

## Book Review

*Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*, by Vedi R. Hadiz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. 228. ISBN 9781107123601.

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Today, discussions of populism reverberate in the literature of social and political science due to its global upsurge and successful penetration in the political landscape in many parts of the world. Rising support for populist parties, whether right-wing or left-wing, not only disrupted the established political order but also upstaged mainstream parties. Recently, the notion of Islamic populism has given a new impulse to the debate on populism in the Muslim world, following the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the rise of Islamic politics in Muslim-majority countries.

In Indonesia, recent events where various Muslim elements joined in dramatic rallies (popularly known as the Aksi Bela Islam or Defending Islam Action) in late 2016 demanding the prosecution of the Chinese-Christian governor of Jakarta, Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, for alleged blasphemy against Islam, has sparked the debate on Islamic populism in the country. While the concept of Islamic populism is not really new (Bashirieh 1984; Afrasiabi 1995), Hadiz’s notion of new Islamic populism is making headlines for its provocative approach in understanding the dynamics of Islam politics not only in Indonesia, but also in the Middle East.

Against dominant literature on Islamic politics, which emphasizes the role of Islamic doctrines and cultural orientation, and their influence on the development of Islamic politics and the political behavior of Islamist actors, Hadiz’s book offers a new approach in understanding the dynamics of Islamic politics by looking at the

significance of political economy and historical sociology that may explain different trajectories of Islamic politics in the Muslim world.

Hadiz's book tries to answer a fundamental question: What accounts for the different trajectories of Islamic politics in different contexts (p. 3)? To answer this question, Hadiz draws a comparative analysis of the three important countries in Southeast Asia and the Middle East—Indonesia, Egypt, and Turkey—that share some similarities: Muslim-majority countries with middle-income economies that experience recent efforts toward democratization and are witnesses to the evolution of Islamic politics that has been integrating itself into the world capitalist economy and electoral democracy.

In order to explain the different trajectories of Islamic politics in these three countries, Hadiz uses the concept of “a new Islamic populism,” which he defines as merging interests, aspirations, and grievances of a cross-section of social classes, particularly the urban poor, the new urban middle class, and possibly peripheralized segments of the bourgeoisie in potentially powerful ways (p. 3). Hadiz's definition of new Islamic populism puts emphasis on the central conception of *ummah* in which he argues is parallel to the conception of “the people” in traditional populism. Yet, if traditional populisms conceive of a “people” who are subordinated by avaricious elites, the new Islamic populism imagines an *ummah* that is dispossessed, in socioeconomic as well as cultural terms, by powerful forces that preside over the social order that is perceived to be inherently exclusionary, unjust, and therefore simultaneously immoral (p. 12). Hadiz further argues that the key elements for the success of Islamic populism rely on whether Islamist actors are able to mobilize two important variables: first, a cohesive cross-class alliance that connects the disparate groups within the *ummah*; and second, a cohesive political vehicle that can represent the *ummah* in competition over power and resources.

Hadiz's examination of Egypt, Turkey, and Indonesia suggests that, despite having similar historical and political trajectories, the outcomes of a new Islamic populism in these countries are different and vary in both degree and composition. In this case, Hadiz uses electoral performance and access to formal politics as parameters to analyze the success or failure of Islamic populism. Hadiz then shared his observations and analysis on the dynamics of Islamic politics, looking at how political actors—Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP or Justice and Development Party) in Turkey,

and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS or Justice and Prosperous Party) in Indonesia—struggled for power and resources through electoral competitions.

In Turkey, the representatives of Islamic politics succeeded in gaining access and reigning over the state. Turkey's case perhaps has become the most successful story of Islamic populism, with the presence of cohesive cross-class alliances among its indigenous Muslim bourgeoisie and various other classes such as the urban poor, who benefited from the provision of services carried out by the AKP governance, and the big Anatolian bourgeoisie represented by the Gulen movement, which emerged as a growing economic power as well as AKP's major ally.

Similarly, Egypt's case also shows the success of Islamic politics in electoral competition against military forces in the post-authoritarian environment, although they have failed to maintain power in spite of early spectacular successes through the democratic route (p. 158). The victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, according to Hadiz, can be credited to its ability to emerge as the main opponent while continuing to maintain a rich tradition of civil society activism (p. 100).

In contrast, Islamic politics in Indonesia experienced “continual failures” to take over the government or dominate the political opposition in the time of both authoritarianism and democracy (p. 13). Despite the surge of Islamic politics in the post-1998 democratization movement and the seemingly rising piety of Indonesian Muslims, Islamic parties never gained popular support in electoral competitions. According to Hadiz, the major factors that differentiate the outcomes of Islamic populism in Indonesia and its counterparts in Turkey and Egypt have been the historical absence of a strong, big business component within the Indonesian new Islamic populism, as well as the lack of vehicles capable of credibly monopolizing the claim of representing an internally diverse ummah (p. 188). Hadiz further argues that the failure of Islamist actors in crafting a cross-class coalition has something to do with the historical precedent in the older form of Islamic populism that shows resentment between the marginalized Islamic petty bourgeoisie and the dominant big Chinese bourgeoisie, which then perpetuates the anti-Chinese sentiment among the large population of the indigenous *pribumi* Muslims even up to date, as seen in the dramatic mass mobilization by Islamic vehicles in Jakarta in late 2016.

Despite his noteworthy analysis of the divergent trajectories of Islamic politics in the three cases, Hadiz's emphasis on the electoral

performance and political-economic motivation of the Islamist actors may have simplified the complexity of the contemporary ummah, as well as overlooked the ideological factor that remains influential in explaining the behavior of Islamist actors across the Muslim world, including the three countries.

In Egypt's case, the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalism can be seen as a resistance to secularization of Egyptian society, which they perceive as traditionally religious and conservative people who aspire for stricter implementation of religious teachings in all aspects of life (Bayoumi 2017). During the short period of Mohamed Morsi's administration, efforts to encourage the adoption of Sharia law through constitutional amendments by the Islamists, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi group, have caused a breakup of coalitions between Islamist and secular groups that were initially formed as an anti-Mubarak coalition (Muslih and Hurriyah 2016).

To a lesser degree, Islamic ideology remains pertinent not only in Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi but also in Turkey's secularized society. In this case, the moderation of AKP's Islamist-rooted ideology was undertaken because the party has to deal with an extreme interpretation of secularism in Turkey that influences party members to refrain from any confrontation with secular strongholds (Hidayat 2012). Yet, once the AKP consolidated its political power through European Union-oriented reforms and successive electoral victories, it has gradually replaced the well-established secular nationalism with religious nationalism. Presenting itself as "the voice of voiceless masses" that have been pushed to the periphery and forced to adopt "imported" values, the AKP appeals to the masses through a cultural populism by underlining the party's and its strong leader's fidelity to national, religious values (Saylan 2016).

Particularly in the Indonesian case, Hadiz's argument of continual electoral failures has also undermined the success of Islamic politics in penetrating formal politics. Since the 1998 democratization movement, evidence shows that there has been a kind of Islamization in laws and regulations at both the national and local levels in different degrees throughout the archipelago (Bagir 2018, 284) not only promoted by Islamist actors but also by secular parties (Buehler 2016). In Aceh, a special province in Indonesia that has the privilege to implement Sharia law, Islamist groups like traditional *ulema* has become a strategic alliance for the government in the enforcement of Sharia law and regulations due to its significance as the "sole interpretation" of Islam

in Aceh (Hidayat and Hurriyah 2016, 261). Arguably, the unprecedented success of the Aksi Bela Islam rallies has represented the growth of a new Islamic populism that was manipulated by the Islamist groups struggling not only for power and resources, but also, as Fealy (2016) suggests, a much broader agenda of Islamization.

Overall, Hadiz's book is a significant contribution to the study of contemporary Islamic politics. His take on comparative perspectives allows for a broader analysis of the trajectories of Islamic politics across the Muslim world. Through his emphasis on political economy and historical sociology in his analysis, Hadiz has successfully demonstrated how the outcomes of the trajectory of Islamic politics in the Muslim world are closely connected to the ability of Islamist actors to represent and mobilize the marginalized ummah in the pursuit of power and resources.

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