



From Street Level Protesters to Strategic Electoral Players

The Evolution of Islamist Movements in Yogyakarta and Solo

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Executive Summary

This report explores the evolving role of Islamist movements in Yogyakarta and Solo, two of Java's most symbolic cities, across Indonesia's 2014, 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. It shows how movements once defined by ideological rigidity and oppositional postures have grown more pragmatic, politically engaged and influential in shaping voter dynamics. In the two cities, Islamists have moved beyond street-level protests – notably through the 212 Movement, the protest movement that briefly united diverse Islamist factions in opposition to President Jokowi following the blasphemy case against Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in late 2016 – to become strategic electoral actors embedded in local and national politics.

President Jokowi's selection of Ma'ruf Amin, then head of the Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI) and a 212 figure, as his running mate for the 2019 presidential elections disrupted the unity that the 212 Movement had fostered among Islamist groups. After 2019, Islamist groups recalibrated their strategies. In Yogyakarta, they shifted their focus to youth engagement through religious revivalism but with political undertones. In Solo, they embraced institutional moderation and electoral participation. Even Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki, once associated with hardline ideology and terrorism, has shifted course, with founder Abu Bakar Ba'asyir formally accepting Pancasila and endorsing democratic participation. The formal disbandment of the Jemaah Islamiyah militant group in 2024 further underscored this ideological recalibration.

By the 2024 elections, Islamist movements had transitioned into effective political players. In Solo, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), supported by Islamist networks, made major electoral gains, breaking the long-standing dominance of Jokowi's secular-nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) by backing the presidential candidacy of Anies Baswedan–Muhaimin Iskandar, widely perceived as aligned with Islamic interests. In Yogyakarta, youth movements like Muslim United, while not overtly political, played a quiet role in shaping attitudes and turnout, subtly influencing the electoral landscape.

In short, Islamist actors in Yogyakarta and Solo are no longer fringe participants in Indonesian politics. Their ideological shifts, strategic innovations and expanding influence demand nuanced engagement, as this paper notes.

Introduction

Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, represents a complex amalgamation of religious, cultural and political identities. Since transitioning from authoritarian rule in 1998, Indonesian democracy has continuously evolved, offering an environment for diverse political movements, including Islamist groups, to engage actively and influence the political landscape. The relationship between Islam, politics and society has shaped public discourse, electoral strategies and policymaking at local and national levels. Understanding the dynamics of Islamist mobilisation, primarily through recent presidential election cycles, is essential to understanding current political trends and future trajectories in Indonesia.¹

This policy report focuses on the crucial role that Islamist movements have played in two strategically important cities – Yogyakarta and Solo. It emphasises their historical, cultural and political uniqueness, shedding light on how these factors shape the dynamics within these cities. Yogyakarta, recognised as a centre of culture and education, has emerged as an essential location for fresh Islamist movements, particularly among younger people influenced by the global trend of religious revitalisation or *hijrah* (a word referring to Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in AD 622 that is used today to mean migration towards a more devout form of Islam). Conversely, Solo holds historical importance as a political stronghold for President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and as a battleground for the clash between secular-nationalist and Islamist ideologies.²

The period under study (the 2014, 2019 and 2024 presidential elections) is crucial as it corresponds directly with Jokowi's presidency, which witnessed heightened political polarisation around religious identities and ideologies. Jokowi, seen initially as a symbol of secular-nationalist politics grounded in developmentalism, faced significant opposition from Islamist factions who portrayed him as indifferent or antagonistic to Islamic interests. This polarisation became especially pronounced during the 2019 elections, influenced significantly by the 212 Movement, which initially mobilised around accusations of blasphemy against then Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama in late 2016 but later evolved into broader political opposition against Jokowi himself.³

Islamist groups and movements are highly diverse in Indonesia, ranging from mainstream political actors advocating Islamic values within democratic frameworks, such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), to radical groups historically associated with violence or rejection of democracy, such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jamaah Anshar at-Tauhid (JAT).⁴ Recent developments, however, illustrate a shift among certain radical factions towards greater acceptance of democratic practices.

¹ Muhammad Wildan, "Mapping Radical Islam: A Study of the Proliferation of Radical Islam in Solo, Central Java," in Martin van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the 'Conservative Turn'* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013), 213.

² "Jokowi Lakukan Peletakan Batu Pertama Ponpes MTA di Karanganyar," *Jawa Pos*, 15 July 2018, <https://www.jawapos.com/berita-sekitar-anda/0167590/jokowi-lakukan-peletakan-batu-pertama-ponpes-mta-di-karanganyar>.

³ "Puluhan Ribu Umat Muslim di Solo Siap Ikut Aksi 212 di Jakarta," *Republika*, 14 November 2016, <https://news.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/daerah/16/11/28/ohce8o354-puluhan-ribu-umat-muslim-di-solo-siap-ikut-aksi-212-di-jakarta>.

⁴ Muhammad Wildan, "Mapping Radical Islam".

Additionally, Islamist movements have increasingly targeted urban youth, connecting religious identity with entrepreneurial aspirations, notably through *hijrah* movements that advocate both religious devoutness and economic self-reliance. Events like “Muslim United” in Yogyakarta embody these new strategies, appealing directly to younger generations through popular cultural and key religious icons, social media outreach and innovative branding.⁵

This report aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how these Islamist movements interact with democratic processes, adapt to changing political circumstances and influence electoral outcomes. Through this analysis, policymakers can gain nuanced insights into the ongoing transformations of political Islam in Indonesia and devise inclusive strategies for democratic resilience and social cohesion by closely examining key figures, specific events and strategic adaptations across election cycles.

Islamism in Yogyakarta: Fusion, Fragmentation and the Muslim United Movement

Yogyakarta, historically recognised as a centre of Javanese culture and education, has recently emerged as an influential hub for Islamist activism, particularly among the youth. The dynamics of political Islam here reveal a compelling mix of ideological fragmentation and tactical unity, highlighted notably during the emergence of Muslim United, a movement that fuses religious revivalism with entrepreneurial ambition. Positioned as both a spiritual platform and a socio-economic network, Muslim United appeals to young Muslims by linking piety with business success, using branding strategies, merchandise, seminars and social media to promote Islamic identity through economic empowerment.

The phenomenon of *hijrah* has significantly shaped Islamist trends in Yogyakarta. Driven by charismatic young preachers such as Hanan Attaki and Felix Siau, the *hijrah* movement appeals particularly to urban Muslim youth, promoting a holistic Islamic identity intertwined with entrepreneurial aspirations. Organisations such as Shift Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah and Yuk Ngaji have effectively used social media and urban da’wah (general preaching of Islamic values and principles) to mobilise young followers. The Muslim United movement, initiated in 2017 by entrepreneur Nanang Syaiforrozi,⁶ epitomises the fusion of religious revivalism and entrepreneurial spirit in what are

⁵ "Dilarang Keraton Yogyakarta, Acara Muslim United Tetap Digelar," *Tempo*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.tempo.co/politik/dilarang-keraton-yogyakarta-acara-muslim-united-tetap-digelar--697016>.

⁶ Nanang is a young entrepreneur involved in fashion franchises (notably bags under the label Rumah Warna). Nanang's involvement in the da'wah movement in Yogyakarta is linked to his background as a young businessman interested in the massive *hijrah* movement prevalent in cities like Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bandung. Initially, Nanang sought *hijrah* communities aligned with his aspirations. As young entrepreneurs began embracing the concept of “spiritual companies” in 2012 – promoting Islamic entrepreneurship through activities like dhuha prayer (a voluntary prayer performed after the sun has risen but before noon prayers and believed to open up doors of sustenance and provide a feeling of sufficiency and freedom from difficulties), charity, and Qur'an recitation – Nanang actively participated in entrepreneurship seminars to inspire youth to become righteous business leaders.

termed as “spiritual companies”.⁷ Originally established under the Indonesian Muslim Ukhuwwah Foundation, the movement quickly became influential due to its innovative branding. The movement engaged prominent religious figures such as Ustaz Abdus Shomad, Adi Hidayat and Salim A. Fillah. The deliberate allusion to global branding strategies, reminiscent of the football club Manchester United, highlights the movement’s targeted outreach strategy for youth engagement.

An event known as “Muslim United: Sedulur Saklawase”, organised in October 2019, was designed to symbolise Islamist unity post-212 Movement and was strategically intended as a space to consolidate Islamist groups. It attracted thousands of young Muslims through activities that combined religious sermons, entrepreneurship seminars and exhibitions. However, the event encountered significant political resistance from traditional local authorities. The decision by Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, leader of the historic Yogyakarta Sultanate and governor of the modern Yogyakarta Special Region, to deny permission for the event at the culturally significant Gedhe Kauman Mosque underscored the broader tension between local cultural authorities and emerging Islamist activism.

Moreover, the Palace’s rejection, informed by concerns over potential unrest and national polarisation post-212 Movement, signifies the complexity of Islamist activism within Indonesia’s political landscape. Although Muslim United leaders publicly positioned their initiative as apolitical and purely religious, their invitations to prominent figures linked to politically charged Islamist movements like GNPf Ulama and Alumni Presidium 212 indicated political undertones.⁸

Local and national political tensions profoundly impacted Yogyakarta’s Islamist dynamics. Following Jokowi’s re-election as president alongside Kyai Ma’ruf Amin, a prominent religious figure closely associated with the 212 Movement, Islamist groups in Yogyakarta faced strategic challenges in maintaining their political narratives. The perceived alliance between Jokowi and a key Islamic figure complicated the Islamist narrative, prompting fragmentation and a reorientation towards localised community movements such as those centred on the Jogokaryan Mosque and the Teras Dakwah Islamic foundation.⁹

Ultimately, Yogyakarta’s Islamist groups display significant adaptability, using religious revivalism and entrepreneurial spirit to remain politically relevant amid shifting national politics.

⁷ “Spiritual company” is the tagline for the company model that applies dhuha prayers, alms, and others when managing employees. It was first popularised by Ustaz Yusuf Mansur, famous for the Movement of alms and dhuha prayers as a formula for becoming wealthy and successful.

⁸ “Tokoh GNPf, FPI dan PA 212 Tempati Posisi Strategis di BPN Prabowo-Sandiaga,” *Kompas*, 28 September 2018, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/09/28/12315231/tokoh-gnpf-fpi-dan-pa-212-tempati-posisi-strategis-di-bpn-prabowo-sandiaga>.

⁹ Yayasan Teras Dakwah Indonesia, active since 2011 in Yogyakarta, is a community-based Islamic foundation committed to spreading goodness and serving others with the belief that the best people are those most beneficial to others.

Solo: Islamist Dynamics in Jokowi's Heartland

Solo, also known as Surakarta, holds symbolic and strategic significance in Indonesia's political landscape. As President Jokowi's hometown and the city where he first rose to political prominence as mayor, Solo presents a unique case study for understanding the complex relationship between Islamist movements and secular-nationalist politics.

Historically, Solo has been characterised by a dual identity: it is simultaneously a bastion of *abangan* Muslims (nominal Muslims or cultural Muslims who practise Islam in a syncretic manner) and a key hub for various Islamist groups. This paradoxical coexistence makes Solo a fascinating microcosm for studying the dynamics of Islamist mobilisation and political participation within the broader Indonesian context.

Islamist movements in Solo are highly diverse, ranging from relatively moderate organisations that seek to influence politics through democratic means to radical groups that traditionally advocated a fundamental rejection of the Indonesian state and democracy itself. Prominent among these groups are the Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki, Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA), Darusy Syahadah and the Syariah Board of the City of Surakarta (DSKS), each representing different ideological currents and strategic choices.

Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki, founded in 1972 by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, became internationally known for its radical Islamist teachings and links to terrorist networks such as JI. Despite its extremist reputation, Pesantren Al-Mukmin's stance towards elections has evolved significantly. Although founder Abu Bakar Ba'asyir historically maintained ambivalence towards democratic processes, in recent developments – particularly during the 2024 elections – Ba'asyir actively encouraged participation, endorsing candidates seen as favourable to Islamic interests. In a politically significant step, approximately 1,200 former JI members formally disbanded the organisation in December 2024, pledging allegiance to the Indonesian state and explicitly renouncing their past extremist ideologies.¹⁰ This event culminated in extensive rehabilitation and reintegration efforts supported by state and civil society groups, aiming at deradicalisation and social reintegration. Ba'asyir's ideological shift, notably his acceptance of Pancasila and symbolic involvement in national events, marked a profound transformation within Solo's radical Islamist spectrum. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and members of the pesantren notably back candidates perceived as aligned with Islamic interests, such as Anies Baswedan.

Darusy Syahadah, another influential Islamist educational institution in Solo, has similarly undergone notable changes. Established in 1994 by alumni of Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki, it traditionally advocated a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and was sceptical of secular governance. By 2018, however, it had begun to adopt a more pragmatic approach, exhibiting a notable moderation in its stance towards the state and democratic processes. Under the leadership of its director, Mustaqim, Darusy Syahadah publicly encouraged electoral participation, stressing the importance of peaceful and fair elections, and emphasised the neutrality and non-partisanship of

¹⁰ "Pembubaran Jamaah Islamiyah di Solo," *Tempo*, 22 December 2024, <https://www.tempo.co/hukum/pembubaran-jamaah-islamiyah-di-solo-ribuan-eks-anggota-deklarasi-kembali-ke-nkri-1184570>.

Islamic educators. Such statements indicate a significant strategic shift, reflecting broader ideological realignments within the radical Islamist milieu of Solo.¹¹

Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an (MTA), established in 1972 and notably influential under Ahmad Sukino, represents a distinct combination of Islamist activism and political pragmatism. Historically, MTA positioned itself as politically neutral, forbidding its members from direct involvement in politics. Although it remains formally non-partisan, the organisation has engaged with politics indirectly, frequently hosting prominent political figures and supporting candidates aligned with its Islamic vision.¹² Navigating the shifting political landscape throughout the 2014, 2019 and 2024 electoral cycles, it gradually began to strategically support selected political candidates and Islamic parties. MTA's shifting stance has attracted the attention of national leaders such as Presidents Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jokowi.

Initially supportive of Islamic parties like the National Mandate Party (PAN) and PKS, MTA was cautious about President Jokowi due to his ties to the secular-nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). But by 2024, as MTA's political engagement intensified, it had evolved to openly support candidates backed by Jokowi, a shift influenced by his outreach, including during the inauguration of MTA's *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in 2018, and a recognition of the changing political environment.

The Syariah Board of the City of Surakarta (Dewan Syariah Kota Suryakarta, DSKS), established in 2013, exemplifies another critical facet of Islamist activism in Solo. Initially aiming to institutionalise Islamic *shari'a* locally, DSKS drew support from various religious organisations, including the Indonesian Council of Ulema (MUI) and influential Islamic leaders. Despite its initial scepticism of democracy, DSKS, under Muinuddinillah Basri's leadership, endorsed election participation as a pragmatic means to protect Muslim interests. Nonetheless, ideological diversity within DSKS remained evident, with some factions maintaining reservations about democratic participation.

The intersection of these Islamist currents significantly shaped electoral politics in Solo. Anti-communist sentiment, particularly the past fear of a resurgent Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), served as a decisive mobilising factor for Islamist participation in elections, notably boosting support for candidates like Prabowo Subianto, who was viewed as aligned with Muslim interests. Meanwhile, local elections (Pilkada) reflected persistent tensions between Islamists and secular-nationalist parties, particularly the PDI-P, Jokowi's political home. Solo's 2020 mayoral election notably highlighted these tensions when Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, secured victory amid declining voter participation and increased invalid ballots, indicative of underlying Islamist dissatisfaction and strategic abstentions.¹³

¹¹ "Pemilu 2019, Ini Seruan Ustaz Mustaqim Pengasuh Ponpes Darusy Syahadah Boyolali," *Fokus Jateng*, 2 December 2018, <https://www.fokusjateng.com/2018/12/02/pemilu-2019-ini-seruan-ustaz-mustaqim-pengasuh-ponpes-darusy-syahadah-boyolali-kepada-masyarakat>.

¹² "Jokowi Lakukan Peletakan Batu Pertama Ponpes MTA di Karanganyar".

¹³ "5 Fakta Pilkada Solo, Gibran Menang Partisipasi Turun, Suara Tidak Sah Naik," *Detik*, 17 December 2020, <https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-tengah/d-5298395/5-fakta-pilkada-solo-gibran-menang-partisipasi-turun-suara-tidak-sah-naik>.

The 2024 elections further underscored the shifting Islamist political dynamics in Solo as anti-Jokowi sentiment surged, breaking the long-standing electoral dominance of the PDI-P. Islamist-backed candidates and parties such as PKS gained substantial electoral ground, reflecting broader ideological polarisation at the national level. PKS's considerable increase in vote share in Solo, directly linked to its endorsement of the Anies Baswedan–Muhaimin Iskandar (AMIN) presidential ticket, marked a significant shift in local electoral dynamics, reinforcing the continued influence and adaptability of Islamist movements in shaping electoral outcomes.¹⁴

Islamists and the 212 Movement

The 212 Movement, also known as Aksi Bela Islam, marked a significant turning point for Islamist mobilisation in Indonesia. Initially triggered by accusations of blasphemy against then Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in late 2016, the movement swiftly transformed from a localised religious protest into a national phenomenon, reshaping political Islam's trajectory in the country.¹⁵

Ahok's controversial remarks on Qur'anic interpretation became a focal point around which Islamist groups unified, temporarily setting aside ideological differences to mobilise unprecedented mass protests in Jakarta. This unity was particularly evident in Yogyakarta and Solo, where tens of thousands participated in solidarity demonstrations facilitated by influential Islamist platforms such as the DSKS and MTA. In Solo alone, around 2,500 individuals participated in the 2017 reunion of the 212 Movement in Jakarta, signalling its sustained resonance.¹⁶

A defining feature of the 212 Movement was its remarkable capacity for mass mobilisation, heavily utilising social media to galvanise support. In Yogyakarta, prominent Islamist figures such as Ustaz Abdus Shomad and Felix Siauww became instrumental in extending the movement's influence through online platforms and urban religious networks. Similarly, Solo's influential Islamic educational institutions, such as Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki, Al-Islam Gumuk, and Darusy Syahadah, facilitated substantial local engagement and provided ideological backing.

The political implications of the 212 Movement extended far beyond the initial blasphemy controversy. Islamists leveraged the movement's momentum to frame President Jokowi as unsympathetic or even hostile towards Islamic interests, an effort that significantly influenced the 2019 presidential elections. However, as a strategist, Jokowi selected Kyai Ma'ruf Amin – former chairman of the MUI and a central figure in the 212 Movement initially – as his vice-presidential candidate, further complicating Islamist narratives and ultimately diffusing some opposition.

Following the 2019 elections, Islamist groups encountered strategic challenges due to this political realignment. Many Islamist factions, previously united under the anti-Ahok sentiment, began to retreat into more localised activities or adapt their

¹⁴ "Efek Dukung AMIN, Perolehan Suara PKS Solo pada Pemilu 2024 Naik Drastis," *Joglosemar News*, 16 February 2024, <https://joglosemarnews.com/2024/02/efek-dukung-amin-perolehan-suara-pks-solo-pada-pemilu-2024-naik-drastis>.

¹⁵ "Puluhan Ribu Umat Muslim di Solo Siap Ikut Aksi 212 di Jakarta".

¹⁶ "2,500 Peserta Reuni 212 Berangkat dari Solo," *Jawa Pos*, 1 December 2017, <https://www.jawapos.com/berita-sekitar-anda/01107507/2500-peserta-reuni-212-berangkat-dari-solo>.

strategies, shifting away from mass mobilisation to community-based religious activities and entrepreneurial initiatives. In Yogyakarta, movements like Muslim United emerged to maintain momentum by integrating religious revivalism with entrepreneurial spirit and youth engagement.

However, fragmentation became more apparent as the broader political context evolved. In Solo, prominent Islamist groups like DSKS, MTA, and Pesantren Al-Mukmin Ngruki exhibited varying stances towards continued political participation, reflecting ideological divergences within the Islamist spectrum. Some factions moderated their positions, notably evidenced by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's acceptance of Pancasila in 2022 and the formal dissolution of JI in 2024, signifying a critical ideological shift within radical circles.¹⁷

Overall, the 212 Movement exemplifies how Islamist movements can dynamically interact with political processes, influencing electoral outcomes and shaping broader societal discourse. Policymakers must recognise the complexity and adaptability of these movements, engaging constructively with moderate elements to promote inclusive politics while addressing the root causes of radicalisation and polarisation.

Election Outcomes and Islamist Influence

The presidential elections of 2014, 2019 and particularly 2024 highlighted the significant and evolving influence of Islamist movements within Indonesian electoral politics. Initially serving primarily as opposition platforms against secular-nationalist figures like Jokowi, Islamist groups transitioned into increasingly sophisticated electoral actors, significantly shaping voter dynamics in Yogyakarta and Solo.

In the 2014 and 2019 elections, Islamist mobilisation in Solo primarily benefited candidates running against Jokowi, notably Prabowo Subianto. Islamist rhetoric emphasising anti-communist sentiments and framing Jokowi as unsympathetic towards Islamic interests resonated strongly among religiously conservative voters. For instance, the intense anti-Ahok mobilisation from the 212 Movement directly translated into anti-Jokowi sentiment, shaping voter attitudes and participation patterns, including increased abstentions or invalidated votes in Jokowi's home region during local elections.¹⁸

However, the 2024 elections marked a significant shift as Islamist groups adapted to a new political landscape. In Solo, parties explicitly aligned with Islamist movements, notably the PKS, significantly increased their vote shares by explicitly endorsing the Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar ticket. This support broke decades of dominance by Jokowi's PDI-P in his political stronghold, highlighting the significant electoral impact of strategic Islamist mobilisation.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Ba'asyir Nyoblos Pertama di Sukoharjo," *Detik*, 14 February 2024, <https://www.detik.com/jateng/berita/d-7192265/baasyir-nyoblos-pertama-di-sukoharjo-kita-pilih-yang-ngerti-islam>; "Pembubaran Jamaah Islamiyah di Solo," *Tempo*, 22 December 2024, <https://www.tempo.co/hukum/pembubaran-jamaah-islamiyah-di-solo-ribuan-eks-anggota-deklarasi-kembali-ke-nkri-1184570>.

¹⁸ "5 Fakta Pilkada Solo, Gibran Menang Partisipasi Turun, Suara Tidak Sah Naik".

¹⁹ "Efek Dukung AMIN, Perolehan Suara PKS Solo pada Pemilu 2024 Naik Drastis".

Additionally, as mentioned above, the pragmatic shifts within Islamist organisations such as MTA and Darusy Syahadah played critical roles in influencing local electoral dynamics. In Yogyakarta, electoral outcomes were similarly influenced by Islamist mobilisation, mainly through innovative youth-targeted movements such as Muslim United. It is worth reiterating that although Muslim United publicly positioned itself as non-political, the involvement of politically influential Islamist figures and connections to the broader Islamist political network implicitly guided youth participation in the 2024 elections, subtly shaping electoral dynamics within urban Yogyakarta.²⁰

These election outcomes reveal a critical transition in Islamist political engagement – from opposition-focused mobilisation towards strategic electoral participation. The adaptability and pragmatism displayed by Islamist groups reflect their deepening sophistication as political actors, capable of profoundly influencing electoral landscapes, voter preferences, and, ultimately, national political outcomes. Policymakers must, therefore, recognise and strategically engage with these evolving dynamics to foster democratic resilience and political stability.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Islamist dynamics in Yogyakarta and Solo through the presidential elections of 2014, 2019 and 2024 reflects significant transformations within the broader political Islam landscape in Indonesia. Demonstrating considerable ideological adaptability and strategic pragmatism, Islamist groups in these two cities have actively shaped electoral outcomes and broader societal discourse, reflecting complex interplays of religious identity, political interests and socio-economic factors.

The evolving stances of historically radical groups, such as JI and institutions like Darusy Syahadah, towards democratic participation illustrate a critical moderation trend within Indonesian Islamism. At the same time, movements like Muslim United demonstrate innovative engagement strategies targeting youth and entrepreneurial sectors, emphasising a diversified Islamist landscape responsive to changing socio-political contexts.

Given these dynamics, policymakers may wish to consider the following strategic moves:

1. **Expansion of Constructive Engagement with Moderate Islamists.** Given the diversity among Islamist movements, recognising the more moderate segment among them as legitimate democratic stakeholders is essential. Continuing to engage constructively with such groups through dialogue and collaborative initiatives can reinforce democratic values and mitigate polarisation.
2. **Youth and Entrepreneurship Initiatives.** Active support for entrepreneurial initiatives that are intertwined with Islamic values would be a constructive way of engaging young urban Muslims. Programmes that blend economic

²⁰ "Dilarang Keraton Yogyakarta, Acara Muslim United Tetap Digelar," *Tempo*, 11 October 2019, <https://www.tempo.co/politik/dilarang-keraton-yogyakarta-acara-muslim-united-tetap-digelar--697016>.

empowerment with moderate religious education can serve as effective counter-narratives to radicalisation and extremism.

3. **Strengthening Democratic Institutions.** Investing in robust democratic institutions that accommodate diverse ideological expressions would give legitimate outlets to the moderates in the Islamist spectrum, channelling them away from disruptive methods of venting their frustrations. Transparent, inclusive electoral processes and civic education programmes emphasising democratic values and pluralism can reduce ideological polarisation and promote political stability.
4. **Continued Deradicalisation and Reintegration Efforts.** Sustaining and enhancing deradicalisation programmes would ensure the continued ideological transformation of former radical groups and support their reintegration into society. Comprehensive, community-based approaches involving civil society, religious leaders and government agencies would help in such reintegration efforts.
5. **Combating Disinformation.** Developing strategies to effectively counter religiously motivated disinformation is critical. Collaboration between government, civil society, religious leaders and digital platforms is crucial for promoting accurate information and reducing misinformation-generated polarisation.

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