Jeremy Menchik. *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 224 pp.

Edward Aspinall

In *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, Jeremy Menchik has made an important contribution to our understanding of the politics of Islam in Indonesia, and to relations between Islam and democracy more generally. The book is complex, but three lines of inquiry stand out. Each deserves careful consideration by scholars and students of Indonesia, and of the Islamic world more generally.

First, Menchik analyzes tolerance of minorities among mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia, zeroing in on attitudes held by leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Tolerance and the limits to it are the major concerns of Chapter 6, "Communal Tolerance," and this focus is well chosen. In a general sense, it is an important topic because liberal theorists view tolerance of minority opinion as a critical underpinning of democratic governance. Specifically, it is important because scholars have long viewed NU and Muhammadiyah as mainstays of Indonesian moderation, even, as Menchik puts it, as "a key reason why Indonesia is a democratic overarchiever" (15).

Yet despite Indonesia's democratic progress, and despite the much-praised tolerance of these organizations, leaders of both groups during the post-Soeharto period have participated in sometimes highly intolerant campaigns against minority groups such as Shias, members of the Ahmadiyah sect, lesbians and gays, and former communists. As the new institutions of Indonesian democracy have settled into place, it has often seemed that mainstream religious opinion has become more intolerant, not less. How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory trends?

In seeking such a reconciliation, Menchik rightly criticizes much of the essentialist and reductionist writing on Islamic attitudes toward democracy, suggesting that "instead of asking whether Islam is compatible with democracy, researchers should investigate what kind of democracy Muslims prefer" (6–7). Menchik carries out such an investigation and, much to his credit, comes up with a clear finding. Groups such as Muhammadiyah and NU, he shows, support a vision, not of liberal democracy, but of "a communal and religious democracy" based on a vision of communal rather than individual tolerance (125). This vision is, in turn, premised on four foundations: emphasis on "communal rather than individual rights," belief in "communal self-governance," "separation between social and religious affairs," and "primacy of faith over other values" (146). On the first point, for example, groups like NU and Muhammadiyah do not "recognize unlimited individual freedom of conscience" (147), such that atheism or deviations from recognized monotheistic religions should be tolerated. Instead, they hold that major recognized (monotheistic) religious communities should have rights to regulate their own affairs and to receive

Edward Aspinall is professor of politics, Department of Political and Social Change, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University.

government support when doing so. On the third point, to take another example, Menchik demonstrates that NU and Muhammadiyah leaders generally demonstrate high tolerance of Christians in social life (e.g., being willing to tolerate a Christian neighbor), but that tolerance precipitously declines as soon as the Christian is seen as impinging on Muslim religious affairs (e.g., by teaching in a Muslim school; 154). Menchik is able to demonstrate these arguments persuasively by using the findings of surveys he conducted of a cross section of the leaders NU and Muhammadiyah at national conferences of these organizations.

Menchik thus relies in part on the findings of fieldwork and survey research he carried out during the post-Soeharto period. But much of the book is historical. And in delving into the historical origins of Indonesian Muslims' vision of communal democracy, *Islam and Democracy* also presents a striking new interpretation of the relationship between Islam and Indonesian nationalism.

It is here that the book makes its second major contribution. While previous generations of scholars have sometimes rather lazily thought of Indonesian politics as being based around a cleavage separating secular nationalists from Islamic political forces, Menchik demonstrates persuasively that the religious embrace of Indonesian nationalism has held tight since Indonesia's very birth. Indonesian nationalism and modern Islamic political thinking and organizations have coevolved. In one of his more memorable formulations, Menchik argues that Indonesia presents above all a form of "godly nationalism" (the focus of Chapter 4), in which national belonging is based on "an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society" (67). Rather than being a form of Islamic nationalism, this is a vision that demands of its citizens that they believe in God and adhere to the tenants of a limited number of officially recognized monotheistic faiths, as defined by their respective orthodoxies. This embrace has been tightened down the years through institutional measures, notably by the Ministry of Religion's support for monotheistic religion and continuing discrimination against believers of non-recognized and heterodox faiths. As Menchik puts it, "For a godly nation to endure, it must privilege some beliefs and prosecute acts of deviance as blasphemy" (67). Here it is worth supplementing Menchik's findings by reading another recent book, Ismatu Ropi's *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia*,[1] which covers in even greater detail how the state has regulated religious expression and practice in modern times.

A third important contribution of the book (see Chapter 3, "Local Genealogies") is a fascinating historical institutionalist account of the evolution of attitudes toward various minorities (notably Christians, members of the Ahmadiyah sect, and communists) among three major Islamic organizations: NU; Muhammadiyah; and Persatuan Islam, or Persis. By examining the origins of these groups, and how each group emerged in response to emerging social divisions in its place of birth, Menchik explains the varying levels of tolerance he finds across these groups (with NU the most tolerant, Persis the least, and Muhammadiyah an intermediate case). For example, he shows how aggressive Christian proselytization in early twentieth century Yogyakarta, the birthplace of Muhammadiyah, stamped an anti-Christian imprint onto

[1] Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2017).

Muhammadiyah that has remained a recurrent feature of the movement to the present day. In East Java, by contrast, Christian missionary activity was far less expansionary, and traditionalist clerics who founded NU often saw coethnic Javanese Christians as potential allies in their defensive struggle against Islamic modernizers. Circumstances surrounding the foundation of each movement thus left a "discursive legacy" that was reproduced by successive generations of leaders and activists, generating varying attitudes to minority groups that were products of political dynamics rather than being "theologically determined" (58).

The rise of Islam as a social and political force in democratic Indonesia is a profoundly important topic, not only for Indonesia itself but also for the wider Islamic world and beyond. It is a topic that invites deep inquiry and reflection. *Islam and Democracy* is a worthy contribution to this effort. By examining the leading Islamic organizations, their historical evolution, and their evolving perspectives on minorities and on tolerance, the book goes straight to the heart of the connection between Islam and democracy in today's Indonesia. Moreover, it provides us with a new set of approaches and a new vocabulary for examining that relationship. Menchik's analyses of godly nationalism, communal tolerance, and religious democracy provide us with important conceptual tools through which to think about the relationship of Islamic politics to democratic order.

Of course, as Menchik would himself surely acknowledge, the book does not present the final word on such a massive topic. There are many other angles from which to examine the relationship between Islam and democracy in contemporary Indonesia. Important new books look at Indonesian Islam from the perspectives of political economy (for example, books by Vedi R. Hadiz and Michael Buehler), ordinary Muslims (a forthcoming book by Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani), and a charismatic preacher (i.e., James Hoesterey's recent book on Abdullah Gymnastiar), to name a few.[2] It seems we are experiencing a new golden age of research on Indonesian Islam. *Islam and Democracy* most certainly takes a place at the leading edge of this new wave of scholarship.

[2] See: Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michael Buehler, *The Politics of Shari'a Law: Islamist Activists and the State in Democratizing Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani, *Piety and Public Opinion: Understanding Indonesian Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and James Bourk Hoesterey, *Rebranding Islam: Piety, Prosperity, and a Self-help Guru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).