

***Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context.***  
**By Azyumardi Azra. Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006. Softcover:**  
**242pp.**

Even before its foundation, Indonesia struggled to balance the demands of nationalism and Islam. The famous seven words of the Jakarta Charter obliging citizens to follow shariah law were removed in the preamble's final draft, but President Soekarno later devised the Pancasila (five principles of state) as an explicit compromise between the secular and religious philosophies of the state. Azyumardi Azra's *Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy: Dynamics in a Global Context*, part of a commendable effort to bring the work of prominent Indonesian intellectuals like Azyumardi to an international audience, shows how the struggle continues as Indonesia returns to democracy in the twenty-first century.

A collection of Azyumardi's papers from the last decade, *Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy* explores how the re-flowering of cultural and political Islam affects the development of democracy and a vigorous civil society. In the first section, "Indonesia, Islam, and Democracy", Azyumardi explains how Islamic involvement in the political system, discouraged by the 1955 elections and suppressed by the New Order regime, was rejuvenated by President Soeharto's late embrace of Islam. President B.J. Habibie's political liberalization then caused a wave of "political euphoria" as more than forty Islamic parties were formed for the 1999 general election, but the results confirm for Azyumardi that "Islamic parties have never been very popular among Indonesian Muslims" (p.18). First, he says, Indonesian Muslims prefer substantive to formalistic Islam, that is, rituals over political parties. Second, the "Islamic ideology" often masks a more elemental power struggle: "political pragmatism is the most important feature of political behavior of most Muslim political leaders" (p. 20). A fragile coalition of Islamic parties promoted Abdurrahman Wahid, promising new prominence for Muslim civil society, but the inefficiency of his administration caused a crisis in public confidence. Hardline groups, critical of a female president and her cautious response to the US invasion of Afghanistan, challenged Megawati Soekarnoputri's government, but Azyumardi sees the political system settling in after bursts of freedom and frustration.

The argument of the second section of the book, "Islam, Indonesia, and the International Order", is less compelling. Azyumardi downplays the role of religious affinity in Indonesia's foreign policy, arguing that

economic and humanitarian considerations better explain Indonesia's relationship with the world's Muslim countries. "Indonesia's support for the Palestinian cause", he writes, "is not based on the principle of Islamic solidarity, but on humanity" (p. 92). Regarding the 1991 Gulf War, he accepts the New Order line that Soeharto opposed the intervention on humanitarian grounds, although Soeharto's appalling human rights record exposes this claim. Similarly troubling is Azyumardi's description of the occupation of East Timor as "integration into Indonesia" (p. 74). On the relationship between Muslim and Western countries, Azyumardi offers well-meaning if vague recommendations: "Fair, frank, honest, and thoughtful dialogue between Western and Islamic civilizations will, undoubtedly, be very helpful" (p. 141). Few would argue against the need for dialogue; the more critical questions are who, when, and how. In this book, Azyumardi is better on the issues and actors of the Indonesian scene than on the global context.

Azyumardi's most insightful chapters concern the distinctive character of Indonesian Islam. In the third section, "The Dynamics of Islamic Movements", he attributes this character to the slow, peaceful, and accommodating introduction of Islam and to the egalitarian structure of Indonesian society. But recognizing difference, he contends, "should not lead one to argue that Indonesian Islam is also a 'peripheral Islam,' a kind of impure Islam, or 'bad Islam'" (pp. 211–12). In the book's most sustained argument, Azyumardi contends that Indonesian Islam is fundamentally "moderate and tolerant" and that radicalism arises from a literal interpretation of Islam combined with political and economic instability. "The empowerment of democratic elements within mainstream Indonesian Islam", he argues, provides the means to deal with the problematic fringe (p. 131). In practice, this means approaching radicalism with a "fair, objective, pro-active attitude" rather than a "reactionary or defensive attitude" (p. 177). The strategy of "cracking down" on violent groups without addressing root causes "will only lead to a vicious circle of violence and terrorism" (p. 158).

Given its centrality as a theme, the notion of "moderation" lacks definition. Azyumardi seeks a return to the perception of Indonesian Islam as "Islam with a smiling face", although the bland superficiality of this image clashes with his fascinating portraits of some of the variations of Indonesian Islam:

Jama'ah Tabligh members wear Middle Eastern style clothes; men wear *jalabiyah*, and women wear a fully closed veil. Men also let their beard grow. The adherents also take a *siwāk* — a kind of

vegetable toothbrush believed to have been used by the Prophet Muhammad — everywhere they go. They have also adopted what they believe to have been the Prophet's way of eating; a communal meal served in a *nampan* (common dish), using only the hand to eat. (p. 190)

Azyumardi's book makes the convincing case that the fundamental question facing Indonesian democracy is not how moderate Islam can overcome political Islam but rather how the moderate, democratically inclined majority can tolerate those with immoderate tendencies, like the Jama'ah Tabligh, and ultimately persuade them that democracy is "the only game in town".

Because it brings together several disparate projects, the collection tends to repeat rather than advance some of its main arguments. Some of the earliest papers have not dated well, and the organization feels uneven at places. Nevertheless, several chapters provide unmatched insight into Indonesia's distinctive experiment, and Azyumardi's optimistic evaluation of the prospects for Indonesian democracy counters the damaging perception of the region as a "hotbed of terrorism".