



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

INDONESIA'S MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS UNDER JOKO WIDODO

Syafiq Hasyim and Norshahril Saat

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo

By Syafiq Hasyim and Norshahril Saat

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world, with 87.18 per cent of its 260 million population embracing the Islamic faith. However, Indonesia is neither an Islamic state nor a secular one. It adopts Pancasila as the state ideology but has a Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) overseeing six official religions.
- MORA has its genesis in Dutch colonial rule (1602–1942). It was strengthened during the Japanese occupation (1942–45) and then sustained by the post-independence Indonesian government (after 1945). The decision to keep MORA was to compensate those who had aspired for the enactment of the Jakarta Charter in the era of Sukarno but failed.
- MORA has always been the arena for contestation between the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the modernist Muhammadiyah. Both organizations eye not only the minister post, or leadership positions in the bureaucracy, but also lower ranking positions.
- This article examines how MORA has been managed under President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) from 2014 till the present. It highlights similarities and differences in Jokowi's control of the influential ministry compared to his predecessors. In 2014, even though Jokowi was elected on a reform agenda, he left MORA untouched.
- After the 2019 election, Jokowi appointed Fachrul Razi, a retired general as Minister of Religious Affairs, departing from past practices of naming a religious scholar (*ulama*) or a religiously

trained person (*santri*) to that position. This demonstrates a wish on the part of the President to shake up the ministry and to exert control over the institution. This decision, however, has alienated core supporters in NU who helped him get re-elected in 2019.

Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs under Joko Widodo

By Syafiq Hasyim and Norshahril Saat¹

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world, with 87.18 per cent of its 260 million population embracing Islam. It is not a theocratic state, however. It should not be considered a secular state either because religion does continue to influence its policies and legislations. A more accurate description is that it is a Pancasila state. Pancasila is a Sanskrit meaning “Five Principles”, and in Indonesia, these five principles are: belief in the Almighty God; sovereignty of the people; national unity; social justice, and; humanity (Norshahril 2018, p. 40). But what makes Indonesia a Pancasila state is that it has a ministry that oversees the affairs of Indonesia's six official religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Already in 1946, the Indonesian government had established the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). It was formed not to cater only to the Muslim community, but to all major religious communities in the country.

Its origins served as a compromise between competing groups in the immediate post-independent Indonesia. The declarators of Indonesia independence had backtracked on the Jakarta Charter, which spelt out the role of shariah. Indonesia's founding fathers were divided into two camps on the issue: on the one hand were those who wanted Indonesia to be an Islamic state with the Jakarta Charter as its ideological foundation; and

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on the other hand were those who envisioned Indonesia as a secular state (Anshari 1979). These two reached agreement on forming a Pancasila state as the middle path, and to make up for the deletion of shariah from the Constitution, they concurred that a ministry overseeing religious affairs be formed (Bowen 2013).

Today, MORA's existence is driven by the assumption that Indonesia's founding fathers agreed to its formation. MORA's main task since independence has always been to provide services for all religious groups and to uphold the freedom to believe and practise their faith. MORA does not interfere with the doctrinal aspects of any of the religions involved. However, in the last decade, there are some Indonesians who have expressed the wish to extend MORA's current position as a religiously neutral institution to one more inclined towards Islam. So far, these lobby groups have not been successful, and calls to increase MORA's area of competence has fallen onto deaf ears. From the Sukarno era to the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono era (2004–14) the role of MORA had remained consistent with the founding fathers' expectations. The question is whether the current Joko Widodo (Jokowi) government will relent.

Under the current government (since 2014), MORA has become one of the country's larger ministries. MORA receives the fourth biggest budget among ministries, currently at 63 trillion rupiah (US\$68.2 million).² It is also one of the ministries whose powers were retained after the decentralization policy was enforced in 2004. Others had their powers significantly delegated to provincial governments. According to Law No. 32/2004 on Regional Government, the affairs of religion remains under the control of central government in Jakarta,³ and MORA continues

² CNBC Indonesia, "10 Kementerian dengan Anggaran Terbesar di 2019", 4 July 2018, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20180704141221-4-21907/10-kementerian-dengan-anggaran-terbesar-di-2019> (accessed 19 August 2020).

³ Arum Sutrisni Putri, "Pengertian Otonomi Daerah dan Dasar Hukumnya". *Kompas.com*, 16 December 2019, <https://www.kompas.com/skola/read/2019/12/16/110000069/pengertian-otonomi-daerah-dan-dasar-hukumnya?page=all>, and <http://www.dpr.go.id/dokjdi/document/uu/33.pdf> (accessed 23 August 2020).

to have offices at various subdistrict levels to provincial levels, managing matters ranging from the marriage registry to education. Control over MORA however, lies in Jakarta.

The relations between the Jokowi government and MORA have not been smooth sailing, and are expected to get rockier in the President's current second and final term. This article seeks to address the following questions. How does Jokowi manage the MORA? What are the differences between Jokowi's management of MORA during his first term and his second term? How has Islamic civil society organizations (ICSOs) responded to Jokowi's management of MORA? Why is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, or Revival of the Ulama), the President's strongest ally during his bid for re-election in 2019, unhappy with the way he is handling the ministry?

We will first study the origins of MORA and its evolution since the colonial period, and follow that up with an examination of MORA under the New Order government (1966–98). A brief discussion on post-New Order development follows, with emphasis on the Jokowi government since 2014. The article then analyses challenges and issues facing MORA going forward.

THE GENESIS OF THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

A succession of governments—Dutch, Japanese and Indonesian—had all been in agreement over the broad importance of an Islamic bureaucracy. They realized that Indonesia being the largest Muslim polity in the world, Islam could serve as agency for both change and resistance. In the early twentieth century, Indonesian Muslims had demonstrated their ability to ride above differences by organizing themselves as effective lobby groups to challenge Dutch colonial rule. They were also united in collaborating with the Japanese, knowing it was their best chance to unsettle the Dutch.

At the risk of simplifying Indonesian Islam, the Muslim community can be divided into two broad orientations—the modernists and the traditionalists. These broad categories are only meant for analysts to understand the different schools of thought in the country, and how

Muslims organize themselves. In reality, one should understand the interplay between the groups and within the groups; the relevant differences in social class and status, and the tension between central and local/regional dynamics (between *pusat* and *daerah*). Scholars have also applied Geertzian categories such as *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* to describe Indonesian Muslims, though this has been widely criticized and debunked.

Two organizations represent the broad-based modernist-versus-traditionalist cleavage and have become the hallmark of Indonesian Islam for a century. The modernists are represented by the Muhammadiyah and the latter by NU. In fact, the first group that organized itself as a socio-religious grouping was Sarekat Islam, founded in 1912 by traders purportedly protecting Muslim interests against Chinese traders.⁴ Sarekat Islam later adopted nationalist ideals and promoted moderate Islamic thought. Anti-colonial in nature, Sarekat Islam was a left-leaning organization seeking to marry socialist principles to Islamic values. It was founded in the same year as Muhammadiyah, a welfare organization wanting to reform Islamic education and practices. The founder of Muhammadiyah was Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, who had studied in the Middle East and was influenced by the reformist movement in Cairo (Egypt) during that period. The modernists hoped to rid mystical and irrational behaviour from the local community, and its followers were aligned to the Salafi movement that sought to purify the religion from *bid'ah* (innovations) such as *ziarah kuburan* (visitations to graves of holy men), *maulid* (celebration of the prophet birthday), and *selamatan* (communal feasting). But to be sure, the organization was more inclined towards the stance of the modernists in Cairo—such as the likes of Rashid Ridha—rather than the more extreme positions taken by the Salafi-Wahhabi in Hijaz (later Saudi Arabia) promoted by Ibn As-Saud. This preference for the former was clear during the controversy over the

⁴ The Sarekat Islam evolved from the Sarekat Dagang Islam, which was formed in 1905.

sending of a delegation to the rivalling Cairo and Hijaz Congress in the 1920s debating the future of Islamic politics after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Republic of Turkey (van Bruinessen 1994, pp. 28–37).

The Muhammadiyah had a strong following in the region where the movement began, namely Yogyakarta. It later spread to Padang in Sumatra. Central to the movement was the concept of *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning. The organization believed in seeking new ideas and understanding religious texts in context, and was against blind faith in those writings.

Muhammadiyah's rival organization was formed a decade later. In 1926, a group of religious scholars claiming to represent traditional Islam formed the NU. Followers of this group argued that Sunni Muslims should adhere closely to the views or *fatwas* of pious savants of the past, and minimize independent reasoning. Specific to Indonesian Muslims, they must adhere to the juristic opinions of the Shafie school of thought (the teachings of Imam Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafii, b.767–d.820). Historically, it was the *ulama* from the Shafie school that brought Islam to the archipelago. Application to the other three schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam, namely Hambali, Maliki, Hanafi schools, were allowed on exigent circumstances. The traditionalists were also appreciative of local practices which the Muhammadiyah declared as innovations, and argued that these had been practised by generations of Islamic scholars. But NU soon outgrew Muhammadiyah in terms of membership to be the more influential Islamic organization.

Highlighting the history of Muhammadiyah and NU here is essential not only because the two organizations continue to exist and exert a strong impact on Indonesia politics and on the country's socio-religious life; it was their rivalry that contributed to the formation of MORA and that continues to the present day to influence the dynamics within it.

MORA has its roots in the Dutch colonial period, although it started under a different name. The colonialists had set up the Office of Native Affairs to administer haj, marriage, and religious education. Its job was to oversee these aspects of Muslim life and did not stem from humanitarian concerns or as acknowledgement of the rights of the natives, but to generate income for the Netherlands through the

lucrative haj pilgrimage, and to exert control over Muslim religious life. The Dutch also had vested interests in determining what was “correct” Islam; they were weary of Indonesians importing progressive and anti-colonial ideas from the Middle East, where pilgrims met other pilgrims. The Dutch famously restricted the number of pilgrims travelling to Mecca, the reason why neighbouring Singapore became the centre for haj pilgrims from Indonesia, serving as a transit point to Arabia. The travel to Singapore allowed these pilgrims to avoid the Dutch quota.

In fact, in 1885, the Dutch government sent their ablest civil servants to study the haj pilgrims in Mecca. Orientalist and Christian scholar Snouck Hurgronje travelled to Jeddah disguised as a Muslim to better understand the Indonesian Muslims living there.

The establishment of an office to oversee Muslim affairs also gave the Dutch powers to disburse and collect taxes from the large Muslim base. It also served as a political tool by capitalizing on the rivalry between Muhammadiyah and NU—and also to appease them by showcasing its care for the community’s interests. They also sought to divert accusations that the Dutch favoured Christians more than Muslims, by subsidizing their schools and institutions. In 1941, the Ministry for Islamic Affairs was set up, but there was no follow-up on this after colonial rule.

During World War II, the Japanese wanted to outperform the Dutch by demonstrating its commitment to Islamic affairs. In essence, however, their control of the population did not depart much from their European predecessors. The Japanese set up two institutions to oversee Islamic affairs—the Religious Affairs Bureau (*shumubu*) based in Java, and the Religious Office in Sumatra. The later was set up only in 1944, towards the end of the Japanese occupation. The role of these offices was administrative rather than about improving religious life, and they were run by Japanese, including some Muslims (Fogg 2020, p. 158). While it was ideal in a secular system for the Japanese government to not interfere with religious life, the reality was about keeping Muslim groups in check so that they would not undermine the occupation government.

Two days after the declaration of Indonesian independence on 19 August 1945, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was being considered

as one of thirteen departments represented in the Cabinet. The idea was opposed by a delegate from the Maluku province, who claimed that this would create tensions between the Muslim and Christian communities. Some Muslim delegates from Lampung and a nationalist from Pasundan, West Java, also gave alternative views. The argument against forming the ministry was that Muslims would not be happy if it was headed by a Christian, and similarly, Christians would not be pleased if the post is given to a Muslim. There was a suggestion for religious affairs to be handled by the Ministry of Education, and another that it be housed under the Ministry of Home Affairs (Noer 1978, pp. 11–12). The motion to create a Ministry of Religious Affairs was defeated in the end by the acting parliament in the early days after the declaration of independence, by a vote of six to twenty-one (Fogg 2020). This failure did not mean that Islamic interests were defeated. Prominent Islamic leaders Wahid Hasyim and Haji Rasjidi were appointed as Minister of State in the first and second Cabinets to act on behalf of Muslim interests. Religious affairs were first parked under the Ministry of Culture and Education, and later moved to Home Affairs. The desire for a Ministry of Religious Affairs did not subside, and on 3 January 1946, President Sukarno established it and appointed Haji Rasjidi as the first Minister of Religion (Fogg 2020, pp. 160–61). So, officially, Haji Rasjidi was the country's first Minister of Religion. However, some argue that Wahid Hasyim played a similar role when he was Minister of State in 1945, though not officially named as the person in charge of religion; this led to some considering Wahid the first Minister of Religious Affairs.

There were three considerations regarding the administration of Islam, and these were already being handled by existing ministries. These were Islamic education, Justice (equivalent to the Syariah courts in other Muslim countries), and Information. Only the justice aspect has remained under the Ministry of Law.

In 1946, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was made up of eight departments: Finance, Islamic Religious Information, Islamic Marriages, the Secretariat, Islamic Education, Protestant, Catholic, and Personnel. Departments for Hinduism-Buddhism and Haj were later added. The ministry had twelve functions to carry out in 1949, mainly to realize

Pancasila the state's ideology; manage the curricula of religious schools (*pesantren* and institutions of higher learning); train teachers; funding; and oversee religious courts and endowment land (*waqf*).

In the early period, the ministry was subjected to rivalry between NU and Muhammadiyah. The power play was not only demonstrated in the competition for the minister post, but also for the recruitment of personnel from top positions in the bureaucracy, to the lower ranks, including those in the educational institutions. The reason for the competition had to do with the ministry's function of disbursing school funds. As mentioned, both organizations ran boarding schools or elementary *madrasahs*. Throughout the Sukarno presidency, the post of Minister of Religion normally rotated between NU and Muhammadiyah, and there were only two instances where the minister did not come from either of the two organizations. It has to be pointed out also that while the ministers may have come from either NU or Muhammadiyah, the two organizations were part of Masyumi, a political party created during the Japanese occupation. The list of religious ministers and their affiliations during the Sukarno period (1945–66) are summed up in Table 1. From 1945 until the fall of Sukarno in 1966, the position was mostly held by NU, Muhammadiyah held the position for less than one year each time, except for Faqih Usman, who was in office between April 1952 and July 1953.

On record, the first Minister of Religion was H.M Rasjidi. This is because the ministry was officially formed only on 3 January 1946. However, Abdul Wahid Hasyim (son of NU founder, Hasyim Asy'ari) and H.M. Rasjidi were already in the Cabinet as Minister of State, and oversaw religious affairs after the idea to form the ministry was rejected by the committee preparing the country's independence (Kemenag 2017). For some reason, particularly within NU circles, Wahid Hasyim is considered the first Minister of Religion. Records show that he was among the favourites to helm a ministerial position related to Islamic affairs during the Japanese occupation, through *shumubu* (Barton 2002, pp. 44–45). In fact, the Japanese offered his father Hasyim Asy'ari (the NU founder) that role, but he declined, preferring his son to assume it so that he himself could be based in Jakarta and be close to the nationalists—Sukarno and Hatta.

Table 1: Ministers of Religion during the Sukarno Period (1945–66)

Period	Name of Minister	Affiliation
Aug 1945–Apr 1952	Abdul Wahid Hasyim	NU
Nov 1945–Mar 1946	Haji Rasjidi	Muhammadiyah
Mar 1946–Oct 1947	Fathurrahman Kafrawi	NU
Jul 1947–Oct 1947	Achmad Asj'ari	Muhammadiyah
Oct 1947–Nov 1947	Anwaruddin	Parti Sarekat Islam Indonesia
Nov 1947–Aug 1948	Masjkur	NU
Dec 1948–Jul 1949	Teuku Mohammad Hassan	Independent
Dec 1949–Jan 1950	Masjkur	NU
Jan 1950–Sep 1950	Fakih Usman	Muhammadiyah
Apr 1951–Apr 1952	Abdul Wahid Hasyim	NU
Apr 1952–Jul 1953	Fakih Usman	Muhammadiyah
Jul 1953–Aug 1955	Masjkur	NU
Aug 1955–Jul 1959	Muhammad Ilyas	NU
Jul 1959–Mar 1962	Wahib Wahab	NU
Mar 1962–Oct 1967	Saifuddin Zuhri	NU

DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE NEW ORDER REGIME

The New Order period began under strong military rule, immediately after the failure of the communist coup in 1965. The practice of appointing NU-affiliated members to head MORA continued, at least during the early years of the New Order government. Saifuddin Zuhri continued to serve as minister until 1967, and was replaced by another NU leader Moh Dahlan who served from October 1967 to September 1971. Once the dust after the coup had settled, Soeharto was committed to promoting Islam in line with his modernization and developmentalist efforts. Under the New Order regime, the economy grew at an average of 6–7 per cent annually. Hence, it was not surprising that the ministry, too, had to undergo modernization and professionalization. In 1969, the ministry was also required to provide guidance related to *zakat*, marriage, and the haj (Noer 1978, pp. 18–19). After Moh Dahlan's time as minister, Soeharto began to fill the position with technocrats (Abdullah 1998, p. xxvii), and soon Golkar politicians, Muslim intellectuals, or military leaders were leading the organization.

Soeharto's preference for modernist Muslims was well exemplified in his appointment of Mukti Ali to run MORA from 1971 to 1978. Significant reforms of religious institutions were undertaken, particularly on religious education. Soeharto would send good students in religious studies to universities in the West or to modern Middle East universities, and not to traditional Islamic colleges such as the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Some of the prominent names from this period included Nurcholish Madjid (who studied at the University of Chicago), Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif (University of Chicago), Azyumardi Azra (Columbia University) and Amin Abdullah (Middle East Technical University, Ankara). Some were offered scholarships to study in the traditional universities, such as Abdurrahman Wahid, the grandson of NU founder Hasyim Asy'ari and son of former Minister of Religion Wahid Hasyim. In the 1980s, when Munawir Sjadzali was Minister of Religious Affairs, MORA introduced a special scholarship programme to send promising Indonesian students abroad, not only to the Middle East, but also to Western universities such as to McGill University, Leiden University and many others. In addition,

the number of the students sent to Western universities was more than those sent to the Middle East.

However, Soeharto soon had to deal with the conservative Islamic groups that emerged out of the Islamic revivalist movement. Islamic revivalism refers to the movement in which there is greater observance of religion among the population. A segment, particularly those living in urban centres, were educated and from the middle class, began to embrace religion as a counterweight to Westernization and what they saw as the ills of modernization. Those who described the positives of the revivalist movement attested that observance of religion brought out the best in the community in the form of philanthropy, empathy, and the practising of values such as humility, egalitarianism and justice. However, the dominant focus tended to remain on religious rituals and form rather than substance. Questions raised included whether Muslims could wish Christians Merry Christmas, whether food was halal (allowed, and slaughtered in the Islamic fashion), and whether bank interests constituted *riba* or usury.

In the 1980s, Soeharto began to engage Islamic revivalist groups in order to neutralize the military faction, which explains why he sought to strengthen MORA and shape it according to his ideals. This period saw Soeharto falling out with his right-hand man, Special Forces Chief General Benny Moerdani. Soeharto forging closer ties with Muslim groups did not however mean that he was giving on his developmentalist religious ideas.

Many however regarded MORA as an administrative body, and not as representative of the Islamic body of scholars or the *ulama*. In response to this, Soeharto established an *ulama* body, Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). It took him about five years to persuade prominent religious figures to head this body, which housed the *fatwa*-making council. MUI was finally established in 1975, and the first Chairman was a Muhammadiyah figure, Haji Abdul Malek Karim Amrullah or Hamka. MUI would take on controversial theological issues, in a way shielding MORA from that necessity. Such issues included the permissibility of national gambling scheme (Porkas) in Islam, frog breeding, the edibility of rabbit meat, the permissibility of mechanical slaughtering, and family planning (Mudzhar 1993; Norshahril 2018, p. 63).

The ministry has now expanded beyond overseeing the affairs of the religions it was originally intended to cover, i.e., Islam, Catholicism and Christianity. As of today, it also oversees Hinduism and Buddhism. Where Islam is concerned, there are other institutions that look into education, religious guidance, haj and *umrah* pilgrimage, legal and justice, and halal certification. There are also separate departments that oversee Confucianism and religious harmony (Kemenag 2017).

MORA IN THE POST-REFORM ERA

In 1998, Soeharto stepped down from the presidency and was replaced by B.J. Habibie. Under Habibie, the Minister of Religious Affairs was Malik Fadjar, a Muhammadiyah figure who was already an established figure in MORA. Habibie continued Soeharto's practice of awarding the ministership to a non-NU figure, and preferred the Muhammadiyah. Soeharto's bias against NU had partly been due to it being a Sukarno ally. The Habibie presidency was considered a transitional government, as was the leadership in MORA at the time. Not much of significance happened in the ministry. But then, in 1999, former NU chairman Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur) was elected Indonesian President. This totally changed the standing of the ministry. Gus Dur appointed Tolchah Hasan, the senior NU cleric from Malang as Minister of Religious Affairs. During the Gus Dur era, MORA had to deal with the ethno-religious conflict in Ambon, with which it struggled badly. But at the administrative level, it made many advances, such as improving the state of the *pesantren*, haj reforms—shortening the length of the haj journey—school holidays during Ramadan, and many others (Umam 2019).

In 2001, Gus Dur was impeached and Megawati took over as President. She continued Gus Dur's tradition of appointing NU figures as Minister of Religious Affairs. This decision was understandable. Even though Megawati had parted ways with her former ally Gus Dur, she understood the importance of having the backing of the NU *ulama*, especially those opposed to Gus Dur. Significantly, she appointed Said Agil al-Munawar (a Muslim traditionalist) to replace Tolchah. MORA continued the programmes introduced under Gus Dur. However, some

scandals broke to affect the ministry's image. Said Agil was jailed after being found guilty of corruption involving Dana Abadi Umat (the endowment fund for the Muslim community).

In 2004, Indonesia began implementing direct election system for the presidency, whereby the President is determined by his share of the popular vote. Megawati was defeated by Susilo Bambang Yudoyono (SBY), who, as it turned out, decided to continue the post-Soeharto tradition of appointing an NU member to head MORA. In his first term as President, SBY appointed Muhammad Maftuh Basyuni, former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, as Minister of Religious Affairs. Basyuni came from the NU family and was also the son-in-law of Muhammad Ilyas, who was formerly Minister of Religious Affairs in the Soeharto era. Basyuni was famous for reforming the management and bureaucracy of MORA, including the management of haj (Nasuhi 2019). Overall, MORA in the first term of SBY was quite successful with reforms. In his second term, SBY appointed Suryadharma Ali as Minister of Religious Affairs (2009–14). Suryadharma was the general chairman of the United Development Party (PPP) and was thus the first politician in the post-*Reformasi* era to be appointed to that position. He also came from an NU background. Suryadharma introduced the reform of haj financial management and advanced the *madrasah unggulan* (excellent Islamic schools) by opening these in many provinces throughout Indonesia (Karni 2019). Near the end of his term as minister, Suryadharma had to face allegations of corruption for abusing haj funds. He was later jailed.

MORA UNDER JOKOWI (SINCE 2014)

Many Indonesians expected Jokowi to win the 2014 presidential election easily. They also hoped he would reform MORA into a clean institution that worked not only for Muslims, but also non-Muslims. After his victory, Jokowi introduced the *Nawacita*, which literally means “Nine Priorities”, to define his government. These are: improving the state's presence in society; gaining public trust through developing a clean, effective and democratic government; developing the countryside; reforming institutions and upholding the law, and creating a clean and trustworthy system; increasing quality of life through education and

training; increasing the productivity of the people so that they can be competitive internationally and rise together with other Asian countries; achieving an independent economy through mobilizing the domestic sectors; revolutionizing the people's character through revamping the school curricula; and defending diversity and working for the social restoration of Indonesia and for dialogue among citizens (Qusyairi 2018, pp. 518–19).

Jokowi, however, did not raise any issues related to MORA explicitly during the 2014 presidential campaign. However, the Indonesian public then assumed that Jokowi would reform it if elected. The Suryadharma Ali corruption scandal surfaced at that time, and provided election ammunition for Jokowi to strengthen his reformist image. In the event, Suryadharma's position was handed over to Lukman Hakim Saifuddin. Jokowi's supporters hoped that the President would enhance MORA's standing institutionally. Some proposed to him to change the political nomenclature of MORA to be about *waqf*, *zakat* and haj (endowment, tithe and pilgrimage). Others proposed removing MORA from the Indonesian ministerial Cabinet, arguing that MORA was the cause of conflict and disharmony among different religious groups. So central was the MORA issue during the 2014 campaign that Jokowi's opponent, Prabowo Subianto, used it against Jokowi.

However, after winning the 2014 election, Jokowi stated that he did not have any plans to expunge MORA from his Cabinet structure. He also did not seek to change the nomenclature of MORA to become the ministry for *waqf*, *zakat* and haj, which would specifically mean that its purpose was to manage only Islamic affairs. The latter would have accurately demonstrated MORA's real work. Jokowi chose instead to continue MORA's role based on what he inherited from his predecessors. In an obvious attempt at not rocking the boat, Jokowi did not appoint a new Minister of Religious Affairs and decided to stick with Lukman Hakim Saifuddin. Far from reducing Lukman Hakim's role, he glowingly promoted him to a senior in his Cabinet, for having served in the previous administration. In short, Jokowi's *Nawacita* was never meant to dismantle MORA; instead he continued SBY's legacy.

Jokowi has managed to improve MORA's public image. MORA has been working at developing religious harmony in the country, one example

of which is through Jokowi's "*moderasi beragama*" (practising moderate religiosity). Lukman Hakim introduced this programme in the later part of Jokowi's first term. This idea serves as a new milestone for seeding and managing religious harmony, tolerance and diversity. Lukman Hakim carefully distinguished between "*moderasi beragama*" and "*moderasi agama*". The former is about being moderate in practising one's faith, as ordained by the Qur'an (*ummatan wasatan*); while the latter means to moderate religion (to tamper with religion), which is prohibited. MORA follows the doctrine that religion is religion, it cannot be moderated or softened (Jahroni and Munhanif 2019). It follows that moderation applies to behaviours and attitudes but not to religious doctrines. The *moderasi beragama* promoted by MORA seeks society's respect for diversity and plurality. *Moderasi beragama* is officially included in Jokowi's five-year programme, the RPJMN (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional) 2020–24 (Jahroni and Munhanif 2019, p. 243).

The context for *moderasi beragama* was that Indonesia had become a hotbed for Islamic radicalism and terrorism. It is also in line with the country's long involvement in the international network for preventing violent extremism (PVE). After some years of being part of PVE, MORA realized that the PVE approach was not effective and that it was being widely criticized by society. While PVE may have been successful in fighting against violent extremism and terrorism, it was not effective against non-violent extremism. The remaining problem for Indonesia is no longer violent extremism and terrorism, but increasing intolerance and radicalism among different religious groups. Both intolerance and radicalism cannot be approached through PVE, and it was on this basis that the MORA introduced *moderasi beragama* ahead of PVE and other approaches.

Moderasi beragama was not designed for the Muslim community alone but for all religions and beliefs living in Indonesia, in line with the ministry's mandate of catering to religious affairs, and not Islamic affairs alone. As Lukman Hakim stated, "moderation should be understood as our common commitment to secure a perfect balance in which each citizen of Indonesia regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and political choice should listen and teach each other in coaching our ability to manage and overcome difference among them" (Kemenag

2019, p. vi). Besides that, the concept of *moderasi beragama* is also MORA's adopted way to moderate NU and Muhammadiyah, such that each of them promotes the model of their Islamness. NU prefers the term "Islam Nusantara" while Muhammadiyah uses "Islam Berkemajuan" to indicate their form of Islam.

NEW CHALLENGES AND INITIATIVES

The relationship between Jokowi and Islamic civil society has been a dynamic one. In his first term, Jokowi was close to NU and the Muhammadiyah, but not to MUI. NU and Muhammadiyah figures were Jokowi's main supporters for the presidential race in 2014, and by contrast, MUI figures were not. Interestingly, after Jokowi was officially sworn in as President, he changed the budgetary procedure for whole ministries, and this affected MUI's funding badly. MUI had received a block budget from MORA on a yearly basis. The amount was not enough for financing MUI, but it helped pay MUI's administrative staff; MUI board members do not receive a salary. In Jokowi's first year as President, MUI stopped getting this funding. The new procedure required MUI to seek state grants on the basis of actual needs which should be properly presented in a detailed sheet; and MUI staff were not trained in this matter.

In retaliation, MUI leaders turned this against the President, and tried to brand him as anti-Islam. MUI figures such as Amirsyah Tambunan (vice-general secretary) for instance used the issue to persuade the public that the new government had stopped the funding completely. Tambunan stated that in 2015, MUI did not get the state grant and all MUI expenses operation had to be funded by MUI's elite members themselves. Tambunan did not mention that the drop in funding was not the government's doing, but was instead due to MUI's failure to follow new procedures.⁵ Another MUI leader, Amidhan also stated that the

⁵ Republika, "Pemerintah Hentikan Bantuan Dana untuk MUI", 12 March 2015, <https://nasional.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/15/03/12/nl30va-pemerintah-hentikan-bantuan-dana-untuk-mui> (accessed 8 August 2020).

government did not provide monetary support to MUI despite President SBY's Presidential Instruction No. 151/2014 that obliged the government of Indonesia to finance MUI.⁶ Lukman Hakim Saifuddin later responded to the MUI board members by explaining that the Jokowi administration had not stopped the funding at all, and that it was pending. The MUI budget for 2015 was pending due to the change in Jokowi government's policy on *bantuan sosial* (Bansos, or social funds). Unfortunately, the MUI grant in the state budget was categorized as a Bansos. Social funds thus far had been transferred to certain religious organizations in the form of block grants, and this had been happening for a long time, even since before the era of SBY. Jokowi did not agree with this procedure and had ordered that the mechanism of transferring social funds be in the form of detailed grants. This was meant to raise the transparency of social funds, which were coming from public taxes.

NU and Muhammadiyah were not affected by the change because both organizations had been quite independent from the government. In addition, both had given more to Jokowi than what Jokowi had given to them. In general, NU and Muhammadiyah as civil society organizations made significant contributions to Jokowi's campaign in 2014, and when he was serving his first term in office (2014–19). They gave full support to the government by affirming government programmes with their own programmes. In short, the relationship between Jokowi and the ICSOs have been constructive and not problematic.

Tension between Jokowi and Islamic civil society organizations began to appear only recently, at the start of Jokowi's second term in office. The ICSOs began suspecting that Jokowi was more inclined towards political pragmatism than championing idealism. The first disappointment came with NU and Muhammadiyah feeling that Jokowi's second Cabinet did not reflect his promises made during the 2019 election campaign. Jokowi

⁶ Randy Ferdi Firdaus, "Jokowi Belum Cairkan Dana Bansos Buat MUI Sebesar Rp 3 M". *Merdeka.com*, 14 March 2015, <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/jokowi-belum-cairkan-dana-bansos-buat-mui-sebesar-rp-3-m.html> (accessed 8 August 2020).

had often been saying that he would no longer be burdened (*beban*) if elected again for a second term. By this, it seemed to mean that he would push unpopular but necessary policies without worrying about his political future. Indonesia has a two-term limit on the presidency. Islamic civil society organizations interpreted Jokowi's statement to mean that he would be independent in managing the country's affairs, free from the intervention of political parties, big corporations, and lobby groups. This was also a reason why many ICSOs, including NU, supported Jokowi. Muhammadiyah's support for Jokowi, was not as clear cut compared to NU's. Having given its full backing to Jokowi and vice-president Ma'ruf Amin (also from NU), the organization expected that at the very least, one of its leaders would be made Minister of Religious Affairs.⁷ NU was optimistic that Jokowi would meet this expectation because besides the electoral support from them, the vice-president was general chairman (*rais am*) of the Syariah advisory body (Syuriah Nahdlatul Ulama) of NU as well. For some members of NU, the vice-presidency was not a big enough catch compared to MORA, which controls funds for Islamic schools, and other matters related to Islam.

On 23 October 2019, Jokowi announced his Cabinet and surprisingly named retired general Fachrul Razi Minister of Religious Affairs.⁸ This is the first time a military man had been appointed to that post since the time of Soeharto. Other military men who had assumed that role previously were Alamsyah Ratu Prawiranegara (1925–98) and Tarmizi Taher (1936–2013). Jokowi's decision disappointed many in NU. Public reaction was divided. One group argued that the appointment of Fachrul Razi was in line with Jokowi's resolve to tackle religious issues, and that the

⁷ During the Soeharto era, the Minister of MORA was always given to the Muhammadiyah and modernist Muslim groups (such as alumni of Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia (HMI, or Indonesian Muslim Student Association) (Umam 1998).

⁸ Ahmad Faiz Ibnu Sani, "Jokowi Umumkan Kabinet Indonesia Maju, Ini Daftar menteriya", *Tempo.co*, 23 October 2019, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1263219/jokowi-umumkan-kabinet-indonesia-maju-ini-daftar-menterinya/full&view=ok> (accessed 12 August 2020).

President needed a strong and firm military figure to deal with fragile and divisive religious issues. Deciding on Fachrul Razi would also distance Jokowi from NU and Muhammadiyah rivalry. By contrast, another group, in which NU was well represented, argued that the appointment reflected partisan politicking within his Cabinet. Some others speculated that Jokowi deferred Cabinet appointments to retired military personnel including Fachrul Razi, who was the coordinator of BRAVO 5, a group of retired military generals who worked for the winning Jokowi team. Jokowi is also very close to Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, his reliable ally in the Cabinet.⁹ Jokowi himself explained that he chose Fachrul Razi in order to tackle radicalism, but many continue to doubt whether that was the true intention.¹⁰

Some observers associate this appointment as a new tendency on the part of Jokowi to accommodate the military. Other Jokowi ministers with a military background include Luhut Binsar Panjaitan (Coordinating Minister of Maritime and Investment Affairs), Prabowo Subianto (Minister of Defence), Terawan Agus Putranto (Minister of Health) and Moeldoko (Chief of Staff of Presidency). Since taking charge of MORA, Fachrul Razi has furthermore recruited retired generals, both from within BRAVO 5 and from outside to be part of his staff. These include Suaedy Marassabesy (the retired general of TNI-AD and BRAVO 5), Ahmad Ubaidillah (the coordinator of BRAVO 5 of East Java), both brought in as Fachrul Razi's Special Staff (Staf Khusus). Although both have left MORA, Fachrul Razi's promotion of generals deserves attention. Fachrul Razi has put forth the idea that to socialize religious harmony (*kerukunan*

⁹ CNBC Indonesia, "Dahlan Iskan: Menteri Agama Fachrul Razi 'Orangnya' Luhut", 24 October 2019, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20191024120639-4-109713/dahlan-iskan-menteri-agama-fachrul-razi-orangnya-luhut> (accessed 12 August 2020).

¹⁰ Kanavino Ahmad Rizqo and Andhika Prasetia, "Tugas Jokowi ke Menag Jeneral (Purn) Fachrul Razi: Urus Radikalisme", *Detik News*, 23 October 2019, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4756517/tugas-jokowi-ke-menag-jenderal-purn-fachrul-razi-urus-radikalisme> (accessed 12 August 2020).

umat beragama), MORA must bring in TNI-AD.¹¹ He assumes that since both MORA and TNI-AD have connections down to the lowest levels of community life, both should be able to work effectively together, and this would in turn increase and secure religious harmony in Indonesia. He is also convinced that military and security approaches should be combined with religious approaches in defending Negara Kebangsaan Republik Indonesia (NKRI, or the Unitary Republic of Indonesia).¹²

But what made NU even more displeased with Jokowi's decision was that although Jokowi personally invited NU general chairman Said Aqil Siradj to provide advice on Cabinet appointments, he did not follow them.¹³ Therefore, the appointment of Fachrul Razi disappointed many in NU's rank and file.¹⁴ NU put Jokowi's decision down to ignorance of the very significant electoral support given him by this traditionalist organization. Without NU's support, Jokowi's victory was not guaranteed. While NU recognized Jokowi's choice of Ma'ruf Amin as his vice-presidential candidate, it felt this did not eliminate its entitlement to MORA. For NU, MORA is not just a ministerial position, but is part of its history, its national identity, and its DNA.

Though upset with Jokowi's decision, NU does not seem to be overtly seeking to undermine the President. Instead, it chooses to ignore him, a move that can be considered as strategic. For instance, for the national

¹¹ CNN Indonesia, "Kemenag dan TNI Bakal Urus Kerukunan hingga Pelosok Daerah", 1 July 2020, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200701180212-20-519690/kemenag-dan-tni-bakal-urus-kerukunan-hingga-pelosok-daerah> (accessed 13 August 2020).

¹² Ibid.; Friski Riana, "DPR Kritik Fachrul Razi Libatkan TNI Soal Kerukunan Umat Beragama", *Tempo.co*, 7 July 2020, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1362315/dpr-kritik-fachrul-razi-libatkan-tni-soal-kerukunan-umat-beragama> (accessed 13 August 2020).

¹³ An informant states that Said Aqil Siradj had proposed ten names of the best cadres of NU for the post of Minister of Religious Affairs.

¹⁴ Kumparan News, "Banyak Kiai NU Kecewa pada Jokowi karena Kursi Menag", 24 October 2019, <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/banyak-kiai-nu-kecewa-pada-jokowi-karena-kursi-menag-1s7QP1X3sVf> (accessed 16 August 2020).

deradicalization programme to tackle terrorism and religious extremism, NU has pledged to continue contributing, with or without partnering with the government.¹⁵ NU has also tried to avoid direct communication with the President over important issues such as the Hizbut Tahrir (HTI). But overall, NU has chosen to remain silent and not publicly defend Jokowi on many of his policies. NU's relationship with Jokowi remains cold, and even Ma'ruf Amin has not been able to mediate between the two parties. In allowing this situation to continue, Jokowi may fail to receive much-needed political support at crucial times. Lately, Kyai Said Aqil Siradj has often been criticizing the Jokowi administration for being an oligarchic government.¹⁶ When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, NU acted independently to reach out to victims without waiting for the government. In another example, NU chose not to assist various ministries in tackling extremist groups, such as the *khilafa* movement.

Without the support of the country's largest organization, MORA may not be able to tackle contemporary issues effectively. One area that needs immediate attention is the administration of the haj in 2020. In his first term, Jokowi inherited a promising legacy of haj reform from SBY through allowing Lukman Hakim Saifuddin to remain as Minister of Religious Affairs. Under Lukman Hakim, MORA was able to stabilize or even lower the cost of haj for pilgrims. In 2016, MORA decreased the cost of haj by up to 15.6 per cent, i.e. from US\$3,219 to US\$2,717. MORA was also able to get a larger quota for Indonesian haj pilgrims from the Saudis. It also successfully raised the quality and quantity of catering services for pilgrims during haj (Jahroni and Munhanif 2019, p. 215). Lukman Hakim managed to establish Badan Pengelola Keuangan Haji (BPKH, or Haj Fund Management Agency), which is separated from MORA, to manage haj funds. To the very end of his time as minister, Lukman Hakim's performance at MORA was

¹⁵ BBC News Indonesia, "Bekas Jenderal Jadi Menteri Agama, 'NU Kecewa, Deradikalisasi Biar Kami Urus Sendiri'", 24 October 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-50153683> (accessed 12 August 2020).

¹⁶ <https://www.viva.co.id/berita/politik/1260699-said-aqil-kritik-pemerintah-di-depan-maruf-amin-ada-apa> (accessed 23 August 2020).

undeniably successful. However, like some of his predecessors, there was an allegation connecting him to a corruption case at MORA that directly involved his political patron Romy Rohahurmuzy (the general chairman of PPP). Jokowi allowed him to run MORA for as long as there was not enough evidence to implicate him.

The issue of haj during the COVID-19 pandemic has become even more challenging for Fachrul Razi. Without a doubt, the haj is a significant yearly event for all Muslims; it is even more pressing for Indonesian Muslims because registered pilgrims have to wait for years, if not decades, before they can carry out the pilgrimage. Pilgrims have to be placed on a long waiting list because of the quota imposed by the Saudi Arabia government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the question whether the government should continue sending pilgrims to Saudi Arabia was debated in public. Skipping the haj this year means pilgrims' waiting time will be prolonged for another year. This was Fachrul Razi's first major test as the Minister of Religious Affairs. The burden of dealing with this issue was actually not related to the government of Saudi Arabia but to the Indonesian public's inability to understand the dangers of COVID-19 if the haj ritual was to proceed this year. The Muslim community was divided into two groups—those who requested the government to send pilgrims to Mecca and those who asked for the haj to be delayed until the pandemic was over. The former argued that COVID-19 did not fulfil the pandemic or *daruri* (Islamic emergency) category, and therefore there was no a strong reason to delay the haj. The latter argued that the COVID-19 had reached the level and the haj must be suspended.

Another difficult challenge for MORA came from the Businessmen Association of Haj and Umra. The cancellation of the haj would be detrimental for their business; the economic value of haj is big for Indonesia, reaching 25 trillion rupiah yearly.¹⁷ This does not include the

¹⁷ CNBC Indonesia, “Wow! Ukuran Bisnis Umrah Tembus Rp25 Triliun”, 25 January 2019, <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20190125162438-8-52399/wow-ukuran-bisnis-umrah-tembus-rp-25-triliun> (accessed 16 August 2020).

economic value of *umrah*; the potential loss to Indonesia due to the delay is around 25–30 trillion rupiah.¹⁸

However, many applauded Fachrul Razi for his decisiveness in suspending the haj for Indonesian pilgrims even before the Saudi Arabia government imposed restrictions on travel to the country. His decision saved businesses some cost. These businesses would have made bigger losses if the haj had been cancelled only at the last minute. Moreover, the quick decision allowed would-be pilgrims more time to emotionally accept the decision.

CONCLUSION

To be sure, the role of MORA has evolved since its founding. Starting out at first as a compromise to appease groups upset with the government for not fulfilling the agreement to make Indonesia an Islamic state, it has undertaken the administrative burden of managing haj and halal certification, education, and the courts. While its role has changed, the political fight for control of MORA has remained consistent. The Dutch initiated the institution for political and economic reasons, and this objective has remained ever since, as have the institutional actors.

At the heart of the contestation for MORA is NU and the Muhammadiyah. MORA controls the purse strings for institutions that are of significance to Muslims, such as religious schools. While it is intended to serve the six religions in Indonesia, it caters mostly to the Muslims. The position of the minister is greatly desired, not because of the powers attached to it, but also for symbolic reasons—it means at the apex of the community’s identity. But as was the case under colonial rule, the political elites post-independence have also sought to control MORA and to align it with state objectives and philosophy. During Soeharto’s New Order, where the military wielded significant influence, the persons in

¹⁸ Vincent Fabian Thomas, “Risiko Ekonomi di Balik Tarik-Ulur Penutupan Umrah Arab Saudi”, *Tirto.id*, February 2020, <https://tirto.id/risiko-ekonomi-di-balik-tarik-ulur-penutupan-umrah-arab-saudi-eBpp> (accessed 19 August 2020).

charge of MORA had to toe the president's line and religious orientation. Military influence on religious affairs ceased after the fall of Soeharto, but accusations of corruption ensued in the ministry.

Jokowi's electoral success in 2014 was due to his ability to reach out to the grassroots and nipping problems in the bud through his famous *blusukan*. One of the areas many thought he would reform was the religious sector and MORA. Despite much promise, the reforms were left wanting and MORA remained in its status quo. His second term, from 2019, started with a more controversial decision to name a military man minister, and not some Islamic scholar. One is reminded of the New Order with this latest decision. This decision has also disappointed his core supporters in NU, the largest Muslim organization in Indonesian. Going forward, MORA will continue to be a site for contestation for power, not only for religious elites, but political ones. The pressure will grow as the country's Muslims become more religious.

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