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HIZBUT TAHRIR INDONESIA IN 2014:
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY
OF DISCONTENT

GWENAËL NJOTO-FEILLARD

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

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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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Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia in 2014: The Political Economy of Discontent

By Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- During the 2014 presidential election, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization committed to creating a global Islamic caliphate that would replace democracy, rejected both Joko Widodo's and Prabowo Subianto's candidacy. However, as in previous legislative elections, its members were allowed to vote for parliamentary candidates that would push for the application of Islamic law.
- HTI has been compelled to clarify its position regarding the emergence of support of IS in Indonesia. It clearly condemns IS's use of violence as a means of establishing the caliphate, but at the same time, it uses the issue to reinforce its anti-Western narrative.
- While HTI's transnational programme and opposition to democracy appear antithetical to Indonesia's current political situation, the organization may still find ways to mobilize in certain sectors of Indonesian society. HTI's strategy of expansion is flexible enough for it to adapt to recent developments and prudently adjust its discourse while holding firm to its ideological foundations.
- As long as economic development is perceived to yield inequalities and discrimination, the transnational organization will continue to have a foothold in Indonesia. It is probable that HTI will not embark on a path of political accommodation as it aims exclusively at the "market of discontent" within Indonesian society.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia in 2014: The Political Economy of Discontent

By Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard¹

INTRODUCTION

The year 2014 was a defining one not only for Indonesia and its people, but also for the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization committed to creating a global Islamic caliphate that would replace democracy, capitalism and the framework of nation states. Indeed, two processes have posed an ideological challenge to HTI and spurred a flurry of counter-arguments in its literature in recent months: first, the parliamentary and presidential elections have confirmed the relevancy of the democratic system (with all its shortcomings) for a majority of Indonesians;² and second, the violent rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (now renamed the “Islamic State”, IS) in the Middle East is jeopardizing HTI’s own ideal of the caliphate in the eyes of the Indonesian public. In recent years, a number of academic papers have been written on the origins, growth, structure and ideology of HTI.³ The purpose of this article is to

¹ Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard is Visiting Fellow at the Indonesia Studies Programme at the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute. Email: gwenael_njoto-feillard@iseas.edu.sg. The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

² Marcus Mietzner, “Indonesia’s 2014 Elections: How Jokowi Won and Democracy Survived”, *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 4 (October 2014): 111–25.

³ Claudia Nef-Saluz, “Promoting the Caliphate on Campus: Debates and Advocacies of Hizbut Tahrir Student Activists in Indonesia”, in *Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*, edited by Al-Rasheed, Madawi, Carool Kersten, and Marat Shterin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 185–205; Mohamed Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia’s Mobilization Strategy and Its Impact

give an update on the organization's ideological positioning in light of these important developments in Indonesia.

HTI is the Indonesian branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), a movement founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by the Palestinian intellectual and jurist, Taqiuddin an-Nahbani (1909–77). As he had close links to the Muslim Brotherhood, an-Nahbani was influenced by Islamist thought, which considers Islam as a total ideology that answers all questions and has to be applied to all domains of life (cultural, political, social, economic), demanding particularly an “Islamic state”. Additionally, like many intellectuals of his time, an-Nahbani was also inspired by leftist ideas. What distinguished him from others, however, was the fact that he saw the revival of the caliphate as the true solution for the “community of believers”, the *Ummah*, in ending “Western” domination, an example of which was the occupation of Palestine and the creation of Israel in 1948. For an-Nahbani, this political framework — entailing the global leadership of a caliph and the strict application of Islamic law — was the only way for Muslims to truly respect God's message.

Soon after its creation in 1953, Hizbut Tahrir (HT) was banned in Jordan. An-Nahbani was arrested and then spent the rest of his life in exile in Syria and Lebanon. However, HT managed to expand to other countries in the Middle East throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. It was supported particularly by Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon.⁴ In the 1960s, in reaction to HT's involvement in a series of coup attempts in Jordan, Syria and Iraq, its members were suppressed in these countries. Consequently,

in Indonesia”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 601–22; Greg Fealy, “Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a ‘Total’ Islamic Identity”, in *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West*, edited by Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), pp. 151–64; Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “The Quest for Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia”, *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, no. 4 (2009): 623–645; Ken Ward, “Non-Violent Extremism: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2006): 149–64.

⁴ This was probably due to the founder's Palestinian origins, but also to HTI support for the cause of Palestine.

the movement experienced a decline in the 1970s and 1980s. However, a revival of HT took place in the early 1990s: it expanded rapidly in post-Soviet Central Asia, North Africa, Turkey, Europe and Southeast Asia. Palestinians emigrants and intellectuals were the main vectors of its dissemination and transformed it into a global movement. HT does not disclose its membership numbers, but it is estimated that it could be between a few hundred thousand to more than a million members.⁵

The Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia was formed in the early 1980s.⁶ It kept a relatively low profile during the Suharto years, as the regime was known to repress radical forms of political Islam. With the end of the New Order, the organization started a wide-ranging public expansion strategy. Greg Fealy suggested in 2007 that “by Indonesian standards, [it was still] a relatively small movement, which has remained on the fringe of the Muslim community since its emergence in 2000”.⁷ Because access to verifiable data is currently impossible, the real weight of HTI remains difficult to assess, but it has been estimated that its members are in the tens of thousands, with many tertiary students with science and technical backgrounds and middle-class professionals from urban areas.⁸ Compared to the millions of members and sympathizers of the country’s two largest

⁵ Fealy, “Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a ‘Total’ Islamic Identity”, p. 154.

⁶ HTI finds its origins in two individuals: Mama Abdullah bin Nuh and Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi. The former was an Islamic scholar who became disillusioned with the existing Islamic movements in the 1970s, which were considered to have failed to answer the problems besetting the Muslim community. He became particularly interested in HT ideology and came in contact with HT members who had migrated to Australia, among whom was Lebanese national al-Baghdadi. In 1982, the duo started disseminating HT ideology through bin Nuh’s *pesan-tren* (Islamic boarding school) and, later on, through more structured proselytizing programmes in campus Muslim groups, notably in larger state tertiary institutions (Bogor Agricultural Institute, Bandung Institute of Technology and Universitas Indonesia). *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁸ Fealy notes that “rural and lower class membership appears small”. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Islamic⁹ organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, HTI can indeed be considered small in terms of members.

Clearly, HTI's objective (at least for now) is not to expand exponentially, but to form a core of fully dedicated cadres. This can be seen from its method of recruitment which is progressive and guarded: first, individuals are invited to a *dauroh*, short-term introductory classes; after which, dedicated members are given access to *halaqah* or study groups, which require committed personal involvement. These strongly dedicated individuals are supposed to form a vanguard of cadres who will convince Indonesian society of the necessity to adopt the caliphate model.

As noted by Fealy, HTI is probably the only Islamic organization in Indonesia that is controlled both structurally and ideologically by a central leadership that is based in the Middle East.¹⁰ However, HTI is given a certain latitude to adapt to certain local issues. The question is how this process was articulated in regards to the two major events of 2014: the general elections and the threat of IS. To answer this, I analysed the official literature of HTI (its journal *Media Umat*, magazine *Al Wa'ie*, bulletin *Al Islam* and Internet site <http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/>), as well as data from focus group discussions (FGDs) with its cadres and members.¹¹

⁹ Islamic organizations are those that are based on Islam whereas Islamist organizations work towards Islamizing the State and society.

¹⁰ In the diversified landscape of Islam in Indonesia, HTI occupies a peculiar place. It is transnational and therefore strongly opposes Indonesian nationalism, which is enshrined in the Pancasila, the State ideology. Interestingly, notwithstanding some fringe radical groups like the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia), most Islamic parties and organizations adhere to the framework of the Indonesian nation-state. This is evidently the case of mainstream moderate organizations NU and Muhammadiyah, but also the "moderate" Islamist party PKS, the more strictly Islamist party PBB, or again of neo-fundamentalist proselytizing organization Hidayatullah.

¹¹ For this study, the HTI representative, Ismail Yusanto, agreed to organize three focus discussion groups (Jakarta, Surabaya and Yogyakarta) with members of HTI (in May, June and August 2014). The author would like to thank him and the FGD participants for sharing their views. Each session comprised around fifteen

One of the objectives of the study is to determine how grassroots activists perceive — and possibly reinterpret — the official ideology of HTI, particularly on political themes such as democracy, political participation (or non-participation), and the role of Islamist and nationalist-secular parties. The second objective is to see if there can be an evolution within HTI towards a more conciliatory position on political participation. For now, it seems that HTI is clearly and exclusively targeting certain sectors of the population which harbour discontent towards the current political and economic situation. According to the organization’s narrative, the culprit of this state of affairs is democracy, and its foundation, capitalism, and the only solution is the caliphate and the application of Islamic law.¹² However, if this strategy of aiming at discontent hinders its development, one has to ask if HTI will choose to adapt to the situation and participate in some form of political process.

Moreover, the underlying concern with regards to HTI is whether its ideology can be defined as “extremist” and whether it can be considered

participants, men and women alike. However, this sample cannot be considered scientifically representative of the organization’s landscape as the members had been chosen in advance by HTI. The organization is known to be very careful managing its image, as some issues that form part of its narrative are sensitive in the Indonesian context. However, the members who attended the FGDs were far from homogenous. Some came from Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and others from a more secular background. Some joined HTI more than ten years ago while others had been around for less than two years. All showed a high degree of commitment to the cause and a strong belief in the ideals of the Hizbut Tahrir. None showed hostility in defending the caliphate. They were most of all activists who were convinced that Indonesian society was in a state of impasse, and that the caliphate was the solution. Many came from higher education institutions linked to HTI, but whether they are representative of the current reality of HTI membership is open to debate. This study was thus limited to define the “market of discontent” in broad terms (see the conclusion), as it was not possible to operate a sociological typology.

¹² It is probable that HTI’s application of Islamic law would entail “*hudud*” (punishments fixed in the Quran and hadith for crimes considered to be against the rights of God). However, HTI literature does not seem to promote the concept too vehemently, possibly because it is not a very popular theme in the Indonesian public.

“non-violent”. Internationally, Hizbut Tahrir has been criticized for favouring the same views as terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda. However, there has not been any evidence of HTI involvement in any activities related to terrorism in Indonesia.¹³ With the general condemnation of the atrocities committed in the name of IS, will HTI adopt a clearer position within its narrative on the subject of *jihad* and the caliphate?

CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM

(a) The 2014 General Elections

The 2014 general elections were a pivotal moment for Indonesia. The legislative election in April showed a general fragmentation of the political landscape and a relative rebound of Muslim-based parties, which had been said to be on the decline (32 per cent of total vote share in 2014, in comparison to 26 per cent in 2009). However, this signified more of a consolidation of traditional party affiliation than popular vote for an Islamist agenda. The presidential election in July illustrated an intense competition between Joko Widodo (the first-ever candidate who is not from the old political and economic elite circles) and Prabowo Subianto, the former son-in-law of Suharto and ex-leader of the Special forces (Kopassus), who symbolized, in contrast, a possible rollback to the country’s authoritarian past.¹⁴ The “strong man” appeal of Prabowo reflected a general “fatigue” of large sectors of Indonesian society in a democratic system that was deemed to promote national fragmentation, endemic corruption and socio-economic inequalities. Moreover, one of the main divides during this presidential campaign was centred on religion. Jokowi was supported by the Islamic traditionalist party, PKB,¹⁵

¹³ Ward, “Non-Violent Extremism: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia”.

¹⁴ Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, “Indonesian Politics in 2014: Democracy’s Close Call”, *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 50, no. 3 (2014): 347–69.

¹⁵ It should be noted that, as with other Islamic currents in Indonesia, the Traditionalists are far from being homogenous (in that one can find both “pluralist” and “conservative” figures).

and made clear during his campaign that he would defend an Islam that was plural, tolerant and anchored in the country's history and culture. Prabowo Subianto showed more ambiguity and was considered to be more open to the implementation of an Islamizing agenda. He thus managed to gather the support of Islamist parties, such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) and the Crescent and Star Party (PBB, Partai Bulan Bintang), as well as radical and violent militias, like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam), the Betawi Rempug Forum (FBR, Forum Betawi Rempug) and the Pancasila Youth (PP, Pemuda Pancasila).¹⁶

The position of HTI was clear during the presidential campaign: they supported neither Jokowi nor Prabowo. However, the organization had to be cautious in justifying this double-rejection and the non-participation of its members in the political process (thereby avoiding being suspected of having authoritarian tendencies). After all, democracy (with all its limitations) is considered by the majority of the Indonesian people to be the best system of governance to date. Thus, HTI argued that it did not oppose the principle of “choosing” a leader, but rather the programmes defended by the two candidates. About a month before the elections, its bulletin *Al Islam* argued that a legitimate candidate had to have the following conditions: he had to be Muslim, a man who had come of age (*baligh*) and a just person who would be able to lead and implement his own policies. For HTI, an important condition was that a head of state had

¹⁶ FPI was formed in 1998 at the fall of the New Order. During its formative years at least, the Islamic militia was known to have links with high-ranking figures of the police and the military. FPI has since used various violent means to impose its own vision of a pious and moral society based on the strict application of Islamic law. The FBR was created in 2001. Its objective is to defend the interests of Jakarta's so-called indigenous population, the Betawi, an ethnic marker that is associated with an Islamic identity. “Rempug” in Forum Betawi Rempug is similar to “united” in meaning; thus, FBR is translated as United Betawi Forum. The PP is a paramilitary organization created in 1959 by General Nasution. It played a key role in the anti-communist repression in 1965. During Suharto's New Order, the PP became an essential support of the authoritarian military regime. PP is known to include in its ranks a significant number of “thugs” (*preman*).

“to apply a system and laws from Islam in their entirety”. It is obligatory, according to Islamic law, for the leader to declare the caliphate in all Muslim lands so as to free Muslim populations from the colonial powers of the unbelievers, and to promote the expansion of Islam to the whole world. According to HTI, since none of the presidential candidates was proposing this (rather ambitious) manifesto, members of the organization could not vote for them.¹⁷

Interestingly, HTI used arguments that had been employed by the candidates during the campaign. One of Prabowo’s earliest messages to counter the Jokowi candidacy was that he was a “puppet candidate” (*capres boneka*) who was subservient to Megawati Soekarnoputri and her party, the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle). HTI in turn considered Jokowi an instrument of foreign interests, such as the United States and the Vatican, and local Chinese conglomerates, and at the same time also considered Prabowo as no less of a puppet, as shown by his links to business interests from the New Order regime.¹⁸ In fact, for HTI, all Indonesian presidents, from Soekarno to Jokowi, are considered to be or have been working for neo-colonial powers.

Thus, a FGD participant declared:

Prabowo wears a *kopiah* (traditional hat) just as a symbol of Indonesia-ness, but he is a symbol of the old order. Who is behind Jokowi but Megawati, who outsourced our assets and jobs? My question is this one: why did Prabowo get so much support from Islamic parties? He managed to present an Islamic image, but don’t be fooled, because there were other interests behind him. Are Prabowo and Jokowi really Islamic or do they just claim to be?

¹⁷ “Hukum Pemilu President” [Law on the Presidential election], *Al Islam*, no. 711, 20 June 2014, pp. 1–2; “Wajibkah Mengangkat Penguasa Di Negara Sekular?” [Is it Compulsory to Choose a Leader in a Secular State?], *Al-Wa’ie*, no. 164, 1 April 2014, pp. 31–33.

¹⁸ “Islam Tegak, Pemimpin Boneka Lenyap” [Islam is Applied, Puppet Candidates Vanish], *Media Umat* 127, no. 2, May 2014, p. 9.

After the election of Jokowi, another participant stated:

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono or Jokowi, this is not the real problem. The real one is the leadership and the system of life (democratic or Islamic). For the presidential election in Indonesia, we say “non-participation” (*golput*), i.e. no to Jokowi and no to Prabowo, because the problem is not leadership. The more serious problem is the system of life. As long as there is a secular or democratic system in Indonesia, there is a problem. I think the democratic system is meaningless. There is only one system for the Islamic community and that is the caliphate, because it implements Islamic law.

While HTI is clearly against participation in the presidential election — as this would be equivalent to recognizing the legitimacy of the nation-state — the legislative election is viewed in a slightly different light.¹⁹ As HTI is somewhat in competition with parties like the PKS, and because it has been accused by such parties of having “anti-democratic” tendencies, the organization has to tread carefully. HTI’s speaker, Ismail Yusanto, declared in the press that the organization did not impose “non-participation” (*golput*) on its members — at least for the legislative election. Hence, for HTI, participation in the legislative election is “allowed” (*mubah*). To justify this, in terms of jurisprudence, HTI uses a hadith (HR. Abu Dawud) in which the Prophet himself allegedly legitimized having “representatives” (*wakil*). However, HTI has a set of conditions that parliamentary candidates must fulfil in order to be eligible as candidates. They have to:

1. Defend and implement laws and programmes that are in line with the Islamic ideal.
2. Come from an Islamic background and not a secular party.

¹⁹ “Hukum Syara’ Tentang Partisipasi Dalam Pemilihan Dewan Legislatif” [Law on the Participation in the Election of the Legislative Branch], *Al Islam*, no. 700, 4 April 2014, pp. 1–4.

3. Exercise control over the government and oppose secularism.
4. Promote the expansion of Islam through proselytization.
5. Have as their purpose to “enjoin good and forbid evil” (*amar makruf nahi mungkar*).

As early as the 2004 elections, HTI had authorized its members to vote for candidates that would further promote the application of Islamic law. Greg Fealy inferred that, at that time, only a small minority exercised their right to vote.²⁰ It remained difficult to evaluate the participation of HTI members for the 2014 elections. During the FGD sessions, this issue appeared to make participants uneasy, and quite logically so. What is clear is that it would be challenging for HTI members to vote for any candidate from existing parties within political Islam, as these have been the target of acute criticism in HTI literature. In many ways, Islamist parties are an “obstacle” to the implementation of the caliphate.

(b) Islamist Parties: A Mere “Ornament” for Secularism

Indeed, HTI deems other existing Islamist parties to be “weak”. Since they “do not have any vision or mission”, they are considered to have joined hands with secular parties.²¹ Moreover, HTI considers political Islam in its actual form to have failed, as shown by the fact that Islamic parties did not manage to unite in 2014 and nominate their own presidential candidate even though they had garnered 32 per cent of the vote share. Besides, using HTI’s logic, even if Islamic parties were one day to become the majority in the democratic system, power would

²⁰ Fealy, “Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a ‘Total’ Islamic Identity”. In *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West*, edited by Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), p. 159.

²¹ Compared to the meta-narrative and utopian solutions of HTI, the existing Islamic parties’ programmes may appear limited in their depth, but they are also more realistic in their application. The main HTI criticism for these parties seems to be that they do not (or not anymore) have the objective of establishing Islam as the sole source of political and legal authority.

be confiscated by secular elites, as shown by the case of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, HAMAS in Palestine and the Muslim Brothers in Egypt.²²

However, their main criticism is aimed at the “pragmatism” of Islamist parties since they are only interested in grabbing bits of power. HTI argues that this process can be seen through the cases of the Masyumi, the main Islamic party of the 1950s, that allied with the Socialist Party (PSI, Partai Sosialis Indonesia) and the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI, Partai Nasionalis Indonesia). Another more recent example is the “Centre Axis” (*Poros Tengah*) that managed to counter Megawati’s candidacy for the presidency, instated Abdurrahman Wahid in 1999, and then deposed him in 2001.²³ The argument is that Islamic parties are ready to strategize and reach any compromise to have their own people at key postings. But HTI believes that “having Muslims” in these posts is not enough. Again, what matters is the ideology and the system, which has to be fully Islamic.²⁴

Therefore, for HTI, the pragmatism of Islamic parties endangers the Islamic cause itself, because they are ready to compromise with secularism and democracy.²⁵ They become mere “ornaments” in the system put in place by secularist nationalist parties. Secular governments use this positioning to their advantage to show that they are actually in favour of Islam. The risk is that, in the end, the population will not see the difference between Islamic and secular parties. HTI considers therefore that Islamic parties are an “obstacle” to the Islamic cause.²⁶

When asked why HTI did not step in and engage in the political process more thoroughly at a time when Islamic parties are apparently

²² “Sejarah Kelam Koalisi Parpol” [The Dim History of Islamic Parties Coalitions], *Media Umat* 127, no. 2, 22 May 2014, p. 17.

²³ “Partai Islam, Berujung Pragmatis” [The Pragmatic Orientation of Islamic Parties], *Media Umat* 127, no. 2, 15 May 2014, p. 16.

²⁴ “Pemimpin Independen Itu” [An Independent Candidate Is], *Media Umat* 127, no. 2, 24 May 2014, p. 7.

²⁵ Adi Victoria, “Koalisi minus ideology” [A Coalition Minus an Ideology], *Al-Wa’ie* 14, no. 166, 30 June 2014, pp. 9–12.

²⁶ “Sejarah Kelam Koalisi Parpol” [The Dim History of Islamic Parties Coalitions], *Media Umat* 127, no. 2, 22 May 2014, p. 17.

experiencing difficulties (especially following the corruption scandal involving the leadership of PKS in 2013), an FGD participant replied:

This won't happen because the strategy of HTI is like a cooking recipe: you have to have the precise ingredients and follow the progressive stages. Then you will have what you want. The first step is to create cadres with a clear view. The second step is to convince the public opinion and shed a light on concepts that are against Islam (socialism, communism, capitalism, democracy). With this, there won't be any necessity of going through the parliament. The prophet never made coalitions with people who are in the "state of ignorance" (*jahiliyyah*).

Another one declared:

We have to go back to education and apply the spirit of Islam and the caliphate. Look at what is happening with our Muslim friends in the context of democracy. We need to fulfil the aspiration of Islam, not of the Islamic community (*aspirasi Islam, bukan Ummat Islam*). Like the PKS, Islamic parties have no clear concept, and some are even allergic to Islamic law. In the end, democracy is designed, not for the interest of Islam, but for other groups that do not have the same goals.

Thus, it is deemed that Political Islam cannot succeed in the current context because the system is flawed. For HTI, the elections, and more generally democracy, show that there is no true transformation: the generalization of money politics and intense party rivalry are a clear indication that the system is not working. The elections have shown that what is strong is materialism, not ideas and ideology. The majority in Parliament votes for the interests of those who have capital and not of the people. There is generally a collusion between politicians and capitalists.²⁷

²⁷ "Campakkan Demokrasi dan Sistem Ekonomi Liberal, Tegakkan Khilafah" [To Counter Democracy and the Liberal Economy, Apply the Caliphate], *Al Islam*, no. 708, 30 May 2014, pp. 1–4.

(c) The Source of the Problem and Its Solutions

HTI is well aware of the discontent produced by various socio-economic issues in Indonesia and analyses them extensively in its literature (for example, one often finds references to the government's cut in fuel subsidies). In the eyes of the HTI, the root of the economic problem is clear: the current system is based on individualism and materialism. Through the activities of various multinational corporations and international organizations (World Bank, IMF, etc.), the natural resources of Muslim countries are being stolen. However, the critique of capitalism is not always dull and limited to conspiracy theories, some arguments are clearly structured and resonate with many Indonesians. Thus, for HTI:

The main weakness of capitalism is the distribution of wealth within society. The main focus of a capitalistic economic system is growth: the more prosperity a society can achieve, the better. But the fact is that wealth can only be achieved by those who are at the front, especially those who have capital, while the poor cannot. Intellectuals and decision-makers in capitalist states are aware of this fact and, one of the methods of filling this "huge gap" within the system includes subsidies and social welfare programs. But it appears that these are not enough to find a solution. Poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and health services, are still unresolved issues. In Islam, these are the responsibility of the state.²⁸

When asked about the Yudhoyono presidency and the role of the state, an FGD participant replied:

These 10 years were a failure. Indonesian natural resources were left unprotected. Those who dominated were the corporations

²⁸ Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, "Refleksi Akhir Tahun 2011: 'Khilafah: Kebutuhan Solusi Dunia dan Indonesia Saat Ini'" [Reflections for the end of 2011: The Caliphate is the needed solution for the World and Indonesia at this moment] (Jakarta: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2011), pp. 21–22.

(70 to 80 per cent of which are foreign-owned) and private national companies, not the state. The Indonesian people are poor. 50 per cent live under the poverty line. We think he did not succeed. From the TV debates (during the presidential campaign), there hasn't been any suggestions to save the resources of Indonesia. However, Prabowo was more daring in saying that he would protect the resources. Prabowo was right when he said there is no need for education and health cards (Jokowi's programme) if you don't have money. It would be good if there was a president who would dare expel all foreign interests²⁹ from Indonesia. The subsidies issue illustrates the problem. Who owns Indonesia? In HTI's programme, it is God. The rules are straightforward, what goes to who, especially in mining. In the end, it is the people who benefit.

Another participant added:

There are a number of agents that rule the world: capitalist states and countries, like the United States, United Kingdom, and France; international financial institutions; Multinational Companies (MNCs) and rulers who cooperate to instate global capitalism, i.e. a modern form of imperialism. What is the meaning of elections when all these actors still operate? Whether Yudhoyono or Jokowi, no one can change things. 9/11, Al Qaeda, ISIS, it's all business linked to the U.S. It's the arms industry. The prophet has never used these violent tactics. That's why we don't use them, because we don't want to be dependent on the arms industry. We want to form cadres who can proselytize.

According to a female activist:

In terms of social and gender issues, the system has destroyed our social fabric. They want our youth to be like in the West, with the

²⁹ The term "foreign" here is a generic one that often includes not only Western companies, but also Indonesian-Chinese conglomerates.

use of condoms for free and such. We consider that the foundation of society is the family, and not capitalism.

In short, the argument is that the Muslim world is not the “best of all communities” (*Khairuh Ummah*), as announced by the Prophet, because it has abandoned the caliphate for nationalism, under the cultural colonization of the West, particularly the United States, which follows the capitalist system and suffers disintegrating effects on society as a result. HTI insists that it is ready to replace the existing system, with its own system of government as well as economic, social, and monetary policies. The main problem of democracy, according to HTI, is that it gives power to the people and, thus, man can be one of the determinants of law. This is clearly against the authority of God. If the power is the hand of the State then it can impose its will on the people.³⁰ The concept of sovereignty to the people in itself is illusory. As noted before, the power to decide is actually in the hands of the members of parliament, who are themselves obliged to parties and capitalistic interests.³¹

Moreover, according to HTI, in a democratic system, law is not constant, and amendments to the Constitution are continuously introduced. The voting of laws takes a long time, it is a costly process. Additionally, laws can be the subject of marketized negotiations. Thus, licit issues can be rendered illicit (*haram*) and vice versa. The law and the system of government are often a compromise between different views and interests. The problem with the democratic system of voting is that what counts is the number of voices, not whether it is right or wrong. Moreover, all votes are considered equal, whether they come from educated or uneducated or honest or dishonest people. In the caliphate system, sovereignty rests in the hand of God, through its laws. It is thus

³⁰ “Melanggengkan Kesuksesan Ramadhan” [Perpetuating the Success of Ramadan], *Al Islam*, no. 716, 8 August 2014, p. 2.

³¹ “Saatnya Khilafah Menggantikan Demokrasi dan Sistem Ekonomi Liberal” [It is Time for the Caliphate to Replace Democracy and the Liberal Economic System], *Al-Wa’ie*, no. 167, 1 July 2014, pp. 56–59.

constant and does not reflect the interest of certain groups.³² For HTI, it is not a matter of a number of votes, but what is right and just.

RECLAIMING THE CALIPHATE: THE CHALLENGE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

(a) The Issue of IS

Being the largest Muslim majority country in the world, Indonesia has naturally garnered the attention of Islamic State (IS) recruiters. Starting in 2014, IS militants took over a number of local mosques and preached for Indonesians to join the growing ranks of jihadists in the Middle East. IPAC's Sidney Jones estimated in March 2015 that up to 200 Indonesian nationals have travelled to Syria and Iraq.³³

IS and HTI share the same objective of building a caliphate. For the latter, however, this objective is to be attained through peaceful means (i.e. proselytization), the public rejection of violence being a hallmark of the organization. Unlike other Muslim organizations in Indonesia, HTI has not formed its own militia.³⁴ Clearly, IS's extreme violence is now jeopardizing the image of HTI in Indonesia, and the organization has been quick to react to defend its own vision of the caliphate.³⁵ According to Ismail Yusanto, HTI's spokesperson, IS methods are contrary to what

³² "Legislasi Demokrasi vs. Islam" [Democratic legislation vs. Islam], *Al Islam*, no. 698, 21 March 2014, p. 10.

³³ "Indonesian Jihadis Could be Galvanized by Return of IS Fighters, analyst warns", *TheGuardian.com* <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/11/indonesian-jihadis-could-be-galvanised-return-isis-fighters-analyst>>; See also Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC). "The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia". IPAC Report no. 23, September 2014.

³⁴ Ward, "Non-Violent Extremism: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia", p. 152.

³⁵ "Khilafah Ajaran Islam Bukan Kejahatan, Stop Kriminisasi!" [The Caliphate Taught by Islam is not Viciousness, Stop the Criminalization!], *Media Umat*, no. 133, 4 September 2014, p. 4.

was taught by the Prophet Muhammad, who was “against violence, especially the destruction of places of religious practice, the killing (of people) without rights, and so on”.³² IS is thus considered by HTI as a “military militia” and cannot be defined as representing the caliphate. Additionally, IS’s caliphate declaration has no legitimacy because it does not comply with any of the following conditions, according to HTI (these arguments were recently laid out by Hizbut Tahrir’s leader Syeikh Atha’ bin Khalil Abu Rasytah).³⁶

1. A caliphate should be instated in an autonomous area, not under an existing state, as is the case with IS (in Iraq and Syria).
2. It should only be declared once security has been achieved in the said area.
3. It should be able to implement the sharia wholly and justly.
4. The nomination of a caliph should follow a precise set of rules (*surutul in’iqadz*): he should be Muslim, a man who has come of age (*baligh*), independent, just and able.
5. Allegiance to the caliph can only be made in accordance to the principle of “abidance and choosing” (*ridha wal ikhtiyar*) by the Islamic community in the said-area; for this, the caliphate as a concept has first to become public knowledge in society.

As the IS caliphate does not comply with these conditions, it cannot be considered as following Islamic law.³⁷

HTI reaffirmed that its method of instating the global caliphate is very different from IS. They believe it should be done through ideas and politics, and not violence. Cadres should be formed; the population should be sensitized to the idea of the caliphate as well as the holders

³⁶ “‘Khilafah’ ISIS vs. Khilafah Sejati” [The ISIS ‘Caliphate’ vs the real Caliphate], *Media Umat*, no. 133, 4 September 2014, p. 5.

³⁷ “Bagaimana Sikap HT Terhadap ‘Khilafah’ Yang Diproklamasikan ISIS?” [What is the Position of HTI Concerning the Caliphate Declared by ISIS?], *Al-Wa’ie*, no. 168, 1 August 2014, pp. 30–33.

of power.³⁸ HTI reminds Muslims that the goal is not to have a state of affairs where insecurity reigns, but a peaceful caliphate where Muslims and non-Muslims can live securely, with their own rights.³⁹

It is noteworthy that, in order to counter the negative image produced by an exogenous IS, HTI “localizes” its own conception of the caliphate. The argument is that the number of revered saints (*Walisongo*) who Islamized Java according to popular belief were not limited to nine, but many more and had been sent by the Caliph Othman (644–656) directly from the Middle East. Another similar argument is that the Acehnese sultanate asked for the help of the Ottoman Caliph against the Dutch in the 1870s.⁴⁰ Accordingly, Indonesians should not be worried about HTI as their own history is related to the caliphate.

In fact, for HTI, the IS issue has only served to “criminalize” (*kriminalisasi*) and “monsterize” (*monsterisasi*) the concept of the caliphate and Islamic law. True to its use of conspiracy theories, HTI also links the IS issue to the electoral process in Indonesia and the need for the armed forces to find a common enemy.⁴¹ The critique also targets the United States and the West in general. The argument is based on the idea that attacks against IS are a strategy of neo-colonialism disguised as humanitarian principles. Thus, for HTI, while the West declares that it wants to save the Yazidi and Christian minorities, its true intention is to divide Iraq. Because of this state of affairs, the only solution is for Muslim populations to unite within the caliphate.⁴²

³⁸ “Khilafah: Ajaran Islam, Bukan Kejahatan” [The Caliphate: An Islamic Teaching, not an Evil Thing], *Al Islam*, no. 717, 15 August 2014, p. 3.

³⁹ “Hentikan Perang di Antara Kalian, Amerika Manfaatkan Perang di Antara Kalian Untuk Campur Tangan Secara Militer di Negeri Kalian” [Stop the War between Yourselves, America Uses This to Intervene Militarily in your Countries], *Al Islam*, no. 719, 29 August 2014, pp. 1–4.

⁴⁰ “Khilafah: Ajaran Islam, Bukan Kejahatan” [The Caliphate: An Islamic Teaching, not an Evil Thing], *Al Islam*, no. 717, 15 August 2014, p. 3.

⁴¹ “Awat, Monsterisasi Khilafah!” [Be Careful of the Monsterization of the Caliphate!], *Media Umat*, no. 133, 24 September 2014, p. 6.

⁴² “Topeng Kemanusiaan Negara Imperialis” [The Mask of Humanity of Imperialistic Countries]. *Media Umat*, no. 133, 19 August 2014, p. 3.

When asked about this particular issue and whether it had affected efforts of proselytization in Indonesian society, a member replied:

IS is actually a blessing in disguise. It usually is difficult for us to talk about the caliphate. While we are asked to preach, people don't know much and don't really care. Now everyone talks about IS and the caliphate. We are often contacted, and people ask us to talk about the caliphate. IS has been created without a clear constitution. HTI is against this. But what we are worried about is that IS is giving HTI and the caliphate a negative image.

Another participant relayed a similar argument:

I think it is a good opportunity for us to establish the right methodology for the caliphate. According to me, there are three methods to establish it: violence (IS calls it *jihad*); the democratic way through elections; proselytization (*dakwah*) and accessing political power (through non-violent means). So it is a great opportunity for us to explain our method (the last one). The caliphate manages a society that is plural, which includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Islam. It was created for the good of all the world. Our concern is the common good.

Whether the issue of IS will impact the growth of HTI in the future remains to be seen. There are signs that the organization is going to encounter more resistance in Indonesian society. Mainstream moderate organizations NU and Muhammadiyah have recently started to counter ideologically the transnationalist ideal of the caliphate through the concepts of “Islam Nusantara” (Archipelagic Islam) for the former and “Islam Berkemajuan” (Progressive Islam) for the latter. Through a series of meetings of its leaders and religious scholars in 2014, NU officially declared for the first time its opposition to HTI's objective of making Indonesia part of a global caliphate.⁴³ As a sign of times, in May

⁴³ See Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard. “Ripples from the Middle East: The Ideological Battle for the Identity of Islam in Indonesia”, *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 42, 13 August 2015.

2015 in Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara province (which holds a majority of Christians), the Council of Ulama (MUI) expressed its opposition to a HTI public gathering, this in the name of religious harmony.⁴⁴

(b) “Radicalism” and the Limits to Religious Pluralism

As Greg Fealy notes, HTI can be considered “radical”, not in the sense that it directly promotes violence, but by the fact that it proposes “sweeping or dramatic social and political change”.⁴⁵ The possible indirect effects of such radicalism, filled with strong anti-Western sentiments, can be problematic. As Ken Ward suggests, “HTI may well reject acts of violence, but it does not eschew violent rhetoric.”⁴⁶ With the issue of IS, this ambiguous positioning is evident.⁴⁷ The argument of HTI is that terror is a “subjective concept” linked to a given political context. It can be defined as the use of force by the state to enforce political domination and, on the contrary, by “external agents” to challenge this political power. It is thus, in a way, vindicated by HTI.⁴⁸ Moreover, it considers the terms “radicalism” and “terrorism” to be “subjective notions” that are instrumentalized to surreptitiously transform Muslim activists into “soft,

⁴⁴ <<http://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/15/05/13/no9xkw-mui-ntt-tolak-rencana-pawai-akbar-hti>>.

⁴⁵ Fealy, “Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a ‘Total’ Islamic Identity”, p. 153.

⁴⁶ Ward, “Non-Violent Extremism: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia”, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Here, the ideological refinement of HTI can be seen by its use of academic references such as Thomas Perry Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation”, *Terrorism: Critical Concepts in Political Science* 3 (1964): 41–64.

⁴⁸ Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, “Refleksi Akhir Tahun 2011: ‘Khilafah: Kebutuhan Solusi Dunia Dan Indonesia Saat Ini’” [Reflections for the end of 2011: The Caliphate is the needed solution for the World and Indonesia at this moment] (Jakarta: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, 2011), pp. 75–90; see also Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, “Terorisme”Produk Radikalisme? (Tanggapan Untuk Hasibullah Satrawi)” [Terrorism: A Product of Radicalism? (A Point of View for Hasibullah Satrawi)], 9 September 2012 <<http://hizbut-tahrir.or.id/2012/09/09/terorisme-produk-radikalisme-tanggapan-untuk-hasibullah-satrawi/>>.

tolerant, plural, moderate and liberal” people. It is also a way for the West to impose its “capitalist-secular” model on the Islamic world. For HTI, so-called deradicalization programmes not only divide the Islamic community (between moderates and radicals), but it also has the final objective of “de-Islamizing” Muslims.

Participants of the FGD sessions could hardly be considered extremists. All showed genuine interest in transforming Indonesian society and solving its problems using an intellectual approach. When asked about the compatibility of the model of the caliphate with one of the fundamental traits of Indonesian society, i.e. its pluralism, respondents often mentioned the idea that HTI was indeed against “religious pluralism”, understood as “all religion being the same”, but not against “religious plurality” (i.e. the coexistence of different religious traditions in Indonesia, with Islam being the dominant one evidently).

To ease inter-faith tensions, HTI’s solution is to apply the sharia in Indonesia. This entails the introduction of the status of “*dhimmi*” to non-Muslims which implies that they:

1. Pay a tax (*jizya*) if they are able financially.
2. Apply Islamic law, except in the domain of religious practice, food, marriage and divorce.
3. Are forbidden to proselytize. Do not build new houses of worship, nor renovate them. Do not show the cross; do not use a strong voice in their religious practice in the presence of a Muslim; do not light candles at Muslim markets; do not eat pork near a Muslim; do not wear Muslim attire; do not use the language of Muslims.

On this matter of taxation of non-Muslim minorities, FGD participants stated:

All individuals are equal in front of the law. There is no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims. All have to pay a tax. This allows equality in all matters, such as security, economy, etc. Taxation of non-Muslims is not a menace if it is applied the right way.

Earth belongs to God, as your soul does. We live because of God. When it is time, France⁴⁹ will accept Islam. If this happens peacefully, then it is alright, if not then “it’s their choice”. If you don’t want to embrace Islam, then you would have to pay a tax.

Taxation gives non-Muslims more advantages. But if they can’t contribute economically, it is not going to be forced upon them.

With this system, it is deemed that the caliphate and the sharia protect harmony (*kebhinekaan*) between Muslims and non-Muslims — as supposedly shown by the history of the caliphate. Islam is considered here as a religion that is a “blessing for all mankind” (*rahmattan lil alamin*).⁵⁰ The problem lies in the fact that co-existence rests on clear segregation between religious communities and submission of minorities to an overarching Islamic political authority.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: UNDERSTANDING THE APPEAL OF HTI

This paper has showed that HTI’s strategy of expansion in Indonesia is refined enough to prudently adjust its discourse and adapt to current developments. While HTI’s transnational and anti-democratic programme may appear antithetical to Indonesia’s strong sense of nationalism and its recent move towards a mature democracy, the organization has found ways to mobilize in certain sectors of Indonesian society, i.e. those that are disaffected with the current state of affairs from a political, socio-economic and religious perspective.

To quote Greg Fealy, one cannot understand HTI’s appeal without acknowledging the sense of comprehensiveness that its “metanarrative” proposes. It gives a more “enveloping Islamic identity for its followers than other movements”.⁵¹ Indeed, none of the existing Islamist parties

⁴⁹ The participant refers to the fact that I have French origins.

⁵⁰ “Syariah dan Khilafah Jalan Keselamatan dan Penyelamatan” [The Sharia and the Caliphate are the Way of Salvation], *Al Islam*, no. 709, 6 June 2014, pp. 1–4.

⁵¹ Fealy, “Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia: Seeking a ‘Total’ Islamic Identity”, p. 163.

or organizations could give a more complete answer to the lingering question faced by Muslim societies: if, according to God, the *Ummah* is the “best of all communities”, why is it in such a dire state? During our FGD sessions, many participants testified to the sense of intellectual superiority and completeness of HTI ideology in comparison with Salafism, Islamism, Sufism, and Islamic modernism. The following final quote from a participant synthesizes the features that make the organization so engaging to so many in the particular context of Indonesia:

I studied in Yogyakarta and was very active in searching for religious knowledge. I followed many Islamic organizations, but I didn't feel satisfied, especially in relation to my “inner-self” (*batin*) and my behaviour (*akhlak*). I started to follow those who were called the “socialists” during the New Order. They had more idealism for problems that were besetting Indonesia. At that time, capitalism was very strong. There were very rich and very poor people. I felt that if I followed Islam there weren't any solutions, but if I followed socialism there was. So, I almost followed socialism because many of my friends were there. But the problem was that many of those who joined these socialist groups left their religion (*meninggalkan agama*), they didn't pray. This made me apprehensive. But, God be praised, I encountered HTI, and my questions were answered. I was attracted by the fact that it was rational and it answered my search for truth in general, and more specifically for religious truth (that made me read philosophy previously). All these questions were answered easily in HTI. With the writings of An-Nahbani, everything was explained step by step, where we come from and where we are heading.

This illustrates what was often conveyed by other participants as well. Their engagement in HTI was not only about Muslims reacting to the pressures of cultural globalization, to “liberal Western values” or to the growing proselytization of Christian churches. Many came to HTI, to find answers to real socio-economic injustices, endemic corruption and

a state that failed to care for the basic needs of its people.⁵² In this, they could find common ground with socialism.

Vedi Hadiz argues that, because the left was suppressed during the New Order years, popular discontent in Indonesia has often taken the form of Islamic populism.⁵³ It is here then that we can understand, in part, the continuing appeal of HTI in Indonesia. As long as development is perceived to cause inequalities and discriminations, this transnational organization will continue to have a foothold in Indonesia. With this potentially growing “market of discontent”, there would be even fewer reasons for HTI to accommodate and integrate into the current political system. Moreover, we have seen through the events of 2014, that HTI’s strategy of expansion is flexible enough for it to adapt to ongoing developments and prudently adjust its discourse while holding firm to its ideological foundations.

⁵² See also Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “The Quest for Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia”, *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, no. 4 (2009): 623–45.

⁵³ Vedi R. Hadiz, “Indonesian Political Islam: Capitalist Development and the Legacies of the Cold War”. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2011): pp. 3–38.

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