

# **A NEW ISLAMIC ORTHODOXY?**

## **MAINSTREAM ISLAM AND MINORITY GROUPS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA<sup>1</sup>**

**Dadi Darmadi**

The Faculty of Ushuluddin, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

### **Abstract**

This research focuses on how Indonesia's mainstream Islamic groups perceive Islam and Muslims, and how they defend their religion through a new formulation of orthodoxy. Using ethnographic fieldworks in five cities, i.e. Medan, Jakarta (and its greater areas), Pontianak, Surabaya and Mataram as well as media studies, this research observes the new trends and patterns of orthodox formation of Sunni Islam, increased anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shi'ism movements in both everyday practice and within the broader context of Muslim majority-minority relations in contemporary Indonesia.

The specific objective of this research is to address these following issues: (1) To understand what constitutes an Islamic orthodoxy in contemporary Indonesia as seen in the cases of anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shi'ism movements; (2) To investigate and explore how the anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shia movements are formed; This study seeks to describe what and who are behind this movement, where, and how, what networks are used to achieve their goals; (3) To identify what the new trends and patterns are in these movements; How they are different from their predecessors, and how they grow; (4) To look and identify the recent demographic development of anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shi'ism movements in Indonesia.

Our research, conducted in 2017, finds that there has been an increased effort by mainstream Muslim groups in Indonesia to define and redefine Islamic orthodoxy. As a way of following or conforming to the traditional and generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion, orthodoxy has been present and maintained in the Muslim world for centuries, but recent reformulation of orthodoxy is considered a strategic medium in order to defend Islamic religion. For example, in

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is mainly based on our recent research entitled, "In Defense of Orthodoxy: Mainstream and Minority Groups in Contemporary Indonesia," conducted by a collaborative research team funded by the Puslitpen-LP2M research funds for lecturers and students of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta from July-December 2017.

an attempt to defend their religion, many mainstream Muslim groups join the rallies against minority groups — becoming anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shi'ism movements.

While Muslim politics have played significant roles despite Indonesia's democratization processes, especially since the post-Soeharto regime (Salim 2007) and conservative forms of Islam have increasingly taken roots among Indonesian Muslims (Bruinessen 2013), our research also reveals that the opinions and actions of some mainstream Islamic groups and the state responses to the questions of Ahmadiyya and Shi'ism have shape changes in the meanings of Indonesia's minority rights, new social and orthodox religious formations, and last but not least, current models of mobilization and campaigns by mainstream Islamic groups.

**Keywords:**

Islam, Orthodoxy, Minority Groups, Indonesia

**Introduction**

In recent years, despite Indonesia's marked progress at strengthening democratic institutions, international organizations have critically highlighted the rising religious intolerance and the dilemma faced by the country's minority groups (International Crisis Group 2001; Menchik 2016). Many of them — such as the Ahmadi and the Shi'ites, who consider themselves Muslims but are viewed as heretics by some other Muslims — have lived and practiced their beliefs for generations, but persistent attacks and intimidation against them have prompted national and local governments to issue certain rules, regulations and restrictions.

This paper addresses the recent reformulation of Islamic “orthodoxy” by examining the increased sentiment of anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shi'ism, looking particularly at trends, patterns, and drivers of militancy among the Sunni majority in Indonesia. In this study, we consider the Ahmadi and the Shi'ites among the largest and perhaps the most visible minority groups in Indonesia, and by the term “orthodoxy” here we mean “a way of following or conforming to the traditional and generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion.” Shahab Ahmed's latest books suggest that Islamic orthodoxy has been formulated over time, and possibly reformulated up this day (Ahmed 2017; Ahmed 2016).

In the case of the Ahmadi, the issuance of two fatwas from the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) in 1980 and 2005, has been followed by dramatic developments (Burhani 2013a; Crouch 2009; Darmadi 2013; Ropi 2010; Plattdasch 2011). For example, in 2008, some groups of Muslims such as *Forum Umat Islam* (FUI) in West Java and *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) in Jakarta began to hold anti-Ahmadiyya protests on the streets, and large demonstrations against the Ahmadiyya during religious gatherings, placing pressure for local authorities to monitor the Ahmadiyya communities and restrict their religious activities. In 2011, the Cikeusik tragedy in