

Whodunit? Politicians Affiliated with Secular Parties implement most Sharia regulations

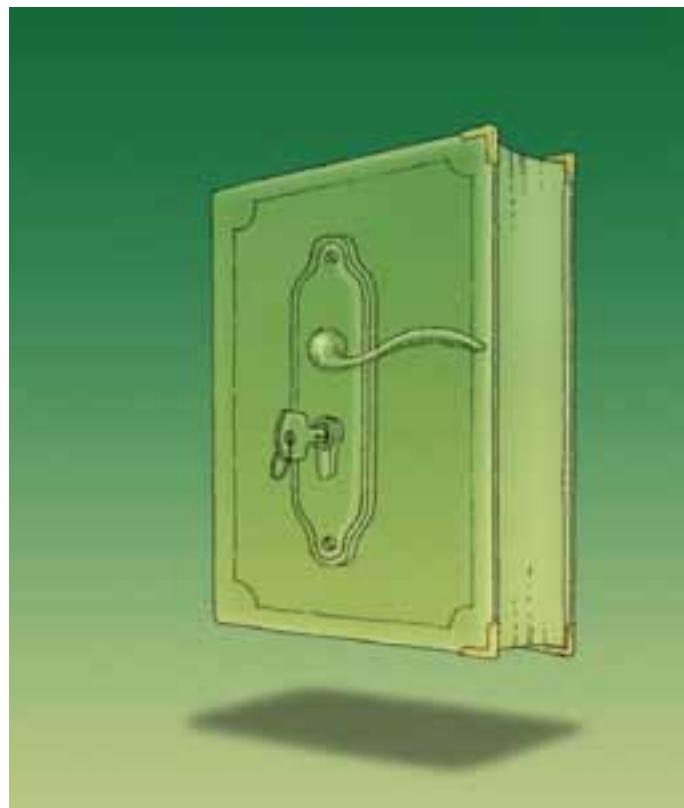
NOTORIOUS for its flight delays, Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Jakarta at least offers a wide array of bookstores to stranded travelers. The well-stocked bookshelves at the domestic terminal target an Indonesian readership and sell mostly religious self-help guidebooks and anti-semitic literature. The shops at the international terminal cater to an altogether different crowd, namely foreign businessmen and embassy folks. These outlets feature a vast array of ‘insights’ about the increasing success of new Islamic parties in undermining the secular basis of the Indonesian state.

The implementation of sharia local regulations is one of the most visible signs of this ‘Islamization’ of Indonesia as a result of Islamic parties playing ‘Muslim identity politics’, or so experts have claimed in numerous books over the past decade.

My research on the reasons for sharia regulations shows, however, that it is not Islamic parties that are chipping away at Indonesia’s secular traditions. On the contrary, it is mainly politicians affiliated with secular parties such as Golkar and PDI-P, who usually had long careers in the bureaucracy, the military or the police, who draft, adopt and implement these sharia regulations.

Concretely, seven out of thirty-three provinces and fifty-one of Indonesia’s approximately 510 districts adopted at least one sharia regulation between 1999 and 2009. The strongest parliamentary factions in all provinces that adopted sharia regulations between the year 1999 and 2009 were from Golkar and PDI-P, with the exception of Aceh province. The pattern is similar at the district level. Golkar gathered a majority of votes in the 1999 legislative elections in four and a plurality in ten of the sharia districts. The PDI-P won a plurality of votes in 1999 in eight districts that later implemented sharia regulations. The two Islamic parties PAN and PPP won a plurality of the votes in the 1999 elections in seven districts that issued sharia regulations between 1999 and 2004. Furthermore, secular parties won either a majority or a plurality of the votes in the 2004 parliamentary elections in all the districts that adopted sharia regulations between 2004 and 2009. The Islamic Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), said to be the main culprit behind the enactment of these regulations, controlled neither a majority nor a plurality of the seats in any of the parliaments that issued sharia regulations over the last decade. In short, secular parties dominate local parliaments that issue sharia regulations.

It is important to also examine the backgrounds and party affiliations of local executive heads because most Indonesian local parliaments are weak and often lack the capacity to draft local decrees, including sharia regulations. My data on the careers of all local executive heads shows that 63 of them signed and implemented at least one sharia regulation between 1999



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and 2009. Thirty-seven were bureaucrats affiliated with the Golkar party. Eight executive heads were former military or policemen. Three were members of PPP and one belonged to PAN. I could not identify the background of fourteen executive figures. In short, almost 60 per cent of local executive heads who adopted sharia regulations are bureaucrats with links to the secular Golkar party.

The same pundits that claim Islamic parties are behind the implementation of sharia regulations have also talked in an alarmist tone about the ‘creeping shariaization’ of Indonesia, giving readers the impression that this is a widespread phenomenon. In reality, sharia regulations were adopted in only 21 per cent of all provinces and approximately 10 per cent of all districts over the past decade. Furthermore, these regulations cluster in Aceh, Banten/ West Java, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi and West Sumatra. It is in these five areas that 68.75 per cent of all provincial and 91.67 per cent of all district-sharia regulations can be found.

My findings raise the question: Why do Golkar affiliates in a small number of provinces push for such regulations? Arguably,



a combination of old social cleavages and new political dynamics cause secular politicians to issue sharia regulations. In the 1950s, all five sharia clusters witnessed rebellions against the state either under the banner of Darul Islam or PRRI/Permesta. The government terminated these revolts quickly but many of the Islamist networks that had formed during the rebellions remained intact. The coercive nature of the Suharto regime subsequently drove these networks underground where they remained invisible for most of the past three decades. After the political opening in 1998, however, these local cleavages re-surfaced and acquired new political meaning.

At the same time, the introduction of elections for local executive and legislative posts has created new imperatives for 'old' New Order-elites. A successful bid for a district head position, for instance, now requires the constant nurturing of local networks, a process that is expensive.

Political parties are ill-equipped to support candidates during this process. Most parties in present-day Indonesia are built 'in the air', which means that they have no local constituencies that

can be mobilized during campaign periods. Parties are also poor and cannot help candidates meet the increasing financial pressures the latter are confronted with.

The underdevelopment of parties at the sub-national level has led local politicians to look for alternative power bases that can supply political goods, such as campaign teams and access to the electorate. This 'personalization' of local politics in which politicians rely on their clout and private networks rather than their association with party organizations is a phenomenon that can be observed across the archipelago. However, it has acquired a distinct form in provinces where Islamist networks are strong, namely by appealing to such groups through the implementation of sharia regulations in exchange for support during elections. In Banten province, for instance, Golkar figures such as Suharto's daughter Siti Hardijanti and former Golkar chairman Jusuf Kalla have used Islamist networks linked to Darul Islam figure Syekh Abdus Salam Panji in every election campaign since 1999. Likewise, prior to elections in South Sulawesi province, numerous Golkar figures, including military general Amin Syam and current governor and Golkar chairman Syarhul Yasin Limpo, have wooed the Committee for the Implementation of Sharia Islam (KPPSI), an umbrella organization of former Darul Islam fighters founded in 2000.

The implementation of sharia regulations also provides Golkar politicians with new means to accumulate much needed cash. Sharia regulations have increased the power local executive heads hold over bars, gambling dens, and massage parlors. Entertainment venues are often permitted to stay in business only if they can reach 'agreements' with local officials. Some sharia regulations have also created de facto monopolies for the distribution of alcohol. In addition, more than twenty districts have adopted regulations on zakat collection that give executive heads great discretionary power over the collection and dispersion of 'religious' alms. The mayor of Makassar and former Golkar member Ilham Arief Sirajuddin told me personally in an interview that his zakat regulation generates around two billion rupiah each month. I found evidence that several local executive heads have used such funds to establish loyalty-bonds to politically valuable power brokers.

In short, most sharia regulations are implemented by shrewd political entrepreneurs affiliated with secular parties in the context of a newly competitive local political environment. Against this backdrop, the staff at the aforementioned airport bookstores would be well-advised to move books that portray Islamic parties as the main force behind the shariaization of Indonesia over to the 'fiction' shelves.

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