

Fostering Tolerant Religious Education to Prevent Violent
Extremism in Indonesia – **CONVEY Indonesia**

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This Policy Brief series was created as part of the CONVEY Indonesia project organized by PPIM UIN Jakarta and UNDP Indonesia, in direct collaboration with research institutes. CONVEY Indonesia is intended to build peace in Indonesia and prevent violent extremism and radicalism through a series of research-surveys, policy advocacy, and public interactions based on the potential of religious education. The Indonesian CONVEY Project touches on issues of tolerance, diversity and non-violence among the younger generation

Ulemas' Strategic Role in Driving Tolerance and Citizenship in Indonesia

The Center for the Study of Democratic Islam and Peace

Executive Summary

1. Most scholars in Indonesia accept the concept of a nation-state with varying degrees of acceptance. Whereas scholars who reject the concept of the nation-state occupy a relatively small percentage.
2. Most ulemas in Indonesia have moderate and inclusive characteristics. The ulemas with radical and extreme characteristics occupy the two lowest levels. Likewise, scholars with progressive characteristics, are dominated by scholars from minority groups in Indonesia.
3. Conservative and exclusive ulemas are the two groups of scholars who accept the concept of nation-state with the highest level of reservation. A number of factors that cause differences in attitudes include the personal side of the cleric subjectively and historical and cultural factors in each city.
4. The difference in the level of acceptance and rejection can also be seen from the three urban clusters which show that scholars in cities with Muslim minorities tend to have a higher attitude towards acceptance of the nation-state concept compared to Islamic metropolitan cities and mainstream Islamic cities.
5. A pro-active state attitude is needed in promoting ulemas with contextual thinking paradigms to compete in controlling public Islamic discourse and practice.
6. The state must pay attention to the process of ulema production, especially in higher education institutions by providing material on the issues of citizenship and tolerance.

Introduction

The relationship between religion and the state is an ongoing debate and usually strengthens when important changes occur in the country's political landscape in Indonesia. In this case, the ulema became an important actor who had long been involved in the debate and had a significant role in political, social and religious life. However, a number of events in Indonesia lately, ranging from the Islamic Defendant Action 212 and its derivative actions, the development of Islamic *Khilafah* understanding, the involvement of a number of religious organizations and civil society who bore allegiance to ISIS, and a number of other issues such as fostering a spirit of superiority over other religious groups, discrimination and persecution of minority groups, and support for acts of violence in the name of religion, appear to be increasingly prominent in our public lives. This is the main reason for this research to re-examine the extent of the pros and cons among the ulemas in relation to the basis and format of the state along with other concepts that accompany it.

Ulemas perception of the concept of nation-state, which is the focus of this research, is an important issue that must be known and acted upon by the Indonesian government. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, ideally, ulemas as religious and community elites have a duty to form a religious society while being good citizens. The higher the level of one's religiosity, the better the citizenship side should be, which is reflected in a tolerant, just and democratic attitude. The principle of belief in the one and only God becomes the foundation of the active role of the state and civil society in developing religious life in Indonesia: the state protects and guarantees freedom of religious life and develops its own politics independent of religious dictates; while religion is expected to play a public role related to strengthening social ethics.



Definition and Methodology

The definition of ulemas in this study includes the following two categories: first, ulemas are people who have deep knowledge in Islamic scholarship who specifically study and explore Islamic texts such as *fiqh*, *tauhid*, and *aqidah* whether through educational institutions such as religious boarding schools, world's leading Islamic universities, such as al-Azhar, Ibn Saud, Tarim Hadramaut, and UIN / IAIN¹ as well as those who study specifically through the strict tradition of the *majelis taklim*. With this background of education and knowledge, they gain authority in conveying religious messages and are recognized by their congregation. In terms of academic ulemas, they are referred to as traditional religious authorities.

Second, along with the rapid development of Islamic education and the birth of new media, especially in Muslim countries, this traditional religious authority has been challenged by the emergence of new scholars. They are people who have the authority to convey religious messages and have followers (*jamaah*) without having a background in strict Islamic religious education. Often their religious knowledge is obtained through available and easily accessible sources such as translation books, study groups, and listening to and taking lessons in new media such as television and the internet. Along with their ability to package religious messages through various mediums such as writing, training,

and short videos and delivered through new media, become the strength of this second category of ulemas to have more influence and followers.

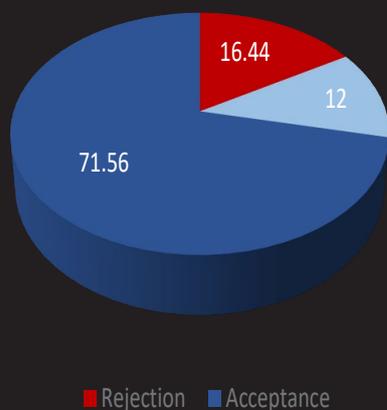
This study strives to measure the level of acceptance and rejection of scholars towards the concept of the nation-state with four main dimensions, namely pro-system, non-violence, tolerance, and pro-citizenship. This study involved 450 respondents spread across 15 cities. The diversity of cities is chosen based on 3 categories: a. the category of Islamic metropolitan cities where Muslim urban culture is very strong (Jakarta, Medan, Bandung, Makassar and Surakarta), b. cities with a predominantly large population of mainstream ulemas (NU and Muhammadiyah) and Islamic tradition (Banda Aceh, Padang, Palangkaraya, Surabaya and Banjarmasin) and, c. cities with specific minority issues (Pontianak, Denpasar, Manado, Kupang and Ambon). With the diversity of locations chosen, this study seeks to understand the map of perceptions and views of scholars regarding the nation-state on a national scale, as well as local dynamics and nuances that contribute in shaping their perceptions and views about these nation-states.

Survey respondents in this study consisted of 76.22% men and 23.78% women. The total number of respondents who claimed to be affiliated with NU (including Fatayat, Muslimat, Ansor, etc.) amounted to 22.22%, Muhammadiyah (counted Aisyiah, Naswiatul Aisyiyah, Muhammadiyah Youth, etc.) by 15.78%, Ahmadiyah and Shia numbers 5, 33% and the remaining 35.56% come from a variety of scholars who are affiliated with a variety of organizations or movements, both at the national and local levels which amount to no less than 40 organizations or groups. The ulema's acceptance and rejection attitude scale of the four dimensions then produces acceptance level categories ranging from progressive, inclusive, moderate, and conservative. Whereas the rejection category starts from exclusive, radical, and extreme.

Ulemas' Map of Perception about Nation-State

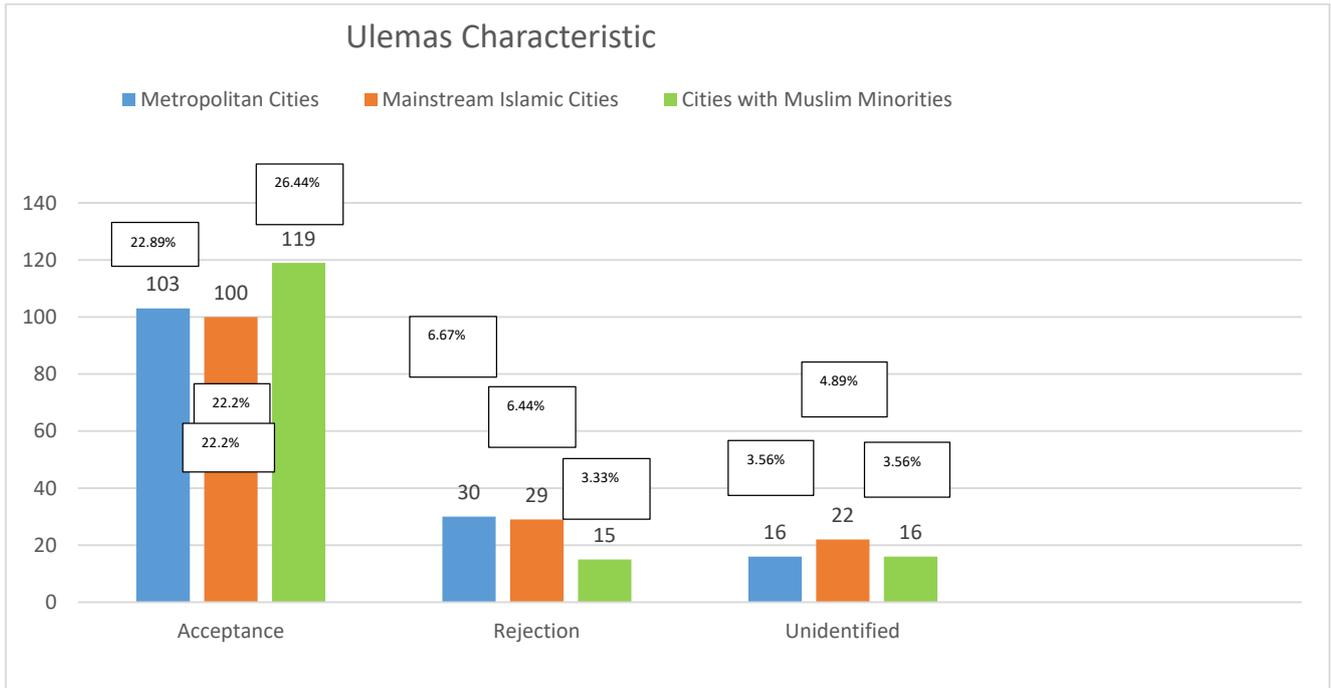
General description of this study shows that the acceptance (acceptance) of ulemas to the concept of the nation-state is fairly high, namely 71.56%. Meanwhile, those who refused (rejection) amounted to 16.44%.

The Percentage of Acceptance and Rejection of Ulemas towards the Concept of the Nation-State

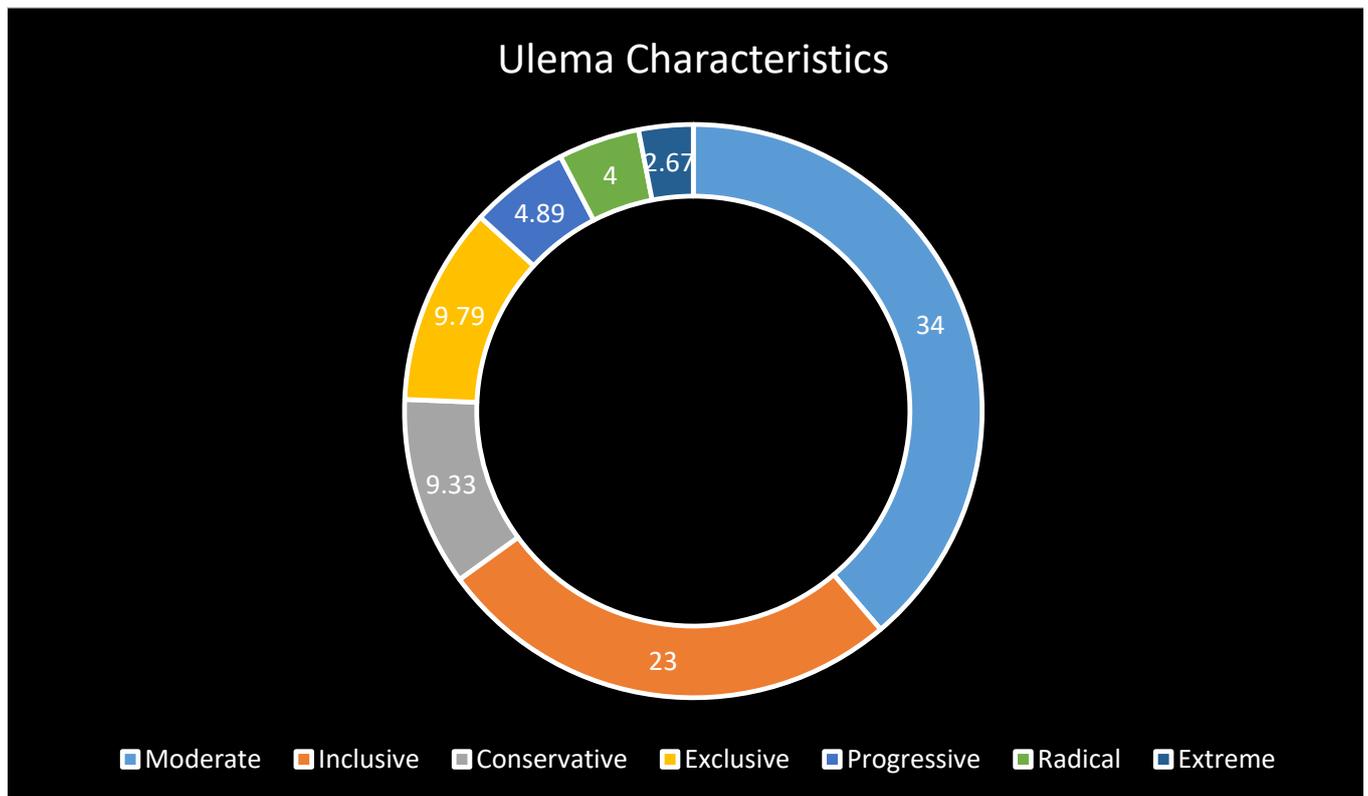


The difference in the level of rejection and acceptance can also be seen from the aspects of the three city clusters namely the Islamic metropolitan city, the mainstream Islamic city, and the city with a Muslim minority. Although the percentage difference is not too large, the level of acceptance of the concept of nation-state and its derivatives in cities with Muslim minorities tends to be higher (26.44%) compared to metropolitan cities (22.89%) and Muslim mainstream cities (22, 22%).

From the aspect of its characteristics, this survey shows that the greatest number of ulemas in Indonesia is moderate (34%) and inclusive (23.33%). While those who are conservative are 9.33%, and exclusive are 9.79%. The rest, on the one hand the group of ulemas who have progressive characters amounted to 4.89%. While on the other hand those who are radical are at 4% and extreme only 2.67%.



Seen from the four dimensions of research namely pro-system, non-violence, tolerance and pro-citizenship, it is known that the very high acceptance is in the **non-violence** dimension (92.89% acceptance; 7.11% rejection) and **pro-system** (90.22% acceptance; 9.78% rejection). While the acceptance in the other two dimensions is somewhat lower, namely the dimension of **tolerance** (acceptance of 76.44%; rejection of 23.56%) and **pro-citizenship** dimension (acceptance of 69.11%; rejection of 30.89%).

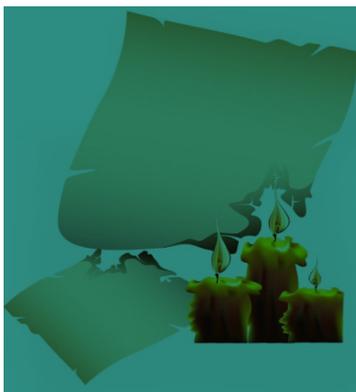


From the aspect of the characteristics of scholars, some important findings in this study are as follows:

First, progressive scholars (4.89%) are mostly from minority groups such as Shiites and Ahmadis. They not only totally accepted the ideas of the Indonesian nation-state, but also actively promoted nonviolence, pro-system, tolerance and pro-citizenship. This indicates that behind the progressive view there is a message that they get the same treatment before the law and get state protection in expressing their beliefs in the public sphere. This correlates with the perception of the ulemas who are pro toward violence (7.11%) where they justify violence against minority groups, especially Ahmadis, using the MUI fatwa on heresy as the legitimacy of their actions.

Radical scholars (4%) and extreme scholars (2.67%) are two groups of scholars who reject the concept of the nation-state. Ulemas in the radical category tend to be passive in terms of non-violence, but their views tend to be anti-system, intolerant, and anti-citizenship. They tend to question the validity of the prevailing state and government system, but avoid the use of violence in realizing a system that they consider legitimate and in accordance with Islam. The ulemas of extreme categories tend to justify the way of violence as an alternative in the rejection of the concept of the nation-state. In their activism, the ulemas of this extreme category have very strong resistance to the nation-state system, as well as legitimate government.

Ulemas with an extreme view demands a single interpretation in understanding Islam, leaving aside the reality of diversity that exists in each locality of Muslim society. This single interpretation then forms a homogeneous religious pattern, where the diversity of religious interpretations is seen as a threat to Muslims. For example, when addressing the differences in interpretation between these extremist clerics with the understanding of the Ahmadis and Shia, the issue was then addressed with a narrative that the two organizations were a threat to Islam. As a result, Ahmadis and Shia are always labeled heretical, not even part of Islam. This single interpretation also impacts on the rejection of pluralism in people's lives. As a discourse that was born in a democratic system, pluralism is seen as an understanding taught by the West to damage the Islamic faith. This thinking has an impact on the limitations on the basic rights of citizens and the rejection of non-Muslim leaders in Indonesia. They even consider non-Muslim citizens to be treated in two categories; namely *kafir dzimmī* and *kafir harbī* which must always be controlled by the Muslim rulers. For extreme scholars the totality of the Islamic system must be fought for to achieve the glory of Muslims, otherwise God's punishment will appear.



As the culmination of these ulemas Islamic understanding is the obligation of jihad among Muslims. In their view, jihad is the main practice for Muslims, beyond prayer, zakat, fasting, pilgrimage, and other worship. These extremists understand that jihad is war, thus allowing “violence” to achieve the goal of Muslim victory.

Reservation:

The Issues of Tolerance and Citizenship

Although the majority of ulemas accept the nation-state system and democracy, not all of them vote for full acceptance. Ulemas in the conservative (9.33%) and exclusive (9.79%) categories are scholars who accept the concept of a nation-state with a high level of reservation. Acceptance accompanied by this reservation, among other things, holds that democracy is the most realistic choice for Indonesia

today. Because, replacing the state system with the *khilafah* is not possible. Therefore, Islamization of the system becomes a realistic choice rather than replacing it with another system. Some other scholars give the perception that democracy today cannot be compared to the concept of *syūrā* in Islam which emphasizes direct election and acclamation. For them, the *syūrā* is the principle of exchanging ideas to find the correct opinion (*tabādul al-ārā li ma rifati al-shawāb*), while the current democracy operates at the level of quantity contestation minus quality attention. Some scholars assess national leadership cannot be equated with the concept of *waliyyu'l-amr*. Because, in the concept of *waliyyu'l-amr* covers aspects of *hirāsat al-din* (protection of Islam) and *siyāsat al-dunyā* (social political society). According to them, the current national leadership does not carry *irāsat al-din*.

If the government allows this ambiguity and contradiction, by not taking preventive steps towards increasingly conservative, exclusive, radical, and extreme ulemas, it is feared that instead of strengthening social cohesion and building religious civilizations, it will instead create a polarization of society, both internal religious communities and between religious communities caused by the development of understandings with intolerant tendencies in Indonesia.

The policy through the deradicalization program through BNPT, blocking a number of websites indicated to spread radical understanding, and providing support to mainstream public organizations, especially NU and Muhammadiyah, is a good and quite effective step that the government has done so far. However, the policy must be accompanied by other policies that are pro-active from the government by presenting ulemas who have a paradigm of contextual Islamic thinking to compete in filling public spaces such as *majelis taklim* and spaces in social media in order to control discourse and Islamic practices in society.

Policy Recommendations

This research offers several points of recommendations that are important to consider by the government, stakeholders and the community:

1. Encouraging issues of citizenship and tolerance to become an integral part of religious discourse and encourage ulemas to formulate strategies for the realization of practice in the life of a plural society.
2. Include citizenship and tolerance materials in the curriculum of religious education, both in the scope of religious boarding schools and higher education.
3. Encourage the idea of civil Islam, namely the articulation of Islam that is related to democratic values as a paradigm of religious thought in ulemas' institutions such as MUI, religious boarding schools, Islamic tertiary institutions, and Islamic religious social organizations.
4. The need to choose, recommend, or even compile Islamic religious literature that is in harmony with the context of the benefit of the present (but at the same time also has a strong scriptural foundation and can be accounted for) to be distributed and used as a basis for religious discourse in educational institutions managed by the government and state institutions.
5. Encourage and facilitate ulemas who have a paradigm of contextual Islamic thinking to (compete) fill the spaces of the *majelis taklim* to control the discourse and practice of public Islam.
6. Intervene in religious discourse with the national cultural agenda so that cultural diversity and views become facts that must be considered in the articulation of religion by scholars.
7. Eliminating all types of laws, government regulations or government decrees deemed incompatible with the values of tolerance and citizenship which are often used as a basis for certain parties to carry out social intimidation against groups that are considered 'heretic'.



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