CHAPTER 8

Empirical Models of the Relationship between Religion and State in Indonesia

How Religious Beliefs Define the Relation between Religion and State

Carl Sterkens and Handi Hadiwitanto

Introduction

Although the separation between religion and state is not explicitly part of the codified list of first-generation human rights, it offers important conditions for it. Freedom ‘of’ religion and freedom ‘to’ religion, but also freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, are at least partly defined by how the ideal relationship between religion and state is conceived. In practice, there are varying degrees of separation or cooperation between religion and state in different countries. And individual people also have differing views of the ideal relationship between religion and politics. This contribution describes the different ways in which Indonesian students perceive the ideal relationship between religion and state governance. It will also explain how Indonesian Muslims and Christians agree with different models of religion-state relationships, against the backdrop of their personal backgrounds and their religious beliefs.

Firstly, we will look at the current context of Indonesia in this respect. In recent years there has been an Islamisation of politics that can be understood against the background of recent democratisation and decentralisation of politics (1), and which illustrates the shrinking divide between religion and politics in recent years with some much-talked-about examples (2). Thirdly, we present a theoretical structure of state-religion relationships. We shall ground this theoretical structure on a political-philosophical distinction between liberalism and communitarianism (3). We then operationalise this typology in cross-religious comparative measurements (4). In a fifth section, we will describe the empirical results of our research on attitudes towards state-religion relationships. We first describe the levels of agreement with the different empirical models among Muslims and Christians, as well as the significant differences between these religious groups. Then we describe where these differing views on religion-state relationships can be found, and end with describing the religious beliefs that can predict agreement with either model (5). In the conclusion, we return briefly to our main findings (6).
We do not refer to the more recent presidential elections of 9 July 2014, because they give a far less refined picture of the Indonesian political landscape. Election law rules that only

Democratisation, Decentralisation and Islamisation of Politics in Contemporary Indonesia

A recent publication of Human Rights Watch (2013) reports extensively on the growing trend of religious intolerance in Indonesia. The end of the 1990s seems to have been a turning point in Indonesia’s recent history with regard to the position of religion in society. Religious extremism seems only to have increased since president Suharto was forced to resign on 21 May 1998. Since that time, two related developments have contributed to the stronger influence of religion on politics, and with that, to the problematic relationship between religion and state in Indonesia.

First, the rise of religious extremism and its influence on politics, paradoxically, is related to the process of democratisation. Religious extremism – not tolerated at all in public until the end of the last century – has been given more space to come to the surface in the past few decades. Muslim groups were severely restricted in the public sphere during Suharto’s presidency (1966–1998). Ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group tensions belonged to the so-called SARA issues (suku, agama, ras, antar golongan), which were taboo in public discourse for a long time. But political Islamism started to flourish shortly after Suharto stepped down; between May and October 1998, no fewer than 22 political parties which could be classified as Islamic were established (Musdah Mulia 2011, 41).

There are still many religiously affiliated political parties active today. In the latest national elections of 9 April 2014 for the People’s Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR or first chamber) and the Regional Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah, DPRD or second chamber), once again religious parties received a considerable number of votes. The most popular Islamic parties with representatives in the parliaments are the moderate National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB, with 9.04% of the votes), followed by parties considered to be islamist: the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN – 7.59%), the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS – 6.79%) and the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP – 6.53%). In almost all cases these results represent an increase over the previous elections of 2009. Adding the 1.46% votes for the Crescent Star Party (Partai Bulan Bintang, PBB), which failed to reach the electoral threshold, this means that something over 31% of the electorate voted for political parties that call for Islam to have a more central role in public life.1 Besides the confessional parties, secular parties sometimes also

---

1 We do not refer to the more recent presidential elections of 9 July 2014, because they give a far less refined picture of the Indonesian political landscape. Election law rules that only