

Religious Fundamentalism and Democratic Transitions: The Case of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Political Science at
The Faculty of Social Sciences, in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

DEPOK

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis intends to analyze how Indonesia's political reforms after the fall of the New Order inadvertently enabled the empowerment of the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a movement opposed to the democratic pluralism pursued at the start of the Reformasi era. The increase of liberalization in political participation created new opportunities for a wide range of groups, including those with anti-pluralist agendas. Utilizing the Political Opportunity Theory, the research studied how these reforms provided the HTI with the legal space to advocate for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, directly challenging Pancasila's pluralist ideals. This study highlights the dilemma that while Reformasi aimed to deepen democratic values, it also opened the political arena to actors who reject those very principles. This is a common phenomenon in newly democratized states for the past couple of decades. It also argues that pluralism under the New Order was largely a top-down project, not a deeply rooted societal value, making it vulnerable to contestation in the more open post-authoritarian era. The transition from Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime to the more open political environment of Reformasi created political opportunities that enabled Hizbut Tahrir's rise by reducing state repression of Islamist activism.

Keywords: *HTI, Democracy, Islam, Caliphate, The New Order*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY	ii
THESIS ATTESTATION.....	iv
THESIS DEFENSE APPROVAL	v
THESIS REVISION COMPLETION DECLARATION	vi
THESIS DEFENSE INTERNAL MEMO	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER I.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Problem Statement.....	1
1.2 Research Questions.....	5
1.3 Objective of the Study	5
CHAPTER II.....	6
THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	6
2.1 Literature Review.....	6
2.2 Theoretical Foundation	10
2.2.1 Political Opportunity Theory	10
2.2.2 Democratization Theory and Post-Authoritarian Transitions	11
2.2.3 Hypotheses.....	13
CHAPTER III	15
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	15
3.1 Research Methods.....	15
CHAPTER IV	20

RESEARCH RESULTS	20
4.1 A Clash of Ideologies.....	20
4.2 Challenging Islamic Pluralism	22
4.3 The HTI under New Order.....	25
4.4 The HTI under Reformasi	27
4.5 Paradigm Shift towards the Caliphate.....	31
CHAPTER V	35
CONCLUSION.....	35
5.1 Conclusion	35
REFERENCES	40

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2. 1 New Order and Reformasi Comparison	9
Figure 2. 2 Developed Democracies and Post-Reformasi Indonesia Comparison	13

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

For many years, Indonesia was led under an authoritarian regime of Suharto, which ended in 1998. The democratization process afterwards marked by the increase of political pluralism and freedom, but Fundamentalist groups like the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (abbreviated as the HTI) also gained a newfound stage in empowerment (Bourchier, 2019; Hamayotsu, 2013; Alam et al., 2023). The New Order period transitioned into the Reformasi period, and the new environment allowed for greater freedom of organization, which enabled fundamentalist groups to access both new and traditional media, mobilize supporters, and challenge the state's pluralistic foundations (Hamayotsu, 2013). The response of the Indonesian government has often been ambivalent, where some politicians and officials make concessions to conservative religious interests in validating restrictive laws like the blasphemy law, while others sometimes use the state apparatus to enforce religious norms (Bourchier, 2019).

This created a peculiar dilemma where, instead of guaranteeing greater tolerance, the democratization process of Indonesia has sometimes facilitated the exclusion and marginalization of religious minorities, as seen in violence against groups like Ahmadiyah and Shi'a communities. Somehow, the legacy of Suharto's Pancasila indoctrination, the resurgence of New Order elites, and the rise of populist and sectarian politics have further complicated the relationship between democracy and pluralism. While intolerance among the Muslim majority persists in the era, empirical evidence has suggested that institutional engagement can help reduce intolerance. Ultimately, Indonesia's experience within the transitional period demonstrates that democratization does not automatically lead to greater inclusiveness and that the interplay between religion, law, and politics remains a central challenge for the country's pluralistic aspirations.

The dilemma of Indonesia's Reformasi is an archetype found in many democratic transitions, whereas reforms aimed to foster pluralism and tolerance, the loosening of authoritarian controls also created space for illiberal actors like the HTI to organize and challenge the very foundations of democratic pluralism. The group has been so shrewd in utilizing the existing contradictions and infrastructures available at the end of the Suharto administration. Of course, such tension is not unique to Indonesia since it reflects a recurring pattern in democratizing societies where pluralism was previously imposed from above and not deeply internalized, leaving institutional safeguards incomplete and

vulnerable to exploitation by anti-pluralist movements as seen in neighboring states (Mietzner, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2021).

The empowerment of HTI within the Reformasi has shown us that mechanisms designed to encourage diversity and open debate can inadvertently empower groups that reject democratic norms, thus threatening the consolidation of an inclusive political order (Mietzner, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2021). This phenomenon is observed in other regions as well, where democratic openings have enabled illiberal actors to gain influence, sometimes under the guise of defending democracy, and to use identity politics and institutional weaknesses to erode democratic quality (Kapidžić, 2020). The Indonesian experience definitely showcased the complex challenge of balancing freedoms of association and expression with the need to protect pluralist principles, which shows the important fact that democratization alone does not guarantee tolerance or inclusiveness as being championed by Western Hegemony. Rather, it could backfire in societies with shallow traditions of pluralism and incomplete institutional protections.

Within the discussion of authoritarian beginnings of the country, Western support was crucial in sustaining Suharto's New Order regime since the United States and other Western powers prioritized anti-communism and regional stability over democratic values and human rights during the Cold War (Batanghari, 2022; Simpson, 2019). Their backing then allowed Suharto to maintain authoritarian control, suppress dissent, and impose a top-down version of pluralism, with little pressure for genuine democratic reform or respect for civil liberties (Batanghari, 2022; White, 2017; Simpson, 2019). The West's willingness to overlook human rights abuses and the lack of political freedoms entrenched the regime's power and delayed the organic development of pluralism in Indonesian society. While Sukarno fell through the strong hegemony of Western favour, Suharto experienced harsher backlash from intra-political actors, such as the youth. The time Reformasi began in 1998, Indonesia faced the challenge of building democracy in a context where pluralism had been imposed rather than internalized, and where institutional safeguards for democracy were weak (Bourchier, 2019).

While scholars since the turn of the millennium might differ on how they define democratic pluralism, the consensual view describes it as a political system that encourages the existence of diverse political groups within a democratic framework. Its main premise is not only about allowing multiple groups to exist, but it also pursues a condition within decision-making where there are negotiations among different interests. Democratic pluralism as a political term means there are pursuance of justice between individual and group autonomy with social cohesion, making sure that all the facets of society, whether

major or minor, have a representation. Its political approach reconciles differing perspectives and tries to create an inclusive society where diversity is seen as an essential strength.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, religious fundamentalism can be defined as a paradigm of strict interpretation of sacred texts and the desire to return to what are perceived by its followers as the foundational principles of faith. It often emerges as a reaction to the modern pursuit of secularism, and by doing so, it rejects alternative interpretations. Religious fundamentalists typically view their beliefs as absolute and non-negotiable, and in the case of Hizbut Tahrir, they promote a clear boundary between insiders and outsiders and sometimes advocate for the transformation of society according to their religious values. While not inherently violent, religious fundamentalism can foster intolerance toward differing views and may oppose the accepted definition of democratic policies, since these are seen as threats to religious orthodoxy.

The legacy of Western-backed authoritarianism complicated the transition, making it easier for illiberal groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to exploit new freedoms and challenge pluralist norms (Bourchier, 2019). The rise of the HTI and similar movements after Suharto's fall reflects not only domestic dynamics but also the influence of global trends, including the resurgence of political Islam and shifting geopolitical pressures (Bourchier, 2019). Palestine's oppression by Israel is just one of the phenomena in the post-modern era influencing the Muslim World into a new fundamentalist trend. Somehow, an authoritarian caliphate is still romanticized, albeit the fall of the Umayyad millennia ago is not seen as the fragility of absolutist exegesis of the Quran. Indonesia's experience highlights the long-term consequences of international support for authoritarian regimes and the complex interplay between external and internal factors in democratic transitions (Batanghari, 2022; Simpson, 2019).

Modern scholarship often highlights Indonesia's democratic achievements post-Reformasi but tends to overlook the unintended consequence of rising religious intolerance, particularly the empowerment of groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) (Rijal, 2022; Osman, 2010; Ward, 2009). The HTI's growth was facilitated by the political liberalization and expanded freedoms of the Reformasi era, which allowed the group to operate openly, mobilize supporters, and use both traditional and digital media to spread its ideology (Rijal, 2022; Osman, 2010). This means that the Web 1.0 era, with its flourishing internet access, should be deeply analysed as an infrastructure. The organization's success is rooted in its ability to frame its agenda around local and national issues, engage university students, and adapt its strategies to the changing political landscape, including leveraging social media

after its official ban (Rijal, 2022). This case challenges the notion that democratization is a straightforward path to greater tolerance, revealing instead that democratic openings can provide opportunities for illiberal actors to thrive, especially in societies where pluralism was previously imposed rather than internalized (Rijal, 2022; Osman, 2010; Ward, 2009).

The persistence of the HTI's influence, even after government crackdowns, underscores the need for nuanced strategies that balance the protection of democratic freedoms with efforts to counter religious intolerance (Osman, 2010; Ward, 2009). Comparative historical analysis, as proposed, is essential for understanding how shifts in governance and social contracts affect religious tolerance and for developing resilient democratic institutions that can withstand the pressures of identity politics and extremism. For the country, this is not the first time such a fundamentalist uproar has happened. However, the utilization of a more moderate Sunni framework has helped the preceding decades in envisioning how the country would be more uptight regarding minority movements. Indonesia's experience offers valuable lessons for other transitioning societies facing similar challenges at the intersection of democracy, religion, and identity.

The HTI has been a huge phenomenon within the Muslim World for the past couple of decades. Since the focus of this research is the Indonesian branch of the movement, a complex discussion of Geopolitics will be shown in the forefront. The way it manifests in Modern History is like a completion of recurring archetypes within the Muslim Ummah. Namely, the fundamental pursuit of a unified caliphate. Islam, as a religion, has influenced the greatest civilizations humanity has witnessed. The enduring nature of the religion is often credited to its pursuit of moderation between progressive and conservative approaches to ethics. The growing interest in re-establishing the Caliphates after their abolition a century ago should be no surprise for anyone with a keen interest in historical patterns.

From the shocking expanses of the Rashidun to the canonization of Sunni Sharia within the leadership of Saladin, the Muslim Nations have gone through unpredictable twists and turns. Who knew a newly established religious tradition started in a harsh desert could influence the geopolitical landscape for centuries? But that is what makes the premise of this research interesting. As even medieval Muslim scholars like Ibn Khaldun believed that there is a recurrence of rise and fall among every nation, and for the Muslim nations, their defeat from the growing Western Hegemony is what motivates the founders of Hizbut Tahrir, and for this thesis, we will focus the problem statement towards Indonesia as a country with the most Muslims.

1.2 Research Questions

Research Question 1:

How did the political reforms of the Reformasi era create opportunities and challenges within Indonesia's democratic transition that allowed Islamist movements like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to emerge?

Research Question 2:

In what ways did Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) strategically navigate and negotiate the post-Reformasi political environment to expand its influence despite the principles of democratic pluralism?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the political reforms implemented during the Reformasi era in Indonesia and to examine how these reforms inadvertently created conditions that facilitated the rise and empowerment of the Hizbut Tahrir, an Islamist organisation. The big question mark has puzzled researchers decades after the end of the Suharto administration. Another objective is to analyse the tension between the ideological agenda of the Hizbut Tahrir and the principles of democratic pluralism that Indonesia aimed to gain after the Reformasi. The Hizbut Tahrir's vision often challenges the secular and pluralistic foundations of the Indonesian state, which aim to promote tolerance. It would definitely help envision a more tolerant Indonesia in the future. This research seeks to understand how the openness introduced by Reformasi allowed a group with a rigid ideological stance to gain visibility, mobilise support, and exert influence within the political landscape of Indonesia.

Finally, the research aims to contribute to discussions on democratisation in post-authoritarian states, particularly in relation to the management of political Islam. The study intends to provide insights into the limits of democratic reforms in preventing the rise of exclusive or radical political movements by identifying the specific reforms and institutional changes that enabled Hizbut Tahrir's emergence. That means it would work not only against the HTI but against similar fundamentalist movements. We could easily see the contrasts between Indonesia and full-fledged democratic Nations on how they treat intolerant religious groups. Ultimately, this research hopes to offer policy recommendations.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Literature Review

The New Order era ended, and the Reformasi started in 1998 in Indonesia, which was widely recognized by scholars as a period of transformation for political participation and freedoms. It showed a paradigm shift toward decentralization, democratization, and expanded civil liberties in Indonesia. (Stott, 2019; Bünthe & Ufen, 2009). However, these reforms also introduced new challenges, notably the empowerment of intolerant groups such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which positioned itself in direct ideological opposition to Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational philosophy of pluralism and tolerance (Bourchier, 2019; Damaitu, 2025). Sukarno has successfully united the nation under one banner of Ideology, but under Suharto, political power was highly centralized, with the military-dominated parliament and judiciary serving as instruments of authoritarian control, which means that in this era, pluralism was more rhetorical than substantive (Bünthe & Ufen, 2009; Damaitu, 2025).

The post-1998 reforms dismantled much of this centralization. A new tension between democratic freedoms and the need to safeguard pluralism started because the openness of the Reformasi allowed Fundamentalist groups like the HTI to challenge the pluralist political order through mobilization (Bourchier, 2019). The dilemma is compounded by the way the political landscape accommodated intolerant interests through the persistence of Suharto-era institutions. The eventual ban of the HTI in 2017 reflects Indonesia's struggle to balance democratic openness with the protection of its pluralist constitution. The dilemma can be seen through the lens of democratization processes, where expanding freedoms of the political organizations created vulnerabilities to illiberal movements, which in the end overlook the ongoing challenge of achieving genuine social pluralism in a diverse society like Indonesia.

Through the concept of repressive pluralism, Greg Fealy argued that the HTI skillfully leveraged the new democratic freedoms by framing its agenda in terms of political rights and civil liberties, which allowed it to gain legitimacy and mobilize support among youth and university students dissatisfied with the uncertainties of the era. Greg Fealy's analysis highlights the dilemma of Indonesia's post-Reformasi political openness, showing how the dismantling of authoritarian controls created both opportunities and constraints for groups like the HTI. (Syah & Setia, 2021; Muhtadi, 2009). His understandings pretty much go parallel with the similar fundamentalist movements in that era. This dynamic illustrates

how reforms intended to foster pluralism can inadvertently enable anti-pluralist ideologies to flourish under the banner of democratic participation (Muhtadi, 2009; Syah & Setia, 2021).

Amartya Sen's framework complements this by emphasizing that democracy's strength lies in its inclusivity and respect for difference, but warns that democracy is fragile if it fails to cultivate a shared commitment to pluralist norms, making it vulnerable to fragmentation and the rise of exclusionary movements (Muhtadi, 2009). The appeal of The HTI among young people, as noted by McRae, is rooted in their response to social and economic grievances, which The HTI channels into grassroots activism and caliphate propaganda within educational settings (Syah & Setia, 2021). The less privileged youth are often seen at the forefront of grievant movements, since they lack the necessities for a proper livelihood. Arskal Salim further explains that Indonesia's legal protections for religious freedom, while essential, also intensify contestations over national identity, as groups like the HTI challenge the pluralistic ideals of Pancasila. Together, these insights reveal the inherent difficulty of maintaining democratic coexistence in a society marked by deep religious and political diversity and underscore the need for robust institutional safeguards to protect pluralism while respecting democratic freedoms.

The transition from Suharto's New Order to the Reformasi era in Indonesia exemplifies the double-edged nature of political liberalization, as highlighted by Fealy and Sen: while democracy and pluralism expanded, these same reforms created space for anti-democratic groups to organize and challenge pluralist norms (Diprose et al., 2019; Suryomenggolo, 2018). This way, the European Enlightenment has provided us with tools to see it from a social contract perspective. Social contract theories provide a valuable lens for understanding this shift. Suharto's regime reflected Hobbesian principles, prioritizing centralized authority to maintain order and suppress dissent, which aligned with Hobbes's argument that only a strong sovereign can prevent societal chaos (Diprose et al., 2019).

The Reformasi differs in ways it embodied the Rousseauian turn, by emphasizing egalitarianism as seen in the proliferation of new laws and institutions made to protect rights within Indonesian pluralism. (Suryomenggolo, 2018). At the same time, the post-Reformasi paradigm revealed to us the fragile process of democratization, where state and market reforms have failed to address social inequalities, with populist discourses undermining social justice. Rousseau, unlike Hobbes, has a more egalitarian leaning in explaining the social contract, not unlike how the PDI-P gained better recognition in the post-reformasi era, contrasting with Golkar. This ongoing tension between freedom and control continues to shape Indonesia's evolving democracy and highlights the importance

of cultivating liberal values within institutional reforms (Diprose et al., 2019; Suryomenggolo, 2018).

Indonesia's political evolution from the New Order to Reformasi can be insightfully framed through the contrasting ideals of Hobbes and Rousseau. The New Order's Hobbesian logic prioritized centralized authority and repression to maintain order, while the Reformasi era embraced Rousseauian principles of popular sovereignty and pluralism, opening space for broader participation and civil liberties (Muhtadi, 2009; Rijal, 2022). The shift after the Reformasi enabled the HTI and similar groups to exploit the terms of democracy to legitimize their anti-pluralist, caliphate-oriented agenda, as their vision echoed Hobbesian calls for a strong, unified authority under Islamic law (Muhtadi, 2009; Amirullah & Rahmawati, 2024; Rijal, 2022). The HTI's strategy involved embedding itself in strategic arenas such as universities and public discourse, capitalizing on public dissatisfaction with post-Reformasi reforms and the perceived failure of democracy to deliver social justice (Osman, 2010).

Despite its eventual ban in 2017, the HTI's networks and influence persist, illustrating the dilemma of democratic transition: movements that reject democracy can flourish within it by leveraging its freedoms (Herdiansah et al., 2023; Krisbianto, 2021). The government's inconsistent responses—oscillating between tolerance and repression—reflect the ongoing tension between safeguarding pluralism and upholding democratic rights (Herdiansah et al., 2023). In crafting policies that address religious intolerance without undermining Indonesia's democratic foundations, the state needs to understand the conditions that allowed the empowerment of HTI. Somehow, the fewer restrictions of the Internet seen in past years have accommodated minority movements that have gained popularity again. The HTI's rise and resilience underscore the dynamic interplay between state power and individual liberty and the enduring challenge of balancing repression and tolerance in Indonesia's evolving democracy.

Greg Fealy's research provides a nuanced understanding of how democratization in Indonesia, particularly after Reformasi, created both opportunities and contradictions for Islamist movements like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) (Fealy, 2004; Fealy, 2019; Bubalo et al., 2008). Fealy argues that the opening of political space allowed groups such as The HTI to organize, publish, and mobilize in ways that were impossible under the New Order's authoritarian regime, but this same openness exposed the dilemma of democratization: while intended to foster pluralism, it also enabled illiberal and anti-pluralist actors to thrive (Fealy, 2004; Fealy, 2019). An Australian native, Fealy himself has seen the phenomenon of modern fundamentalism in his home country.

Drawing on Political Opportunity Theory (POT), Fealy shows that democratization does not automatically lead to liberal democracy; instead, it can provide avenues for movements that seek to challenge or even replace the democratic order with alternative, often exclusionary, systems (Fealy, 2004; Bubalo et al., 2008). HTI's rise is thus seen as a direct consequence of the new political opportunities generated by Reformasi, but also as a reflection of its ideological rejection of pluralism and democracy (Fealy, 2004; Fealy, 2019). Fealy's work situates the HTI as an active participant in Indonesia's evolving political landscape, exploiting democratic freedoms to further an agenda fundamentally at odds with those. It would definitely help us see how the current phenomenon of democratic abuse could be worse in future policies. These dynamic underscores the persistent tension between expanding participation and safeguarding pluralist values in democratizing societies and highlights the need for policies that address the risks posed by illiberal movements without undermining the democratic gains of Reformasi.

Amartya Sen's explanation about the spectrum of ethical pursuits brings us close to the unique nature of Pancasila. Since the five points of Pancasila focused on different leanings of Political exercise, it could sometimes be used or abused by anybody finding any relatable point to the Ideology. For example, during the leadership of Suharto, the democratic pursuit of the country was masked under what he called "Pancasila Democracy", which carefully covers his absolutist tendencies under the guise of respecting the Pancasila Ideology. In relation to our discussion about the HTI, we can see that the different parties which ended up becoming the most powerful party within the two different eras took different approach on how they influence policies about the HTI.

Aspect	New Order (Hobbesian)	Reformasi (Rousseauian)
Political Control	Strong state control, limited freedoms	Open political space, more freedoms
Freedom of Assembly	Restricted, no room for HTI activities	Allowed, HTI could organize publicly
HTI's Activity	Underground, limited reach	Open, expanding recruitment and influence
Political Pluralism	Low, single dominant party	High, multiple parties and groups are active
Impact on HTI	Suppressed and marginalized	Enabled growth and empowerment

Figure 2. 1 New Order and Reformasi Comparison

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

2.2.1 Political Opportunity Theory

The first theory I would like to utilize is the Political Opportunity Theory (POT). This theory was developed by some American Scholars who tried to make sense of Social Movements in Modern times. Among those scholars are Sydney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, and Doug McAdam. Each one of them specialized in one aspect of Social Movements, which gained Opportunity in the political aspect. Generally, the theory emphasizes that the shifts in the external political environment create openings for previously marginalized groups to mobilize. In the context of the HTI's strategies post-Reformasi, it could help explain the weakening of authoritarian controls and the expansion of civil liberties after the fall of Suharto. We see that the sudden availability of political space and greater freedoms allowed the HTI and similar groups to organize, recruit, and build networks, particularly among youth and university students, without needing to participate in electoral politics (Yunanto, 2017; Diprose et al., 2019; Asrawijaya, 2019).

Sydney Tarrow's concept of "political opportunities" explains how political openings incentivize collective action, even by groups with anti-democratic agendas. The Indonesian case demonstrates that democratization does not guarantee liberal outcomes. In fact, groups like the HTI surprisingly felt empowered by exploiting new freedoms. It means that democracies within developing countries are not intrinsically on the verge of modern pluralism. These dynamic underscores the importance of understanding how changes in the political context, not just grievances or ideology, shape the emergence and influence of social and political movements in transitional democracies like Indonesia (Yunanto, 2017; Diprose et al., 2019; Asrawijaya, 2019).

Charles Tilly's concept of "repertoires of contention" refers to the set of protest tools and tactics available to social movements within specific historical and political contexts, and it is highly relevant for analyzing the HTI's strategies during Indonesia's Reformasi era. The democratization process expanded the available repertoire for groups like HTI, granting them access to legal protests, mass rallies, and Islamic educational institutions, which became central to their mobilization efforts. This perhaps shared its parallels in South American youth movements. Ironically, the HTI adopted a public-facing, lawful identity while promoting anti-democratic goals, exploiting the freedoms of the new political environment, an example of how liberalization can benefit intolerant actors as well as democratic ones.

Doug McAdam's explanation is through his idea of "repertoires of contention". It means that contentious politics of social movements are in the form of dissatisfactions of

social groups, a sense of repertoires where such negative grievances create a collective consciousness for them to express their dissatisfaction (McAdam et al., 2002). Indeed, like Tarrow's and Tilly's, his ideas could be a framework to understand social movements all over the globe and not limited to a small scope. And in that understanding, we could explain the growing grievances of Indonesian Muslims into the formation of the HTI and its protests after the Reformasi. A "repertoire of contention" in this regard could be seen in their utilization of media to gain collective consciousness.

Political Opportunity Theory helps explain that the HTI's rapid growth was less about its internal strength and more about the new opportunities created by the post-authoritarian context (McAdam et al., 2002). This challenges the notion that the HTI's rise was an anomaly, instead framing it as a rational response to the expanded political space. Such a phenomenon did not exist within developed democracies due to better handling of the political infrastructure. By applying POT and Tilly's framework, it becomes clear that transitional democracies often see both democratic and illiberal groups using new repertoires of contention to advance their agendas, highlighting the complex and sometimes contradictory outcomes of democratization.

2.2.2 Democratization Theory and Post-Authoritarian Transitions

Democratization theory, as developed by scholars like Larry Diamond, is central to understanding Indonesia's transition from the authoritarian New Order to the Reformasi era and the challenges that followed (Hadiz, 2003; Bünte & Ufen, 2009; Diprose et al., 2019). However, these transitions are frequently marked by institutional fragility, as new democracies struggle to enforce laws, manage competing interests, and protect minority rights (Diprose et al., 2019; Hadiz, 2003). For some, the recent democratization is not unlike a game of smoke and mirrors, with ruling oligarchs continuing to have a share in profit. In Indonesia, the Reformasi period opened political space not only for democratic actors but also for groups like the HTI, whose illiberal agendas challenge the very pluralism that democratization seeks to establish.

The persistence of old elites, clientelistic networks, and a weak rule of law further complicated the consolidation of democracy, allowing predatory or intolerant actors to exploit the system's vulnerabilities (Hidayat et al., 2025). As if nothing changed within the corrupt few. Thus, Indonesia's experience exemplifies the dilemma of democratization, that while reforms aimed to build a robust democracy, the transitional environment also enabled anti-democratic forces to gain influence, revealing the ongoing tension between institutional development and the risks posed by illiberal movements (Bünte & Ufen, 2009). Vedi Hadiz offers a structural critique of Indonesia's democratization, arguing that

the post-Reformasi era has produced only superficial democratic reforms while real power remains concentrated among entrenched elites from the New Order period (Platzdasch, 2010; Buehler, 2014; Buehler, 2012).

According to Hadiz, the decentralization and liberalization that followed Suharto's fall did not fundamentally transform power relations; instead, local and national elite factions adapted to the new system, manipulating political institutions to maintain their dominance (Platzdasch, 2010; Buehler, 2014). As if the puppet masters behind the shadowplay are still performing, only under different sets of puppets. This "hollowing out" of the state means that democratic institutions are often weak, inconsistent, or easily co-opted, creating an environment where groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) can flourish. The lack of robust institutional safeguards and effective rule of law allows radical or illiberal movements to exploit the political space opened by democratization, even as they reject its pluralist values (Ismanto, 2018). Hadiz's analysis complements concerns raised by democratization theorists about "defective democracies," highlighting how the persistence of predatory networks and oligarchic interests undermines genuine democratic consolidation (Ismanto, 2018). This is what differentiates it from the cold-handed tools used within developed democracies to ward off fundamentalism. In this context, the HTI's ability to mobilize and expand its influence is less a dilemma and more a predictable outcome of a transition where old power structures persist beneath a democratic façade.

In this way, the different focus of the three scholars of Political Opportunity Theory is writing in the same veins with scholars analyzing the democratization theory. For social movements in the past century are always within the framework of the rising Western Hegemony and that particular Hegemony favors democracy to its area of influence. In this regard, how the HTI found its groundwork post-Reformasi is very much influenced in how they could exploit the demise of democratization of Indonesia as a Nation State, which differs with already established democracies.

Factor	Developed Democracies	Post-Reformasi Indonesia
Institutional Maturity	Strong, independent judiciary and enforcement agencies	Democratic institutions are emerging but still fragile
Political Culture	Long-standing pluralism and tolerance norms	Society is diverse, but still grappling with sectarian tensions
Social Safety Nets	Relatively high economic security and social welfare	Economic inequality and regional disparities persist
Civil Society	Active NGOs, watchdogs, and education campaigns	Civil society is growing but often fragmented
Political Inclusion	Political parties absorb diverse views, addressing grievances democratically	Political competition is expanding but often fragmented

Figure 2. 2 Developed Democracies and Post-Reformasi Indonesia Comparison

2.2.3 Hypotheses

H1 The transition from Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime to the more open political environment of Reformasi created political opportunities that enabled Hizbut Tahrir’s rise by reducing state repression of Islamist activism.

H2 Weak enforcement of pluralism-protecting laws and limited institutional checks in Indonesia’s post-Reformasi democracy allowed the Hizbut Tahrir to gain influence, in contrast to Western democracies, where stronger safeguards have limited similar movements.

I made both hypotheses as connected in spirit. The first one put emphasis on the political shift from authoritarianism to democracy during the Reformasi. Islamist movements under Suharto were heavily restricted. Suharto actually made policies like ICMI, which supported the Muslims, but even the biggest Muslim organisations during that time were heavily controlled. It focused on the Utilitarian virtues of the New Order. The democratisation after his fall loosened state controls and opened space for a broader range of political actors, including Islamist groups like HTI, to organise, campaign, and disseminate their ideology without fear of repression. The second one builds on this newfound political openness by pointing out that while democratic space expanded, the institutional framework to manage this pluralism remained weak.

Post-Reformasi Indonesia lacked strong enforcement of pluralism-protecting laws and effective institutional checks that could prevent radical or anti-democratic groups from gaining traction. The HTI exploited these institutional gaps to build influence, often framing its anti-democratic agenda within the language of democratic rights like free speech and assembly. It goes well with Political Opportunity Theory. This is a common issue for newly independent nations as well. This contrasts with many Western democracies, where stronger rule-of-law institutions and entrenched democratic norms act as barriers to the success of such movements. Together, the hypotheses present a synchronised argument: the political liberalisation of Reformasi created opportunities (H1), while the underdevelopment of democratic safeguards allowed these opportunities to be exploited (H2). The first hypothesis explains *why* the HTI could emerge in post-Suharto Indonesia, while the second explains *how* it managed to grow in influence. I will try my best to explain both hypotheses through the available theoretical frameworks. It is my final explanation.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Methods

To examine how the political reforms of Reformasi facilitated the rise and empowerment of the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), despite Indonesia's official commitment to democratic pluralism, this study employs *process tracing* as its primary methodological tool. This research is more qualitative than quantitative in spirit. I would look at the historical past of political exercise in Indonesia and see how it would explain certain phenomena which is sparked in the research question. Ultimately, this process-tracing approach aims to move beyond surface-level correlations and uncover the specific mechanisms by which democratic reforms inadvertently empowered an illiberal actor. In doing so, it contributes to broader theoretical debates about the unintended consequences of democratization, especially in transitional societies where institutional liberalism may outpace cultural or ideological pluralism.

That means the HTI could be explained well in both eras. In this chapter, I outline the research design employed in this study, which is grounded in a comparative case analysis between the New Order regime (1966-1998) and the Reformasi period (1998-present) in Indonesia. It consists mostly of interpretive writings. Additionally, I include a smaller comparative case study between Indonesia and England to highlight broader lessons on the relationship between democratization and the rise of Islamist movements like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). This section explains why these methodological choices are well-suited to addressing the research questions, providing insights into the HTI's political strategies in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

A key reason for selecting a comparative case analysis of Indonesia's New Order and Reformasi periods is to investigate the causal mechanisms that enabled the HTI's rise within two contrasting political environments. As explained before, the social contract theories made in the Enlightenment period have influenced how I contrast the two periods. Under Soeharto as President, the New Order era is ripe with absolutist tendencies, a time when religious fundamentalism expressed through movements like the HTI was suppressed through repressive policies. After his fall and the Reformasi began, a more pluralistic environment in politics created new opportunities for said Religious Fundamentalists to expand their influence, especially among the youth.

The two distinct phases are compared philosophically within this research in the pursuit of uncovering the impact of democratic transition on the political opportunities available to the HTI. The Thesis seeks to understand how the process from authoritarian

rule to a more open democracy could open space for the radicalization of the HTI and similar movements in Indonesia. Such an ongoing process has its peculiar question marks. The New Order and Reformasi represent polar opposites in terms of political freedoms, and thus, offer a natural comparative framework for exploring how different forms of governance affect the success of such movements. While the primary focus of this research is on Indonesia, I also include a small comparative case study between Indonesia and England to gain a broader understanding of how Islamist movements navigate democratic systems. The democratic context in England provides a useful point of comparison because, unlike Indonesia, it has had an established, stable liberal democracy for centuries. It is a good country by standards. By comparing the rise of Islamist movements in both countries, this smaller case study allows for an international perspective on the role of democracy in shaping the strategies of radical groups like HTI.

The qualitative research design is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the historical and political dynamics that shaped The HTI's rise. I chose to use Mills' Method of Difference, a well-established comparative method, to identify causal mechanisms by comparing cases that share a common outcome—the rise of HTI—but differ in the key variables of political context (New Order vs. Reformasi). It suits well with the interpretive tradition. According to Mill's Method, the key to identifying causal relationships is to compare instances where the outcome is present, but the causal conditions are different. The New Order is characterized by state repression and authoritarian rule, while the Reformasi is marked by political liberalization and greater pluralism. The different political conditions provided an ideal setting for the application of such a method.

The approach of focusing on the differences between the two periods enables a clearer understanding of the causal factors behind the HTI strategic adaptation within the Reformasi era. Secondary data collection is appropriate given the historical nature of this study. I studied the existing academic literature, historical records, and government documents. The search for those non-quantitative writings will allow for the efficient collection of data that offers insights into the political differences of the two periods I mentioned. Multiple perspectives gathered will be a virtue I adhere to using secondary sources, including academic analysis and media reports. Such journals will provide context for understanding the shifts in political opportunity paradigms. Secondary data collection is time-efficient and cost-effective, making it ideal for decade-spanning phenomena. Narrative analysis could trace a deeper exploration of the temporal dynamics within the empowerment of the HTI. Such an approach is particularly valuable for examining how

the HTI's tactics and messages evolved from the tightly controlled environment of the New Order to the more open political space of the Reformasi period.

A comparative case analysis is particularly well-suited for this study because it allows for an in-depth comparison of two distinct political environments: The New Order regime (1966–1998) and the Reformasi period (1998–present), which provide contrasting political opportunities for HTI. The main theoretical usage has been explained in the previous chapter. In essence, a comparative case analysis is better suited for identifying causal relationships between political transition and the success of radical movements. Methods such as descriptive case studies or single-case analysis might provide rich detail but would fail to offer the comparative depth needed to understand how The HTI's strategies evolved in response to the political opportunities offered by each era. They would also lack the ability to offer a contrastive lens between two distinct political phases.

The case study methodology enables the Thesis to engage with the causal mechanisms behind the HTI's emergence by focusing on how these political changes directly shaped the movement's influence within the country. One example is that it can explore how legal reforms, such as the liberalization of civil society and the reduction of state control, created opportunities for the HTI to expand its influence within Indonesia's political and social systems. The tracing method offers a level of depth and contextual understanding that broad surveys cannot provide. The merit is that it enables me, as the researcher, to delve into the specific strategic decisions made by The HTI in response to the changes in the democratization process. Cross-sectional surveys or statistical modeling are often used within quantitative analysis. Those processes may be able to identify correlations between political changes and the rise of Islamist groups, but they might fail to account for the nuances of causal mechanisms this thesis tried to provide.

Those kinds of surveys might indicate a broad relationship but would not provide the insight needed to understand how the HTI specifically navigated the complex political landscape of Indonesia's democratization within the context of this thesis. A more philosophical framework needed to be dug deeper. The richness of the data that can be generated from a case study is essential for capturing the multifaceted ways in which the HTI responded to the liberalizing reforms of the post-Suharto era. A case study offers a strength in investigating causal links within a specific historical and political context, in which I could define the HTI's strategies that evolved in response to the political change of a certain era.

I decided to use the qualitative method because it helps me understand the role of democratization in the empowerment of the HTI as a context-dependent phenomenon.

Transitions from authoritarianism to democracy are not something new for emerging nation-states, and most of the time, it is not linear in predictability. Also, social movements are often deeply shaped by local contexts and historical legacies. My decision to employ a qualitative method is central to understanding the context-dependent phenomena associated with the HTI's rise within Indonesia's democratizing political environment. Political transitions, particularly from authoritarianism to democracy, are rarely linear or predictable, and the strategies employed by social movements like The HTI are often deeply shaped by local contexts, historical legacies, and subjective experiences. While at first glance it felt linear, the writings showed that plenty of factors influenced the HTI in such utilizations of freedom.

In favor of an Islamic caliphate, the HTI outright rejects democratic pluralism through its political discourse. My use of narrative analysis would unpack how the HTI frames its political responses to the democratization of the Reformasi era. Through this, an in-depth exploration could be made regarding the HTI's media communications. Their public appearances often play a pivotal role in mobilizing supporters and shaping the broader social discourses. Quantitative analysis would often ignore the subjective and contextual aspects of political behavior. On the other hand, the qualitative method provides the flexibility and allowance for an emergent design where the evolving nature of political movements can be adapted.

Methods like large-n surveys can offer generalizable insights into patterns of political behavior, but they are often too broad and reductive to capture the complexities of social movements like the HTI. These methods might identify general trends such as the increasing popularity of Islamist politics in post-authoritarian contexts but they are unlikely to provide a detailed examination of how the HTI's members mobilize and rationalize their actions within a changing political landscape in Indonesian history, not to mention that the Muslim communities within the country has diversified so much since the Reformasi started. Qualitative methods offer the depth and specificity needed that quantitative methods fail to address. To conclude, the qualitative approach offers the ability to capture the nuances of how this movement adapted to the changing political climate in Indonesia after the Reformasi. It also helps to explore the broader discourse around Islamism, democracy, and pluralism that shapes the HTI's actions and interactions with both the state and civil society. Religion and Politics always go hand in hand in human history. This research design aligns perfectly with the research goal of understanding the interactions between the HTI and the political environment of post-Reformasi Indonesia.

Utilizing all the references I could get, I could say that the historical narrative that I am using in this research could explain how the HTI exercised its growing power among the Muslims of Indonesia. It is started with the fall of Suharto's Authoritarianism, growing steadily with the rise of social media, and ended up with backlash that make the group officially banned in 2017. Such observations could only be made through the research design I just explained in this chapter. Synchronizing the available political theories and available information regarding the group's activities of past couple of decades, I could then make sure the research design of this Thesis could come into coherent conclusions in the end.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 A Clash of Ideologies

This chapter contained an analysis of how the Reformasi era enabled the empowerment of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia despite its official embrace of democratic pluralism. As explained before, I will utilize the Political Opportunity Theory and Democratization Theory. Suharto's fall in 1998 ushered in sweeping reforms that created a new landscape where previously suppressed groups like the HTI could operate openly and mobilize support. The paradigm shift is seen in the form of expanded civil liberties, decentralization, and political liberalization (Rijal, 2022; Muhtadi, 2009). POT helps explain how the HTI capitalized on these structural openings by using legal protests, mass rallies, and social media to expand its influence, particularly among university students and urban youth (Rijal, 2022). Democratization Theory further reveals the dilemma of Indonesia's transition, that while reforms aimed to foster pluralism, weak institutions and inconsistent enforcement of democratic norms allowed anti-democratic actors like the HTI to thrive (Muhtadi, 2009).

HTI's rejection of democracy and advocacy for a global Islamic caliphate reflect a core tension in Indonesia's democratization, where liberalization inadvertently empowered illiberal movements. The chapter traces the HTI's historical roots, its marginalization under the New Order, and its strategic use of new freedoms post-Reformasi, including the influence of Middle Eastern geopolitics and digital platforms. As the country with the most Muslims, what has happened in the Middle East miles away will certainly influence Indonesia on a Geopolitical level. By comparing the HTI's trajectory with similar movements in other developing democracies, the analysis highlights how institutional weaknesses and elite manipulation shape the boundaries of political tolerance and the risks facing pluralist democracies.

Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational state ideology introduced by Sukarno in 1945, is built on five core principles—belief in one God, just and civilized humanity, national unity, democracy, and social justice—intended to unify the country's vast ethnic and religious diversity. It has successfully united the nation within one vision in the past decades since the Proklamasi was done. Its pluralistic vision is rooted in accommodating multiple faiths and cultural identities, with the first principle supporting religious pluralism while maintaining a monotheistic framework (Fathurrohman, 2016; Madung & Mere). The fourth principle, emphasizing democracy through consensus, was designed to ensure that

all groups could participate in national life, theoretically preventing sectarian conflict (Madung & Mere, 2021).

However, the interpretation and implementation of Pancasila have often shifted with political contexts; under Suharto's New Order, for example, Pancasila was used to legitimize authoritarian control and marginalize groups that challenged the secular state, including Islamist movements like the HTI. This multiple exegesis of the five points has made an interesting analysis of the country in Global Politics. Scholars argue that while Pancasila has historically helped maintain unity, its effectiveness depends on genuine understanding and application of its pluralist values, which are sometimes undermined by political interests or insufficient public engagement (Fathurrohman, 2016; Madung & Mere, 2021). In the post-Reformasi era, debates continue over whether Pancasila's pluralism is being upheld or eroded, especially as new challenges to religious and ethnic harmony emerge (Madung & Mere, 2021). Thus, Pancasila remains both a symbol of Indonesia's commitment to unity in diversity and a site of ongoing contestation over the boundaries of pluralism and national identity.

Somehow, the New Order has fulfilled the third point about unity, while the reformasi aims to fulfill the socialist tendencies of the fourth point of Pancasila. The Reformasi era's democratization in 1998 fundamentally changed Indonesia's political landscape, creating new opportunities for groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) that openly rejected Pancasila's pluralistic ideals and instead advocated for an Islamic caliphate (Aritonang, 2020; Putra et al., 2024). The reduction of state repression and the liberalization of political space allowed the HTI to operate more freely, exploiting weak enforcement of laws meant to protect pluralism and using democratic freedoms to spread anti-Pancasila narratives, particularly through public preaching and social mobilization (Aritonang, 2020; Putra et al., 2024). The HTI has its fair share of identity crises among its followers. The HTI's ideological stance positioned Pancasila as a Western, secular imposition incompatible with Islamic governance, making the state ideology a central target in its campaign to delegitimize Indonesia's national identity and democratic system.

This contestation turned Pancasila from a unifying framework into a battleground between secular pluralism and Islamist visions, with the HTI leveraging the ambiguity and inconsistent application of Pancasila to gain traction among segments of the Muslim population (Putra et al., 2024)). Since the country will no longer tolerate divisiveness, a strong policy has been implemented. Ultimately, the government responded by banning the HTI in 2017, citing its threat to Pancasila and national unity, but the episode underscores how democratization can inadvertently empower groups fundamentally opposed to the

pluralistic ideals it seeks to promote (Aritonang, 2020). The post-Reformasi paradigm created a democratic opportunity not only for the HTI but also for a range of radical organizations from extremes of the spectrum.

The loosening of state controls and the decentralization of power allowed organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) to emerge as influential players, leveraging political openings to promote their agendas, form alliances with political elites, and shape public discourse, often encouraging radicalism and intolerance in the process (Facal, 2020). While these movements differ in point of view regarding the Sharia, their similarities in challenging Pancasila have been an ongoing threat. On the other side of the Islamic spectrum, the Reformasi period also saw the decline of liberal Islamic movements, as the new political space was increasingly dominated by more conservative and radical Islamist forces, marginalizing progressive voices that had previously thrived under the New Order regime (Fealy, 2019). While Islamic Fundamentalism capitalized on the opportunity to assert its influence, left-wing groups also found space to organize and challenge the political establishment, although their impact was less pronounced compared to Islamist groups.

Tolerance after the Reformasi worked both ways. The overall effect of Reformasi was to create a more porous and contested political landscape, where both radical Islamists and left-wing actors could mobilize, form alliances, and pursue their objectives, demonstrating that political opportunity during this period was not exclusive to any single group (Facal, 2020; Fealy, 2019). The HTI advocates for the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate, a vision fundamentally at odds with Indonesia's national ideology, Pancasila. Since the Ideology is rooted in pluralism, democracy, and religious tolerance, it cannot fulfill the monocultural wishes that Taqiuddin Nabhani dreamt of. Both Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, as two of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, firmly reject the HTI's caliphate agenda by viewing it as extremist and incompatible with the nation's commitment to unity and diversity. Both organizations have preceded them even before the country's independence.

4.2 Challenging Islamic Pluralism

NU, in particular, has consistently emphasized the harmony between Islam and Pancasila, interpreting the first principle of Pancasila, belief in one God, as aligned with Islamic monotheism, while still supporting a secular, inclusive state framework. Muhammadiyah also opposes the caliphate as a political system, though it may accept certain cultural aspects, and instead focuses on modernizing Islamic thought within the context of Indonesian society. The ideological contest between The HTI and these

mainstream organizations culminated in the government's decision to disband The HTI in 2017, a move strongly supported by NU, which leveraged its influence to defend the "Islam Nusantara" ideology and national stability. Both NU and Muhammadiyah have historically promoted moderate, tolerant forms of Islam, drawing on traditions that value local autonomy and cultural adaptation, which contrasts sharply with the HTI's rigid, transnational vision. Indonesia itself is a unique case in the Islamic World since for centuries the lands embraced Buddhism. This commitment to pluralism and nationalism has made NU and Muhammadiyah key actors in strengthening interfaith harmony and national unity, while the HTI's rejection of Pancasila has marginalized it from mainstream Indonesian Islam and society (Putra et al., 2024; Fauzi & Kosandi, 2022).

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, have long promoted a moderate, inclusive form of Islam that emphasizes social harmony, pluralism, and compatibility with democracy, drawing inspiration from the Ottoman Empire's legacy of religious tolerance and local autonomy. In contrast, Hizbut Tahrir (HT) advocates for the restoration of a global caliphate and rejects democratic principles, positioning itself in direct opposition to the values upheld by NU and Muhammadiyah. Interesting how the HTI contradicts its aim of establishing caliphates while at the same time betraying the last caliphates in their ideology. The dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate in the early 20th century shaped Indonesia's wariness toward HT's radical agenda, as the nation's Islamic organizations instead sought to build a pluralistic society responsive to Indonesia's unique context.

NU, in particular, has been influential in defending the "Islam Nusantara" ideology, which prioritizes local traditions and national unity over transnational caliphate ambitions (Fauzi & Kosandi, 2022). Both NU and Muhammadiyah emerged partly as responses to colonialism and the spread of Wahhabism, favoring reform and tolerance over radicalism. While the HTI are not Wahhabis in a technical sense, they are nonetheless challenging the traditional notions of Sunnism. The Indonesian government's 2017 ban on HT reflected concerns that its ideology threatened the country's delicate social fabric and pluralistic order, a stance strongly supported by NU and Muhammadiyah. These organizations continue to play a central role in promoting peaceful coexistence and countering exclusivist narratives, viewing HT's vision as a danger to Indonesia's stability and diversity (Silaban, 2023).

Taqiyuddin Nabhani founded Hizbut Tahrir (HT) in 1953 in Palestine, aiming to restore the Islamic caliphate through non-violent political activism rooted in a strict Pan-Islamist ideology that rejects nationalism, democracy, and Western political systems as

incompatible with Islam (Mubarak, 2007). HT's foundational texts, especially those by Nabhani and his successor Abdul Qadeem Zallum, argue that sovereignty belongs solely to Allah, making any human-made legislative system, including democracy, fundamentally illegitimate (Mubarak, 2007; Ahnaf, 2011). This translates well with their grudges against Western Imperialism. The group's strategy centers on building transnational networks, particularly targeting Muslim intellectuals and students, which facilitated its spread to Indonesia in the 1980s, mainly through university campuses (Mubarak, 2007).

In Indonesia, the HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) adapted its approach by using the freedoms of the Reformasi era to promote its anti-democratic message, organizing public events, and leveraging legal avenues to advocate for the caliphate without directly participating in the democratic system (Ahnaf, 2011). This reflects a pragmatic distinction between ideological purity—refusing to legitimize democracy—and tactical flexibility—using democratic space to spread its ideas (Ahnaf, 2011). The HTI's activism is characterized by a “refolutionary” strategy: challenging the legitimacy of the political system while engaging with its institutions to influence public opinion and recruit supporters. The dilemma is that they are abusing the Indonesian legal system worse than they are exploiting Middle Eastern geopolitics. Despite its radical anti-system stance, the HTI strictly avoids violence, focusing instead on intellectual and public confrontation with prevailing ideas. The movement's global leadership, including Ata Abu Rashta, continues to emphasize non-violent activism and the use of available legal means to advance its vision of a unified Islamic state.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) emerged in the early 1980s, introduced by students returning from the Middle East, and operated clandestinely during Suharto's New Order due to the regime's suspicion of Islamist and transnational ideologies. Unlike other radical groups, the HTI is notable for its strict rejection of violence and terrorism, instead focusing on ideological commitment, cadre training, and influence within Islamic educational circles, particularly among university students and urban professionals (Ward, 2009; Shobron, 2014; Osman, 2010). The resort towards non-violence has garnered its appeal among non-Arabs. The HTI's strategy involves both cultural and structural approaches: it seeks to shift public consciousness toward the establishment of a caliphate through study circles, public lectures, and mass rallies, while also building a disciplined internal network (Shobron, 2014; Osman, 2010). The organization's internal diversity—comprising students, professionals, clerics, and women's groups—has led to varied outreach strategies and pragmatic engagement with state institutions, despite its official stance against electoral politics (Ward, 2009).

After the fall of Suharto, the HTI capitalized on the political liberalization of Reformasi, actively framing its message to resonate with disillusioned segments of the pious middle class and positioning itself as a critic of Western liberalism, corruption, and the perceived moral failings of mainstream Islamic parties. This is a doublespeak in nature because they are speaking against democracy while at the same time utilizing Indonesian democracy. The HTI's transnational connections further amplify its influence, linking its Indonesian chapter to a global network advocating for a unified Islamic caliphate (Osman, 2010; Setia & Rahman, 2021). The Indonesian government eventually banned the HTI in 2017, citing its incompatibility with Pancasila and the threat it posed to national unity, sparking debates about freedom of association and the balance between security and civil liberties (Ubaidillah & Syalafiyah, 2025; Arifianto, 2017; Marfiando, 2020). Despite the ban, the HTI's ideas persist, especially through online platforms, illustrating the organization's adaptability and the ongoing contestation over the role of Islam in Indonesia's public sphere (Setia & Rahman, 2021; Ward, 2009).

The Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) was established on December 7, 1990, during the final years of Suharto's New Order regime. Its creation was a strategic move by the government to co-opt and manage the growing influence of Muslim intellectuals, integrating them into the state apparatus while promoting a version of Islam compatible with national development and political stability. It served its purpose well the days it started its formation, gaining applause from many Muslims within the Nation State. ICMI served as a bridge between the state and moderate Islamic groups, allowing Muslim professionals and scholars to participate more actively in public life and government bureaucracy, which had previously been dominated by secular elites.

4.3 The HTI under New Order

This mutually beneficial relationship enabled the state to harness Islamic support for its policies, while ICMI members gained greater access to political and economic opportunities. However, critics argued that ICMI's close ties to the regime risked fostering elitism and undermining grassroots Islamic culture, and some saw it as a tool for Suharto's political interests, particularly in securing his re-election and maintaining control over Islamic activism. Nevertheless, the group has benefited from the anti-fundamentalist aspect of Muslims under the Suharto regime. Despite these criticisms, ICMI contributed to the increased visibility and influence of Muslims in Indonesian society, especially in the fields of politics, education, and social welfare, and played a significant role in shaping the discourse on Islam and modernity in Indonesia during the 1990s (Rosidi, 2022; Udin et al., 2023; Pitri et al., 2022).

ICMI's significance in relation to the HTI lies in its role as a state-backed organization that promoted moderate, intellectual Islam and helped marginalize more radical groups like the HTI during Suharto's New Order. By integrating Muslim intellectuals into the political and bureaucratic elite, ICMI provided a channel for Islamic aspirations within the boundaries set by the regime, reducing the appeal and influence of groups advocating for an Islamic caliphate or anti-secular ideology, such as HTI. This co-optation strategy allowed the government to present a modern, development-oriented face of Islam while simultaneously suppressing movements that challenged the secular, pro-Western orientation of the state. The New Order is known for its political stability, especially in its early years. As a result, ICMI helped to domesticate and depoliticize Islam, ensuring that Islamic activism remained compatible with state interests and limiting the space for the HTI's radical agenda to gain traction in public life. In essence, ICMI functioned as a buffer, channeling Islamic energy into state-sanctioned forms and preventing the rise of oppositional Islamist movements during a period of strict political control.

Reformasi policies following Suharto's fall in 1998 fundamentally transformed Indonesia's political landscape, enabling groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to emerge and expand rapidly. The shift from authoritarianism to democracy brought decentralization, the legalization of new political parties, and expanded civil liberties, which dismantled previous restrictions on political expression and organization. This new openness allowed HTI, which had operated underground during the Suharto era, to organize openly, recruit members—especially among university students—and hold public events and rallies advocating for an Islamic caliphate and the implementation of shari'a law (Rijal, 2022; Muhtadi, 2009). Technology has helped them with propaganda. The HTI's message resonated with segments of the population dissatisfied with the perceived failures of Reformasi to deliver meaningful improvements, positioning itself as a radical, uncompromising alternative to both the state and mainstream Islamic organizations (Muhtadi, 2009; Rijal, 2022).

The group's rejection of electoral politics and democracy, which it viewed as incompatible with Islam, further distinguished it from other Islamic parties and allowed it to claim moral and ideological purity. The weakened capacity of the state to regulate or suppress such groups in the early Reformasi years, combined with greater media freedom, enabled the HTI to gain visibility and mobilize support. Such is the main argument of this thesis. Ultimately, the political opportunities created by Reformasi allowed the HTI to

flourish until the government later moved to dissolve the organization, citing threats to national unity and the foundational principles of Pancasila (Syamlan, 2018).

The Western Hegemony has its fair share of support towards Suharto's regime in Indonesia from 1967 to 1998, as the United States viewed Suharto as a bulwark against communism during the Cold War. Among the support given by the States are military aid, economic assistance, and diplomatic backing, which helped Suharto consolidate power after the violent anti-communist purge of 1965. The regime's neoliberal economic policies, encouraged by Western institutions like the IMF and World Bank, opened Indonesia's markets to foreign investment and allowed Western corporations to profit from the country's natural resources, often at the expense of local welfare and environmental standards. Sukarno's leadership, which precedes him, is often seen as wishy-washy and potentially loyal to the Eastern Bloc despite the *bebas aktif* terminology (Rikza, 2020). Since Western governments prioritized geopolitical stability and economic interests over democratic values despite widespread human rights abuses and authoritarian rule, Suharto's long tenure has shaped Indonesia's integration into the global capitalist order. After Suharto's fall in 1998, the Reformasi era brought greater political openness, which allowed new actors, including Islamist groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), to emerge and gain influence.

4.4 The HTI under Reformasi

The HTI's rise was fueled by public dissatisfaction with the perceived failures of post-Suharto reforms and a rejection of Western-inspired secularism, which the group blamed for ongoing social and economic problems. The HTI's call for a global Islamic caliphate and its opposition to democracy and the nation-state reflect a broader backlash against the legacy of Western dominance and the secular state model established during and after colonial rule. Indonesian embrace of democracy under Pancasila means that such an idea is not to be tolerated. The Indonesian government eventually securitized and banned HTI, viewing its ideology as a threat to national unity and the foundational principles of the state, but the group's growth highlights the enduring impact of both Western intervention and colonial legacies on Indonesia's political landscape (Mujahiduddin, 2011). During Habibie's presidency, ICMI was identified with state power but sought to remodel it in a more inclusive and progressive direction, focusing on educating society about political and social rights.

Habibie, in many ways, is more visionary towards the modernization of Islam, with the buildings of *Insan Cendekia* and the like, albeit during his short presidency. Thus, ICMI's influence was more about fostering moderate, intellectual Muslim engagement in

politics rather than directly confronting or suppressing groups like HTI, which advocated for an Islamic caliphate and were later banned for threatening national unity and Pancasila values (Tahqiq, 2020). During Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur's) presidency, HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) continued its activities by promoting the idea of a caliphate and conducting religious outreach (dakwah) in universities and public spaces. However, Gus Dur's administration was characterized by strong support for pluralism, tolerance, and the rejection of religious exclusivism and violence (Firdaus, 2023; Munjid, 2020). Rather than using repressive measures against HTI, the government under Gus Dur emphasized dialogue, democratic values, and the protection of minority rights. Definitely a more charismatic approach than the authoritarian ways of Suharto before him. This inclusive and pluralist approach limited the influence of political Islamic groups like HTI that sought to replace Indonesia's foundational ideology, Pancasila, with an Islamic state.

As a result, while HTI remained active, it did not receive state support, and public discourse under Gus Dur focused on strengthening democracy and respect for diversity (Firdaus, 2023; Zamzam & Haikal, 2023; Munjid, 2020). Megawati Sukarnoputri's leadership influenced Indonesia's approach to Islamist movements like HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) primarily through caution and avoidance rather than confrontation. During her presidency, Megawati and her administration were generally unwilling or unable to directly challenge Islamist groups, partly due to her political vulnerability as a female leader and the need to maintain stability in a democratizing society (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). Instead of taking strong action against HTI, her government used the discourse of moderate Islam mainly to reassure the international community that Indonesia did not support transnational terrorism, rather than to address domestic Islamist challenges (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). Her short presidency did not make a lasting impact on groups like the HTI. This approach allowed HTI to continue its activities relatively freely, as the state did not implement significant restrictions or bans on the group during her tenure (Ward, 2009).

During Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's presidency (2004–2014), HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) was allowed to operate openly and continued its activities without significant government intervention or restriction. Yudhoyono's administration generally took a cautious and accommodative approach toward Islamist groups, aiming to maintain political stability and avoid alienating segments of the Muslim population. Rather than confronting HTI directly, the government prioritized broader issues of democratization and national unity, which meant that groups like HTI could spread their ideology and organize public events, including large-scale rallies and campus activities. This period saw HTI gaining visibility and influence in Indonesian society, as the state did not implement legal

bans or strong countermeasures against their calls for a caliphate and the replacement of Pancasila with Islamic law (Harahap, 2019; Maksum, 2021). This is well known as part of his leadership style. As a result, Yudhoyono's leadership is often seen as a time when HTI and similar movements were able to expand their reach, largely due to the government's reluctance to take decisive action against them (Harahap, 2019; Maksum, 2021).

Under Joko Widodo's presidency, the Indonesian government took decisive action against HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) by officially banning the organization in 2017. This move was justified by the government as necessary to protect the state ideology of Pancasila and maintain public security, especially amid rising tensions and concerns about radicalism and the spread of anti-Pancasila ideologies (Aswar, 2018; Fauzi & Kosandi, 2022). While not every Muslim dislikes the HTI, their ban from the country has been proven to have a positive impact. The decision was influenced by both political and ideological factors, including pressure from moderate Islamic groups like Nahdlatul Ulama, which supported Jokowi and opposed HTI's push for a caliphate (Fauzi & Kosandi, 2022).

After the ban, the government expanded anti-radicalism policies, targeting not only organizations but also civil servants and educational institutions to prevent the spread of extremist ideas (Suryana, 2020). Despite the dissolution, some former HTI members attempted to regroup by forming new organizations or aligning with political parties that shared similar ideologies (Qohar & Hakiki, 2017). This also happened during the ban of FPI and other radical groups. Jokowi's approach marked a significant shift from previous administrations, demonstrating a willingness to use legal and executive powers to confront Islamist movements perceived as threats to Indonesia's pluralist foundation (Aswar, 2018; Suryana, 2020).

At the start of Indonesia's Reformasi era, the Palestinian conflict played a significant role in shaping HTI's (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) geopolitical worldview. HTI viewed the Palestinian struggle as emblematic of the broader oppression of Muslims worldwide and used it to galvanize support for its vision of a unified Islamic caliphate. Of course, it later helped them recruit the youth with collective grievance, even with the ones with a strong Sunni background. The conflict was framed by HTI as evidence of the failure of nation-state systems and secular governance in protecting Muslim interests, reinforcing their call for transnational Islamic solidarity and the rejection of Western political models.

This narrative resonated with many Indonesian Muslims during Reformasi, a period marked by political openness and a surge in Islamic activism, allowing HTI to expand its influence by linking local grievances to global Muslim struggles. Israeli

settlements have been a source of turmoil in the Muslim World since their illegal inception. The Palestinian issue thus became central to HTI's rhetoric, serving both as a rallying point for mobilization and as justification for its anti-Western, anti-secular stance and its push for a Pan-Islamic political order (Ersoy-Ceylan, 2023). The irony lies in the fact that Suharto's regime, which was strongly backed by American hegemony during the Cold War for its anti-communist stance, helped entrench a pro-Western, secular, and authoritarian order in Indonesia (Batanghari, 2022; Simpson, 2019). This support enabled Suharto to suppress leftist and Islamist movements alike, prioritizing political stability and Western investment over democratic freedoms and human rights (Batanghari, 2022; Simpson, 2019). It then helped the American hegemony with Indonesian policies. After Suharto's fall and the onset of Reformasi, groups like HTI leveraged global Muslim grievances—such as the Palestinian conflict—to criticize the very Western-backed order that had marginalized them for decades.

HTI's anti-Western, Pan-Islamic rhetoric thus gained traction in a society emerging from an era of American-supported authoritarianism, highlighting the paradox that U.S. efforts to maintain regional stability inadvertently set the stage for the rise of movements deeply critical of American influence and its local allies (Batanghari, 2022; Simpson, 2019). Nevertheless, the movement never stopped gaining sympathy from the Muslim Nation. These dynamic underscores how international backing for authoritarian regimes can fuel long-term opposition rooted in both local and global injustices. The Ashari-Shafii praxis, which shaped the religious and political landscape of Indonesian kingdoms for centuries, emphasized a moderate, inclusive interpretation of Islam that harmonized with local cultures and the pluralistic values enshrined in Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational ideology.

This legacy fostered a strong sense of national identity and religious moderation, making it difficult for transnational movements like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to gain widespread acceptance. Unlike NU and Muhammadiyah, which championed Ghazali, the HTI has no strong footing in medieval sharia scholarship. HTI's push for a global Islamic caliphate and its rejection of Indonesia's nation-state model and Pancasila directly contradict the established Ashari-Shafii tradition, which supports coexistence and the integration of Islamic principles within the framework of the Indonesian state (Putra et al., 2024; Aritonang, 2020). The government's decisive action to disband HTI in 2017 reflects the enduring influence of this moderate legacy and the societal resistance to ideologies perceived as threats to national unity and pluralism (Aritonang, 2020; Putra et al., 2024).

While HTI has attempted to spread its message through campus organizations and public preaching, its formalist and exclusivist approach has struggled to resonate in a society deeply rooted in Ashari-Shafii traditions (Arifianto, 2019; Rijal, 2022). Thus, the Ashari-Shafii praxis continues to serve as a bulwark against radical ideologies, reinforcing Indonesia's commitment to religious harmony and national integrity (Putra et al., 2024; Aritonang, 2020; Arifianto, 2019). Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) has effectively leveraged social media to promote its caliphate ideology, especially among Indonesian youth, by adapting its messaging to digital platforms. Before its dissolution, it witnessed the great utilization of emerging social media like Facebook and Twitter among Millennial followers. After its official dissolution by the government in 2017, The HTI intensified its online presence, using social media as its primary campaign instrument to continue spreading its message and recruiting new members, with figures like Felix Siauw playing a prominent role in normalizing and popularizing The HTI's ideas through entertaining yet dogmatic content that appeals to a broad audience (Hew, 2018; Syah & Setia, 2021).

4.5 Paradigm Shift towards the Caliphate

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) uniquely exploited the democratic freedoms of the Reformasi era not to participate in Indonesia's electoral politics, but to systematically challenge and undermine the democratic system itself. Perhaps its main failure lies in the aim of non-political infrastructures. Unlike Islamist political parties such as PKS, which work within the democratic framework, the HTI openly rejects democracy as un-Islamic and instead uses the freedoms of speech, assembly, and association to propagate its vision of a global Islamic caliphate and to build grassroots networks, particularly among university students (Mujahiduddin, 2012). HTI's non-violent, public campaigns and educational outreach allowed it to gain legitimacy and expand rapidly, all while promoting anti-democratic narratives and rejecting the foundational principles of Pancasila and the nation-state. The country has more and more aware of its premise of national disunity. This strategic use of democratic openness to advance an anti-democratic agenda—without resorting to violence or electoral participation—sets The HTI apart from both mainstream Islamist parties and militant jihadist groups (Arifianto, 2019).

The ideological and organizational development of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) is deeply shaped by transnational influences from the Middle East, particularly the circulation of Islamist ideologies and support networks originating in the Gulf region. Perhaps also fueled by the demise of Sufism of the late Ottoman period, Muslim youths now prefer a more aggressive approach in politics, albeit non-violent. The HTI's vision of a global caliphate and its rejection of Western political concepts like democracy and

nationalism reflect broader trends in Middle Eastern Islamic movements, which gained momentum in the late 20th century as Saudi Arabia promoted Salafism and other fundamentalist doctrines worldwide. Indonesian students returning from studies in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, played a key role in transmitting these ideas and strengthening the HTI's local networks, while Gulf-based funding and informal support helped sustain the organization during both the New Order and Reformasi periods (Rijal, 2022). However, not all Middle-Eastern Nation States are welcoming towards the HTI.

This transnational dynamic enabled the HTI to adapt non-violent, gradualist strategies similar to those of Middle Eastern Islamist groups, building grassroots support and leveraging Indonesia's post-Suharto political openness to expand its influence and challenge the country's pluralist, democratic foundations (Zulkarnain, 2020). Political Opportunity Theory explains how the opening of political space—such as increased freedoms and weakened state controls—can lower barriers to collective action, enabling not only democratic movements but also groups that may challenge or undermine democratic norms. When institutional frameworks are weak or incomplete, as in Indonesia's post-authoritarian period, illiberal groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) can exploit these opportunities to advance agendas that conflict with pluralistic democracy. It suits well with the Political Opportunity theory. These dynamic highlights a core tension in democratization: while formal political liberalization creates space for participation, it does not guarantee the consolidation of democratic values like tolerance and pluralism, leaving democracies vulnerable to internal threats from actors who use democratic freedoms to pursue anti-democratic goals (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017).

Comparative research shows that in more established democracies with robust institutions and social integration mechanisms, such as England, illiberal movements face greater constraints and less political influence, illustrating the importance of strong institutional safeguards (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). It gave a very strong feature of democratic stability. The Indonesian case underscores the challenge for democratizing states: balancing the protection of civil liberties with the need to defend democratic norms against those who would erode them from within (Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2017; Schock, 1999). England is a particularly useful comparison to Indonesia when examining how each country treats Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) because both nations are democracies with strong traditions of freedom of association and expression, yet they have taken markedly different approaches to HTI.

While it hosts plenty of immigrants, particularly from the Commonwealth, England nevertheless has successfully adapted a good boundary to groups like the Hizbut Tahrir. Indonesia banned HTI in 2017, citing concerns that its ideology threatened national stability, security, and the foundational principles of the state, especially the potential to undermine democracy and promote radicalism through the vision of a global caliphate, which was seen as incompatible with Indonesia's constitution and pluralistic society (Marfiando, 2020; Zulkarnain, 2020). In contrast, England, while also home to Hizb ut-Tahrir, has not banned the group, instead relying on legal protections for free speech and association, and monitoring the group's activities within the bounds of existing laws unless direct incitement or violence occurs. This contrast is especially instructive because both countries face similar challenges in balancing civil liberties with national security, but their legal frameworks and political cultures lead to different outcomes.

Comparing Indonesia to England, rather than to countries with less robust democratic institutions or different legal traditions, highlights how similar democratic values can produce divergent policy responses to the same organization. Having democratic ideals since the formation of Pancasila, Indonesia has nevertheless not always been successful in implementing its national policies. Other countries may not provide as clear a contrast due to differences in legal systems, levels of democracy, or the presence and influence of HTI itself, making England the most illustrative case for understanding the implications of state responses to non-violent but ideologically radical groups like HTI (Ward, 2009; Marfiando, 2020; Zulkarnain, 2020).

Vedi Hadiz views democratization in Indonesia as a process deeply shaped by existing social power structures and the persistence of old elites, rather than a straightforward transition to more open and equitable politics. It means that contemporary politics worked like a manipulation. He argues that the post-authoritarian shift, especially through decentralization, did not fundamentally transform power relations but instead allowed new and old actors—including those with predatory or oligarchic interests—to adapt and thrive within the new democratic framework (Platzdasch, 2010; Buehler, 2014; Rahmawati, 2017). This environment created opportunities for groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to emerge and expand, as democratization opened space for new mass organizations and ideological movements to operate more freely (Syah & Setia, 2021).

Hadiz's analysis of Islamic populism further explains that alliances of marginalized or disaffected groups can unite under the banner of Islam, not necessarily out of pure religious conviction, but as a means to pursue political and economic interests in a changing socio-political landscape (Garadian, 2017). His views resemble Larry Diamond,

in which the fragility of political infrastructure could also give preferences to Fundamentalist Organizations. Thus, the rise of HTI can be seen as a product of Indonesia's democratization, where the loosening of authoritarian controls and the persistence of entrenched interests created fertile ground for new forms of political Islam and populist mobilization (Platzdasch, 2010; Garadian, 2017; Syah & Setia, 2021).

Political Opportunity Theory and Democratization Theory yield similar outcomes in explaining the rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) because both focus on how changes in the political environment create openings for new actors and movements. Both theories are very useful in the explanation of this thesis. Political Opportunity Theory emphasizes that shifts such as increased openness, reduced repression, or elite divisions provide social movements with chances to mobilize and gain influence (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Choe & Kim, 2012). Similarly, Democratization Theory highlights how transitions from authoritarianism to more open, competitive political systems often relax state controls and allow previously suppressed groups to organize and express their agendas (Gleditsch & Ruggeri, 2010; Choe & Kim, 2012).

After the fall of Suharto, Indonesia's democratization process created a more permissive environment, which reduced barriers for groups like HTI to operate, recruit, and advocate for their vision of an Islamic state. Both theories thus explain HTI's emergence as a response to new opportunities created by political liberalization and institutional change, rather than simply by ideological or grassroots factors (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Gleditsch & Ruggeri, 2010). The change of Leaders within the country marks the changes in Policies. The convergence of these theories lies in their recognition that structural changes have enabled the rise of movements that were previously marginalized or repressed, whether conceptualized as "opportunities" or "democratization".

In a sense, the challenge of this research is not to fall into broad generalizations, as even the Reformasi has different Presidential Personalities that could be very different from each other, even under the same banner of increased democratization. In this way, I make sure the fourth chapter is coherent in its pursuit of great discussions within the topic, as can be proven by the diverse references that I have used. At the core of the political issue is how the power struggle could be balanced out in the transition between the two eras. All the prolific discussions about the HTI's rise into empowerment would culminate in the conclusion seen in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

I wrote this thesis as a way to understand the strategies of the HTI in the context of empowerment within the country's post-authoritarian political transition. The theory of political opportunity and democratization is suitable as a tool to dig deeper into the topic. In this research, a utilization of comparative case analysis and qualitative methods was used to explore how the HTI were shaped by the transition from the New Order to the Reformasi. The writing tried to strike a balance between the understanding of political phenomena in both eras. In doing so, it offers a deeper understanding of how the political opportunity structure and the broader democratization process played pivotal roles in the movement's success.

This part will now conclude the findings of the study with emphasis on both theories and explore the contributions for understanding not only the rise of HTI but also similar political phenomena, especially those related to authoritarian movements. In doing so, this part will highlight the importance of context and the definition of political space that occurred after the downfall of Suharto. The main theoretical framework of this research has been the political opportunity theory, which argues that the political opportunities in which social movements operate significantly influence their strategies and chance of success. It is grounded in the concept that structural openings create opportunities for collective action. Such structural openings might be in the form of changes in the political system, shifts in public opinion, or the weakening of state repression, which could be seen clearly after the fall of Suharto. The Reformasi provided a profound change in Indonesia that altered the legal opportunity structure and allowed Islamist movements, even those against Pancasila, to expand their influence.

In the past, New Order's utilitarian policies have made groups like HTI face significant state repression. The Suharto regime was characterized by a centralized authoritarian control that criminalized any form of political dissent. In this case, Islamist ideologies that did not conform to the state-sanctioned version of Islam, like HTI, would be in trouble. However, the country underwent massive political reforms after the 1998 reformation. That transition is the main focus of this research. Plenty of things were introduced to the paradigm shortly after. Democratic elections, decentralization of power, and freedom of speech are all practices of liberalization within the political space. This shift worked both as a challenge and an opportunity for the HTI. On one side, gone are the

limitations of Suharto with his repressive measures that had kept them in check during the New Order.

On the other side, the HTI faced the challenge of navigating an emerging democratization in which legal discourse was more diverse and the state was far less able to suppress radical ideologies. Such issues would motivate the HTI to thrive in times of political openings as they tried to be empowered to engage in political mobilization when these changes disrupt established political orders. The gaps in political economy were capitalized on by the HTI as the political liberalization of the Reformasi took shape. HTI's strategic responses reflect its use of political space to promote its agenda. Among them are framing democracy as a false ideology and advocating for the Islamic caliphate. Those strategies highlight the agency of the HTI in shaping its own political trajectory. As explained by the scholars of social movements, the ability of social movements to redefine their goals and mobilize support in response to changing political opportunities is key to their survival and growth. Within the HTI's ability to underscore the salience of political opportunity, they transform the post-Reformasi landscape into a battleground for its fundamentalist goals.

Another important theoretical framework utilized in this research is the post-authoritarian theory. It is a useful tool to understand how social movements adapt themselves to the paradigm shift of a new democratic system following the end of an authoritarian regime. The theory argues that the democratization process gave both challenges and aids for social movements since it involves the reconfiguration of political identity and collective action. The HTI was mostly hidden under the Suharto regime, since even senile criticism of the regime would meet harsh repression. However, after the Reformasi, the movement became more visible through the mainstream media. The liberalization of politics in Indonesia made the HTI's activism recognized, even within the local TV channel TVRI, which champions Pancasila. Strategic adaptation is an important lens to understand the way the HTI capitalizes on post-authoritarian openings. This means that they must be able to adapt strategically to the new ways of pluralist ideas, freedom of expression, and democratic unpredictability.

The HTI made an effort to reframe the concept of democracy, which illustrates how it strategically navigated the pluralistic nature of the post-Reformasi paradigm shift in ways to gain legitimacy and further its goals. They tried to propagandize that Democracy is a false promise of individualism and secularism, forgetting the liberal nature of successful caliphates like the Abbasids. I could also utilize the post-authoritarian context as a crucial tool in understanding the role of state institutions at the turn of the Millennium.

What enabled the HTI to operate more freely than in authoritarian times was the weakness of Indonesian democratic institutions, especially in terms of enforcing pluralism and regulating religious groups.

It was such an archetypal move for groups like the HTI to exploit the weakness of institutional voids in the transition to democracy to build influence and gain traction within the political discourse. Both the political opportunity theory and post-authoritarian theory provide a comprehensive lens through which to understand the social movements in the post-Reformasi era. Both thoughts emphasize that the rise of social movements was not simply a result of ideological appeal but also a product of strategic maneuvering within the shifting political paradigms. On one side, Political opportunity theory helps explain how the HTI was able to capitalize on the opening up of political space after the New Order ended, while post-authoritarian theory highlights the movement's capacity to adapt its strategies in response to the new democratic structures at the start of Reformasi.

When we combined both frameworks, the thesis revealed the complex interplay between political structures and social movements, demonstrating that the success of the HTI in recent years was not inevitable but rather the outcome of deliberate and context-sensitive strategic decisions. While it's true that the Reformasi ended up opening new opportunities for social movements, the HTI's capitalization on such opportunities, both from the redefinition of political identity and the exploitation of institutional weakness, has underscored the importance of agency in post-authoritarian transitions like we saw after 1998. This research hopes to contribute to the broader literature on post-authoritarian movements by highlighting the dynamic strategies employed by intolerant groups like the HTI. It is shown that Islamism in Asia, like the post-Suharto Indonesia, is not a static phenomenon but one that adapts to and interacts with the evolving political and social contexts in which it operates. When we see a historical narrative about the rise of the HTI within the intersection of political opportunity and post-authoritarian transition, this study will deepen our knowledge of how social movements can both influence and be shaped by the broader political paradigm shifts.

The HTI has significantly benefited from the political reforms of the Reformasi era, which created a political opportunity structure for the movement. Gone is the state repression of the New Order's authoritarian regime. Instead, the more open political environment gave audacity for social movements to operate more freely. The liberalization of political space offered the HTI opportunities to engage in public discourse, organize mass mobilizations, and media-wise challenge the pluralist democratic framework. This includes the newfound freedom of speech, press, and decentralization of media. However,

it's not all without its challenges, because the HTI had to adapt to the increasingly pluralistic and competitive political paradigm, as they are not the only movements with relevant messages to the youth.

Utilizing the available literary resources, we can trace how the process of democratization has been exploited by the HTI. Part of the research design of this thesis is the historical comparison between the past governance. It is known that the Reformasi era differs from the New Order in the way it permitted a short-term presidency to prevent tyrannical abuse seen by the first two Presidents of Indonesia. All the different Presidents chosen through the newly implemented election system have their own signature way of implementing the post-Reformasi policies, through which lens we can see the differing methods utilized by the HTI as well. For example, the ban on the HTI was only finalized under the Joko Widodo administration, in which we can see the kind of affirmative move not seen in the previous administrations. We have discussed, for example, how Gus Dur contrasts Joko Widodo in his pursuit of diplomacy, not only between religious communities but also those under the same religious banner.

The HTI gained legitimacy in public debates by using Islamic discourse and nationalistic rhetoric. It has successfully established itself as a significant actor in Indonesia's democratic discourse, despite rejecting the very principles of democracy that the state sought to embrace. The group provides a compelling and nuanced example of how political movements are deeply shaped by both the structural openings and limitations created by political transitions. By examining the HTI through the combined lenses of political opportunity theory and post-authoritarian theory, this research deepens our understanding of the mechanisms that facilitated its rise, offering valuable insights into how political change affects not only the political landscape but also the strategic behavior of social and political movements.

The historical nature of this thesis is willfully made so that the present generation could learn from the past to anticipate the way things are moving forward in Indonesia. A democratic regime with flawed implementations has been proven as devastating for the people under which the policies have been implemented. Being tolerant towards fundamentalist groups is not only dangerous for the political landscape within a country, but also for the whole geopolitical spheres of influence, as already discussed in chapter IV. Perhaps the limitations of this research also showcase its strength, that while it is so much focused on the available narrative of democratization, it is nevertheless relevant to the ongoing turmoil within Indonesian democratic pluralism. I also hope that this thesis will contribute to the broader discussions about the intersections within Islamism and social

movements within the democratic period, like we often see in newly independent nation-states. Social sciences are always interconnected, whether we are discussing religion, politics, or both.

The intertwined nature of social theories has led me to the conclusion that the strategic adaptations of the HTI and similar groups should be seen in the context of the diversification of political environments. By providing a detailed examination of the HTI's strategies and ideological responses to Indonesia's democratization, this thesis enriches the ongoing debates on the challenges and opportunities that arise during periods of political transformation. It highlights the tension between democratic pluralism and Islamist movements in the region, offering a clearer understanding of how such movements operate within and against the structures of democratic governance. In return, it enriches the already lush discussion about Islamic Politics.

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