

67 "Senpi Ilegal yang Diamankan dari Mayjen Purn Soenarko Jenis Senjata Serbu", detik.com, 21 May 2019.

68 "Fadli Zon Respons Soal Terorisme di Aksi 22 Mei", republika.co.id, 19 May 2019.

69 "Jelang 22 Mei 2019, 30000 Personel TNI-Polri Disiagakan", kompas.com, 9 May 2019.

groups. One of them read:

To my beloved Mujahid and Mujahidah. Please prepare yourselves with: 1) Goggles (to prevent tear gas from entering your eyes). 2) 3M masks (so the tear gas doesn't fill your lungs). 3) 1.5 meter bamboo spears (to raise the national flag and for self-defense). 4) Slingshots and 300 pieces of 7 to 8 mm steel shot pellets.<sup>70</sup>

Everyone expected that KPU would announce the final election results during working hours on 22 May. But in an apparent effort to pre-empt the demonstrations, the commission finished the official counting early and proclaimed Jokowi as victor just after midnight on 21 May. The first protest that took place later that morning was relatively small, with around 3,000 participants. Even the larger protest on 22 May, with an estimated 6,000 people, was much smaller than expected. The organisers had previously (and unrealistically) claimed that they could bring seven million people to the streets.

The series of alarming messages from both the government and Prabowo's team may have further disconcerted his less-committed supporters and turned them away from street protests.

### C. Restrictions on Social Media

On 22 May, the Jokowi government moved to restrict the use of social media platforms – including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp – to send photos and videos, concerned that these could be used to incite violence. It was a legitimate step to take in a crisis situation, though looking forward, the government should develop clear criteria, available for public discussion, about when such drastic measures can be put in place and with what kind of review process. The move to restrict WhatsApp had unintended consequences. It drove many Prabowo supporters to Telegram, the encrypted app which has long been used by sympathisers of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On Telegram, Prabowo supporters found themselves being taunted by ISIS supporters over how democracy had failed them yet again. While as of July 2019 there was no evidence that any pro-Prabowo supporters had crossed over to violent extremism, there was plenty of evidence that ISIS sympathisers were encouraging them to do so.

## VI. ISLAMISTS AND THE RIOTERS

Information to date suggests that none of the Islamist groups involved in organising the 21 and 22 May protests orchestrated the violence that ensued, although three of the eight fatalities were FPI sympathisers.<sup>71</sup> FPI claimed that because the riot location was very close to its headquarters in Petamburan, Central Jakarta, the police mistook some of its members for rioters.<sup>72</sup>

On 21 May, the protest at Bawaslu proceeded peacefully from afternoon to evening, with protestors reluctantly dispersing by 9 pm. Indonesian Police Chief Tito Karnavian recounted that around 11 pm, some 1,200 people came from different directions, swarmed into the areas around Bawaslu and attacked the Brigade Mobile (Brimob) anti-riot police with Molotov cocktails, firecrackers and rocks.<sup>73</sup> Having shown initial restraint, the overwhelmed police

70 Telegram "Adil Makmur" Group, 20 May 2019.

71 "Peluru Maut Siapa Punya", *Tempo*, 8-4 July 2019, pp. 29. *Tempo* investigation suggests that at least one victim was killed by a bullet identical to those used by police, although police denied using live ammunition during the protests, and many criminal groups can buy such bullets through corrupt police or military. The bullet found in another victim's body was of completely different type. *Tempo* also reported police mistreatment of some of those arrested, with some being beaten, forced to confess, detained and then released due to lack of evidence.

72 "FPI Merasa Disudutkan Terjadinya Insiden Tanah Abang", *antaranews.com*, 22 May 2019.

73 Stefanus Teguh Edi Pramono, "Bau Mawar di Jalan Thamrin", *Tempo*, 3-9 June 2019.

officers responded by shooting teargas and rubber bullets at the rioters. Just after midnight, a group of rioters targeted a Brimob dormitory in Petamburan, about four kilometers from the main protest site, burning several cars.

A second demonstration took place in the afternoon of 22 May and a clash soon broke out between police and some demonstrators who came fully equipped with Molotov and other rudimentary weapons. By 23 May, eight people were dead, most from live ammunition gunshot wounds. Another victim later died of his injuries, making the death toll in Jakarta nine, with another casualty in Pontianak, West Kalimantan. Hundreds more were injured and 257 alleged rioters were taken into custody. The police later produced evidence that many of the rioters were “paid thugs” unrelated to the protestors.<sup>74</sup>

One suspected riot leader arrested on 22 May was Abdul Gani Ngabalin aka Cobra Hercules, the chief of Garda Prabowo, a pro-Prabowo volunteer group. Cobra was also a former right hand-man of Hercules, a notorious Timorese gangster close to the army and founder of another pro-Prabowo volunteer group. Cobra told the police that he and his men were instructed to instigate the clash by Fauka Noor Farid, one of Gerindra’s top officials and Prabowo’s former subordinate in the army’s Special Forces (Kopassus), who has denied the accusation.<sup>75</sup> Police investigators also uncovered an assassination plot targeting four national figures that was allegedly masterminded by retired army intelligence officer Kivlan Zen, a vocal opponent of Jokowi but not formally part of Prabowo campaign. Kivlan was arrested on 30 March on suspicion of rebellion.

On 22 May, police also stopped in an ambulance near the Bawaslu office in Jakarta that was found to be carrying bamboo spears, bows and arrows. It belonged to a Cianjur-based group called the Islamic Reform Movement (Gerakan Reformis Islam, GARIS), which was never part of the 212 Movement and had a very peculiar record of claimed engagement with – and then disengagement from – ISIS.<sup>76</sup> There was no evidence to link the ambulance to either pro-ISIS groups or any of the 212 Islamist components. GARIS leader Chep Hernawan was known to be a Prabowo supporter, however.

There is no evidence thus far that FPI or other Islamist groups were directly involved in the planning of the riot. On 22 May, the leader of FPI-Jakarta, Muhsin Alatas, even helped the police to haul the provocateurs out of Petamburan. Muhsin also did a joint interview with the local police chief, both claiming that the rioters were bused in from West Java and other areas.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, he criticised the heavy-handed police response to both the protestors and the provocateurs.

Islamists and Prabowo sympathisers alike used a video of a teenager allegedly beaten to death by police near a mosque in Tanah Abang, to spread a narrative of police brutality. (Police later clarified that the youth was still alive and showed him in police custody).<sup>78</sup> FPI also complained that police had “wrongfully” arrested dozens of its sympathisers and mistook them for rioters just because they were in the same area.<sup>79</sup> They did not go so far as some former military generals who accused the police of deliberately framing Fauka Noor and Kivlan Zein. On social media, however, Islamists like other Prabowo supporters ceaselessly slammed the police while

74 “300 Perusuh Ditetapkan Tersangka, Sebagian Preman Tanah Abang Bayaran”, jawapos.com, 23 May 2019.

75 Ibid.

76 Founded in 1998 by businessman Chep Hernawan, a figure with longstanding ties to conservative politicians, retired army officers and the intelligence community, GARIS is an anti-apostasy, anti-vice group that conducts raids on entertainment clubs and so-called deviant Islamic sects – much like FPI. Chep was arrested in August 2014 for possession of ISIS flags but released after two months. In 2015, Chep boasted that he had donated \$70,000 to help 156 Indonesians join ISIS in Syria, but the claims were false. On 13 March 2019, Chep again made headlines for escorting Prabowo during a campaign stop in Cianjur. “Polri: Chep Hermawan Hanya Cari Sensasi Jadi Donatur ISIS”, liputan6.com, 22 March 2015; “Jurkam Prabowo Tak Tahu Chep Hernawan Eks Donatur ISIS”, cnnindonesia.com, 13 March 2019.

77 “Ulama FPI Bantu Polisi Halau Massa dari Luar Jakarta yang Bikin Rusuh di Flyover Slipi”, tribunnews.com, 22 May 2019.

78 “Viral Remaja Meninggal Dipukuli Polisi di Masjid, Polri: Hoax!”, jawapos.com, 25 May 2019.

79 “FPI Ajukan Penangguhan Penahanan Tersangka Perusuh Aksi 22 Mei”, detik.com, 25 May 2019.

praising the military as true defenders of the people. They tweeted videos of how some military officers supposedly protected the protestors at Bawaslu from police brutality.<sup>80</sup> Other images were circulated with captions suggesting the military guards around Bawaslu did not carry any weapons because unlike the police, they had no malign intent to hurt the people.<sup>81</sup> The violence was thus used to try and exacerbate police-military hostility, with the military portrayed as the Islamists' friend and the police as their enemy.

FPI's mixed reactions to the May riots further exposed an internal disjuncture between its Grand Imam-in-exile Rizieq Shihab and local FPI leaders, including chairman Shobri Lubis.<sup>82</sup> Despite earlier cooperation between Muhsin Alatas and the police, Rizieq on 27 May released an audio message claiming that there was no such thing as paid provocateurs, that it was merely a "hoax" invented by police to justify its excessive use of violence against the peaceful protestors. Invoking the Qur'anic passage popularly known as the "the sword verse" (*ayat qital*), Rizieq called on Muslims to avenge the Muslim deaths at the hands of police, saying that "blood must be paid with blood".<sup>83</sup>

No FPI local leaders wanted to implement or even reinforce Rizieq's instruction to use force, for two reasons. First, as noted, it did not want to jeopardise its efforts to renew its legal status, especially as an online petition to the government to reject renewal gained wide traction. Second, it was a much more attractive option to simply follow the example set by Prabowo campaign team: keep a distance from the rioters and continue mobilising peaceful protests. On 14 June, FPI chairman Shobri Lubis led an orderly small rally in front of the Constitutional Court as the first hearing of Prabowo's legal challenge against Jokowi's election victory took place. To further prove its commitment to non-violent activities, FPI intensified its relief efforts, including by sending humanitarian aid and workers to help flood victims in Sulawesi and Kalimantan throughout May and June.

FPI also organised a "Super Peaceful Rally" from 25 to 27 June 2019, when the court was due to announce its ruling on the Prabowo challenge. In a desperate last-minute effort to increase the number of participants, the organisers tried to tone down the political nature of the demonstration and promoted it as "the world's largest Eid al-Fitr gathering (*halal bi halal*)". If they had hoped to recreate the festivities of the original 212 rally, they failed miserably. Even the biggest protest on 27 June only drew a few hundred people. Islamist mobilising power, so feared before the 22 May protests, seemed for the moment to have evaporated.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

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The fact that the Prabowo camp could not turn out the numbers for their post-election protests does not mean that Islamism is a paper tiger. It does mean that the Jokowi government learned a few lessons from the 2016 demonstrations. It was more willing to use repression – preventive arrests, intimidation, and break-ups of rallies – than in the past, to the point that different Islamist leaders and organisations had to think twice about the risks involved in joining Prabowo's protests. But the less-than-hoped for numbers were also the result of the discomfort many Islamists had with the politics of the Gerindra campaign, despite their aversion for Jokowi.

For the Islamists, the big issue was never election fraud. It was and remains the nexus of secularism, liberalism, pro-Communism and inequality that, in their view, the Jokowi administration embodies. It is not easy, however, to translate these concerns into a sense of

80 [https://twitter.com/imau\\_rokan/status/1131747075387985920](https://twitter.com/imau_rokan/status/1131747075387985920)

81 <https://twitter.com/pamanyanblogs/status/1131470827935789058>

82 Wilson, op. cit.

83 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRx\\_RcwB94c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRx_RcwB94c)

imminent threat that will get people out in the streets. Ahok was the perfect target in 2016 but the Prabowo campaign was too overtly political to engage Islamists in the same way.

President Jokowi and his advisers have their work cut out for them as they approach a second term. While being careful not to appease the intolerant religious right, the president can focus on ensuring that he is less vulnerable on the inequality charge by ensuring that his economic programs are not concentrated on Java and in NU-dominated areas but are spread evenly across different Islamic groups and regions.

The president also needs to ensure that his government's new determination to take a tougher line on hate speech and extremism does not feed into a narrative of police repression. He can do that by ensuring that there are clear criteria for curbing hateful or demeaning expressions on social media, that defamation laws are not used to arrest individuals for casual criticism of public officials, and that there is a clear distinction made between incitement and legitimate dissent. Likewise, if vetting of civil servants or academics for suspected radicalism takes place, the government needs to ensure there are transparent criteria in place and that those affected have legal recourse to challenge institutional decisions. The Jokowi government's decision to take a firmer line against extremism is welcome, but it should not be done in a way that gives the Islamists a new cause for unity.

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