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Democracy in Flux: Political Alliances and the Role of Religion in Indonesia and Turkey

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Abstract

Home to approximately one-fifth of the global Muslim population, Indonesia and Turkey underwent democratization efforts in the early 2000s. However, two decades later, both countries are facing growing tendencies of autocratization. Both countries also face challenges typical of liberal democracies, such as the rise of populist leaders, concentration of power, elite-driven politics, resource exploitation, and growing inequality. This paper analyzes how political alliances influence the reconfiguration of political parties in the two countries. Contributing to the literature on change and adaptation in democracies, as well as addressing the scarcity of comparative studies between Indonesia and Turkey, this paper poses the following questions: How are political alliances formed and structured in Indonesia and Turkey? What role does religion play in shaping these alliances? What are the implications of political alliances on democracy in both countries? In this paper, I show how, during political rivalry—especially in electoral competition—political alliances in Indonesia are formed suddenly within a messy landscape, while in Turkey, it is a gradual and slow process in which rigid ideological boundaries lead to alliances across ideologies. Both conditions contribute to autocratization tendencies, creating no real opposition in Indonesia and a relatively weak opposition in Turkey. In this process, religion is central in both countries and is intertwined with nationalism in different ways.

Keywords: Democracy, political alliance, Indonesia, Turkey, electoral competition

Introduction

The successful transition in Indonesia in 1998 from an authoritarian regime to a democracy (known as *reformasi*/reform) is an attractive political phenomenon for many scholars in analyzing the aftermath of the democratization process. During the transition, not only did pressure come from mass movement led by student organizations, human rights activists, and political oppositions, but religious authorities were among the most influential figures. These religious actors, despite skepticism from those upholding the liberal secular democracy model, have been at the forefront to foster democracy. In Turkey in the early 2000s, several political turbulences and instabilities led the country to embrace relatively democratic reform and undertake massive political reforms in line with the country's accession to the European Union. In this period, Indonesia and Turkey were celebrated both by Western leaders¹ and political scientists as examples of democracy in the Muslim world, showcasing the compatibility between Islam and democracy.²

Indonesia and Turkey in the early 2000s were part of the global optimism for liberal democracy,³ and were regarded as the champion of liberal democracy in the Muslim world.⁴ During the early years of their democratic transitions, both countries adopted similar elements of liberal democracy, coupled with economic liberalization with large support from international donors. These included the instruments Larry Diamond⁵ characterized as part of the 'fourth wave' of liberal democratization, such as establishing institutions to ensure checks and balances and horizontal accountability, promoting judicial independence, limiting the military's role in government, advancing discourse on individual and minority rights, protecting press freedom, and upholding the rule of law. In their early

¹ See for example George W. Bush statement in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/jun/29/eu.nato1>.

² Hasyim 2013; Kirişçi 2011; Tansel 2018; Altunisik 2005; Tuğal 2016.

³ Schäfer 2024.

⁴ Parkinson 2013.

⁵ Diamond 1997.

reform period, both countries embraced relatively liberal concepts of democracy and had regular local, regional, and national elections.⁶

However, Indonesia and Turkey both showed signs of democratic decline shortly after their reforms. The two countries demonstrated hesitation and limited commitment to further advancing democratization efforts.⁷ In Indonesia, only few years after *reformasi* began, the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014) showed reluctance to further accelerate human rights reforms,⁸ while the subsequent Joko Widodo presidency (2014-2024) showed further and significant democratic backsliding.⁹ In Turkey, the crackdown on the Gezi Park protests in 2013 highlighted the government's increasing authoritarian turn.¹⁰ Both countries similarly also saw a consolidation of religious conservatives and nationalism synthetics.¹¹ As Kim Scheppele¹² points out, the failure of liberal democracy can often be traced to elections that bring charismatic or populist leaders to power, who then undermine constitutional norms and abandon democratic commitments. While some scholars view these early developments with blind optimism, others had already begun signaling clear warnings of a dangerous shift much earlier.¹³

A key factor of Indonesia's democracy is its vibrant civil society, especially its religious-based civil society, which has actively supported democratic consolidation by promoting democracy at the grassroots level while also maintaining its position as a government watchdog.¹⁴ However, the role of the religious organizations in Indonesia has been challenged in recent years by the conservative turn,¹⁵ and their close alignment with the

⁶ Kirişçi and Sloat 2019; Tagma 2011; Aspinall et al. 2015; Mietzner 2012.

⁷ Kuru 2017.

⁸ Aspinall et al. 2015.

⁹ Power 2020; Mujani and Liddle 2021.

¹⁰ Tuğal 2009.

¹¹ Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018.

¹² Scheppele 2018.

¹³ Tomsa 2017; Hadiz 2000; Vedi and Richard 2013.

¹⁴ Azra 2006; Hefner 2000; Künkler and Stepan 2013.

¹⁵ Bruinessen 2013.

government has undermined their credibility in the eyes of many,¹⁶ In Turkey, the decline of the so-called ‘Turkish model’ is reflected the government’s suppression of protests, restrictions on civil liberties, and crackdowns on journalists and the media, as well as the consolidation of executive power that further strengthens autocratic measures.¹⁷

A similar characteristic of both countries is their rejection of an Islamic state model while maintaining certain aspects of *secularism* in their political systems. The difference between the two countries laid in its *secularity* – the empirical condition over the multiple contestations of religion – based on Charles Taylor’s three notions of secularity.¹⁸ The three conditions are, Secularity I: The regulation of religion by the state, rather than mere differentiation. Secularity II: the decline of religious belief and practice. Secularity III: condition emerges through “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and, indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace”, reflecting a value of pluralism in society.

In Indonesia, secularism is understood as a balance between religion and state, guided by the state’s philosophy *Pancasila*,¹⁹ which promotes religious harmony while limiting full pluralism. Citizenship is shaped around being a religious citizen, with little space for atheism or unrecognized beliefs.²⁰ This reflects a blend of Secularity I (regulation of religion and politics) and limited aspects of Secularity III (pluralism), making secularity a process of constant negotiation.²¹ Turkey’s secularism (*laiklik*) is an evolving form of French Western secularism (*laïcité*). Instead of separating religion and state, it has led to efforts to manage and control religion in order to create a homogenized society based on Sunni Islam

¹⁶ Arifianto 2024.

¹⁷ Tugal 2016; Yilmaz et al. 2017

¹⁸ For the debate on Secularization, secularism and secularity see Taylor 2007; Künkler et al. 2018.

¹⁹ Pancasila is Pancasila is the foundational philosophical theory of the Indonesian state, consisting of five principles: belief in God, a just and civilized humanity, national unity, democracy, and social justice.

²⁰ Schäfer 2016.

²¹ Künkler 2018.

(Hanafi), which is hostile toward diversity, but committed to secularity (the Turkish variant of Secularity I and Secularity III). Turkey's variant of *laik* (secular) is neither a neutral approach toward religion nor strictly differentiates the region-state institution; rather, the project is to produce *laik* Islam where there is oscillation between more religious and more secular notions membership took place.²² In Indonesia, the project of nationalism aims to create religious citizens, guided by the spirit of Pancasila, and envisions the country as a multireligious state. In contrast, Turkish nationalism combines both religious and secular elements,²³ with religion closely aligned to Sunni Islam, whereas in Indonesia, religion is not tied to any specific faith.

Similarly, both countries only experienced a brief period of relatively liberal democracy in the early 2000s, and have since moved toward autocratization with Turkey undergoing this shift more rapidly than Indonesia. Indonesia and Turkey also set examples of how the model of democracy for the Muslim world now is failing to expand its democratic potential, as well as the so-called failure or crisis of liberal democracy.²⁴ Some scholars regard such phenomena as a democratic decline,²⁵ democratic regression,²⁶ democratic backsliding,²⁷ or autocratization.²⁸ In this article I used the term autocratization, considering that democratic backsliding in Indonesia is unfolding within autocratization process and different forms of democratic backsliding have emerged as part of a broader wave of autocratization.²⁹

In this change of political direction, some prominent democratic features nevertheless remained. However, subsequent legal changes within political competition have altered the democratization process. It is

²² Künkler and Shankar 2018; Bâli 2018.

²³ White 2014.

²⁴ For more discussion on crisis of liberal democracy see: Busse et al. 2023; Ercan and Gagnon 2014.

²⁵ Schäfer 2019.

²⁶ Warburton and Aspinall 2019.

²⁷ Tansel 2018.

²⁸ Sözen 2020.

²⁹ Lührmann 2021; Curato and Fossati 2020; Bermeo 2016.

important to examine electoral competition in both countries and analyze the configuration of political alliances to understand democratic backsliding in Indonesia and autocratization in Turkey. In both countries, the set of democratic institutions and regulations has been erected,³⁰ and it is the inter-alia and interaction between diverse groups, political parties, and electoral competition that predestine the shape of democracy in Indonesia and Turkey at the macro and micro level.

Some scholars have compared the interplay between religion and politics in the two countries. Hadiz³¹ analyzed the emergence of Islamic populism in Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt. He argued that while Turkey's Islamist conservative party, AKP, has successfully leveraged the 2002 economic crisis to represent the country's bourgeoisie, urban middle class, and marginalized groups, Indonesia's Islamist party, PKS, failed to capture these segments of society. Demir and Barton³² show how religion is a central tool used to support the rise of populist politics, contributing to democratic backsliding in both countries. Anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen³³ compared the different forms of secularism in Indonesia and Turkey, highlighting how Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Turkey's *Diyanet* (Directorate of Religious Affairs) have both been used to control religion, ultimately reinforcing homogenization based on Sunni orthodoxy. Van Bruinessen also wrote several further pieces juxtaposing both countries' Muslim intellectuals and how they operated under different forms of secularism and political Islam which contributed to the discourse of human rights and minorities. Some larger aspects of international relations, civil society, and cultural exchange also marked

³⁰ In Indonesia, reforms target strengthening institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission, Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, General Election Commission, and Election Supervisory Body. In Turkey, reforms focus on reducing military influence and addressing Kurdish rights for greater inclusivity, press reform, civil and individual freedom, and electoral institution reform.

³¹ Hadiz 2016.

³² Demir and Barton 2023.

³³ Martin van 2021; Van Bruinessen 2014; Bruinessen 2018.

both countries as the engines of cooperation among Muslim countries.³⁴ Overall, the literature remains scarce, especially in investigating the formation of political alliances from a comparative perspective.

This research focuses on how political alliances, which some literature suggests have undergone dynamic changes, have contributed to democratic backsliding or the trend of autocratization in both countries. Using Scheppele's diagnostic tools to trace early signs of democratic decline by analyzing how charismatic or populist leaders were elected, I focus on political party alliances, which are shaped in both countries by multiparty systems and competitive politics that influence the formation of alliances by elected leaders. This paper highlights how political parties evolve and adapt in response to both internal and external factors, linking political alliances to autocratization in both countries.

Political alliances in both countries show that cross-ideological alliances, with pragmatic and transactional politics, contributed to autocratization. In Indonesia, McCargo and Wadilapa referred to these political alliances as 'toxic alliance[s]'³⁵: cross-ideological coalitions that blur partisan lines, diminish genuine political representation, and restrict voters' ability to hold parties accountable. In Turkey, the cross-ideological party alliances, previously short-lived due to deep polarization, have now consolidated effectively in two ways: to strengthen Recep Tayyip Erdogan's presidency and for the opposition to solidify their stance against him.

Despite the seeming tendency of the 'Islamist versus pluralist' configuration in Indonesian elections, and the secularist versus Islamist competition in Turkey, a closer look at the development of political alliances in both countries shows frequent cross-ideological alliance. This research highlights the metamorphic configuration of alliances in both countries. Political alliance is a feature of multi-party democratic setting. Some theories emerged to explain the behavior of political alliance,

³⁴ Bishku 2021; Lerner 2013; Barton 2014; Robby et al. 2022; Al Qurtuby 2015.

³⁵ McCargo and Wadilapa 2024.

including the cleavage of identity and ideology³⁶ and the office-seeking theory.³⁷ Political groups with different religious tenets and religious organizations have endorsed different camps in Indonesia and Turkey; they are not concentrated to the closer ideology. In Turkey, in 2018 the Saadet Party, an Islamist party, allied with the Kemalist-Secularist CHP Party, while in Indonesia in the same year, Islamist party PKS, forged an alliance with secular nationalist party PDIP in regional elections. Under these circumstances, this study asks: How and in what way are political party alliances in Indonesia and Turkey configured? What is the position of religion in this configuration in both countries? What is the implication of this alignment?

I argue that political party alliances in Indonesia are made in a sudden manner thanks to the country's messy political landscape, with parties frequently shifting their alignments, and as a result creates no real formal opposition. In contrast, in Turkey, alliances develop gradually, as rigid ideological boundaries are carefully navigated to form cross-ideological coalitions. In Indonesia, the 'toxic alliance' is the main characteristic of political alliances, while in Turkey, the consolidation of the cross-ideological alliance is fragile and bound by a pact due to ideological constraints. The condition feeds further into autocratization in both countries.

In Indonesia, there is no significant ideological political party opposition due to the constant reshuffling of alliances and toxic behavior, as political parties tend to side with the winning party for their own benefit and produce and reproduce 'depoliticized politics'.³⁸ Since political parties in post-reform Indonesia are not strongly grounded in ideology and often function as service vehicles for candidates, their members frequently shift between parties and form coalitions, even with former opponents. As a result, there is no genuine political opposition capable of

³⁶ Lijphart 1999; Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

³⁷ Schlesinger 1975.

³⁸ Kuddus 2023; Hui 2006.

acting as a counterbalance to democratic backsliding. In Turkey, political parties are deeply tied to strong loyalties and polarized along ideological lines, making it difficult for them to easily create political alliances. As a result, attempts to challenge autocratization have been weak and fragile.

Political Alliances in Indonesia and Turkey

The spectrum of political parties in Indonesia is crowded in the center and right-center, with ideologies somewhat blurred. Left-leaning labor parties are very small in number, and the emergence of the Green Party has so far been weak. The absence of a leftist political presence in Indonesia since an attempted coup in 1965 was reinforced by Suharto's New Order regime, which banned the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) through constitutional measures and stigmatized leftist ideologies. This ban, coupled with anti-communist narratives, effectively marginalized leftist movements and restricted political discourse, leaving a long-lasting impact on Indonesia's political landscape that is still felt today. On the other hand, Islamist party Masyumi, which came second in the 1955 election, was banned by then-President Soekarno in 1960 for challenging Indonesia's secular state. Its members later fragmented into smaller parties and organizations, and became relatively insignificant.

The military authoritarian New Order regime fell in 1998, and democracy was installed. Since then, electoral competition is largely the competition of figures rather than ideologies or party politics. Fionna and Tomsa³⁹ classified the new parties that established after 1998 as 'personalistic parties', because their primary purpose at formation was to serve as electoral vehicles for major political figures' presidential ambitions. These parties include the Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*, PD), Greater Indonesia Movement Party (*Gerakan Indonesia Raya*, Gerindra), People's Conscience Party (*Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat*, Hanura), and National Democratic Party (*Nasional Demokrat*, Nasdem). Meanwhile,

³⁹ Fionna and Tomsa 2017.

the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan*, PDIP) has a dynastic party tradition centering in the daughter of Soekarno, Megawati Sukarnoputri, has clientelist elements and is known for its more 'secular' stance.⁴⁰

The former quasi-state party, Golkar (*Golongan Karya*), rebranded itself after 1998 as a centrist force, focusing on economic development and governance reforms. Other parties, such as the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, PKB), United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP), and National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional*, PAN), are significant players among Islamic-oriented parties. PKB, founded by Indonesia's fourth president, Abdurrahman Wahid, has a strong base among traditionalist Muslims and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations. PKB emphasizes pluralism, social justice, and moderate Islamic values. PPP, on the other hand, is known for its commitment to integrating Islamic principles into national politics. Finally, the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS), a conservative Islamist party, has gained traction among urban and middle-class Muslims advocating for more pronounced Islamic governance.

The 1998 reform period in Indonesia did not significantly alter the role of religion in politics, despite the authoritarian Soeharto regime's earlier sustained pressure on Islamic groups. One common mistake by some analyst when assessing the success of political Islam in Indonesia is assuming that Islamist parties are unsuccessful simply because they have never achieved a majority or have remained marginalized in the post-reform period. Relying on the political outcomes of the Islamic political parties discards the evidence that even secular and nationalist political parties in Indonesia promote and accommodate religious regulations and demands.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The vote share in 2024 legislative elections as follow: PDIP 16.7%, Golkar 15.3%, Gerindra 13.2%, PKB 10.6%, Nasdem 9.7%, PKS 8.4%, Democrat 7.4%, PAN 7.2%. PPP for the first time was disqualified, as it did not meet the parliamentary threshold (4%) with 3.87%. See Tenri 2024.

⁴¹ Buehler 2016

In 2004, during Indonesia's first direct presidential elections, the usage of Islam and religion contributed to the success of retired army general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Yudhoyono was from the Democrat Party, and was backed by several small Islamic parties and Islamist organizations. More than one decade later, in 2016, a similar trend sharpened significantly during the Jakarta gubernatorial election, which incited Islam as a major force to form alliances and see the Islam-aligned candidate elected as governor. In the 2014 and 2019 presidential election, a tendency to exploit religion appeared once more, although this alliance was defeated. In the 2024 presidential election, religion was exercised again to promote one's candidacy through *fatwa* issued by *ulamas*.⁴²

In Turkey, political ideology is rigid and has very clear, straight boundaries. Since the establishment of the Republic in 1923, Turkish politics has seen the emergence of several key ideologies, including Kemalism (*Atatürkçülük*, Atatürkism), Turkism (extreme right-wing nationalism), Political Islam under *Milli Görüş* (National View)⁴³, and socialist-leftist and pro-Kurdish parties (mainly represented by Peoples' Democratic Party/HDP). Generally, the major political parties are the CHP (Republican People's Party) with Kemalism points of view; AKP (Justice and Development Party), a socially conservative party presenting a new form of *Milli Görüş* and representing the agenda of more Muslim-ness variant of secularism (*laiklik*); MHP, representing the far-right ultranationalist Turkism; and HDP the pro-Kurdish political party alongside several small and diverse parties on the left. In contrast with Indonesia, where political parties are crowded in the center, Turkey has a broader spectrum of political parties, including a communist party that won the local mayoral election in Tunceli.

In Turkey, Altuntaş-Çakır⁴⁴ argues that "the engagement with democracy has not been grounded on norms but was instead pursuant to

⁴² Aditiya 2024.

⁴³ Öktem 2022.

⁴⁴ Altuntaş-Çakır 2022.

the logic of necessity or instrumentality”. She argues that democratization is the functionalist convergence between democracy and Islam, and appears to have produced a ‘semi-democracy’. Instead of the seemingly comprehensive way of competition between secular and religious camp, ‘*din*’ and ‘*laik*’, the boundaries have become blurred even from the early Turkish Republic. Actors compete in the political event has become more eagerly, using, exercising, the discourse of religion, highlighting the oscillation between more secular and more Islamic orientations, with a noticeable shift toward greater religious influence.

In the early years of the Republic of Turkey, the political scene was dominated by CHP, which upheld Kemalist *laiklik* and nationalism. The Democrat Party (DP), founded in 1946, marked the beginning of significant political pluralism, appealing to a broader conservative and religious electorate that challenge assertive secularization in Turkey. The emergence of DP marked the first significant challenge to the Kemalist model of secularity. Under Adnan Menderes's leadership, DP reversed some of the more rigid secular policies of CHP, advocating for greater economic liberalization and increased religious freedom. The DP's stance also included a pro-Western foreign policy, aligning more closely with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States (US) during the Cold War. Political instability and military interventions mark the period between 1960 and 1980 in Turkey. The military coup ended Menderes's leadership, after which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. In the aftermath, new political parties emerged, including the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP), the successor of DP. During the 1970s, political fragmentation led to the formation of various coalitions and alliances. The Nationalist Front (*Milliyetçi Cephe*) was a notable alliance of right-wing parties, including (AP, National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP), and Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP). This alliance was primarily aimed at countering the influence of left-wing and secular parties, such as CHP and the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Turkey İşçi Partisi*, TİP). During this period, political alliances

instead formed as a result of the tension between left-wing and right-wing factions.

The secularization project in Turkey during the Cold War was not a straightforward continuation of Atatürk's reforms. Instead, the Cold War influenced the state to adopt a pragmatic and sometimes contradictory approach to secular state of Turkey. While the state maintained its commitment to secularism, it also promoted a controlled broader form of religion to serve its broader political and social objectives. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the military junta in Turkey, which saw itself as the guardian of the Kemalist *laik* state, used Islam as a defense against the perceived threat of communism. The fear of Soviet expansion and communist influence in neighboring regions led to the promotion of Islamic values as a way to counter leftist ideologies.⁴⁵ The state facilitated the expansion of religious infrastructure, including Islamic schools, while the legal role of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, expanded to provide 'moral guidance' to the nation.⁴⁶ *Diyanet*'s main task was to rid Islam of superstition (*hurafat*) and fundamentalism (*irtica*). During the Cold War, Islam was promoted as a countermeasure to communism, which was considered Turkey's primary national threat.⁴⁷

In 1980s, even under its secular military regime, religion was exercised in a way that was contradictory to Turkey's secularization effort. For example, under the military provision, the religious education become a compulsory subject for all students in all levels of education, while Qur'an and religious moral classes became optional subjects. The military regime also created the trilogy of '*family, barrack, mosque*' to repel the influence of communism.⁴⁸ The state expanded the power and resources of *Diyanet*, transforming it into a tool for controlling religious expression. In this historical process, religion and secular converge. The military interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980 further reinforced this controlled

⁴⁵ Rabasa and Larrabee 2008.

⁴⁶ Lord 2018; Kara 2004.

⁴⁷ van Bruinessen 2018..

⁴⁸ Rabasa and Larrabee 2008.

form of secularism (*laiklik*). Each coup resulted in constitutional and legal changes that bolstered the military's role as the protector of secular state, while paradoxically endorsing the use of religion as a counter-ideological tool.

The period after marked a short-lived cross ideological alliance due to differences and internal discord, leading to brief administrations. In the 1995 general elections, the Virtue Party (*Refah Party*), with its *Milli Görüş* political Islam leaning and led by Necmettin Erbakan, emerged as the largest party in parliament, marking a significant shift in Turkish politics. Erbakan's tenure as Prime Minister, however, was short-lived. His Islamist agenda, including attempts to strengthen ties with Muslim-majority countries and implement religiously influenced policies, alarmed the secular establishment, particularly the military. This led to his ousting in the 'post-modern coup' of 1997. In 1999, the Democratic Left Party (DSP), Motherland Party (ANAP), and far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) formed the Democratic Left-Nationalist-Anatolian alliance. These patterns highlighted three things: first, the fragmentation of the political landscape, with no single party able to secure a decisive majority. Second, the rising influence of nationalist and right-wing politics, as evidenced by MHP's strong performance. Third, the enduring appeal of political Islam, despite the legal challenges faced by the Refah Party.

The polarization of political parties and the diverse spectrum of ideologies in Turkey have made coalition-building a necessity for securing a parliamentary majority. This historical trend has continued to shape the dynamics of contemporary Turkish politics, where fragmented political landscapes often necessitate the formation of alliances to achieve stable governance. In 2002, the establishment of AKP, itself a fragmentation of the Refah Party, swept the vote, winning almost 34% in the general election, which allowed the party to form a government without the need for a coalition. At the same time, the election result also signaled the collapse of several established political parties such as ANAP and DYP, and highlighted the struggles of CHP. This dramatic shift indicated a

significant realignment of the Turkish political landscape, with AKP emerging as the dominant force.

However, AKP's dominance weakened in the years after, especially in 2015 and 2017 general elections. In order to secure the constitutional referendum, which changed Turkey's parliamentary system to a presidential one, AKP made a coalition with far-right ultranationalist MHP. The AKP-MHP alliance has been significant for several reasons. It has allowed AKP to maintain a stable governing majority in the face of increasing political polarization and economic challenges. MHP's support has also been crucial in passing key legislation and constitutional amendments, further consolidating Erdoğan's executive power.

The opposition to AKP-MHP's government spans a broad spectrum of ideologies : the 'National Alliance' of Kemalist CHP, the far-right İYİ Party, the Islamist Saadet Party, and the Democrat Party all however lose in the 2018 general elections. The National Alliance coalition gradually showcased success in local elections in 2019 and 2024 in Istanbul and Ankara and closed the margin with the AKP-MHP coalition. Such a coalition is nothing new, having also occurred during the 1990s, reflecting the fragmented and polarized political landscape in Turkey and the pragmatic approach to political contestation. These victories not only showcased the effectiveness of strategic alliances but also provided the opposition with a platform to demonstrate alternative governance models. The success of the National Alliance in challenging AKP in local election is not solely attributed to their ability to unite a wide range of political ideologies across the fragmented spectrum. They have also adeptly engaged with a variety of critical issues that resonate deeply with the populace, including justice and religion.

On the other hand, Indonesia's political parties tend to be more centrist and less ideologically rigid. In contrast, Indonesia's political parties often emphasize broad-based, inclusive policies to appeal to a wide spectrum of voters. Indonesia's cultural and historical context

reinforces its political centrism,⁴⁹ especially the long-lasting impact of the Suharto regime⁵⁰. The ban on the communist party and the suppression of leftist ideologies have created an environment where political discourse is limited predominantly to centrist and right-wing viewpoints. The absence of diverse political ideologies may also be due to the fact that Soeharto's regime only permitted three political parties to 'contest' elections until its downfall in 1998: Suharto's own party, Golkar, plus two 'independent' parties, the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) and United Development Party (PPP).

The democratic reforms that followed Suharto's fall in 1998 fostered a political environment that prioritized stability and gradual change, yet the remnants of Suharto's dramatical homogenization of political ideology remain. Many of the new political parties that emerged post-Suharto operated within a constrained ideological range, avoiding leftist policies due to historical stigmatization and fear of backlash, while other parties established after *reformasi* acted as electoral vehicles for major political figures' presidential ambitions. Islamic parties resurfaced, but soon found themselves struggling due to their lack of popularity. While democratic reforms have introduced significant changes, the political environment remains influenced by a historical legacy that prioritizes stability and incremental change over broader ideological diversity.

Indonesia's proportional representation system and the requirement for parties to cross a national threshold to enter parliament encourage coalition-building. This has led to the formation of broad-based coalitions, such as the 'Great Indonesia Coalition' led by PDI-P in 2024 and the 'Red and White Coalition' led by Gerindra in 2014, which encompass a wide range of political ideologies. These coalitions are often fluid, with parties joining or leaving based on strategic pragmatical considerations rather than strict ideological alignment. The political culture in Indonesia also reflects the continued influence of patron-client

⁴⁹ Warburton and Aspinall 2019.

⁵⁰ Roosa 2020; Marching and Nicholls 2017.

networks and oligarchic interests.⁵¹ Political parties frequently rely on these networks to secure financial support and mobilize voters, which can lead to policy decisions driven by vested interests.

Political alliances in Indonesia also involve informal alliances with religious networks and organizations, clerics, businessman and ethnic groups.⁵² Informal alliances are just as crucial as formal ones, allowing Indonesian political parties to navigate the country's diverse social landscape and also add to the messy landscape of Indonesian politics. Informal alliances are not the main focus of this paper. However, as Buehler argues, these alliances often extend beyond mass mobilization to include trade-offs for sharia law. Secular-nationalist politicians and parties, in turn, adopt religious rhetoric and implement sharia-inspired policies once in office, blurring the ideological lines among Indonesia's political parties.⁵³

In Indonesia, Party membership and loyalty are often fluid, allowing for a dynamic political landscape, relying more on personality and individuals, rather than partisanship. Although some parties are bound by characteristics such as religious or nationalist affiliations, partisanship in Indonesia is primarily driven by pragmatic rather than ideological aims. On the other hand, religious and ethnic organizations have become a characteristic of Indonesian society.⁵⁴ The importance of religious organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, which together encompass 100 million Muslim members, is significant for electoral competition in Indonesia, as evidenced with the allocation of ministerial positions for representatives of those organizations.

2016 marked the beginning of intensified clashes between Islamism and pluralism. That year's Jakarta gubernatorial election saw the Chinese heritage Christian candidate, Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama accused of blasphemy against. Islamist groups, including the radical-

⁵¹ Aspinall and Berenschot 2019; Winters 2013; Simandjuntak 2012.

⁵² Slama 2019.

⁵³ Buehler 2016, 2017.

⁵⁴ Steenbrink 1986.

vigilante Islamic organization Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), and elements within PKS, mobilized large segments of the Muslim population against Ahok, framing the election as a defense of Islam.⁵⁵ Ahok lost the election and was sent to jail after being found guilty of blasphemy.

In the subsequent 2019 presidential election, incumbent and PDIP presidential candidate Widodo suddenly forged an alliance with the chairman of Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), Ma'ruf Amin. The 2016 Ahok case had brought religion to the forefront as a significant factor in Indonesian politics. While Jokowi was initially expected to pair with a senior lawyer and bureaucrat, he ultimately chose Amin, who had contributed to several anti-pluralist fatwas, as his vice-presidential candidate. This move aimed to bridge the ideological divide by appealing to conservative Muslim voters within NU and Islamist groups.⁵⁶ In addition, during his presidency, Widodo officially banned radical Islamist groups FPI and HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia).⁵⁷

In the most-recent 2024 presidential election, candidate Anies Baswedan, the former Governor of Jakarta who defeated Ahok in 2016, was backed by Islamic parties such as PKB and PKS, along with National Democratic Party. Meanwhile, the Advance Indonesia Coalition (*Koalisi Indonesia Maju*) led by retired general Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Widodo's son, included a diverse array of parties such as the religious-leaning PAN and PBB, the right-wing Gerindra, the center-right Golkar, and Demokrat Party among others. Lastly, the third presidential candidate was endorsed by the center-left PDI-P, Perindo, and Islamist party PPP. The involvement of Islamic parties in all three presidential candidate pairs illustrates that the political landscape in Indonesia has transcended a simple binary competition between Islamist and secular-nationalist factions. Islamists supporting Baswedan in the 2024 election were also keeping the option to support Prabowo if the

⁵⁵ Peterson and Schäfer 2021.

⁵⁶ Martin van 2021.

⁵⁷ Prastiwi 2020.

presidential race went to a second round.⁵⁸ This became even more evident after Prabowo's election victory, as nearly all political parties, including former competitors, swiftly shifted positions and declared their intention to join his coalition, highlighting the office-seeking nature of Indonesian politics.

The discrepancy of political alliances at the national, regional, and local levels adds to this messy landscape. During 2018 local elections, for example, PDIP and PKS were in a coalition in 33 regions, and PDIP, Gerindra, and PKS were in a coalition in 21 regions.⁵⁹ While at the national level, these parties often act as opposition to one another or have seemingly clashing ideologies, they demonstrate a pragmatic approach to politics by forming alliances when it is strategically advantageous at regional and local levels.

The artificially-constructed ideological clash between Islamist and pluralist-nationalist camps is reflected in Indonesian media and public discourse. Campaign narratives often emphasize this division, sometimes exacerbating societal tensions for political gain. This dichotomy, while influential, does not fully capture the complexity of Indonesian politics. Political parties and candidates navigate a spectrum of positions, often prioritizing pragmatic solutions to address the electorate's diverse needs. As with Turkey, democratization in Indonesia has been shaped by the intense usage of religion during political competitions.

Toxic Alliances and the Discourse of Religion in Indonesia

The messy landscape of political alliances in Indonesia is partly due to fluid political maneuvers and less strict ideological partisanship, which allow for extreme shuffling of political alliances, as well as factors of toxic alliances, which are often necessary to stabilize governments. McCargo and Wadipalapa⁶⁰ illustrate how the 2024 Indonesian presidential

⁵⁸ Nuraniyah 2024.

⁵⁹ Dariyanto 2018.

⁶⁰ McCargo and Wadipalapa 2024.

candidates all had close connections to Widodo, in effect making the electoral competition an empty ritual. After Prabowo won the 2024 presidential election, his main opponents – Demokrat, PKB, and Nasdem – began moving closer to him to support his upcoming presidency.⁶¹ This mirrors the 2019 election, when the main opposition (Prabowo and Gerindra Party), who were Widodo's opponents in the last two elections, maneuvered to join Widodo's ministry.

In Indonesia, candidates often frame their persona using religiosity and Muslim identity, with their political party's background functioning only as a tool. The complex segments of Indonesian society are a war-arena to gain voters through the ongoing negotiation of secularity. In this context, parties often adapt their strategies to appeal to different segments, including Islamist groups. This includes efforts to acknowledge or embrace Islamist sentiments, integrating their concerns into broader coalitions, as seen during the 2004 political coalition under President Yudhoyono. Such coalition-building often involves pragmatic concessions, like supporting Islamic banking, increasing religious education, and promoting moral governance—issues that resonate with conservative Muslim voters.

The 2019 election debate in Indonesia centered on the contrasting platforms of incumbent Widodo and his opponent Prabowo. Widodo campaigned on a platform emphasizing pluralism and multireligious values, while Prabowo, who was backed by Islamist parties such as PKS, reproduced the rhetoric of Islam. Prabowo's rhetoric revolved around Muslim identity, the usage of religious words,⁶² and support from Islamic clerics and organizations.⁶³ This was a continuation of his strategy from the 2014 election, when Prabowo ran for president with PAN's Hatta Rajasa.

While on the surface, the contest appeared to be a cleavage between Islamist and pluralist sentiments, it is important to note that both

⁶¹ Nugroho 2024.

⁶² Purnama et al. 2021.

⁶³ Hermawan 2016.

sides were strategically navigating the complex terrain of Indonesia's religious and political landscape. Widodo, for example, sought to tame Islamist sentiments by aligning himself with Islamic clerics and organizations, including selecting Amin as his vice-presidential candidate. Ma'ruf Amin is the former chief of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), which issued several anti-pluralist fatwas, including a fatwa declaring secularism, pluralism, and liberalism as *haram*. Widodo's candidacy was also supported by PPP, who are supporters for increased sharia law.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Prabowo, aligned himself with Islamist parties in 2014 and 2019, only bound by vague commitments and not ideology.

In their campaign, Widodo and Amin used the discourse of Islam coupled with tolerance, moderation and against terrorism. Widodo emphasized moderation and toleration to shield Amin from his involvement in the Ahok case and his fatwa on secularism, pluralism, and liberalism. This strategic narrative served multiple purposes. By highlighting Amin's Islamic credentials, Widodo aimed to secure the support of conservative Muslim voters who were pivotal in the previous gubernatorial election. At the same time, his emphasis of moderation and tolerance was designed to reassure more liberal and pluralist segments of the electorate, who might have been concerned about Amin's involvement in the blasphemy case against Ahok. The campaign also strategically addressed the broader concerns of extremism and terrorism. By promoting a vision of Islam that aligns with national values of tolerance and moderation, Widodo and Amin positioned themselves against radicalism, appealing to a wide audience that included both religious conservatives and secular moderates. For example, during his campaign, Widodo announce that Malang City is an example of harmonious society and tolerance in Indonesia.⁶⁵ In order to have a contrasting stance with his rival, Prabowo, who has allegedly conduct human rights abuses during his

⁶⁴ Tehusjarana 2018.

⁶⁵ Febrianto 2019.

time as a military general, he appealed to human rights activists with his promise to uphold human rights and tolerance.⁶⁶

The language used in political discourse has played a significant role in shaping public perception, particularly in portraying Widodo as a pluralist and pro-human rights candidate. Conversely, those who did not support Widodo were often labeled as supporters of the Jakarta Charter⁶⁷ or similar ideologies. This narrative first emerged during the 2014 election and has persisted through the elections in 2019 and 2024 likely as a result of elite engineering.⁶⁸ This polarization gave rise to the phenomenon of *cebong*" (lit: tadpoles –used to refer to Widodo Jokowi supporters and sometimes to anti-Islam sentiment and *kadrun*" (lit: desert lizard –used to refer to Islamist supporters, pro-Jakarta Charter sentiment) marked it significantly as the most polarized election with intense cleavage framing.

The discourse of justice has been a central theme in the political discourse of the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Indonesian elections, employed by all major candidates to advance their platforms. During the 2014 and 2019 elections, Widodo broadened the discourse of justice to encompass his commitment to human rights and protection of minority groups. Widodo's campaign emphasized social justice and equitable development, portraying him as a defender of marginalized communities. Widodo however later upset human rights activists by betraying the commitments he made during his campaign and instead showing a rollback of the *reformasi* agenda⁶⁹. On the other hand, Prabowo framed justice within the context of Islamist majoritarian tendencies. Prabowo's rhetoric highlighted the perceived injustices faced by Indonesian Muslims under Widodo's administration, arguing that they suffered from alienation and systemic bias. In the 2024 election, the narrative surrounding justice is further complicated by Baswedan's alliance with PKS. This alliance elicited

⁶⁶ Maharani and Erdianto 2019.

⁶⁷ The Jakarta Charter was a proposed preamble to Indonesia's 1945 Constitution, advocating Sharia law for Muslims. It was later revised for inclusivity but remains historically significant.

⁶⁸ Hermawan 2023.

⁶⁹ Baker 2023; Power 2018; Mujani and Liddle 2021.

antipathy from some due to fears of Islamist influence, while others view it as a commitment to reform and justice. Baswedan capitalized on the theme of justice by critiquing Widodo's administration for its handling of constitutional issues, democratic institutions, and civil liberties.⁷⁰

The framing of the political divide in Indonesia as pluralist versus Islamist has been extensive but often misleading. Labels such as 'pluralist' are sometimes applied to political figures or groups that exhibit illiberal tendencies,⁷¹ while 'Islamist' groups are frequently misunderstood as advocates for an Islamic state when many focuses instead on justice, welfare, and ethical governance. The current Islamist parties have long refrained from challenging the secular state itself, instead focusing on incorporating Islamic values into regulations. To add into this complex behavior, Islamist parties, PPP, PKS, PAN and PKB, forging alliances in unpredictable manners. In 2014, the PPP supported Prabowo, but switched to support Widodo in 2019. Meanwhile, PAN, which backed Prabowo in both 2014 and 2019, decided to join Widodo's cabinet in 2019. These political alliances do not reflect the ideological divide between Islamist and pluralist factions, rather partly the office-seeking tendencies and the co-optation of political opposition.⁷² While political parties may engage with Islamist sentiments to maintain popular support, these efforts are largely pragmatic and do not reflect deep ideological divides among parties, rather among voters.

The imprecise vocabulary often used to describe these alliances contributes to misunderstandings among the electorate, resulting in a fluid and multifaceted political terrain where alliances and ideologies are not easily defined. Since 2006 and the Ahok case, the competition has been framed between actors with explicit Islamic political agendas and other actors supporting existing constitutional structures. This framing

⁷⁰ Bhwana 2024.

⁷¹ Mietzner 2018; Fealy 2020.

⁷² Mietzner 2023.

persisted as elite engineering, that does not reflect the actual ideologies and behavior among candidates.

Fragile Alliance and the Discourse of Religion in Turkey

Turkey demonstrates democratic backsliding through executive aggrandizement, where disassembling institutions, legal changes exercise to extend Erdogan's power. However, unlike the toxic alliances seen in Indonesia, these alliances in Turkey are more calculated and focused on maintaining stability after changing the constitution from a parliamentary system to a presidential system in 2017. In Turkey, the failure of a serious opposition since 2011 has further entrenched authoritarian tendencies, as the ruling party legitimizes its grip on power by exploiting these alliances. This lack of effective opposition has allowed the government to erode democratic norms and consolidate authority without significant resistance coupled with curbing dissent, highlighting a troubling shift towards authoritarianism under the guise of stability and governance. The revival of opposition in Turkey has been a gradual process to challenge Erdogan's presidency, with the opposition then consolidating their stance, creating a temporary alliance for the 2018 election that encompassed a cross-ideological spectrum.⁷³

Erdogan's alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) allowed him to project an image of strong statehood and leadership, emphasizing nationalist themes and persuading the public that Turkey is under internal and external threats. While this approach was previously successful in consolidating support, the ongoing economic crisis has become a significant factor driving political competition. The opposition to Erdogan, consisting of a diverse spectrum of ideologies, has become more formidable, but its heterogeneity also provides Erdogan with multiple avenues for attack. He has accused the opposition of cooperating with terrorists, specifically targeting the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic

⁷³ Esen 2022; Çevik 2018.

Party (HDP) and its alleged ties to Kurdish militant. Erdogan challenges the assertive Kemalist elements within the opposition, accusing them of undermining national unity, while also criticizing the pragmatic Islamist parties for compromising their values.⁷⁴

Both Indonesia and Turkey reflect the strategic exercise of religion in political alliances. The opposition alliance in Turkey was derived from a combination of resentment of Erdogan, a pursuit of justice, and a pragmatic approach toward religion. In 2023, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, National Alliance's presidential candidate, faced various accusations that undermined his position among Muslim voters. Widely circulated photos showed him stepping on a prayer mat, and he was photographed with members of the CHP Istanbul branch who praised pork consumption. Additionally, his *iftar* photos sparked controversy among secularist voters.⁷⁵

Among the controversies, Kılıçdaroğlu engaged to create a positive sentiment around his stance toward religion. For example, he said in his personal twitter: "We should cultivate tolerance, not anger, in the Islamic world. Without discriminating between you and me, we should join hands and fight together for our future"⁷⁶. Kılıçdaroğlu contrasted tolerance and anger in his message, intending to portray Erdogan as driving the Islamic world into fragmentation while at the same time positioning himself as a proponent of tolerance and unity. In April 2023, he boldly declared 'I am Alevi', a religious minority in Turkey, signaling the problems of religious minorities and discrimination in Turkey.⁷⁷ However, his acts also provoked criticism from those who preferred to ensure Sunni Islam maintains its dominance in public life. AKP and People's Alliance on the other hand, initially focused on security issues like terrorism and the survival of the

⁷⁴ See for example Erdoğan's post on Twitter on 27 February 2019 to call the alliance as 'Alliance of Disgrace' (*Zillet İffifaki*).

⁷⁵ Sabah 2023.

⁷⁶ Hürriyet 2017.

⁷⁷ Yetkin 2023.

nations,⁷⁸ moving to exploit Kılıçdaroğlu's religious background and controversies around religious practices. Erdoğan responded by stating that there is no separate Sunni, Shia, or Alevi identities in Turkey, only one religious' identity: Islam.⁷⁹

As leader of CHP party, Kılıçdaroğlu made some unconventional moves. For example, he cited Qur'an verse during his speech at the Türk Ocakları symposium. The strategy from the National Alliance was to combine the issue on justice, democracy, discrimination, and economic problems with religion as reflected in several speeches. For example, he said: "Islam, for whatever reason, does not allow injustice or inequality. Islam does not permit favoritism, lack of oversight, or authoritarianism under any circumstances...to justify poverty, exclusion, and repression for millions".⁸⁰ By emphasizing that Islam opposes injustice and authoritarianism, Kılıçdaroğlu sought to appeal to both religious and secular audiences who value social justice and ethical governance.

The most surprising move prior to the election was when CHP and alliances proposed a bill to place legal safeguards for the headscarf, aiming to attract Muslim voters.⁸¹ This move marked a significant shift in the party's stance, as it has historically been associated with staunch laicism. By proposing this bill, CHP sought to appeal to a broader electorate, reflecting the party's pragmatic approach to religion in politics. Erdoğan responded by showing documents and video of Kılıçdaroğlu proposing an anti-headscarf policy in 2008.⁸²

The tensions became more pronounced as cross-ideological alliances allowed for significant breakthroughs in previously rigid ideologies. For instance, CHP Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu made headlines by publicly showing his mother wearing a hijab. Additionally, he initiated his election campaign with a visit to the Tomb of Fatih Sultan

⁷⁸ Yılmaz and Shipoli 2019.

⁷⁹ Yıldız 2023.

⁸⁰ Ergör and Açıkgöz 2022.

⁸¹ Bajec 2023.

⁸² Sabah 2022.

Mehmet instead from the Kemal Ataturk graveyard, a move that angered some secularists. AKP's alliance with MHP also sacrificed the AKP vision that has already successfully softened Kemalist laicism-nationalism toward more general Sunni Muslimness identity, including embracing Kurdish minorities. MHP's ultra-nationalist stance and their resentment of Kurdish minorities largely influenced this shift⁸³, leading to a more hardline approach in Eastern Turkey in addition to AKP's disappointment to its defeat in the region.

In this regard, the first aspect for analysis is that in Turkey, the cross-ideological party alliances, which include a wide array of ideological camps, reshape the discourse on social justice, economy, and democracy by incorporating religious elements. These alliances often balance secular (*laik*) and religious values to appeal to a broader electorate, thereby repainting the national narrative with a blend of diverse perspectives that reflect Turkey's complex secularization. In Indonesia, however, the political discourse is more diffusely distributed across the spectrum, and a significant tension arises from accusations aimed at individuals or parties for not fulfilling an idealized version of Muslimness. This tension manifests in the competition among political actors to present themselves as the most authentically Islamic, which can lead to both positive and negative outcomes in the electoral landscape.

The second aspect to note is that political alliances became important tools to deliver the ongoing nationalism project both in Indonesia and in Turkey. In Turkey, the top-down reidentification of nationalism is continuing, defined by the state leaders. The Turkish education system for example, controlled by the ruling party, has significantly fueled nationalism through its curriculum. For example, in the early republic period, the civic education heavily emphasized the embodied and visual practices of secularism: hairstyles, clothing, beards vs shaved faces- focusing on key marker identity.⁸⁴ Nationalism in Turkey

⁸³ Celep 2010.

⁸⁴ Türkmen 2009; Özyürek 2006.

has been shaped by masculinist and state-sponsored secular-Islamic tendencies. During the AKP regime, this concept of Turkishness was redefined, a shift Jenny White describes as "Muslim Nationalism": "pious Muslim Turk whose subjectivity and vision for the future is shaped by an imperial Ottoman past overlaid onto a republican state framework but divorced from the Kemalist state project". Education has also undergone significant changes, with more religious content and subjects added, while civic education, human rights, and democracy courses were abolished or merged.⁸⁵

Conclusion: Undermining Democracy

In Turkey, the state maintains religion's subordinate position. The state's commitment to secularism coexisting with a strategic utilization of Islam. The state heavily regulates religious expression, and religion is often used pragmatically in politics. This is evident in how Erdogan shifted from a moderate stance in the early 2000s to a more religious-conservative approach in recent years. In contrast, Indonesia presents a scenario where religion is deeply intertwined, with various actors influencing religious discourse. While the state places religion in a subordinate role, it also leaves part of it under the influence of institutions, creating a mutually constitutive relationship.⁸⁶ In Indonesia, political parties facilitate this exchange by giving the venue for religious mobilization and accommodation for Islamist agenda as prominently manifested in 2004, where the Yudhoyono presidency established significant space for hardliner Islamist groups who supported him during the election.⁸⁷ Similarly, Widodo gave more space for NU under his presidency.⁸⁸

The political landscape in Indonesia is complex and dynamic, characterized by a multitude of actors engaging in the messy field of

⁸⁵ Cornell 2015.

⁸⁶ Menchik 2016.

⁸⁷ Mietzner 2006.

⁸⁸ Arifianto 2024.

electoral democracy and less ideological stance. Formal alliances (political parties) and informal alliances (religious groups and organization) compete and collaborate, creating a fluid and often unpredictable political environment. In contrast, Turkey's political landscape is driven by deep ideological divisions and polarization. Political parties in Turkey play a more centralized role, and the historically-common cross-ideological alliances continue to shape the political arena. Turkey is seemingly embroiled in a fierce battle between secular and Muslim sectors of the population, likewise pluralist versus Islamist tension in Indonesia. These tensions are not easily discernible through categorical binary labels, as secular (*laik*) and religious conservative impulses and actions do not align neatly with what might be expected from a 'secular' or 'Muslim' government or population.⁸⁹.

In both countries, political alliances contribute significantly to democratic backsliding, autocratization, and polarization. In Indonesia, toxic alliances and the constant shuffling of political parties undermine the significance of elections. Political parties frequently form alliances with the winning party after the election, despite having been fierce competitors during the campaign. This opportunistic behavior diminishes the clarity of electoral outcomes and weakens the democratic process. In Turkey, political alliances made to consolidate the grip of government to ensure its majority to pass crucial referendum and fostering autocratization. Both camps, using religious discourse

The usage of religion and Islam has been more pronounced in Indonesia since 2004 only used as a tool, and all Islamist party are distributed equally in all presidential candidates. In Turkey, recent political alignments have broken many social and political taboos, such as Kılıçdaroğlu's declaration of his Alevi identity, the showcasing of hijabs by members of CHP, and the addressing of Syrian and Kurdish issues. While these moves were revolutionary, the election was marked by mutual

⁸⁹ White 2014.

mockery and demonization of opposing sides, as they formed alliances across various ideologies.

Factors that motivate alliances in Turkey and Indonesia are slightly different. In Turkey, the opposition alliance was derived from resentment of Erdogan. In Indonesia, alliances are formed based on practical considerations, such as political expediency and the desire to gain power, rather than strict ideological alignment. In Turkey, the opposition consolidated its alliance to challenge Erdogan in 2018, while in Indonesia, the messy political landscape, coupled with the co-optation of the opposition, result in a weak opposition alliance. This is marked by instances of opposition betrayal, where parties often join the ruling government, undermining the coherence and strength of the opposition.

While both Indonesia and Turkey were once hailed as models of democracy, they now serve as examples of how popular and charismatic leaders can dismantle prior commitments to democracy, even rolling it back further. In this process, political parties and their alignments play a crucial role. In Indonesia, office-seeking tendencies have led to a lack of a strong formal opposition. The debate between pluralism and Islamism, initially an organic discussion, has become entrenched through elite manipulation, no longer reflecting the true ideological tendencies of the parties. In Turkey, to challenge the dominant AKP and Erdogan's alliance with the MHP, the fragmented opposition—driven by deep ideological divides—has formed temporary alliances and pacts. However, these coalitions are vulnerable to attack due to their ideological diversity. Both conditions contribute to the growing tendency toward autocratization. In this way, the crisis of liberal democracy, which has traditionally focused on institutions and measuring through quantification, reveals its limitations in addressing deeper social and political challenges.

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