A REVIEW ON ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ITS PRACTICES IN INDONESIA AS MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRY

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
  	This study examines the phenomenon of Islamophobia in Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country, highlighting its characteristics, historical dynamics, and manifestations at the state and societal levels. Departing from the dominance of Western studies that position Islamophobia as a phenomenon in Muslim-minority countries, this study aims to fill the theoretical gap by exploring how Islamophobic practices emerged in the Indonesian political context from the Old Order, New Order, and post-Reformasi eras. Using a qualitative approach based on literature studies and case analysis, this study compiles academic sources, policy documents, and news reports to identify forms of state control, social stereotyping, and religious labeling. The results show that Islamophobia in Indonesia is not a single phenomenon, but emerges in a pattern that combines characteristics of Western Islamophobia and Muslim-majority countries, particularly through political policies, restrictions on religious expression, and the stigmatization of Islamic symbols in public spaces. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening religious moderation (Islam Wasathiyyah) and improving religious literacy to prevent intra-religious polarization and maintain national social cohesion. These findings contribute to the expansion of the concept of Islamophobia in the socio-political studies of the Muslim-majority context and open up opportunities for further research based on empirical and comparative analysis. **Keywords:** Islamophobia, Muslim-majority countries, religious discourse, identity politics, Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Islamophobia has become increasingly prominent in global discourse post-9/11, marked by a rise in political narratives, security policies, and media representations that position Islam as a threat to Western values and public security (Cesari, 2011; Esposito, 2019). Globally, Islamophobia is generally understood as a form of religion-based prejudice, discrimination, and marginalization that has historically been extensively researched in the experiences of Muslim minorities in Western countries (Allen, 2010; Bleich, 2011; Carr, 2016; Cheng 2015). With the development of critical

studies, scholars have emphasized that Islamophobia is not limited to the individual socio-psychological realm but also operates structurally through state policies, security instruments, and the production of public discourse (Kundnani, 2017; Beydoun & Choudhury, 2020).

However, studies of Islamophobia still tend to be Western-centric, resulting in the experiences of Muslim-majority countries receiving limited academic attention (Bayraklı, Hafez, & Faytre, 2019). Recent studies have shown that patterns of Islamophobia can also emerge in Muslim-majority countries, in the form of state control of religious expression, the politicization of Islamic identity, and restrictions on religious organizations deemed to threaten national stability (Osman, 2019b; Bazian, 2019). Thus, this phenomenon demands an expansion of the analytical framework for Islamophobia, moving beyond the West versus Islam narrative to encompass internal relations within Muslim communities themselves.

Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim population, presents a complex empirical context. On the one hand, Indonesia is known as a Muslim democracy with a tradition of religious moderation and the foundation of the Pancasila ideology, which guarantees religious freedom (Menchik, 2016). However, various contemporary political dynamics demonstrate the emergence of discourses and actions that can be interpreted as Islamophobic practices, both through state policies and social constructs that stigmatize certain Islamic symbols (Heriyanto, 2019; Munib, 2021).

While numerous studies have explored global Islamophobia and the experiences of Muslim minorities, in-depth studies of Islamophobia in the context of Muslim-majority countries, particularly Indonesia, remain limited. Some public discourse even denies the phenomenon's existence, creating conceptual ambiguity and gaps in scientific analysis (Hakim, 2020). Therefore, this research is needed to fill this gap and provide a comprehensive mapping of how Islamophobia is formed, manifested, and negotiated within the Indonesian socio-political context.

This research aims to analyze the nature of Islamophobia within the framework of global theory and the experiences of Muslim-majority countries. It explores the manifestations of Islamophobia in Indonesia's political history pre- and post-Reformasi, and identifies patterns of restrictions on religious expression and stigmatization within Muslim communities. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to broadening the understanding of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority contexts, as well as practical contributions to strengthening the narrative of religious moderation (Islam Wasathiyyah) and inclusive public policies to maintain social cohesion in Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research design and descriptive-interpretive analysis to understand the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the context of Muslim-majority countries, particularly Indonesia. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on conceptual explanation, socio-political discourse analysis, and historical context exploration, which do not require field data collection but rather literature mapping and critical reasoning (Yin, 2000).

Data were collected through a systematic search of primary and secondary academic sources, including academic books, reputable journal articles, state policy documents, national media reports, and organizational publications related to the issue of Islamophobia. To ensure relevance, the following inclusion criteria were used: (1) the publication discussed the concept of Islamophobia theoretically or contextually; (2) the publication focused on a Muslim-majority country or the socio-political context of Indonesia; and (3) the publication was published between 1997 and 2024, in line with the development of contemporary Islamophobia discourse, particularly post-9/11.

Thematic analysis was chosen to identify patterns, meanings, and narratives within the text, given the literature-based nature of the data and policy discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The validity of the study was strengthened through source triangulation (Neuman, 2014) through cross-checking across academic literature, policy findings, and media reports, resulting in a comprehensive and measured interpretation, rather than mere opinion. With this approach, the research aims to generate a deeper understanding of the nature, patterns, and dynamics of Islamophobia in Indonesia, while also providing a theoretical foundation for further analysis that can be supplemented through future empirical studies..

3.   RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The Existence of Islamophobia in Muslim-Majority Countries

The phenomenon of Islamophobia is not only present in Western countries but also emerges in the context of Muslim-majority countries, with distinct characteristics. While Islamophobia in the West is driven by historical constructs that position Islam as a threat to liberal values and national security (Cesari, 2011; Kumar, 2012; Kundnani, 2017; Hillal, 2021). In Muslim-majority countries, this phenomenon is often rooted in tensions between the state and religious authorities, fears of Islamic political conservatism, and the legacy of colonialism that fostered a secular, modernizing orientation among state elites (Bayraklı, Hafez, & Faytre, 2019; Bazian, 2019).

In this context, Islamophobia manifests as state control of religious expression perceived as potentially disrupting political stability or changing the direction of state ideology. Unlike Western Islamophobia, which is generally directed at immigrants or Muslim minorities, in Muslim-majority countries, this phenomenon occurs as a political response to religious groups or symbols perceived as capable of challenging state authority (Osman, 2019b). Thus, Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries is more of an intra-Muslim political anxiety than a racially or ethnoculturally based fear, as is common in the West (Beydoun & Choudhury, 2020).

Several countries exemplify this phenomenon. In Turkey, post-Ottoman Empire state secularism resulted in systematic policies restricting religious symbols, Islamic education, and faith-based political activity as an effort to re-engineer national identity toward secular modernity (Aslan, 2019). Despite the subsequent resurgence of political Islam under Erdoğan, the long history of repression of Islamic symbols demonstrates a multi-layered institutional form of Islamophobia.

In Egypt, a similar trend emerged through discrimination against political Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly after the Arab Spring. The state narrative linking political Islam with radicalism and instability reinforced the

stigmatization of public religious expression (Abdelkader, 2019; Zahed, 2019). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the dynamics of Islamophobia exhibit a strong racial dimension, where tensions between Malay Muslim groups and non-Muslim minorities contribute to polarities and identity politics that influence state policy (Osman, 2019a).

The phenomenon of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries can be formulated into several key characteristics:

1. State-driven securitization of political Islamic movements perceived as threatening national stability and state ideology;
2. Regulation of religious symbols reflecting state control over religious expression;
3. A colonial legacy that encourages state elites to interpret modernity as a strict separation of religion from the public sphere; and
4. Media and political elite discourse that reinforces suspicion of conservative Islamic groups (Massoumi, Mills, & Miller, 2017; Kalin, 2011).

The results of this study confirm that Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries is not simply a copy of Western constructs, but rather a local reality influenced by historical factors, political transformations, and ideological competition within Muslims. The articulation of this phenomenon broadens the theoretical framework of Islamophobia, from its initial focus on the context of Muslim minorities in the West to an autonomous phenomenon with its own distinctive domestic political, ideological, and security dynamics.

Existence of Islamophobia in Pre and Post Reformation Indonesia

Studies of the existence of Islamophobia in Indonesia reveal unique dynamics that differ from the dominant patterns in Western countries. Historically, Indonesia has not recognized Islamophobia in the classical sense that is, collective hatred or fear of Islam as a religion but rather reflects a form of political contestation between the state and certain Islamic groups (Liddle, 1996; Cusdiawan, 2020). Therefore, to understand Islamophobia in Indonesia, a structural and historical approach is necessary to distinguish political repressive actions from phenomena based on ideological or cultural prejudice.

In the pre-Reformation era, particularly during the New Order era, the state tended to curb Islam-based political activity to maintain stability and uphold the Pancasila ideology as the sole foundation (Liddle, 1996; Matanasi, 2017). The policy of merging Islamic parties into the United Development Party (PPP), the ban on the hijab in public schools in the early 1980s, and the crackdown on religious groups have been associated with the depoliticization of Islam, not hatred of Islam as a religion (Jo, 2018). The regime viewed Islamic activism as a potential political opposition, not a theological threat. This confirms that during that period, the state pursued a strategy of containment against Islamic movements, not Islamophobia in the substantive sense (Bayraklı, Hafez, & Faytre, 2019).

This contrasted with the Reformation era, where democratization opened up public space to more diverse expressions of Islam. The emergence of da'wah organizations, the revitalization of religious spaces, and the penetration of digital media demonstrated a resurgence in public religiosity (Menchik, 2016). However, simultaneously, indications of Islamophobia have emerged in the form of state discourse and policies, such as the

disbandment of the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and Front Pembela Islam (FPI) through special emergency law, certification of ulema and religious preachers, prohibition niqab and sunnah-styled trouser in governmental agencies. (Movanita, 2017; Arigi, 2019; Suprima, 2023; Fajri, 2024). In the social media, the stigmatization also come through the labelling, for instance "kadrun" or "bani gurun," which demonstrate bias and stereotypes against Islamic expression (Movanita, 2017; Suprima, 2023; Heriyanto, 2019; CNN Indonesia, 2021) These phenomena aligns with findings from global literature on racism-driven Islamophobia, where religious symbols and attributes become targets of negative generalizations (Beydoun & Choudhury, 2020; Jackson, 2018).

Nevertheless, this phenomenon retains its local character. Islam in Indonesia is not positioned as an "other" that conflicts with national identity, but rather, internal interfaith othering occurs, where Muslim groups deemed extreme or different from the mainstream are positioned as threats to Indonesian-style religious nationalism (Menchik, 2016). Thus, Islamophobia in post-Reformasi Indonesia is hybrid: a combination of state control mechanisms against political Islam, social stereotypes about religious symbols, and efforts to maintain a moderate religious identity as the foundation of the state.

By examining these dynamics, it can be concluded that Islamophobia in Indonesia is not a phenomenon rooted in fear of Islam as a faith, but rather a form of political securitization, ideological boundary-setting, and narrative contestation in determining the face of Indonesian Islam. This finding confirms that the phenomenon of Islamophobia in Indonesia needs to be understood within the framework of intra-religious and state-religious conflict, not as a replication of Western Islamophobia.

The Potential Dangers of Islamophobia

The potential dangers of Islamophobia in the context of a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia are not only related to negative sentiment toward certain groups, but also concern social stability, the integration of religious ideologies, and national political resilience. Theoretically, Islamophobia can trigger reactive radicalization, social fragmentation, and the delegitimization of religious and state authority (Abbas, 2012; Esposito, 2019). In Muslim-majority societies, these conditions are potentially even more dangerous because they involve internal identity competition and a struggle for religious legitimacy in the public sphere.

First, Islamophobia can trigger identity radicalization and defensive responses from Muslim groups who feel stigmatized or marginalized. Studies on radicalization indicate that stigmatization of Islamic identity has the potential to foster faith-based identity militancy, particularly among young people, through the search for alternative meanings and communities in digital spaces (Abbas, 2012; Esposito, 2019). This situation can be exacerbated by the presence of online content that constructs narratives of religious alienation and resistance (Hillal, 2021). Thus, Islamophobia can be a catalyst for the consolidation of radical religious movements as a form of social resistance and identity.

Second, Islamophobic practices in the form of labeling and social polarization, such as the use of pejorative terms against certain Muslim groups—for example, kadrun or "local Taliban" have the potential to create intra-Muslim othering that weakens communal solidarity (Heriyanto, 2019; Jackson, 2018). This identity polarization risks generating horizontal conflict, especially when combined with religiously based electoral political competition. This situation aligns with research findings that religiously based

polarization can disrupt stability and social cohesion in multireligious societies (Yilmaz, 2016).

Third, Islamophobic sentiment can hinder moderate religious authorities from acting as social balancers. When public discourse simplistically associates certain religious symbols with extremism, society can lose trust in mainstream religious leaders, opening space for alternative, often unverified, authorities (Kalin, 2011; Menchik, 2016). This has the effect of weakening the dissemination of Wasatiyyah Islam and the religious inclusivity that underpin national unity.

Fourth, the long-term danger of Islamophobia is the erosion of religious public space and the decline of public trust in the state. If the public perceives government policies as biased against certain religious expressions, distrust of the state will arise, which can threaten the legitimacy of government institutions and open the door to the emergence of religious-based opposition movements (Beydoun & Choudhury, 2020). This situation is exacerbated if the state fails to develop an inclusive narrative and responds solely through a security approach (securitization) rather than dialogue and public education (Kundnani, 2017).

Thus, the potential danger of Islamophobia in the Indonesian context lies not only in symbolic discrimination, but also in its implications for identity radicalization, social polarization, the delegitimization of religious authority, and political instability. In line with the Wasathiyyah Islamic values that emphasize fairness, balance, and moderation (MUI, 2018), a dialogical approach, increasing religious literacy, and strengthening credible religious institutions are important strategies to prevent the escalation of the Islamophobic phenomenon into a threat to national unity.

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4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Islamophobia is not a phenomenon exclusive to Western countries but can emerge in the context of Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia. However, the pattern of Islamophobia in Indonesia has a substantially different character. In the pre-Reformation era, phenomena resembling Islamophobia were more political in nature, namely the state's strategy to control the expression of political Islam for the sake of power stability and national ideological consolidation. Meanwhile, in the post-Reformation era, the dynamics of Islamophobia have developed into more complex forms, encompassing the regulation of religious symbols, social labeling of certain Muslim groups, and digital narratives that frame religious conservatism as a public threat.

These findings expand theoretical understanding of Islamophobia by demonstrating that the phenomenon can stem from intra-Muslim political contestation and the state securitization of certain expressions of Islam, rather than solely from tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Thus, Indonesia presents a hybrid model of Islamophobia, combining political factors, religious identity, and state discourse structures. A critical awareness of the historical formation and transformation of this phenomenon is crucial to prevent analytical reductions and generalizations that equate the Indonesian context with Western countries.

On the other hand, the potential dangers of Islamophobia for Indonesia are evident in increasing social polarization, strengthening identity militancy, and weakening the legitimacy of religious and state authorities if this phenomenon is not managed wisely. Therefore, it is crucial for the government, academics, and religious stakeholders to develop a responsive approach that emphasizes the principles of moderation, dialogue, and religious literacy rather than a repressive and simplistic approach.

Further research needs to be conducted using an empirical approach, particularly through digital discourse analysis, policy studies, and field studies of public perceptions. These efforts are crucial for verifying patterns, identifying key actors and narratives, and formulating inclusive and sustainable policy strategies to maintain social harmony and national integrity. This study not only provides an academic contribution to the study of Islamophobia in the context of Muslim countries but also offers direction for strengthening Indonesian civil religion based on Wasathiyyah Islam, justice, and social coexistence.

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