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FROM ORGANIZATION TO DIGITAL NETWORK: The Resilience of Tahriri Activism in the Aftermath of Hizbut Tahrir's Ban in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines the survival and revival strategies of Hizbut Tahrir, affiliated activism in Indonesia following the state dissolution of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in 2017. Challenging the assumption that the banning of Islamist organizations necessarily leads to organizational and ideological decline, the article argues that HTI's dissolution prompted a strategic reconfiguration of Tahriri activism. Drawing on resource mobilization theory, the study analyzes how former HTI activists reorganized informal networks, symbolic resources, and digital media to sustain the movement under increasingly restrictive political conditions. Based on digital ethnography and content analysis of Instagram and YouTube platforms between 2017 and 2020, the article focuses on three key cases: Felix Siauw, Yuk Ngaji, and Khilafah Channel. The findings show a shift from formal organizational structures to more fluid, decentralized, and digitally oriented forms of activism. At the discursive level, key ideological concepts such as democracy, Pancasila, and the caliphate are pragmatically rearticulated in non-confrontational ways, less as state-oriented political projects than as moral and cultural frameworks for Muslim

everyday life. This adaptation reflects a strategic response to state repression rather than a substantive ideological transformation.

[Artikel ini mengkaji strategi bertahan dan bangkit kembali Hizbut Tahrir, serta aktivitas afiliasinya di Indonesia, setelah pembubaran Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) oleh negara pada tahun 2017 silam. Menantang asumsi bahwa pembubaran organisasi Islamis secara otomatis menyebabkan kemunduran organisasi dan ideologi, artikel ini berargumen bahwa pembubaran HTI memicu rekonfigurasi strategis aktivitas Tahriri. Dengan menggunakan teori mobilisasi sumber daya, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana mantan aktivis HTI mereorganisasi jaringan informal, sumber daya simbolik, dan media digital untuk mempertahankan keberlangsungan gerakan di tengah kondisi politik yang semakin represif. Berdasarkan etnografi digital dan analisis konten terhadap platform Instagram dan YouTube pada periode 2017–2020, artikel ini memfokuskan kajian pada tiga kasus utama: Felix Siauw, Yuk Ngaji, dan Khilafah Channel. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran dari struktur organisasi formal menuju bentuk-bentuk aktivisme yang lebih cair, terdesentralisasi, dan berorientasi digital. Pada level diskursif, konsep-konsep ideologis kunci seperti demokrasi, Pancasila, dan khilafah direartikulasi secara pragmatis dalam cara-cara yang non-konfrontatif, tidak lagi semata sebagai proyek politik kenegaraan, melainkan sebagai kerangka moral dan kultural bagi kehidupan sehari-hari Muslim. Adaptasi ini mencerminkan respons strategis terhadap represi negara, alih-alih menunjukkan transformasi ideologis yang substantif.]

Keywords: *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Islamism, Social Movements, Post-Dissolution Activism*

Introduction

On July 19, 2017, the Indonesian government officially declared Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) a banned organization. According to the coordinating minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, Wiranto, the decision rested on three primary considerations. First, HTI as a legal entity was deemed insufficiently aligned with Indonesia's national goals. Second, it was suspected of engaging in activities that contravened the values of Pancasila—i.e., the state's philosophical foundation—and the 1945 Constitution. Third, the organization's activities were viewed as

disruptive to public order and as posing a threat to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).[1] The dissolution of HTI was enacted through Government Regulation (Perppu) No. 2/2017 on Mass Organizations.[2]

As a transnational Islamist movement that rejects Western political models, democracy, pluralism, and secularism, Hizbut Tahrir (HT) demonstrates differing organizational dynamics when operating in authoritarian versus democratic contexts. Scholars have noted that HT struggles to survive in authoritarian states, especially in the Middle East, where state security apparatuses are deeply repressive. In Lebanon, for instance, HT failed to expand not only due to authoritarian constraints but also because of entrenched sectarian politics and competition from more established local Islamist groups.[3] In Egypt, the government's success in suppressing HT was reinforced by the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose extensive social networks and more adaptive political strategies overshadowed HT's efforts.[4] In Turkey, HT has faced persistent repression from both secular governments and the AKP administration, as the state successfully incorporated various expressions of Islamism into formal political institutions—thereby narrowing the space for HT's articulation of its caliphate agenda.[5]

Unlike authoritarian contexts, most research shows that HT is generally better able to survive—and even flourish—in democratic

[1] "HTI Resmi Dibubarkan Pemerintah - Kompas.Com," accessed on September 7, 2019, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/07/19/10180761/hti-resmi-dibubarkan-pemerintah?page=all..

[2] "Pembubaran HTI Pakai Perpu Ormas, Kemenkumham Uraikan Prosedurnya," accessed on August 29, 2021, https://nasional.tempo.co/read/892592/pembubaran-hti-pakai-perpu-ormas-kemenkumham-uraikan-prosedurnya/full&view=ok

[3] Mohamad Khalil Gharib, "Hizbut-Tahrir in Lebanon and the Arab World: History, Ideology and Praxis," *MA Thesis* (Lebanese American University, 2014).

[4] Ihsan Yilmaz, "The Varied Performance of Hizb Ut-Tahrir: Success in Britain and Uzbekistan and Stalemate in Egypt and Turkey," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 4 (2010): 501–517.

[5] *Ibid.*

settings. This is not because democratic states support the movement, but because these environments provide civil liberties, legal protections for religious organizations, and open public spheres that enable ideological mobilization. In Malaysia, HT operates relatively openly because the government does not view it as a direct threat, partly due to its non-violent approach. The country's loose federal structure and the availability of campus *daʿwah* (preaching) networks further contribute to the movement's resilience.[6] In Uzbekistan, although the government applies severe repression, HT grows as a significant underground movement. Its expansion was fueled by poor socio-economic conditions and widespread public distrust of the government, making its presence less a sign of institutional success, but rather, more an expression of silent resistance to an authoritarian rule.[7]

In the United Kingdom, HT thrives under an open democratic framework, weak regulations on non-violent organizations, and the absence of a state-endorsed theology. These conditions allowed the group to propagate its caliphate vision without being regarded as an immediate security threat.[8] Meanwhile, in Indonesia HT's long-standing presence was shaped by a combination of factors: its non-violent stance;[9] its ability to capitalize on the post-*Reformasi* democratic landscape; its extensive networks with Islamic organizations and Muslim professionals;[10] and its appeal to young people searching for identity, certainty, career direction,

[6] Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia: The Emergence of a New Transnational Islamist Movement in Malaysia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2009): 91–110.

[7] Emmanuel Karagiannis, "Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb Ut-Tahrir Al-Islami," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 2 (2006): 261–280.

[8] Ihsan Yilmaz, "The Varied Performance of Hizb Ut-Tahrir: Success in Britain and Uzbekistan and Stalemate in Egypt and Turkey," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 4 (2010): 501–517.

[9] Ken Ward, "Non-Violent Extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia," Australian Journal of International Affairs 63, no. 2 (2009): 157–158.

[10] Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Political Islam: Identity, Ideology and Religio-Political Mobilization* (Routledge, 2018).

and guidance on marriage.[11] Thus, HT's varying degrees of success across countries are largely determined by the interplay between state repression, available political opportunity structures, and the movement's ability to adapt its propaganda strategies.

Departing from much of the existing literature, this study argues that in Indonesia—often considered the world's largest Muslim democracy—HTI ultimately failed to survive due to its formal dissolution by the state. Nevertheless, Tahriri activism has not vanished. Instead, activists have found new spaces and adopted alternative strategies to sustain their presence. Over time, they have reformulated their discourse to resonate with contemporary democratic and political developments. Some Tahriri actors have begun to articulate acceptance of Pancasila, democracy, a reframed concept of the "caliphate," and an increasingly strategic engagement with mainstream—or "secular"—media platforms.

This article examines the trajectory of Tahriri activism in the aftermath of HTI's dissolution. It investigates how the movement has evolved, why it continues to persist, and the strategies activists employ to maintain their presence. To answer these questions, the study analyzes Tahriri activists' online engagement, with particular attention to their use of Instagram and YouTube.

This study examines an Islamic social movement through the lens of resource mobilization theory. According to Charles Tilly, mobilization constitutes a key component of collective action: to achieve its objectives, a social movement must be able to acquire and effectively deploy available resources. These resources typically include human resources (such as members and supporters), social-organizational resources (both formal institutions and informal networks), and material resources (notably funding). Tilly further emphasizes that formal and informal networks are among the most crucial resources, as they link individuals to movement

[11] Ahmad Yazid, "Politik Hijrah Anak Muda di Komunitas Yuk Ngaji Yogyakarta" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2019), 154.

organizations and facilitate coordinated action.[12] In this context, the present study analyzes how Tahriri activists mobilized their resources following the disbandment of HTI in 2017 to continue pursuing their primary objective—the establishment of a caliphate.

The data for this study were collected from observations of Instagram and YouTube between July 2017 and December 2020. These platforms were selected due to their central importance within the movement's online ecosystem: Instagram functions as a primary channel to promote their activities in a more concise, but appealing manner, while YouTube serves as the main platform for the dissemination of their online content. Together, these platforms provide a comprehensive view of the discursive practices of Tahriri activists and the engagement of their online audiences. Prior to analysis, the study identified several HTI-affiliated social media accounts that remained active after the organization's dissolution. *Felix Siauw (@felixsiauw), Yuk Ngaji (@yukngajiid*), and *Khilafah Channel (@khilafahchannel)* were selected as key cases because they are highly representative of HTI's strategies for mobilization in responding to Indonesia's democratic system.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia: From a Closed to an Open Movement

The openness or closedness of a political system is one of the most decisive factors shaping the emergence of any movements.[13] In Indonesia, the rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in the 1980s cannot be separated from the political climate of the New Order, which was characterized by repression toward segments of the Muslim community. During this period, Suharto was against the political participation of Islamic groups, and simultaneously pushed them into underground

[12] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 52-90.

[13] Doug McAdam, John D McCarthy, and Meier Zald N, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23–40.

movements. For instance, he refused to rehabilitate Masyumi—the largest Islamic party prior to its dissolution by President Sukarno—and pressured its leading figures to refrain from political engagement.[14] The implementation of the Campus Life Normalization Policy (Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus, NKK) and the Student Coordinating Board (Badan Koordinasi Kemahasiswaan, BKK) further restricted student political activities. Suharto's antagonism toward political Islam inadvertently encouraged the growth of non-political, religiously oriented activities on university campuses in the 1980s, including those organized by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and campus-based study or *da'wah* circles. Among these was the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Council (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII), a movement active in campus mosques and initiated by several former Masyumi figures.[15]

In this broader context of constrained political expression, HT emerged in Indonesia through the initiative of Abdul Rahman al-Baghdadi, an HT activist who settled in Sydney, after fleeing the Lebanese regime because of his affiliation with the movement. His introduction to Indonesia began in 1978, when he met Abdullah bin Nuh, a prominent Indonesian Muslim scholar who was visiting his son in Australia.[16] Following this encounter, al-Baghdadi made several visits to Indonesia to maintain contact with Abdullah bin Nuh. In 1981, he decided to reside permanently at Abdullah bin Nuh's home, where he began laying the groundwork for the spread of HT's ideas in Indonesia.

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[14] Martin van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 10, no. 2 (2002): 117–154.

[15] Yusril Ihza Mahendra, "Combining Activism and Intellectualism: The Biography of Mohammad Natsir (1908-1993)," *Studia Islamika* 2, no. 1 (1995): 111-147.

[16] Abdullah Bin Nuh was a respected Muslim scholar who was popularly addressed as "Kiai" by the people of Bogor. He founded the al-Ghazali Islamic boarding school, whose students were largely drawn from the Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB). See Agus Salim, "The Rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (1982-2004) Its Political Opportunity Structure, Resource Mobilization, and Collective Action Frames" (2006): 40.

The development of Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia can be broadly divided into two phases: an initial covert phase and a subsequent open phase.

HTI's Clandestine Movement

In response to the repressive measure toward political Islam, various Islamic groups—including Hizbut Tahrir—chose to operate underground or develop new platforms to sustain their activities. Al-Baghdadi, the founder of HT in Indonesia, played a central role in coordinating the organization's clandestine operations. Recruitment and cadre development were carried out discreetly and informally to avoid state surveillance.[17] Throughout his activities, al-Baghdadi never openly disclosed his affiliation with HT. After several years of teaching, he began forming a small circle of carefully selected students—among them Saifuddin Asip and Muhammad Al-Khaththath—to whom he introduced the ideology of Hizbut Tahrir more deeply. Al-Baghdadi ensured that these students would not reveal the organization's existence, a precaution necessitated due to the political restrictions of the time.[18]

By the late 1980s, the Suharto regime's stance toward Islam began to shift. The government grew more accommodating toward Islamic groups and even invited them to participate in state structures. This change stemmed partly from Suharto's waning support within the Indonesian Armed Forces,[19] prompting him to seek legitimacy and broader support from Muslim communities—a trend that Hefner terms the emergence of

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[17] Informal networks are defined here as groups that are not officially affiliated with Hizb ut-Tahrir (HTI), but that reflect and promote its ideological framework. These networks do not use the name "Hizb ut-Tahrir" or its initials in their organizational titles. In contrast, formal networks are organizations officially affiliated with HTI and explicitly incorporate the name "Hizb ut-Tahrir" in their titles. See Nef, "Living for the Caliphate," 250.

[18] Mohamed Osman, "The Rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia: Identity, Ideology, and Religio-Political Mobilization, *Ph.D. Thesis*," 112.

[19] R. William Liddle, "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia: A Political Explanation," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 3 (1996): 613–634.

an "Islamic regime."[20] The regime initiated several measures, including the removal of the ban on the *hijab* (headscarf) in schools, the augmentation of state funding for Islamic educational institutions, and the expansion of Muslim-oriented programming on television. These moves are widely interpreted as part of Suharto's strategy to consolidate his political influence ahead of the 1997 general elections.[21] These initiatives can be understood as components of Suharto's calculated effort to secure continued control of the political system during the 1997 general election.[22]

According to Gabriel Ondetti, periods of reduced state repression can provide opportunities for groups to expand their membership.[23] Suharto's shift in political attitude created such an opportunity, prompting HTI to engage in large-scale recruitment through the Campus Da'wah Institute (Lembaga Dakwah Kampus, LDK). Alongside other Islamic groups—such as Jamaah Tabligh (JT)[24] and Jamaah Shalahuddin (JS)[25]—HTI activists initiated the formation of an umbrella organization for Muslim students in Indonesia, known as the Communication Forum for Campus Da'wah Institute (Forum Silaturahmi Lembaga Dakwah Kampus, FSLDK). Through this forum, HTI successfully recruited Ismail Yusanto, who at the time held a leadership position within Jamaah Shalahuddin in Yogyakarta. As Sidney Tarrow observes, the incorporation of important

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[20] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 19.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Liddle, "The Islamic Turn in Indonesia." 613-634.

[23] Gabriel Ondetti, "Repression, Opportunity, and Protest: Explaining the Takeoff of Brazil's Landless Movement," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 2 (2006): 62–64.

[24] Jamaat Tabligh is a transnational Islamic revivalist movement originating in India that seeks to promote adherence to Islamic practices modeled on those of the Prophet Muhammad.

[25] Jamaah Shalahuddin is a student activity organization at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta that operates in the field of Islamic propagation (*da'wah*) and serves as the university's Campus Da'wah Institute (LDK).

actors can substantially enhance a movement's capacity.[26] The recruitment of Ismail Yusanto—an individual with established authority within JS—clearly reflects such a strategy. Following its recruitment efforts through FSLDK, HTI established the Standard Chartered Islamic Study Group (Kelompok Studi Islam Standard Chartered, KSISC) at Wisma Standard Chartered in Jakarta. One of KSISC's most significant contributions was the publication of the Al-Islam Bulletin, which was widely distributed in mosques.

HTI's Open Movement

The fall of Suharto in 1998 marked the beginning of a democratic era and significantly relaxed political controls. This newly open political environment encouraged Muslims to express their religious identity more visibly in the public sphere, as evidenced by the increased use of the *hijab* (headscarf), *niqab* (face veil), and other forms of Muslim dress.[27]

Responding to this openness, HTI shifted from an underground organization to an overt public movement, a transition marked by its organization of the international caliphate conference at Istora Senayan in Jakarta. At this event, HTI publicly articulated its ideas for the first time, explicitly calling on the Indonesian people to establish a caliphate in Indonesia.[28] Following the conference, HTI expanded its public activities, including open recruitment, the publication and distribution of HTI literature, and campaigns advocating the implementation of Islamic *sharīʿa* in Indonesia. As Meyer and Staggenborg argue, an open

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[26] Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd edition. (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 95–157.

[27] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3 (2009): 229–250.

[28] Mohamed Osman, "The Rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia: Identity, Ideology, and Religio-Political Mobilization," *Ph.D. Thesis* (Australian National University, 2012), 125; Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf, "From Revolution to 'Refolution': A Study of Hizb al Tahrir, Its Changes and Trajectories in the Democratic Context of Indonesia (2000-2009)," *Ph.D. Thesis* (Victoria University of Wellington, 2011): 36.

political system significantly expands opportunities for a movement's collective mobilization.[29]

One of HTI's major initiatives during this period was to cultivate relationships with political elites and other Islamic organizations through visits, dialogue, and the introduction of caliphate-related ideas into these interactions. For instance, HTI representatives met with Indonesian Vice President Hamzah Haz to discuss the Anti-Terrorism Law and to promote caliphate-oriented ideas among candidates from Islamic political parties in the 2004 elections, with the expectation that these ideas would be advanced if those candidates were elected. These consistently anti-systemic strategies contributed significantly to HTI's expansion, as reflected in its growing membership base and increasing political visibility in Indonesia.[30] Drawing on Serge Moscovici's concept of "minority influence," a minority group that maintains a consistent and uncompromising position can compel the majority to engage and negotiate with them.[31]

Beyond cultivating ties with political actors, HTI also encouraged the formation of umbrella organizations for Muslim groups in Indonesia. According to Munabari, HTI—together with the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, MMI)—played a significant role in establishing the Islamic Community Forum (Forum Umat Islam, FUI). The forum aimed to formulate collective strategies to advance Muslim interests, promote public morality, foster unity among Muslims, and counter negative stereotypes of Islam.[32]

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[29] David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity," *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (1996): 1628–1660.

[30] Mohamed Osman, "The Rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia," 89–90.

[31] Serge Moscovici, *Perspectives on Minority Influence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9–48.

[32] Fahlesa Munabari, "Islamic Activism: The Socio-Political Dynamics of the Indonesian Forum of Islamic Society (FUI)," *Ph.D. Thesis* (The University of New

In 2006, HTI was officially registered as a mass organization, thereby indirectly gaining the legal capacity to conduct public activities and access state facilities.[33] This status was clearly reflected in the 2007 International Caliphate Conference held at Gelora Bung Karno Stadium—the largest stadium in Indonesia—which was attended not only by HTI members but also by representatives of other Islamic organizations, including the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The success of the conference underscored HTI's growing influence and public visibility in Indonesia. Moreover, it reinforced among its members the perception that HTI had expanded rapidly and had become part of a broader transnational Islamic movement.[34]

The Disbandment of HTI

The disbandment of HTI is closely linked to the 2016 Defending Islam (411 and 212) rallies in Jakarta, which highlighted growing tensions among the government, nationalist groups, liberal factions, and Islamist organizations. During these rallies, HTI emerged as one of the most vocal groups, delivering speeches challenging Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (then known as Ahok), who was accused of blasphemy.[35] Ahok's candidacy for re-election as Jakarta governor in 2017 prompted many Muslims to invoke the principle that "it is forbidden to elect an infidel leader." During his tenure, Ahok was perceived by segments of the Muslim community as an arrogant leader whose policies were harmful to Muslims. For instance, he restricted certain Islamic activities in public spaces, prohibited the slaughtering of sacrificial animals (*Qurban*) in mosque courtyards, and regulated public celebrations for Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.[36]

South Wales, 2016), 190.

[33] M Iqbal Ahnaf, "From Revolution to 'Refolution'," 37.

[34] Mohamed Osman, "The Rise of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia," 94–95.

[35] Hasbi Aswar, "Destructing the Islamist in Indonesia: Joko Widodo Policy and its Controversy," *International Journal of Malay-Nusantara Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 72.

[36] *Ibid.*

HTI and other groups leveraged emerging technology and social media to mobilize Muslims under the Defending Islam movement and disseminate their message opposing non-Muslim political leaders. Within five months, Ahok was convicted of committing blasphemy against Islam and then imprisoned. Additionally, he lost the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election to Anies Baswedan. The Jokowi administration perceived the growing influence of Islam in Indonesian politics as a potential threat. Framing the issue through an anti-Pancasila narrative, the government imposed strict measures against Islamic organizations. HTI became the first group to be disbanded, with authorities citing its ideology as incompatible with the state's philosophical foundation of Pancasila.

The disbandment of HTI in Indonesia in 2017 elicited responses from various stakeholders, particularly the government and Tahriri activists themselves. From the government's perspective, the disbandment fell within the state's authority to dissolve organizations deemed a threat to Pancasila. According to Najib Burhani and Ibnu Nadzir, the government's decision aimed to strengthen democracy and curb conservative movements. In this context, the enactment of the Perpu (Regulation in Lieu of Law) represented a legitimate exercise of state power to safeguard national unity and security.[37] Conversely, HTI viewed the disbandment as an expression of government authoritarianism. They argued that the authorities failed to provide evidence of HTI acting against Pancasila. The Tahriri activists emphasized that they had contributed positively to Indonesian society, including educating citizens to be practicing Muslims, discouraging drug use and promiscuity, and promoting Islamic conduct. Furthermore, they noted that their organization, which had existed for over 30 years, had never engaged in violence or posed a threat to

[37] See Ahmad Najib Burhani and Ibnu Nadzir, "The Banning of Hizbut Tahrir: The Threat to Democracy and Islamic Diversity in Indonesia?" *Islam and Cultural Diversity in Southeast Asia*, vol. 3, Eds. Ikuya Tokoro and Hisao Tomizawa, 15-35. (Tokyo: TUFS, 2021).

individuals, groups, ethnicities, or religious communities.[38]

The survival and influence of Islamic movements in Indonesia are closely tied to the prevailing political context. The disbandment of HTI during Jokowi's administration warrants careful examination, as his government appeared selectively tolerant—welcoming certain Muslim groups while suppressing conservative Islamic movements perceived as politically threatening. Ben Bland observes that Jokowi sought to legitimize and engage Muslim movements while simultaneously using state power to neutralize those deemed a threat.[39] Thomas Power reinforces this perspective, noting that in an effort to mitigate opposition from conservative Islamic groups, Jokowi strategically selected Ma'ruf Amin as his vice-presidential candidate. Ma'ruf Amin was selected due to his significant influence within Indonesia's Muslim community and his leadership role in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the country's largest Islamic organization, thereby strengthening Jokowi's political support among the Muslim majority.[40]

The question arises: why was HTI disbanded when it was not the only conservative Islamic movement active during the Jokowi era? For example, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) mobilized extensively and is well-known for its vigilante actions, which it justified as protecting Islam from perceived threats.[41] The FPI frequently conducted raids on bars, nightclubs, malls, and restaurants. In contrast, HTI never resorted

[38] Mohamad Susilo, "Tolak dibubarkan, HTI sebut langkah pemerintah 'tak punya dasar,'" *BBC News Indonesia*, 9 Mei 2017, accessed on Mei 18, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-39852533.

[39] Ben Bland, *Man of Contradictions: Joko Widodo and the Struggle to Remake Indonesia* (London: Penguin, 2021).

[40] Thomas P. Power, "Jokowi's Authoritarian Turn and Indonesia's Democratic Decline," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 54, no. 3 (2018): 307–338.

[41] Diego Fossati and Marcus Mietzner, "Analyzing Indonesia's Populist ElectorateDemographic, Ideological, and Attitudinal Trends," *Asian Survey* 59, no. 5 (2019): 769–794; Marcus Mietzner, "Fighting Illiberalism with Illiberalism: Islamist Populism and Democratic Deconsolidation in Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 91 (2018): 261–282.

to violence in its mobilization. Although FPI was eventually dissolved, it is HTI that was disbanded first. This study argues that the disbandment of HTI was primarily due to its ideological stance. HTI's ideology, which is explicitly anti-democratic, posed a clear challenge to the unity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Moreover, its minority status and non-violent activities made it politically easier for the government to dissolve the organization without facing significant resistance.[42]

By contrast, the FPI's disbandment was delayed, despite its disruptive actions, because its direct disbandment would bring more serious consequences for the government. Two key factors explain this. First, the FPI maintains a paramilitary wing, the Laskar Pembela Islam (LPI). This structure allows the FPI to deploy forces against perceived adversaries. Second, the FPI has cultivated strong affiliations with state actors. Since its establishment in 1998, it had received support from General Prabowo Subianto—now the President of Indonesia—who wielded considerable influence in Indonesia, and cultivated relationships with members of the Army who held political influence, enabling them to secure a degree of protection from the government. In addition, FPI also benefited from backing by state-affiliated religious institutions, such as Minister of Religious Affairs Said Agil Husain Al-Munawar—who supported *sharīʿah*-related initiatives—and the Indonesian Ulema Council, which occasionally adopted FPI proposals.[43] Thus, FPI's paramilitary capacity and institutional affiliations provided it with a level of resilience that HTI lacked.

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[42] Ken Ward, "Non-Violent Extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2009): 157–158.

[43] Gabriel Facal, "Islamic Defenders Front Militia (Front Pembela Islam) and Its Impact on Growing Religious Intolerance in Indonesia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 7–10.

Movement Flexibility as a Survival Strategy for Tahriri Activists

Following the disbandment of HTI, Tahriri activists adapted by transforming their movement into a more fluid and decentralized form, aligned with the democratic context and prevailing political system. Despite the loss of a formal organizational identity, they were able to survive and continue their activities. The key factor enabling their resilience was flexibility, which allowed them to adjust their strategies and modes of mobilization. This adaptability is rooted in their long experience of navigating the Indonesian political landscape, particularly before and during the early periods following the 1998 Reform era.

Following the Reform era, HTI shifted its mode of mobilization toward a more open and public orientation. Unlike earlier rigid forms of mobilization, young HTI activists in this period employed economic logic to disseminate their ideas to the public. This shift was influenced by global capitalism, which encouraged them to reach broader audiences through more appealing strategies.[44] During this era, its youth activists began to articulate their ideology in ways that were closely intertwined with neoliberal rationalities. Here, neoliberalism refers to a framework emphasizing productivity, efficiency, and self-discipline. HTI's younger cadres conceptualized religion through market logic, mobilizing Islamic values as tools for achieving financial success, academic excellence, and organizational efficiency, while simultaneously promoting their vision of a better Islamic society. This phenomenon corresponds with what Sarah Tobin terms "neoliberal piety." Drawing on David Harvey, Tobin argues that neoliberalism is closely associated with ideas of social and individual well-being, best realized through private property rights, free markets, and free trade.[45] Piety and neoliberalism converge in that both generate a sense of scarcity and an aspiration for greater gain. The form of neoliberal piety cultivated by HTI activists compels individuals to strive

[44] Claudia Nef, "Living for the Caliphate," 275.

[45] Sarah A. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan* (New Yrok: Cornell University Press, 2016), 5.

relentlessly for material profit and divine blessings, while also seeking salvation from hellfire.[46]

For instance, young HTI activists have called on the public to reject Western products—such as popcorn or McDonald's—and instead prioritize local goods. They argue that preferring Western products over local ones reflects a symbolic preference for the West over Islam. Another example is HTI's fusion of neoliberal discourse with anti-Zionist rhetoric. HTI frames Islamic ideology as fundamentally incompatible with the West, frequently linking neoliberalism, democracy, Western power, and the United States to the suffering of Muslims in Palestine, which they associate with Israeli support. In 2009, HTI distributed pamphlets urging the boycott of Western brands such as Danone, Nokia, Nestlé, and others, claiming that these companies supported international Zionist interests. These pamphlets, often bearing the headline "Save Palestine,"[47] were circulated at university campuses and in mosques. HTI also organized fundraising campaigns—collecting money, gold, and even mobile phones—for Hamas, accompanied by emotionally charged imagery of suffering Palestinian children. Such rhetoric was not limited to public spaces but was also disseminated through HTI-affiliated magazines and books. According to HTI discourse, consuming Western products signifies a failure to cultivate proper Islamic morality.[48] Together, these examples demonstrate how "neoliberal piety" operates as a disciplinary force, shaping individual behavior by prescribing what to consume, where to shop, and how to align everyday economic choices with religious identity. This market-oriented form of mobilization has enabled HTI to adapt flexibly to changing political conditions and to attract significant support, particularly among young Indonesians.

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[46] Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec, *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 138

[47] Claudia Nef, "Living for the Caliphate," 191-195.

[48] Claudia Nef, "Living for the Caliphate," 188-195.

HTI's flexibility, rooted in market-oriented logic, has become a crucial resource for Tahriri activists in sustaining their presence in Indonesia following the organization's disbandment. Although their political space has become more constrained, developments in information technology and popular culture have enabled them to adapt to changing media environments. They have also incorporated forms of neoliberal piety into their religious practices, allowing them to claim adherence to what they present as "the most authentic expression of Islam." Moreover, Tahriri activists have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to rearticulate their movement in ways that align with the prevailing political order. This includes their rhetorical acceptance of Pancasila and democracy, as well as the reframing of the caliphate into a more pragmatic concept—an articulation that is increasingly disseminated through virtual platforms, as will be discussed in the following section.

Virtual Space as a New Stage

> "If (HTI) is truly disbanded, what steps will HTI take?" "Yes, we (HTI) will fight—certainly." (Ismail Yusanto, HTI Spokesperson) [49]

One of the most crucial resources for social movements lies in formal and informal organizations capable of connecting individuals to broader movement networks.[50] Following the disbandment of HTI, informal organizational structures became the primary resources through which Tahriri activists continued to mobilize. The post-disbandment period coincided with the rapid expansion of new media technologies. Within this context, Tahriri activists increasingly relied on their informal networks in virtual spaces. Online media emerged as an effective mobilization tool, allowing Tahriri activists to conduct activities

[49] Excerpt from an interview with Ismail Yusanto, HTI spokesperson on https://tirto.id/soalrencana-pembubaran-jubir-hti-kami-akan-melawan-cox accessed on December 14, 2020.

[50] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 52–90.

with minimal cost. Moreover, digital platforms possess significant organizational power due to their openness and capacity to reach audiences across time and space. These characteristics make online media a central resource for organizing collective action.[51]

After HTI's dissolution, online mobilization by Tahriri activists became noticeably more intensive and systematic. They regularly upload carefully edited photos and videos documenting their activities, prioritizing visual styles that appeal to younger audiences through the use of vibrant colors, graphic designs, and engaging animations. In addition, they frequently frame their content around trending issues and widely discussed topics within Indonesian society.

The use of social media by Tahriri activists intensified further with the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic, which spread to 185 countries including Indonesia, fundamentally altered various social structures, including religious practices. This shift was evident in Indonesian President Joko Widodo's first public appeal on March 16, 2020, urging citizens to "work, study, and worship from home."[52] Within this context, Tahriri activists increasingly turned to the internet and social media as key platforms for sustaining and expanding their movement in the aftermath of HTI's disbandment. To substantiate this argument, this study focuses on the Instagram account of Felix Siauw—one of the most prominent Tahriri activists in the digital sphere—as well as two informal HTI-affiliated platforms—namely, *Yuk Ngaji* and *Khilafah Channel*, which most clearly illustrate this mode of online mobilization.

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[51] Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest, "The Arab Spring| Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory," *International Journal of Communication* 5, Vol. 5 (2011): 1207-1224.

[52] Kompas, "Jokowi: Kerja dari Rumah, Belajar dari Rumah, Ibadah di Rumah Perlu Digencarkan Halaman all," *kompas.com*, last modified 2020, accessed on February 20, 2021, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/03/16/15454571/jokowi-kerja-dari-rumah-belajar-dari-rumah-ibadah-di-rumah-perlu-digencarkan

Felix Siauw: A Call for Online Da'wah and Islamic Brotherhood

Since the government's plan to disband HTI emerged in early 2017, Felix Siauw had actively responded through his Instagram account, which boasts over 4.5 million followers. Rather than shutting down his account, Siauw had used it as a platform to resist the government's move to dissolve HTI. He encouraged his followers to engage in *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) via social media, emphasizing its potential to transcend personal and spatial limitations.[53] He also emphasized that visualization in Islamic preaching is crucial and demands careful attention. Visual preaching is defined as the delivery of Islamic message on social media through images, photos, and videos, with the primary goal of ensuring that the message is easily understood and accessible to the public.[54] This strategy illustrates Siauw's adaptability as a tech-savvy Tahriri activist, maintaining the movement's presence and influence in the digital age.

Beyond promoting online *da'wah*, Siauw actively emphasizes Islamic brotherhood. In a post, he mentioned several established preachers such as Bachtiar Nasir, Yusuf Mansur, Habib Rizieq, and AA Gym, alongside newer figures like Muzammil, Hanan Attaki, Salim A. Fillah, Taqy Malik, Adi Hidayat, Abdul Shomad, and Khalid Basalamah. Siauw encourages collaboration and mutual support between older and younger preachers.[55] Deliberately avoiding divisive group distinctions, Felix Siauw adopts active mobilization by engaging influential Islamic figures across Indonesia. This approach mirrors a key strategy of HTI during the New Order era, where collaboration with prominent and professional figures facilitated

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[53] "Felix Siauw (@felixsiauw) • Foto Dan Video Instagram," Pentingnya Media Sosial, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/felixsiauw/?hl=id.

[54] "Felix Siauw (@felixsiauw) • Foto Dan Video Instagram," Visualisasi Dakwah, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/BU-v5O8hmmW/.

[55] "Felix Siauw (@felixsiauw) • Foto Dan Video Instagram," Tua Tuntunan, Muda Harapan, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/BV7JlGAho1R/.

the recruitment of new members effectively.[56]

Khilafah Channel: The Rise of Tahriri Activists in Online Media

Felix Siauw's call for online preaching received a positive response from other HTI figures, evident in the launch of the YouTube platform Khilafah Channel (KC) on August 13, 2017. This initiative was led by Tahriri activists who had previously focused solely on mosque-based preaching, including Hafidz Abdurrahman, Rokhmat S. Labib, Ismail Yusanto, and others.[57]

Unlike Felix Siauw's posts, which openly rejected the government's plan to disband HTI, KC never explicitly mentioned the organization's disbandment. Instead, it began by uploading preaching videos from HTI figures addressing emerging cultural issues in Indonesia, such as the Social Security Agency (BPJS), prostitution, and rising fuel prices, ultimately presenting the caliphate system as the sole solution to these problems. This online mobilization only began more than a year after the channel's creation, i.e., in October 2018, suggesting caution or even apprehension among HTI figures in presenting their ideas on social media—a subtle form of resistance to the government.

By 2019, Tahriri activists became increasingly bold in addressing HTI's disbandment. This was evident from their posts on KC Instagram account, launched that year. Posts highlighted ideas such as "the threat to Indonesia is not the caliphate but capitalism,"[58] "the caliphate is

[56] "Felix Siauw on Instagram: 'Mengikat Hati Dalam Dunia Ini, Ada Banyak Hal Yang Kita Lalui Tanpa Kita Ingat, Tapi Ada Beberapa Hal Yang Jadi Benar-Benar Kita Hargai…,'" accessed on March 20, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk4j1SHnKK4/?igshid=b8zmv3nio2go.

[57] "Khilafah Channel - YouTube," accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCO3Fl4H3B3hAPGqb6xBkMEw; "Khilafah Channel on Instagram: 'Ramadhan Kita Ramadhan Istimewa Kajian Online Ramadhan Raih Berkah di Tengah Wabah Kendati Harus di Rumah, Jalan Menuntut Ilmu Masih…,'" accessed on March 20, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/B_VTbvuJE3K/?igshid=35nefak3bht4.

[58] "Khilafah Channel (@khilafahchannel) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Bukan Khilafah, Ternyata Ini Ancaman Sebenarnya!, accessed on December 14, 2020,

not merely an obligation,"[59] and "the government is misguided for prohibiting individuals from preaching the caliphate."[60] They consciously avoided using the term "HTI," replacing it with "caliphate" to reposition themselves from a formally banned organization to an informal, resilient movement.

Yuk Ngaji: Online Islamic Study Groups After HTI's Disbandment

In addition to *Khilafah Channel, Yuk Ngaji* (YN)—widely recognized as HTI's informal movement—also responded to Felix Siauw's call for online *da'wah*. This response was evident in YN's fundraising campaign launched in April 2017 on the crowdfunding platform kitabisa.com, which aimed to establish a production house dedicated to creating digital content, including videos, photographs, written materials, animations, and audio for YN's online platforms.[61]

As seen from YN's production house proposal, several planned online programs are mentioned, including: (1) the "Rihlah Yuk Ngaji" program, (2) the "Ngaji Online" program, and (3) the Up-to-Date program.[62] This initiative illustrates how online media had become a central platform for mobilizing the Tahriri movement in the aftermath of HTI's disbandment. It closely aligns with Felix Siauw's advocacy for social media–based *da'wah*, which he framed as an effective means of transcending spatial and temporal limitations.[63] Through this digital strategy, YN positioned online media as a primary entry point for

https://www.instagram.com/p/Bvp7_RIBEz8/.

[59] "Khilafah Channel (@khilafahchannel) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Khilafah Bukan Sekedar Kewajiban, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/BzpJvShAl3/.

[60] "Khilafah Channel (@khilafahchannel) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Larangan Individu Dakwahkan Khilafah, Pemerintah Salah Fikir??, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B2ikNjhAa8Z/.

[61] "Rumah Produksi YukNgaji," Rumah Produksi YukNgaji, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://kitabisa.com/campaign/phyukngaji.

[62] "Rumah Produksi YukNgaji," Proposal Rumah Produksi YukNgaji, accessed on December 14, 2020, http://bit.ly/phyukngaji.

[63] Ibid.

movement mobilization, disseminating Tahriri ideas through creative formats such as videos, images, animations, and other visual content.

The Online Qur'an Recitation Program is evident in YN's YouTube uploads from January 2018. This program, directly led by Felix Siauw, marked a departure from his earlier content, which typically lasted around one hour.[64] Previously, YN primarily uploaded recordings of offline Qur'an recitation activities, which tended to appear monotonous as they largely took the form of conventional religious lectures. Following the disbandment of HTI, however, YN's uploads underwent a notable transformation; it began to employ diverse visual styles and themes popular among younger audiences, while also collaborating with professional figures. For instance, YN produced Question-and-Answer (Q&A) programs that allowed online audiences to become more familiar with the organization's founders,[65] as well as video blogs (vlogs),[66] including one that specifically addressed the world of K-Pop[67] in response to the growing popularity of Korean pop culture among Indonesian youth.

Ideology in the Movement's Pragmatism

As an Islamist ideological movement, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) mobilized around its central objective of "continuing the Islamic way of life through the establishment of an Islamic state." Drawing on Martin Seliger's definition, ideology can be understood as a system of beliefs articulated through values, appeals, and explanatory statements that

[64] Komunitas YukNgaji, Kelas Online | I.R.A - Ustadz Felix #EP01, 2018, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxgXvfFbSuM

[65] Komunitas YukNgaji, Q&A Bersama Ustadz Felix Siauw & Ustadz Cahyo, 2017, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5tLsqjphDU.

[66] Komunitas YukNgaji, Hawaariyyun Bikin Ulah di Malaysia | YNVLOG 1, 2019, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rJpFIt6ozk.

[67] Komunitas YukNgaji, Roadshow AADK (Ada Apa Dengan Korea) Jakarta-Jogja | YukNgaji Untold, 2019, accessed on December 14, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2WgstnAABg.

serve to justify a group's actions in preserving, reforming, dismantling, or reconstructing a particular social or political order.[68] Within HTI's ideological framework, supreme state authority is assigned to a caliph bound exclusively by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This movement positions nationalism as a rival ideology, which it regarded as a modern form of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).[69]

Following its disbandment, however, former Tahriri activists adopted a more pragmatic posture by reframing HTI as a relatively tolerant and less overtly political Islamic movement. This shift is evident in their public recognition of Pancasila and democracy, their reinterpretation of the concept of the "caliphate," and their intensive engagement with secular and digital media platforms.

Tahriri Activists' Negotiations with Democracy

Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhānī consistently maintained that Islam and democracy are fundamentally incompatible. He argued that democracy undermines God's sovereignty by placing legislative authority in human hands rather than grounding it in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Echoing this position, ʿAbd al-Qadīm Zallūm contended that the implementation of democracy constitutes a violation of Islamic law.[70] Similar views were articulated by Indonesian Tahriri activists such as Fatih Karim, who described democracy as a human-made system designed to govern humans, thereby establishing a second source of legislation alongside God. From this perspective, democracy was portrayed as an outdated and misleading concept employed to serve the interests of ruling elites.[71]

However, their rejection of democracy begins to soften following the Indonesian government's decision to ban HTI. This shift is evident

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[68] John B. Thompson, *Studies in Theory of Ideology* (Oxford: Polity, 1984), 79.

[69] Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf, "From Revolution to 'Refolution', 295-320.

[70] Masdar Hilmy, *Islamism and Democracy in Indonesia: Piety and Pragmatism* (Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2010), 135–140.

[71] Cinta Quran TV, Demokrasi Dalam Pandangan Islam - Ustadz Fatih Karim, 2017, accessed on March 6, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxxXbWdGfg0.

in statements by Felix Siauw, who expressed conditional support for participation in the existing political system. He remarked, "If asked about the current political system, as long as it is not *haram* (forbidden), I will do it."[72] This pragmatic turn was further apparent during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, when HTI encouraged the public to vote for Muslim candidates rather than abstaining from electoral participation, a stance the movement had previously endorsed.

HTI's adaptation to Indonesia's political framework is also reflected in Felix Siauw's reinterpretation of Pancasila. Rather than rejecting it outright, he reframed its principles through an Islamic lens. For instance, he interpreted the fourth principle—democracy guided by wisdom through deliberation—as "democracy led by (a leader) who implements Allah's laws in the best possible way."[73] Within this reading, legitimate leadership ultimately corresponds to what HTI conceptualizes as a caliph. Siauw has publicly expressed support for Pancasila, particularly in response to state accusations that HTI constituted an anti-Pancasila movement.

Use of Online Media

Following the government's dissolution of HTI, the emergence of *Tahriri* activists conducting lectures, talk shows, and vlogging on social media has significantly transformed the public face of the movement. Rather than operating openly as an Islamist group advocating the establishment of a caliphate in Indonesia, Tahriri activists now disseminate their ideas through digital platforms using high-quality visual content. This content—produced in the form of photos and videos—employs colors, aesthetics, and design strategies that resonate with younger audiences. To support this media-oriented approach, activists

[72] Refly Harun, Felix Siauw: Bagaimana Mau Mewujudkan Pancasila Kalau Orang Beragama Diganggu Terus!!!, 2020, accessed on March 6, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R81K116uadc.

[73] Cerita Untungs, Islam Anti Pancasila? Talk Part 3 with Felix Siauw, 2020, accessed on March 6, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQR3482oJyY&t=204s.

have established dedicated production teams responsible for recording, editing, and publishing content across social media platforms.[74]

Most of these online activities, particularly live-streamed sessions, attract audiences of over 1,000 viewers. Notably, however, explicit discussions of the caliphate—a core tenet of Tahriri ideology—are largely absent from this digital mobilization. Instead, the form of Islam presented online tends to dilute or marginalize the movement's original ideological commitments, resulting in a more superficial reception among audiences. This dynamic is illustrated by the response of "Budi" (a pseudonym), who, when asked about Taqiyuddin al-Nabhani's *Nizām al-Islām*, assumed that the work had been written by Felix Siauw and was unaware of al-Nabhani's role or intellectual contributions to Hizb at-Tahrir. His interest in participating in the informal HTI-affiliated movement *Yuk Ngaji* stemmed primarily from his admiration for a charismatic figure, Fuadh Naim, rather than from ideological alignment. Tahriri activists involved in *Yuk Ngaji* also strategically appropriate elements of Korean popular culture—currently influential among Indonesian youth—to frame their activities in a more appealing and contemporary manner.[75]

In addition, Tahriri activists in the *Yuk Ngaji* program consciously avoid discussions of the caliphate, which could threaten their continued existence and invite state repression. This avoidance is evident in the *Yuk Ngaji* Question-and-Answer sessions, which accept open-ended questions from online audiences. During one livestream, when a participant asked about the meaning of "caliph," prominent figures such as Felix Siauw, Husain Assadi,[76] and Hawariyyun[77] appeared reluctant to address the question directly. Instead, they deflected it among themselves until Hawariyyun offered a "pragmatic" reinterpretation, defining the caliph as

[74] "Fast Training Center (@ngefast) • Foto Dan Video Instagram," accessed on September 7, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/ngefast/?hl=id.

[75] "Wawancara Dengan Budi (Pengikut Yuk Ngaji)," accessed on January 15, 2021.

[76] Hussain Assadi is one of HTI's daʿwah activists in Yuk Ngaji.

[77] Hawariyyun is one of HTI's daʿwah activists in Yuk Ngaji.

a "guardian of the earth." He further elaborated that such guardianship entails practical ethical actions, such as properly disposing of waste and reducing plastic use. This interpretation, however, diverges significantly from HTI's original ideological conception of the caliph as the political leader of a caliphate state.[78]

The Changing Meaning of the Caliphate

The caliphate constitutes a core ideological principle of Hizb at-Tahrir (HT) worldwide, including in Indonesia. Within HT's ideological framework, the caliphate is presented as the sole political solution capable of resolving social, political, and moral crises in Muslim societies. Although HT has operated in Indonesia since the 1980s, it has consistently rejected any equation of the caliphate with democratic governance. As Ismail Yusanto has argued, democracy is founded on popular sovereignty and public consensus, whereas the caliphate is grounded in Islamic sources—namely the Qur'an and the Hadith[79]—and structured around four key principles: the implementation of *sharīʿa*, authority derived from members of the Muslim community, the existence of a caliph who governs strictly according to the Qur'an and Hadith, and the exclusive right of the caliph to adopt and formalize Islamic law.[80]

In mobilizing its movement in Indonesia, HTI frequently drew upon Qur'anic verses and Hadith concerning the caliphate to legitimize its ideological claims. Following the organization's dissolution, however, a notable shift has occurred in how Tahriri activists interpret and articulate the meaning of the caliphate. While explicit promotion of caliphate ideology is largely absent within the informal *Yuk Ngaji* movement, the *Kajian Cendekia* (KC) forum illustrates this transformation. In KC discussions, senior Tahriri figures such as Ismail Yusanto, Hafidz

[78] Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf, "From Revolution to 'Refolution', 295-320.

[79] Yus T. Sultrawan, Kritik Hizbut Tahrir Terhadap Demokrasi | Ust. Ismail Yusanto (Jubir HTI), 2017, diakses 6 Maret 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vqe5rCQYGZI.

[80] Taqiyuddin Al-Nabhani, *Peraturan Hidup Dalam Islam* (HTI Press, 2003), 40.

Abdurrahman, and Rokhmat S. Labib continue to address the caliphate, often reframing it in broader civilizational terms. One recurring argument is that "the primary threat to Indonesia is not the caliphate but capitalism," which they portray as a Western construct capable of alienating Muslims from Islamic values.[81] Within KC, the caliphate is frequently interpreted in historical terms, referring to the Islamic polity established by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina based on the Qur'an and Hadith. Yet, the format and substance of these online study sessions closely resemble religious lectures conducted by other Islamic movements, with speakers appearing primarily as preachers urging audiences to live in accordance with divine norms. In this context, the caliphate is articulated as a more flexible and non-confrontational concept, one that can coexist with democratic governance in Indonesia[82] and be practiced by Muslim communities without challenging the state.

This reinterpretation is further reinforced by Felix Siauw, who has argued that the caliphate is not an ideology but a divine concept—a method for fulfilling humanity's role as God's vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth through divine principles of universal applicability. According to Siauw, the caliphate bears no inherent contradiction with the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). To illustrate this view, he offers the analogy of family leadership: a husband who governs his household in accordance with Islamic principles may be considered a caliph who has implemented the concept of the caliphate.[83] Such interpretations mark a significant departure from Taqiyuddin al-Nabhani's original conception of the caliphate as a comprehensive state system of governance. Overall, this shift in meaning reflects the broader adaptation of Tahriri activism

[81] "Khilafah Channel (@khilafahchannel) • Instagram Photos and Videos."

[82] "Khilafah Channel (@khilafahchannel) • Foto Dan Video Instagram," Kajian Online Khilafah Channel, accessed on December 15, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CB7qXggpfSS/.

[83] Refly Harun, Satu Jam Dengan Ustadz Felix, Keluar Semua Ilmunya!! | Dicecar (Full), 2020, accessed on March 6, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7zfqUmFm0g.

to Indonesia's prevailing socio-political environment. The recalibration of caliphate discourse functions not only as a strategy to broaden public appeal but also as a means of minimizing state scrutiny and avoiding renewed repression.

Conclusion

The dissolution of a movement's formal organization does not necessarily end its activism or extinguish its ideology. As scholarship on social movements suggests, movements can persist beyond institutional bans so long as informal networks endure, ideas continue to circulate, and activists retain adaptive capacity. The trajectory of Hizbut Tahrir (HT) across national contexts underscores this dynamic. In Malaysia, its continued presence reflects a state assessment that it poses limited political threat. In authoritarian Uzbekistan, HT survives underground by cultivating support among socially and economically marginalized communities, demonstrating resilience rooted more in its social base than in state accommodation. In Lebanon, by contrast, sustained repression combined with competition from stronger Muslim actors has curtailed its presence.

In Indonesia, although Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) has been formally disbanded, Tahriri activism persists. Activists have adapted through diversification—leveraging digital *daʿwah*, commercial religious classes, *sharīʿah*-oriented fashion brands, and informal economic networks developed since the Reformasi era. They remain active on social media platforms such as *Yuk Ngaji* and *Khilafah Channel*, navigating Indonesia's democratic framework and state ideology, including Pancasila. This has produced a more fluid and pragmatic public posture compared to HTI's pre-dissolution rigidity. The "caliphate" is now framed less as a concrete state project and more as a principle of Islamic living—an apparent strategic recalibration to mitigate repression rather than a substantive ideological shift.

Overall, HTI's dissolution has not marked the end of the movement in Indonesia. Instead, it has prompted tactical recalibration, expansion into new social and economic arenas, and the construction of alternative networks that sustain its continued existence, leaving open the possibility of renewed mobilization under changing political conditions.

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