

**Bernard Plattdasch. *Islamism in Indonesia: Politics in the Emerging Democracy*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009. 452 pp.**

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To date, most of the published scholarship on Islamist parties in Indonesia has fallen into two main categories, either single case studies, often focusing on the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera), or articles that assess the grand sweep of Indonesian political parties, highlighting the most significant characteristics of individual parties and addressing the broad trends in party behavior. While many of those studies are highly insightful and theoretically grounded, comparatively few have succeeded in balancing depth with breadth. *Islamism in Indonesia* is a robust comparative study assessing the three most significant Islamist parties in the Indonesian political system: Partai Keadilan (PK, Justice Party; also, since 2003, PKS), Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, United Development Party), and Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB, Crescent and Star Party). While Bernard Plattdasch's book spans the period from 1955 to 2009, the bulk of his analysis centers on the transition period, between 1998 and 2002.

Plattdasch contends that Islamists endeavor to apply Islamic philosophy, law, and morality to politics for very specific doctrinal, theological, and historical reasons. Namely, Islamists believe that *syariah* law is more indigenous and better suited to Indonesia than is colonially derived civil law. Moreover, to varying degrees, Islamists view Muslims as victims of a global anti-Islamic plot, of which Muslims must be mindful and against which Muslims must safeguard their interests. To that end, *syariah* is the best remedy. However, Plattdasch also notes that as PPP, PBB, and PK all recognize that general support for *syariah* is lacking among Indonesian voters, these parties tend to react pragmatically and expediently to the reality of the Indonesian political system, deemphasizing overtly Islamist themes around elections, avoiding sectarian rhetoric, and adjusting their positions when necessary. PBB, alone, has bucked this trend and campaigned on *syariah*, to its own political detriment. The message embedded in this book is that when one examines Islamist party behavior over time, the parties are, indeed, normalizing.

Plattdasch's ambitious goal in this book is to highlight the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions in Islamist party behavior. To that end, he grounds his analysis in the scholarship of Muslim modernist and revivalist thinkers, as well as the thought and history of the Masyumi Party, to create a baseline of ideology against which contemporary Islamist party behavior can be assessed. Put another way, he analyzes the PK, PPP, and PBB according to the standard set by their intellectual and ideological predecessors both in Indonesia and in the broader *umma*. Subsequently, Plattdasch compares the PPP, PBB, and PK on their (a) perceptions of hostility toward Muslims in the international environment, (b) perspectives on *syariah* law, and (c) approaches to specific issues, most notably the decision to allow Megawati to become president after the impeachment of Abdurrahman Wahid and the debates over the Jakarta Charter between 1999 and 2002. In doing so, Plattdasch emphasizes occasions of policy shift, debate, retrenchment, and positional ambiguity. In the process, he also introduces new value-neutral terms such as "*syariah*-mindedness" into the lexicon,

which he uses to denote the desire on the part of Islamists to give the philosophical and moral aspects of Islam a substantive form, often through policy.

This book is impressive for several reasons. First, it is thoroughly grounded in the Islamic politics literature. By addressing the ideological streams that influenced PBB, PK, and PPP, Platzdasch enables the reader to understand both the commonalities and divergences in party worldview and approach. In doing so, he avoids the pitfalls of assuming Indonesian Islamist parties are doctrinally monolithic or of simply dividing them according to their roots (i.e., the indigenous PPP/PBB vs. the Middle Eastern-inspired PK). Second, the book is based on a remarkable degree of fieldwork and primary documents, including official party publications, *banayats* (rulings), speeches, and conference proceedings, as well as books and articles authored by party officials. This access has enabled Platzdasch to offer fresh insights on party debates over electoral strategy, ideology, and political positioning on specific issues. Topics, such as the Jakarta Charter, that have been discussed at some length in prior scholarly works, most notably by Nadirsyah Hosen, gain new clarity with an analysis of intra-party disputes. Third, as there have been few studies conducted on PPP and PBB, and none of this magnitude in English, Platzdasch's book is especially notable for illuminating the internal debates within these parties, their organizational dynamics, and the challenges they currently face. The analysis of PPP, in particular, is quite compelling, as Platzdasch convincingly portrays the party as less ideologically driven than are PBB and PK. He argues adeptly that the party's historical origins, its personalism, its intricate hierarchies, and the multiple streams of Islamic ideology within it have impeded it from developing a unified set of beliefs and a clear blueprint for political action. He shows how the PPP, concerned about alienating potential voters, eschewed the conspiracy theorizing found in PBB and PK circles, emphasized pluralism in its platforms and public statements, and adopted careful positioning on contentious issues.

*Islamism in Indonesia* constitutes a welcome and important contribution to the literature on Indonesian Islamist parties. Nevertheless, I believe one criticism is warranted. The primary time period covered by this book is the immediate transition era, from 1998–2002. While Platzdasch's analysis of party behavior during this era is meticulous, the book would have benefitted from a similarly rigorous approach to the political decision-making surrounding the 2004 elections and other post-2003 issues. Although the 2004 and 2009 elections are addressed in the text, as well as important debates, including the 2006 and 2008 Anti-Pornography Bill and the push for local level *syariah*-inspired legislation, these more-contemporary events and issues are mostly found in the conclusion sections of chapters, in the conclusion itself, and in the postscript. For the PKS, specifically, this results in most of the analysis being conducted on the PK period, prior to the party's re-formation in 2003. Although all the necessary benchmarks are ultimately covered, the book would have benefitted from better integration of those sections to avoid a sense of disjointedness. Given the author's robust analysis of the transition period, the assessment of the 2003–09 years was simply less satisfying. That being said, for its depth, breadth, and analytical approach, this book should be required reading for both scholars and students of Islamist parties and political Islam in Indonesia.