

**INDONESIAN ISLAMISTS:  
ACTIVISTS IN SEARCH OF AN ISSUE**

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## I. OVERVIEW

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Indonesia's Islamists, once united in the so-called 212 Movement, are less visible and more divided than ever as Covid-19 continues to quietly ravage the country. The two big blocs within the 212 alliance – the traditionalists, best represented by the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), and the Salafi modernists, best represented by Bachtiar Nasir's AQL Islamic Center and Wahdah Islamiyah – have continued to press a conservative legislative agenda. They support state enforcement of morality and orthodoxy, rejection of economic “neo-liberalism”, and upholding of “family values”. In June and July 2020, they joined the Indonesian Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) and many mainstream Islamic organisations in fiercely opposing a proposed Pancasila bill for its alleged encouragement of Communism.

Both groups, however, have taken a back seat to other Islamist players in political advocacy, perhaps because the tactic they excelled at – turning huge numbers of people out into the streets for mass rallies to force political change – is no longer possible in the Covid-19 era. The 212 components may come together temporarily to back Islamist candidates in the December 2020 local elections, but overall, the movement has not become the political force that many feared.

The 212 groups also remain in search of a new political patron after Prabowo Subianto, President Jokowi's rival and their chosen candidate in the April 2019 elections, shocked them to the core by accepting Jokowi's offer to become defence minister. A Prabowo victory had held out the promise of positions, funding, and ideological support, though Prabowo himself was anything but a strict Muslim. After his defeat and subsequent defection, both the traditionalists and Salafi modernists looked to Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan as a possible successor. But while Anies had their support, particularly in his efforts in early March to impose stricter anti-Covid-19 measures than the central government was willing to undertake, he never sought to recruit them in the same way, and the hole Prabowo left remains unfilled.

This short paper looks at what has happened to the remnants of the 212 Movement since IPAC's last update in July 2019.<sup>1</sup> That report focused on how the Islamists were coping with the re-election of President Jokowi in April 2019 and increased state repression of groups and individuals seen as “radical”. It concluded that while the 212 alliance was in disarray, “Islamism [...] is far from a spent force” and one of Jokowi's big second-term challenges would be how to manage them. As it turned out, aside from the flare-up over the Pancasila bill, which was much more than just an Islamist concern, the Islamists have not been a major problem for Jokowi, and his de facto alliance with Nahdlatul Ulama has been effective in keeping them in check.

For the moment, then, the 212 Islamists are in a holding pattern. While leaving conservative political advocacy to others – PKS, MUI, and the right wing of Muhammadiyah, among others – they are focused on activities that serve their institutional interests and strengthen their respective grassroots bases. FPI is concentrating on humanitarian work; Wahdah Islamiyah continues to expand its educational and organisational network; Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) continues to act as though it had never been banned; and Bachtiar Nasir plays a behind-the-scenes role through the Council of Young Ulama and Intellectuals (Majelis Intelektual dan Ulama Muda Indonesia, MIUMI). They are players in search of an issue, a political patron, and a compelling target, but they have not gone away.

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1 IPAC, “Indonesian Islamists and Post-Election Protests in Jakarta”, Report No.58, 23 July 2019. This was the third in a series. The first two were “After Ahok: The Islamist Agenda in Indonesia”, Report No.44, 6 April 2018 and “Anti-Ahok to Anti-Jokowi: Islamist Influence on Indonesia's 2019 Election Campaign,” Report No.55, 15 March 2019.

## II. BACKGROUND: AFTER JOKOWI'S VICTORY

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Jokowi's re-election and Prabowo's defection seemed to effectively end the 212 Movement even before Covid struck. The third reunion of the mass march on 2 December 2019 was relatively small, down to 10,000 from an estimated 40,000 the year before, according to police estimates.<sup>2</sup> Little was on the agenda to excite Islamist constituencies – a few bills in the national parliament that were of interest to the Salafis but less so to FPI.

FPI had suffered the most from Prabowo's loss and his subsequent alliance with Jokowi. Of all the components, it was the most focused on practical politics and had staked the most on a Prabowo victory. Rizieq Shihab remained in exile in Saudi Arabia with little prospect of coming back anytime soon to face criminal charges. His two most prominent successors, Shabri Lubis and Hanif Al-Athos, had none of his charisma.<sup>3</sup> FPI was also kept in legal limbo by the failure of the Ministry of Home Affairs to renew its registration (Surat Keterangan Terdaftar, SKT) that had expired on June 2019. Minister of Home Affairs Tito Karnavian said that the words "caliphate" and "jihad" in FPI's statute were a problem. FPI said it was fully loyal to Pancasila and the Indonesian republic, which was true. If anything, FPI leaders were ultra-nationalist: they just believed that secular politicians had betrayed the nation's Islamic foundations, hence their concept of "NKRI Bersyariah" (the Indonesian republic based on Islamic law). Nevertheless, the registration remained on hold.

Another active component of 212, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which the government had banned in 2017, refused to die. Its online bulletin, Media Umat, was active as ever, and while there was no public use of the name HTI, there were plenty of seminars promoting the caliphate and denouncing neo-liberalism. It also continued recruiting on university campuses, and according to some sources, infiltrating the civil service and other government agencies.<sup>4</sup>

The Salafi-modernist networks of Bachtiar Nasir and Zaitun Rasmin turned inward, focusing on education and dakwah.<sup>5</sup> Bachtiar Nasir saw his role after the 2019 election as trying to heal a deeply polarised *ummah* although he kept a lower profile than before, perhaps because of money-laundering charges that police continued to hold over him.<sup>6</sup> Most of his YouTube sermons after the Covid-19 outbreak were about strengthening faith.<sup>7</sup> He stressed the value of *tadabbur* (contemplation) over *tafsir* (interpretation), as a way of encouraging ordinary Muslims without much knowledge of Islamic law or doctrine to pursue religious study. He called Covid a blessing in disguise that would give Muslims an opportunity to "do good and avoid evil" as well as spend more time with their families.<sup>8</sup> On the AQL YouTube channel, he created a program called "Studying the Qur'an in Self-Isolation", promoting Qur'anic study as a cure for psychological and physical pain caused by the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

2 "Reuni 212 Kembali Digelar, Mari Kita Bandingkan dari 2017 hingga 2019", kumparan.com, 2 December 2019.

3 In the leadership structure of FPI, Shabri Lubis is the overall head, and Hanif Al-Athos is head of the Indonesian Santri Front (Front Santri Indonesia, FSI), an FPI affiliate. Shabri is the main organizer and field coordinator while Hanif, as Rizieq's son-in-law, is seen as FPI's chief intellectual, even as his speeches more and more resemble Rizieq's.

4 "HTI Menolak Mati: Bermutasi, Menyebar, dan Bergerak di Bawah Tanah", alinea.id, 13 February 2020. HTI YouTube channels, each of which has more than 50,000 subscribers, include Fokus Khilafah Channel, Muslimah Media Center, and Khilafah Channel. For a discussion of infiltration tactics, see presentation by Alissa Wahid on Cokro TV Webinar, "Infiltrasi Radikalisme di Lembaga Negara, Pemerintah dan BUMN," 11 August 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eyt82-5ko4>, from 2:05:18.

5 At a meeting in January 2020, it decided to establish 20 new Regional Leadership Councils (Dewan Pimpinan Daerah, DPD) in Jakarta, West Java and Banten. "2020 Wahdah Islamiyah Target Perkuat Dakwah dan Kaderisasi di Tiga Provinsi Ini", luwuk.today, 13 January 2020.

6 IPAC, "Indonesian Islamists and Post-Election Protests," op.cit., p.11

7 AQL Islamic Center, "Pesan UBN Tentang Corona", 5 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah9xXwDg3ZE>.

8 Bachtiar Nasir, "Wabah dan Rahmat Allah | KH. Bachtiar Nasir", 16 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-vCVSa-omcQ>.

9 AQL Islamic Center, "Tadabbur bersama Ust. Bachtiar Nasir", 16 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBSQZqQtnUc>.

Both AQL and Wahdah Islamiyah kept a close eye on two bills in the Indonesian parliament. One was a draft law to protect religious leaders and symbols; the second was a “family resilience” bill.<sup>10</sup> The first was introduced on 17 December 2019 by the Islamist party PKS as the fulfilment of a campaign promise; later two other Islamic parties, PPP and PKB, joined as sponsors. A PKS leader explained that the intent of the bill was to ensure that clerics had immunity from prosecution while teaching or preaching. It was thus a response to the Jokowi government’s “criminalisation” of Muslim clerics after the 212 protests when charges were brought against many of the leaders for actions unrelated to their roles in the rally (e.g. the money-laundering charges against Bachtiar Nasir).<sup>11</sup> Some moderate Muslims saw the bill as a defence of hardliners and as such it got only lukewarm support.<sup>12</sup>

The family resilience bill was also introduced in December 2019, with four parties backing it: PKS, Golkar, PAN, and Gerindra.<sup>13</sup> This bill was a direct response to a bill to end sexual violence that hardline Islamists said encouraged extra-marital sex and other immoral acts.<sup>14</sup> The preamble to the bill spoke of “families in crisis” because of “sexual deviation”, which it defined as “sexual urges shown in an unnecessary or inappropriate way including sadism, masochism, homosexuality and incest”. Article 87 in the draft requires any adults who experienced such urges to report themselves to a body to be set up under the law to receive treatment.<sup>15</sup> Diah Pitaloka, an MP from ruling PDIP party, said the bill would set Indonesian women back decades.<sup>16</sup> Many civil society activists saw it as an excessive form of state intervention in the private sphere and a violation of human rights.<sup>17</sup> It was fully supported, however, by AQL’s affiliate, the Family Love Alliance (Aliansi Cinta Keluarga, AILA).<sup>18</sup> Battlelines were being drawn for discussions in late 2020.

### III. ALLYING WITH ANIES AS COVID STRIKES

The first officially-recognised case of Covid-19 was announced on 2 March 2020 and almost immediately a dispute over the desirability of social distancing measures broke out between President Jokowi and Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan, the man who had replaced Ahok.<sup>19</sup> Jokowi dithered about imposing restrictions; Anies wanted a lockdown and made clear his anger over the central government’s lack of any sense of urgency. The Islamists supported Anies. This was mostly the continuation of election politics and the strong antipathy to Jokowi, but it may also have been the result of many Salafis in the medical profession who understood the consequences of the pandemic and knew what needed to be done.<sup>20</sup>

On March 15, the FPI’s Central Board issued a statement expressing disappointment with the central government’s inaction, its inability to deal with the virus’s spread and its lack of transpar-

10 These two bills were included in the list of 50 priority bills for 2020. “Daftar 50 RUU yang Masuk Prolegnas Prioritas 2020”, [cnnindonesia.com](http://cnnindonesia.com), 16 January 2020.

11 IPAC, “Indonesian Islamists and Post-Election Protests in Jakarta,” *op.cit.*, pp.12-16.

12 “Usulkan RUU Perlindungan Tokoh Agama, Begini Penjelasan PKS”, [tempo.co](http://tempo.co), 19 January 2020.

13 <http://www.dpr.go.id/uu/detail/id/413>

14 IPAC, “Anti-Ahok to Anti-Jokowi: Islamist Influence on Indonesia’s 2019 Election Campaign”, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

15 “Draf RUU Ketahanan Keluarga”, pp. 39, 44, and 89.

16 “Protes ke Pengusul RUU Ketahanan Keluarga, Ini yang Dikatakan Politikus PDI-P”, [kompas.com](http://kompas.com), 26 February 2020. Diah referred to Article 25 paragraph 3 of the bill’s draft which stated that a wife must have responsibility to take care of the household. See again, “Draf RUU Ketahanan Keluarga”, p. 18.

17 “Wakil Ketua MPR: Cabut RUU Ketahanan Keluarga dari Prolegnas”, [tempo.co](http://tempo.co), 4 March 2020.

18 “AILA Prihatin RUU Ketahanan Keluarga Ditolak”, [kiblat.net](http://kiblat.net), 6 March 2020.

19 For a good discussion on the clash between Jokowi and Anies and its political implications, see Marcus Mietzner, “Populist Anti-Scientism, Religious Polarisation, and Institutionalised Corruption: How Indonesia’s Democratic Decline Shaped Its Covid-19 Response,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 5 August 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103420935561>.

20 Navhat Nuraniyah, “Religio-Political Polarisation during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” presentation in Canberra, 22 July 2020.

ency with regard to information on cases. It praised the firm steps taken by Anies to anticipate and manage the virus – a clear offer of a political alliance.<sup>21</sup> Zaitun Rasmin from Wahdah Islamiyah and Bachtiar Nasir supported Anies as well, using arguments from Islamic jurisprudence and explaining the need for a response in moral terms, rather than focusing on Anies’ qualities as a leader.<sup>22</sup>

Jakarta’s “large-scale social distancing measures” (pembatasan sosial berskala besar, PSBB) went into force on 10 April 2020. One of the potentially most controversial provisions was the temporary ban on religious activities at houses of worship, including Friday prayers at mosques.<sup>23</sup> To many people’s surprise, the FPI’s Habib Rizieq was one of the first leading clerics not only to endorse a 16 March fatwa from the Indonesian Ulama Council permitting Friday prayers at home but also to urge his followers in Jakarta to obey government restrictions. “This is not because we’re afraid of Corona, we leave everything to Allah, but we must prevent slander against Muslim congregations that the virus is spreading because people went to Friday prayers,” he said.<sup>24</sup> His statement was helpful and probably helped keep some of the traditionalists home at a time when religious gatherings around the world were becoming major super-spreaders.<sup>25</sup> But he made clear that it applied only in “red zones” where the virus was raging, not in “green zones” or areas that had been deemed low risk. He may have been drawing on his experience in Saudi Arabia where the government moved swiftly to ban non-Saudi pilgrims from entry and close the main mosques in Mecca and Medina.

By mid-April, most mosques in Jakarta and a few other provinces were closed for Friday prayers.<sup>26</sup> Some traditionalists were angered by the fact that while the government enforced PSBB restrictions at mosques, it allowed traditional markets, some factories and some public transport to function. Rizieq changed position accordingly, urging the government to allow people to attend Friday prayers in mosques even in the red zones, but no one seemed to pay much attention.<sup>27</sup> His new position was not supported by Salafi-modernist clerics. As Ramadan ended and the government was preparing to loosen PSBB restrictions and implement what it called the “new normal”, Zaitun Rasmin said that Muslims should still restrain themselves from going to the mosque:

When people go to the market, to the airport, even though we remind them and there are no emergencies, they might have other reasons that they feel are very important, especially those who are trying to make a living for their families. But there is no emer-

21 “FPI Usul Menteri Kena Corona Dikarantina di Pulau Sebaru”, tagar.id, 17 March 2020.

22 UZR OFFICIAL, “Sikap Islam Ditengah Wabah Corona”, 30 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXs1q3Ld-Sc>; UZR OFFICIAL, “Masalah Fiqh Seputar Covid-19”, 31 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wASPqaD4M-fc>; AQL Islamic Center, “Pesan UBN Tentang Corona”, 5 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah9xXwDg-3ZE>; and Bachtiar Nasir, “Wabah dan Rahmat Allah | KH. Bachtiar Nasir”, 16 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvCVSa-omcQ&t=278s>.

23 Pemprov DKI Jakarta, Jaringan Dokumentasi & Informasi Hukum, “Peraturan Gubernur Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta No. 33 Tahun 2020 Tentang Pelaksanaan Pembatasan Berskala Besar Dalam Penanganan Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) di Provinsi Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta”, p. 11. [https://jdih.jakarta.go.id/uploads/default/produkhukum/PERGUB\\_NO\\_33\\_TAHUN\\_20204.pdf](https://jdih.jakarta.go.id/uploads/default/produkhukum/PERGUB_NO_33_TAHUN_20204.pdf)

24 “HRS Minta Jemaah Jakarta Ikuti Fatwa Salat Jumat MUI: Cegah Fitna Corona”, detik.com, 20 March 2020.

25 IPAC, “Religious Super-Spreaders in Indonesia: Managing the Risk of Stigmatisation,” COVID-19 Briefing No.4, 19 May 2020.

26 Of 3,200 mosques in Jakarta, only 20 still held Friday prayer by mid-April. “Pemprov DKI: Masih Ada 20 Masjid yang Gelar Shalat Jumat Saat PSBB”, megapolitan.kompas.com, 20 April 2020.

27 On 19 April, as Ramadan approached, Rizieq reversed course and not only instructed followers to hold Friday prayers in green zones but also urged the government not to ban Friday prayers even in the red zones. His statement, widely circulated over social media, was written in capital letters: “STOP THE DEBATE! BEWARE OF PITTING MUSLIMS AGAINST EACH OTHERS! DO NOT INSULT THE ULAMA BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENTS OVER FRIDAY PRAYERS! MUSLIM SHOULD UNITE IN THE FACE OF DIFFERENCES IN VIEWS! LET’S PRAY SO THAT THE PLAGUE WILL GO AWAY!” See “Arahan IB-HRS Dari Kota Suci Mekkah: Ayo Sambut Ramadhan Dengan Shalat Jum’at”, fpi-online.com, 19 April 2020.

gency to go to the mosque, because we have *rukhsah*, an easing of our obligations under Islamic law, and those receive this relief are loved by God.”<sup>28</sup>

#### IV. UTILIZING ONLINE PLATFORMS

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Like all groups and organisations, Islamists turned to online platforms during the pandemic, especially during Ramadan when religious gatherings and study sessions normally increase. But far from becoming an instrument for strengthening common concerns within the 212 alliance, online dakwah became a tool for underscoring differences.

YouTube channels were most popular because the faithful could listen to their favourite preachers in real time. The difference in discussion themes between the traditionalists and the Salafis was immediately apparent. Bachtar Nasir, whose AQL channel already had hundreds of thousands of subscribers, reached out to his middle-class audience with tips about how to survive the pandemic and deal with stress; he also offered advice about online business. He drew a large audience with “Hijrahfest From Home”, hosted by Arie Untung, a former MTV Video Jockey who had become a more observant Muslim since 2017. The FPI’s FRONT TV, meanwhile, which was always more focused on dakwah than politics, showcased Muhammad Hanif Al-Atthos, Rizieq’s son-in-law, giving lectures on the writings of Al-Ghazali, the 12<sup>th</sup> century philosopher. All groups gradually became more comfortable with Webinars and online discussions.

YouTube content was generally more measured in tone than the chat forums on Telegram, perhaps because preaching featured clerics who wanted to portray themselves as learned scholars. The Telegram users, however, could be the angry masses. The Telegram channel of an FPI supporter called ANGIN GUNUNG repeatedly ran a diatribe against the Jokowi government, especially over its handling of the pandemic. It accused the government of being stingy for not providing more social assistance, suggested it was abusing power, and blasted presidential adviser and Coordinating Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan for thwarting Anies’ policies. It was this channel that coined the term “Jokovid-2019” to indicate the government’s failure:

The fraud and lies of the Jokowi regime are leading the country to destruction! The carelessness of the Jokowi regime makes coronavirus cases worse! The arrogance of the Jokowi regime endangers people’s safety! The stupidity of the Jokowi regime destroys health and humanity! The dictatorship of the Jokowi regime violates constitutional guarantees for the protection of the people, nation, and country! The Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia is caused by the Jokovid 2019 pandemic! Together, let’s fight #Covid-19! Together, let’s fight #Jokovid-19!”<sup>29</sup>

The anger evident in the ANGIN GUNUNG postings suggests that FPI wanted to present two faces. One, on YouTube, was a voice of moderate piety, showing a respectable organisation that could appeal to a middle-class constituency or seek political alliances with top officials. The Telegram postings were more for the rank-and-file, a rant against the Jokowi government designed for mass circulation over social media.

The expansion of online platforms will surely outlast the pandemic, as all institutions realise how convenient they are for strengthening a mass base, especially in travel-choked cities. There is no indication, however, that they are serving as a tool to unify 212 organisations, indeed quite

28 Wahdah TV, “Kembali Ke Masjid Di Tengah Pandemi? | Ustadz Dr. KH. Muhammad Zaitun Rasmin, Lc., MA”, 22 May 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmxQ3TeF8S8>.

29 Telegram “ANGIN GUNUNG” Channel, 25 March 2020. Created on 23 May 2019, this channel was initially named “Info IB-HRS”. It changed to “ANGIN GUNUNG” a few days later.

the opposite: they are helping instead to solidify the “brand” of each organisation.

## V. THE CONTROVERSY OVER PANCASILA

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The one issue that seemed, briefly, to have the potential to bring conservatives and mainstream Muslims out on the streets again was the controversy over a bill to strengthen Pancasila, the state ideology, that some saw as opening the door to Communism.

The bill had been drafted by PDIP, the ruling party, on the grounds that understanding of Pancasila had steadily weakened during the post-Soeharto years and this had allowed transnational ideologies, including violent extremism, religious intolerance and various forms of immorality to take root. To address this decline, the Jokowi government, under a February 2018 regulation, had set up a new body called the Agency of Pancasila Ideology Education (Badan Pembinaan Ideologi Pancasila, BPIP), with PDIP chairman Megawati Soekarnoputri as chair. PDIP believed the agency needed a stronger legal basis so that it could not be easily overturned by Jokowi’s successor, and thus proposed a bill called the Pancasila Ideology Orientation Bill (RUU Haluan Ideologi Pancasila, RUU-HIP). On 12 May 2020, in a plenary session of parliament, it was agreed that the bill would be a parliamentary initiative, and it was placed on the agenda of legislative priorities.

Immediately a firestorm erupted, with FRONT TV kicking off protests on 5 June. On 12 June, the MUI, which is dominated by conservatives, issued an emotional statement outlining Muslim objections:

- There was no mention of the 1966 ruling banning the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) throughout the country as well as any activities designed to spread Marxist-Leninist teaching.<sup>30</sup> This was tantamount to agreeing to the betrayal of the nation.
- The draft distorted the meaning of Pancasila as outlined in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution and gave it a new and degrading interpretation by trying to reduce its five principles first to three (Trisila) and then to one (Ekasila). This would weaken the commitment to belief in Almighty God, the first principle.<sup>31</sup>
- The political party blocs in the parliament should remember the sadistic and inhumane actions of the PKI between 1948 and 1965, even if some activists and their sympathisers had tried to remove its negative image and contradict historical facts. The draft was clearly part of this agenda and its promoter had to be someone who wanted to revive the PKI.
- The Muslim community must watch out for the “slippery methods” of the Communists. The MUI urged full support for the Indonesian military to guard Pancasila and the state against this threat, and anyone with information on Communist teachings should report immediately to the nearest military post.
- If the government ignored this statement, MUI would persuade all Muslims rise up, unite and guard the country against Communists, using constitutional means.<sup>32</sup>

30 This was TAP MPRS No.215/MPRS/1966.

31 The references to Trisila and Ekasila tracked the 1 June 1945 speech in which Soekarno, Indonesia’s first president, introduced Pancasila, but those concepts do not appear in the constitution’s preamble. The fact that they appeared in the bill reflects the ongoing influence of the Soekarno family in PDIP politics.

32 MUI Sumbar, “Inilah Maklumat Lengkap Dewan Pimpinan MUI Pusat dan Dewan Pimpinan MUI Provinsi Se-Indonesia”, 12 June 2020, <http://muisumbar.or.id/baca-361-inilah-maklumat-lengkap-dewan-pimpinan-mui-pusat-dan-dewan-pimpinan-mui-provinsi-seindonesia.html>.



The Salafists condemned the bill as an invitation to syncretism. In a speech live-streamed on YouTube, Bachtiar Nasir warned that the unity of the nation was at stake:

“Belief in Almighty God” is replaced by “Belief in a multicultural God [Ketuhanan yang berkebudayaan]. This is syncretism! This is idolatry! Religion mixed with tradition, religion mixed with culture in the name of socialism, this can lead to Communism. This is what is happening. The unitary republic of Indonesia will only stay united if we are steadfast against negotiating on religious issues!”<sup>33</sup>

The traditionalists tried to seize the moment although by 18 June, Jokowi had already decided to stop discussion on the bill. This followed a meeting with Ma’ruf Amin, in which the vice-president laid out the concerns of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the country’s two largest Muslim organisations.<sup>34</sup> He said that NU *kyai* in the regions were deeply concerned about the bill and its potential for reviving Communism, but this was not its only concern. NU was also upset that there was no reference in the bill to banning the “ideology of the caliphate”. If there was going to be a bill to strengthen Pancasila as an antidote to radicalism, then the ban on extremist ideologies should be explicit. Muhammadiyah argued that it undermined the position of Pancasila as the basis of the state. The MUI was obviously outraged and Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII), a conservative dakwah organisation, also weighed in. With all of these organisations up in arms, FPI was not a key player.

On 24 June, however, FPI, in the name of “Children of the Indonesian Republic” (ANAK-NKRI, with the word ANAK an acronym for Anti-Communist Alliance) led a demonstration in front of the entrance to parliament. About 1,000 people showed up, including a few representatives of right-wing nationalist groups like Pemuda Pancasila. Bachtiar Nasir and Zaitun Rasmin were invited but did not attend. A few HTI flags could be seen.

Hanif Al-Athos gave a speech setting out ANAK NKRI demands:

It is not enough just to stop the bill. We ask that the initiator of the bill, particularly the treasonous controversial articles, be prosecuted! Agree? Agree? If the initiator was a political party, then we demand that the party be disbanded!”<sup>35</sup>

Someone set fire to a PDIP flag. As the protest began, the participants were chanting, “Crush the PKI!”. By the afternoon, they were chanting “Bring down Jokowi!”<sup>36</sup> Shortly afterwards, Pemuda Pancasila’s leadership instructed members to not take part in further demonstrations against the bill because of FPI’s efforts to frame objections to it in anti-Jokowi terms.<sup>37</sup>

On 5 July, ANAK-NKRI held another protest, this time at Ahmad Yani Field in South Jakarta but it was even smaller. One of the speakers called for participants to swear an oath to wage jihad against Communists.

On 16 July, Jokowi sent six top ministers to the parliament with a new draft that put the BPIP directly under the president but also inserted the reference to the 1966 legislation and removed some of the controversial articles on the history and philosophy of Pancasila, including the ref-

33 AQL Islamic Center, “Tidak ada Tawar Menawar dalam Ideologi,” 11 June 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhry1A0\\_Rc0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhry1A0_Rc0). See also Wahdah TV, “Ujian Ummat Islam Sebagai Pengusung Kebenaran | Ustadz Dr. Rahmat Abdurrahman Lc., M.A.,” 18 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0H1lwetHO4>.

34 “Luka Lama Perekat Barisan,” *Tempo*, 22-28 June 2020, p.28.

35 FRONT TV, “Habib Hanif Alatas: Hasil Dialog DPR Dengan ANAK NKRI (PENOLAKAN RUU HIP),” 24 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGyO3YspFc>.

36 IPAC observation during the protest. The complete chant was “Ganyang, ganyang, ganyang PKI! Ganyang PKI sekarang juga!” and “Turun, turun, turunkan Jokowi! Turunkan Jokowi sekarang juga!”

37 “Pemuda Pancasila Larang Kadernya Ikut Aksi Tolak RUU HIP dengan Ormas Lain”, *inisiatifnews.com*, 14 July 2020.

erences to Trisila and Ekasila.

Traditionalists still objected to the new bill. The head of FPI's HRS Center, Abdul Chair Ramadhan, said it could be used as a cudgel to go after organisations that are seen as undermining Pancasila (a charge against dissidents in the past).<sup>38</sup> PKS also expressed opposition to bill on procedural grounds, saying it was substantively different than the first bill and therefore could not just be substituted or suddenly put on the legislative priority list.<sup>39</sup>

It became clear from the trajectory of the Pancasila debate through early August 2020 that the power of NU and Muhammadiyah, combined with MUI, were more than enough by itself to kill the HIP draft. It also showed what emotive power the communist issue still has in Indonesia, more than 50 years after the bloody purge of the PKI.

## VI. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

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All the Islamist organisations have had active humanitarian programs during the Covid-19 crisis, many of them providing much-needed assistance to laid-off workers and other vulnerable groups. The programs are a genuine response to need but they can also help boost the image of the organisations. FPI, known for the critical work it did during the 2004 Aceh tsunami and its assistance to evicted fishermen in north Jakarta, was particularly active from the end of March onwards, documenting the geographic reach and variety of its activities on its official website, [fpi-online.com](http://fpi-online.com). Through its humanitarian arm, Indonesian Red Crescent (Hilal Merah Indonesia, HILMI), FPI sprayed disinfectants, including in churches; distributed food to the poor; and gave masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to medical workers.<sup>40</sup>

FUI, Wahdah Islamiyah, and AQL also distributed basic goods but it was each organisation for itself. There was no effort to pool resources or work out a division of labour, even after Rizieq called for a united front in April.

## VII. CONCLUSION: DON'T COUNT THEM OUT

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In late 2016, the 212 Movement looked like a powerful force that could rely on a combination of grassroots mobilisation and massive street rallies to influence the political elite. It did not just achieve its immediate goal of bringing down Ahok but seemed to have pushed the Indonesian public toward more intolerant, more majoritarian views. As two noted scholars point out, “[T]he pre-2017 softening of religio-cultural intolerance was halted – and eventually reversed – as a result of the anti-Ahok mobilisation that hardened Islamist attitudes in society.”<sup>41</sup>

In the meantime, three somewhat contradictory developments have taken place that bear watching:

The Islamist agenda of fighting secularism, liberalism and pluralism – and, of course, Communism – is still very much alive, but it is being pursued as much by the conservative main-

38 <https://twitter.com/HrsCenter/status/1285840734197739520>.

39 “PKS Geram, RUU HIP Tak Bisa Asal Main Tukar dengan RUU BPPI”, [jawapos.com](http://jawapos.com), 20 July 2020.

40 In Jakarta, FPI disinfected the Bethel Petamburan Church. They did the the same for three churches in Tapan, South Kalimantan and Palu, Central Sulawesi. See, “FPI Bantu Semprot Disinfektan di Gereja Bethel Petamburan”, [gelora.co](http://gelora.co), 19 April 2020; and “Dari Masjid Sampai Gereja, Tidak Lepas Dari Semprotan Disinfektan Oleh FPI Banjarbaru”, [fpi-online.com](http://fpi-online.com), 29 Maret 2020. On food distribution, see for example “Bagikan Sembako Kepada Yang Membutuhkan, FPI Babelan Disambut Warga”, [fpi-jabar.com](http://fpi-jabar.com), 10 April 2020. On PPE, see “Bantu Ringankan Beban Tenaga Medis, FPI Serahkan Bantuan APD Ke IDI Jombang”, [fpi-jatim.com](http://fpi-jatim.com), 7 April 2020.

41 Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.42, No.1, 2020, p.67; Mietzner and Muhtadi, “Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious Intolerance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Accommodation,” *Asian Studies Review* 42, No.3, July 2018, pp.479-97.

stream as by the ex-212 components. This means that even if Covid-19 has curbed the use of mass mobilisation tactics since March 2020, there might be less need for that kind of mobilisation now, since much of the mainstream is already on board.

At the same time, the former alliance partners and their fellow conservatives are also facing more sophisticated pushback from civil society groups. Indonesia may still be growing more social conservative, but women's organisations and other activist group are finding new ways to fight back, especially when intolerant or reactionary legislation is involved. One test of conservative strength will be the ultimate fate of the two bills, those on Family Resilience and Protection of Religious Leaders. Both will be up for discussion before the end of the year and it will be important to watch how the Salafi modernists, traditionalists and conservative mainstream position themselves.

Finally, Jokowi is increasingly relying on the military to implement his policy agenda, as Jun Honna points out in an insightful article.<sup>42</sup> This could empower the Islamists if they see the military as allies, especially on the anti-Communist issue and perhaps in fighting economic neo-liberalism. But the issue of radicals infiltrating the government, a hot topic in late 2019, has not gone away, and this will continue to be a concern of Jokowi's security advisers.

The challenge for the Islamists since Ahok fell has been to work out a common strategy that blends Salafi grassroots organising with FPI's political alliance-building. They have shown little ability to do this on any kind of sustained basis. The old 212 alliance may be in a holding pattern now, but regrouping, sudden realignments, and unforeseen flashpoints are the stock-in-trade of Indonesian politics. Watch this space.

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42 Jun Honna, "Military Politics in Pandemic Indonesia", *The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, 1 August 2020, <https://apjif.org/2020/15/Honna.html>.

## **INSTITUTE FOR POLICY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT (IPAC)**

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