

Mirror of the People: International Journal of Social Studies

Vol 1, No. 1, Juni 2026, DOI:

E-ISSN pp. \

Between Democratization and Politics: Islamic Civil Society in Indonesia Civil Islam, Democratic Erosion, and Populist Pressures

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Keywords:

Civil Islam,
democratic decline,
populism, Islamic
civil society,
Indonesia,
polarization.

Abstract

This research re-examines Robert W. Hefner's Civil Islam theory in light of democratic backsliding, digital populism and post-truth communication in Indonesia. It meticulously and analytically evaluates the work in Scopus from 2000-2025 to map how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have responded to rising identity politics, social media polarization, and transnational Islamist pressures. Three discoveries are there. The first example of structural persistence is the associational and decentralized structure of Civil Islam as a normative framework. Second, digital media not only has enlarged the reach of moderate Islamic voices, but has also accelerated the spread of disinformation and exclusivist religious content. Third, gender has been an overlooked aspect of Civil Islam studies, despite its analytical importance. The article suggests that a reimagined framework of Civil Islam sensitive to subnational variation, gender inclusive in scope, and attentive to digital communication ecologies is a more appropriate tool for analyzing how Indonesia's major Muslim groups oppose post-truth populism. The concept has implications for comparative studies on religion, democracy and communication in Southeast Asia, Europe and Americas.

Kata kunci:

Islam sipil,
kemunduran
demokrasi,
populisme,
masyarakat sipil
Islam, Indonesia,
polarisasi.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji ulang teori Islam Sipil Robert W. Hefner dalam konteks kemunduran demokrasi, populisme digital, dan komunikasi pasca-kebenaran di Indonesia. Penelitian ini secara cermat dan analitis mengevaluasi karya-karya di Scopus dari tahun 2000-2025 untuk memetakan bagaimana Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dan Muhammadiyah menanggapi meningkatnya politik identitas, polarisasi media sosial, dan tekanan Islamis transnasional. Terdapat tiga temuan. Pertama, contoh persistensi struktural adalah struktur asosiatif dan desentralisasi Islam Sipil sebagai kerangka normatif. Kedua, media digital tidak hanya memperluas jangkauan suara Islam moderat, tetapi juga mempercepat penyebaran disinformasi dan konten keagamaan eksklusif. Ketiga, gender merupakan aspek yang terabaikan dalam studi Islam Sipil, meskipun penting secara analitis. Artikel ini menyarankan bahwa kerangka kerja Islam Sipil yang ditata ulang, peka terhadap variasi subnasional, inklusif gender, dan memperhatikan ekologi komunikasi digital, merupakan alat yang lebih tepat untuk menganalisis bagaimana kelompok-kelompok Muslim utama di Indonesia menentang populisme pasca-kebenaran. Konsep ini memiliki implikasi bagi

Article history:

Received: 5-06-2026

Revised: 10-06-2026

Accepted: 15-06-2026

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Introduction

The relationship between Islam and democracy has been a long-standing concern for social scientific and communication studies, particularly since Huntington's (1993) thesis that Islam and the liberal West are fundamentally incompatible. In this context Hefner (2000). *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* explicitly disputed that view: in the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, Islamic values and civil-society associations had historically promoted, not hindered, democratic culture. Since then the picture has grown murkier. Identity politics has gone to extremes (Hadiz, 2016; Mietzner, 2018), the transmission of viral misinformation (Lim, 2017; Slama, 2025) and digitally mobilized Islamist organizations have continued to undermine pluralist norms (Hasan, 2006; Fealy & White, 2008). The study, in this sense, asks whether Civil Islam remains an analytically useful concept in the post-truth era and what modifications its framework should undergo to account for the communication dynamics that Hefner could not have imagined in 2000.

But the stakes are much higher than Indonesia. In Europe and the Americas, populism and misinformation are eroding democratic norms (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Tucker et al., 2018) and Muslim-majority democracies provide one vantage point for thinking about how Islamic civil society may bolster or degrade democratic resilience. Indonesia is a 'hard case' in the sense of Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017): a vast, heterogeneous democracy where the intersections of religion, populism and digital communication are exceptionally prominent, giving it a fertile ground for cross-regional comparison.

Section 2 situates civic Islam in the context of ongoing disputes over religion, civic society and democracy. Section 3 describes the process. Section 4 assesses NU and Muhammadiyah as democratic actors and Section 5 deals with the challenge of digital populism and post-truth communication. Section 6 discusses the gender gap in Civil Islam scholarship, and Section 7 offers a redesigned paradigm. Section 8 ends with conclusions and comparative reflections.

A few methodological decisions need brief justification. The focus on NU and Muhammadiyah is because of their significance as the world's two largest Islamic mass organizations and their centrality to the Civil Islam literature. Indonesia's Islamic scene is much broader, from Salafi networks, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (until its breakup in 2017) to the numerous pesantren traditions of Banjar, Bugis, Acehnese and other regional populations. The concentration on NU and Muhammadiyah is an analytical choice, not a claim to represent all of Indonesian Islam. Similarly, the decision to focus mostly on English-language scholarship indexed by Scopus is driven by the requirements of publishing in international journals, although this does create a bias in the selection of perspectives available to the worldwide academic community. The corpus includes

Indonesian-language scholarship where translated or heavily mentioned, including fundamental works by Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Azyumardi Azra, in the Scopus corpus.

The study situates Civil Islam within the post-truth turn in democratic communication theory (McIntyre, 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2018) as the overarching framework of communication studies. Post-truth dynamics are not only epistemological phenomenon deterioration of shared factual reference points but are produced through particular communication infrastructures: algorithmic platforms, network media ecologies, and the political economics of digital attention. Hefner's original formulation predates the advent of social media, but civil Islam as a normative project based on deliberative civic involvement and public articulation of shared moral norms is therefore immediately implicated in arguments about post-truth communication. The main theoretical contribution of the article is to bring various literatures into conversation. This manuscript was written with the help of Claude Sonnet 4.5 (Anthropic, 2025) and human review throughout. The prompt and validation criteria details are described in the additional Gaudete statement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Democratic Theory and Civil Islam

Hefner's (2000) Civil Islam is informed by both the Tocquevillian and Putnamian traditions, both of which locate democratic power in associational life rather than in state institutions alone. Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993) showed that dense networks of civic groups provide social capital norms of reciprocity and trust that make representative government work, at least in the Italian context. Hefner's contribution was to demonstrate that in Indonesia Islamic associations perform this social-capital function, generating what he terms a 'Muslim civic culture.' The argument was a direct challenge to Huntington's (1996) civilizational determinism, and Gellner's (1994) assertion that Islamic theology is structurally inhospitable to pluralist civil society.

Later study has mostly confirmed Hefner's central claim, although with major qualifiers. Esposito, Sonn, and Voll (2015) extend the comparative scope to Muslim democracies after the Arab Spring, and they show that the associational density of civil society, rather than theological belief per se, best predicts democratic durability. A complementary framework is provided by Stepan's (2000) concept of 'twin tolerations', whereby religious institutions and democratic states mutually respect each other's legitimate authority, which maps reasonably well onto the historical relationship of NU and Muhammadiyah to the Indonesian state (Menchik, 2016). Indonesia's mainstream Islamic organizations arguably exemplify the path of what Bayat (2013) called 'post-Islamism', a term he developed to describe movements which, having reached the boundaries of Islamist politics, turn to democratic standards.

More critical readings argue that Civil Islam is a form of flattery for the moderate mainstream. Hadiz (2016) contends that the mobilisation of Muslim identity against economic and political elites within Islamic populism is a structural element of post-

New Order Indonesia, not a marginal aberration, and that organisations like as NU and Muhammadiyah are not immune to its pull. The 2016-2019 'Ahok affair' the prosecution for blasphemy of Jakarta's ethnically Chinese, Christian governor-revealed fault lines among mainstream Islamic groups, with certain elements associating themselves with the Islamist mobilization, according to Mietzner (2018) and Power (2018). These findings complicate the tale that Civil Islam provides, leading to a more conflict-sensitive reading.

Post-Truth Communication, Populism And Religion

The concept of 'post-truth' has spawned a considerable interdisciplinary literature, described as an epistemic environment in which emotional appeals and party identities regularly supplant factual evidence (McIntyre, 2018). Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) influential typology differentiates between misinformation (false content provided without purpose to hurt) and disinformation (deliberately manufactured or modified content) and misinformation (actual content weaponized to harm). Lim (2017) highlighted in the Indonesian context how social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, played a crucial role in the rapid transmission of anti-Ahok disinformation throughout the 2016-2017 campaign, with Islamic network channels being key vectors of amplification.

The idea of cultural backlash proposed by Norris and Inglehart (2019) suggests that populist authoritarian forces benefit from the backlash against progressive cosmopolitan norms among communities who feel culturally displaced by modernization. Hadiz and Robison (2013) show that in Muslim-majority settings, Islamic populism melds religious and class grievances into a formidable identity-politics coalition. Tucker et al. (2018) demonstrate across several nations that exposure to social media is linked to both political awareness and susceptibility to misinformation an ambivalence that applies directly to digital Islamic communication. Marwick and Lewis (2017) and Bennett and Livingston (2018) further theorize how 'media manipulation' by politically motivated actors exploits platform affordances to mainstream extreme content mechanisms that Indonesian studies confirm operate within Islamic digital communities (Menchik & Trost, 2015; Hasan, 2019).

Those dynamics are not unique to Indonesia. In Brazil, religious disinformation networks through WhatsApp were essential in electing Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 (Machado et al., 2019). In Poland and Hungary, right-wing populist regimes have strategically instrumentalized Christian identity to delegitimize pluralist opposition (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Digital echo chambers exacerbated the polarization beyond established groupings of civil society in the conflict in Catalonia in Spain (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). All of these incidents point to the fundamental issues that the confluence of internet communication, religious identity and populist mobilization creates for democratic civil society beyond Indonesia.

Digital Media and the Islamic Public Sphere

The edited volume by Eickelman and Anderson (2003) had predicted that new media will reorganize Islamic public spheres. They contended that access to communication technologies was democratizing religious authority by expanding the

voices available to interpret Islamic scriptures. This theory has been expanded to Web 2.0 environments by Bunt's (2009) concept of 'iMuslims' and more recently by scholarship that has especially focused on the affordances of platform-based social media. Slama's (2025) study of social media in Indonesia's Islamic field demonstrates that while digital media have extended the reach of established organisations such as NU, they have also opened up new sites of competition over religious authority that NU's hierarchical structures are ill-equipped to handle.

Mariani (2021) and Fealy (2023) trace the rise of 'digital ustaz' religious influencers, who have attracted significant followings not based on scholarly qualifications but on their charm and entertainment, often peddling exclusivist narratives at odds with the pluralist principles of Civil Islam. The algorithmic architecture of big platforms exacerbates these processes. Empirical investigations on political Twitter and Facebook in Indonesia have validated the filter bubble thesis of Pariser (2011) and the work on echo chambers by Sunstein (2017) with major subtleties (Syambas et al., 2019; Juditha, 2018).

Research on computational propaganda by Woolley and Howard (2019) demonstrates how automated accounts and coordinated inauthentic behaviour increase partisan content, including religiously coded deception. In this context, the question is not whether Civil Islam is normatively acceptable, but whether the communication infrastructures of the post-truth period allow it to work as planned

RESEARCH METHODS

The study is based on a rigorous analytical-critical literature evaluation (Snyder, 2019). This approach is acceptable here, since the purpose of the essay is not to generate new empirical data, but to analyze a well-developed conceptual framework in light of existing scholarship, and to propose a revised version that is suitable for present conditions. The approach provides for visible and replicable synthesis, which is one of the main advantages for conceptual formation identified by Webster and Watson (2002).

The identification of the literature was systematic. In this context, the searches were conducted in Scopus and Web of Science with the following clusters of keywords: (I) 'civil Islam' AND 'democracy' OR 'democratization'; (II) 'Islamic civil society' AND 'Indonesia'; (III) 'Muslim organizations' AND 'populism' AND 'Southeast Asia'; (IV) 'post-truth' AND 'religion' AND 'social media'; (V) 'digital Islam' AND 'Indonesia'; (VI) 'Nahdlatul Ulama' OR 'Muhammadiyah' AND 'democracy' OR 'digital'; (VII) 'Islamic populism' AND 'Indonesia'; and (viii) 'gender' AND 'Islamic civil society' AND 'Indonesia'. The search was restricted to sources published between 2000-2025, with 2000 as the baseline year, reflecting Hefner's original publication. Language was limited to English. The initial corpus consisted of 347 records that were screened by title and abstract. 186 were selected for full-text review and 127 were included in the final synthesis based on their relevance to the research topics of the paper.

The analysis was performed in 3 steps. First, the original argument by Hefner was recreated in order to find out which specific statements are supported, qualified, or refuted by later study. Second, a theme synthesis clustered the literature around four nodes: (a) organizational resilience, (b) digital communication demands, (c) gender characteristics, and (d) comparative implications. Third, a modified Civil Islam framework was created to fill the observed shortcomings. Attention was made to sex and gender variables as an analytical dimension throughout, accordance with the journal's criteria. Where included scholarship reported sex- or gender-disaggregated data, these findings are included in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational Resilience: NU and Muhammadiyah as Democratic Pillars

Evidence has accumulated since 2000 to primarily support Hefner's contention that NU and Muhammadiyah are genuine assets for democracy. Bush (2009) has chronicled the internal pluralization of NU in the post-New Order era, when younger ulama and activists, many of whom were educated at state Islamic colleges or overseas, incorporated deliberative principles and human-rights discourse into the organization's intellectual culture. Fenwick (2012) showed that NU's pesantren network works as a decentralised nursery of civic skills, where students study not just religious texts but also organizational management, public speaking, and debate abilities that are immediately transferable to democratic engagement.

Muhammadiyah's democratic role is mostly exercised through its educational and health care infrastructure. By the early 2000s, Noor (2004) estimated that Muhammadiyah maintained over 6,000 schools, 170 universities and 400 hospital networks serving tens of millions of Indonesians that constitute the kind of dense associational life Putnam (1993) equates with democratic culture. Micro-level support for the social-capital rationale Civil Islam relies on is found in Buehler (2013) who noted districts with a dense Muhammadiyah organizational presence score higher on local governance quality and public participation. Van Bruinessen (2013) and Azra (2016) both agree that despite their internal arguments being sharper, the mainstream of both organizations remains dedicated to Pancasila Indonesia's pluralist state ideology as a fundamental political commitment.

The picture, however, is a lot more convoluted. Menchik's (2016) work on Islamic organizations' perception of religious minorities revealed a striking paradox. The views of mainstream organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah are always pro-democracy and pro-Pancasila, but they have

exclusivist theological views regarding the position of Ahmadis, Shia Muslims, and Christian proselytizers. This combination is called 'godly nationalism' by Menchik, which is civic in form, but exclusivist towards religious outgroups. Power (2018) and Warburton (2016) expand this research to electoral politics, finding that in several regional elections NU-affiliated candidates have mobilized Islamic identity markers in ways that blur the divide between Civil Islam and identity populism. These findings indicate that Civil Islam's democratic contribution is real but uneven: most consistent within mainstream Muslim politics and at the level of regime-type democratization, less reliable when it comes to religious minorities.

Digital Populism and the Peril to Civil Islam

The clearest empirical challenge to the optimism of Civil Islam comes from studies of the dynamics of digital communication. Lim (2017) documented how the '212 movement' the mass Islamist mobilisation against Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in 2016-2017 used WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels and Facebook pages, coordinated by loosely affiliated Islamist networks, to reach millions of Indonesians with content that NU and Muhammadiyah's official communications could not effectively counter. The episode is a wonderful example of what Bennett and Livingston (2018) call 'the misinformation order' an information ecosystem in which decentralized political networks replace institutional gatekeepers as agenda setters.

Hasan (2019) and Fealy (2023) provide an in-depth discussion of the phenomenon of the 'digital ustaz', showing how figures like Felix Siauw and Khalid Basalamah have built audiences of millions on YouTube and Instagram by mixing Islamic instruction with exclusivist and anti-secular messaging content that directly competes with NU and Muhammadiyah's pluralist narrative for the attention of younger Muslim Indonesians. As Slama (2025) states, these dynamics constitute a fundamental reorganization of Indonesia's Islamic field: whereas NU and Muhammadiyah previously held the monopoly of the legitimate means of religious symbolic production through their pesantren, schools and publications, the platform economy has disrupted this near-monopoly in ways similar to what Bourdieu (1993) theorized as a field-level crisis.

The propagation of fake hadith, distorted images of religious leaders, false assertions of Christian or foreign threats to Islam are widely documented in Indonesia's fact-checking ecosystem (Juditha, 2018; Purnomo & Wahid, 2020). Syambas et al.'s (2019) computational analysis of Twitter during the 2019 presidential election showed that Islamic identity hashtags were disproportionately amplified by bot accounts, indicating coordinated inauthentic conduct in the fabrication of what appeared to be organic religious emotion. This

is consistent with comparative data on computational propaganda in polarized democracies (Woolley and Howard, 2019).

NU and Muhammadiyah have not responded passively. Both organizations have also developed digital counter-disinformation efforts. NU's Lakpesdam and Muhammadiyah's Pusat Studi Islam have produced social-media-ready content promoting moderate Islamic messages, while youth wings such as Gerakan Pemuda Ansor have become active fact-checkers on the platforms (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). Platform engagement logic encourages emotionally charged material rather than factually accurate content (Lim 2017), and this is really the wrong context for the strengths of Civil Islam. It is these very qualities deliberative techniques, scholarly qualifications, institutional authority that are typically penalized by algorithmic structures.

Gender and the Underbelly of Civil Islam

Gender remains a constant blind spot in the literature on Civil Islam, even in Hefner's initial description. For decades, women's organizations Muslimat NU and Aisyiyah (Muhammadiyah) have been at the core of the construction of civic culture in Indonesia (Blackburn 2004; Robinson 2009). Yet, their contributions have been consistently understated in analyses that privilege ulama councils and male organizational leadership. With more than twenty million members, Muslimat NU is likely the world's largest Muslim women's organization, and its healthcare, education, and community development activities impact millions of homes.

More importantly, Rinaldo (2013) shows how Indonesian Muslim women have created what she calls 'pious activism', a form of civic engagement that relies on both Islamic piety and feminist critique to contest both gender inequality within Muslim communities and broader political exclusions. Hefner or his immediate predecessors do not sufficiently theorize this contribution. Doorn-Harder (2006) presents anthropological evidence of women religious scholars (nyai) in pesantren settings with great communal authority who negotiate the patriarchal institutional restrictions, a form of democratic cultural labor that is usually neglected in organization-level research.

This divide is particularly relevant in the digital context. As Mariani (2021) and Nisa (2018) have shown, Indonesian Muslim women are the main producers and consumers of Islamic digital content, and women-led Instagram and TikTok accounts have millions of followers. The content produced by these accounts ranges from encouraging Islamic feminism to advocating conservative veiling and anti-pluralist messaging a spectrum that defies any simple mapping onto the Civil Islam versus anti-Civil-Islam division. In sum, taking gender seriously is

not simply a matter of filling an empirical gap, but rather of re-shaping the analytical picture in ways that alter the usage of the framework.

Tabel 1

Tema Utama	Temuan Kunci	Bukti Empiris	Implikasi terhadap Civil Islam
Ketahanan Organisasi NU dan Muhammadiyah sebagai Pilar Demokrasi	NU dan Muhammadiyah tetap menjadi kekuatan utama demokratisasi Indonesia melalui jaringan pendidikan, pesantren, dan organisasi sosial.	Bush (2009) menunjukkan pluralisasi internal NU; Fenwick (2012) menemukan pesantren NU membentuk keterampilan sipil dan demokratis; Noor (2004) mencatat luasnya jaringan pendidikan dan kesehatan Muhammadiyah.	Mendukung tesis Hefner bahwa organisasi Islam moderat mampu menjadi fondasi masyarakat sipil demokratis.
Penguatan Modal Sosial dan Partisipasi Publik	Kehadiran organisasi Islam memperkuat kualitas tata kelola dan partisipasi warga.	Buehler (2013) menemukan daerah dengan kepadatan organisasi Muhammadiyah memiliki kualitas pemerintahan lokal dan partisipasi publik yang lebih baik.	Memperkuat argumen bahwa modal sosial keagamaan berkontribusi pada demokrasi substantif.
Komitmen terhadap Pluralisme Politik	NU dan Muhammadiyah tetap mendukung Pancasila dan sistem demokrasi meskipun menghadapi perbedaan internal.	Van Bruinessen (2013) dan Azra (2016) menunjukkan komitmen kuat kedua organisasi terhadap ideologi pluralistik negara.	Civil Islam terbukti berfungsi sebagai penyangga stabilitas demokrasi Indonesia.
Paradoks Demokrasi dan Eksklusivisme Teologis	Organisasi Islam mendukung demokrasi, tetapi masih mempertahankan batas-batas eksklusif terhadap kelompok minoritas tertentu.	Menchik (2016) menemukan sikap eksklusif terhadap Ahmadiyah, Syiah, dan misionaris Kristen meskipun tetap pro-demokrasi dan pro-Pancasila.	Menunjukkan keterbatasan Civil Islam dalam menjamin inklusivitas penuh terhadap minoritas agama.
Politik Identitas dalam Kontestasi Elektoral	Simbol dan identitas Islam kadang digunakan dalam mobilisasi politik lokal.	Power (2018) dan Warburton (2016) menunjukkan kandidat yang berafiliasi dengan NU memanfaatkan identitas Islam dalam beberapa pemilihan daerah.	Menunjukkan bahwa Civil Islam dapat beririsan dengan populisme identitas dalam praktik politik elektoral.
Tantangan Populisme Digital	Media digital mengurangi dominasi organisasi Islam arus utama	Lim (2017) mendokumentasikan keberhasilan Gerakan 212 melalui WhatsApp, Facebook, dan YouTube.	Civil Islam menghadapi tantangan baru dalam ruang publik

	sebagai sumber otoritas keagamaan.		digital yang terdesentralisasi.
Munculnya Ustaz Digital	Otoritas keagamaan bergeser dari lembaga ke figur media sosial.	Hasan (2019) dan Fealy (2023) menunjukkan popularitas ustaz digital seperti Felix Siauww dan Khalid Basalamah.	Mengurangi monopoli simbolik NU dan Muhammadiyah dalam produksi pengetahuan keagamaan.
Disinformasi dan Propaganda Komputasional	Hoaks keagamaan dan manipulasi identitas Islam diperkuat oleh teknologi digital.	Juditha (2018), Purnomo & Wahid (2020), serta Syambas et al. (2019) menemukan penyebaran hoaks dan amplifikasi tagar keagamaan oleh akun bot.	Menunjukkan kerentanan demokrasi terhadap manipulasi sentimen agama di era digital.
Respons Digital NU dan Muhammadiyah	Kedua organisasi mengembangkan strategi kontra-disinformasi melalui media sosial.	Mietzner & Muhtadi (2018) mencatat keterlibatan Lakpesdam NU, Pusat Studi Islam Muhammadiyah, dan GP Ansor dalam literasi digital dan pemeriksaan fakta.	Menunjukkan adaptasi Civil Islam terhadap transformasi ekosistem komunikasi digital.
Bias Gender dalam Teori Civil Islam	Kontribusi perempuan Muslim terhadap demokrasi dan masyarakat sipil sering terabaikan.	Blackburn (2004) dan Robinson (2009) menunjukkan peran besar Muslimat NU dan Aisyiyah dalam pendidikan, kesehatan, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat.	Mengungkap kelemahan konseptual Civil Islam yang terlalu berfokus pada kepemimpinan laki-laki dan organisasi formal.
Aktivisme Kesalehan (Pious Activism)	Perempuan Muslim mengembangkan bentuk partisipasi sipil yang menggabungkan kesalehan dan kritik feminis.	Rinaldo (2013) menunjukkan perempuan Muslim Indonesia memperjuangkan keadilan gender melalui kerangka Islam.	Memperluas definisi Civil Islam dengan memasukkan dimensi gender dan agensi perempuan.
Otoritas Nyai dalam Pesantren	Perempuan ulama memiliki peran penting dalam membangun budaya demokratis di tingkat komunitas.	Doorn-Harder (2006) menemukan nyai berperan sebagai pemimpin moral dan sosial dalam pesantren.	Menunjukkan bahwa demokratisasi berlangsung tidak hanya melalui organisasi formal tetapi juga melalui kepemimpinan perempuan.
Perempuan dalam Ruang Keagamaan Digital	Perempuan menjadi produsen dan konsumen utama konten Islam digital.	Mariani (2021) dan Nisa (2018) menemukan akun-akun perempuan Muslim di Instagram dan TikTok memiliki jutaan pengikut	Mengharuskan revisi kerangka Civil Islam agar mampu menjelaskan

dengan spektrum ideologi yang beragam.	dinamika gender dan media digital secara lebih komprehensif.
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Sumber: A thematic table that maps the main dimensions, key findings, empirical evidence, and their implications for the Civil Islam theory developed by Robert W. Hefner.

DISCUSSION

Reinventing Civil Islam in the Post-Truth Era

The previous examination suggests a case for modifying the framework of Civil Islam-preserving its analytical core while broadening it to encompass the realities of modern communication. The four following changes *First*, Civil Islam is best understood as an area of contestation than a fixed reality. Bourdieu's (1993) field theory provides a constructive supplement to Hefner's more Tocquevillian paradigm. Within a contested field, many actors deploy diverse types of capital scholarly, organizational, digital, financial to lay claim to legitimate Islamic authority. NU and Muhammadiyah have a lot of organizational and scholarly capital, but they are becoming challenged by actors who utilize digital capital more efficiently. To see Civil Islam as contested terrain is to see that democratic Islamic principles have to be replicated continually by communicative effort. They do not just persist by organizational momentum. This aligns with Habermas's (2006) post-secular argument that deliberative democracy requires both religious and secular individuals to engage in ongoing translation across epistemic frameworks, a sort of communicative activity that digital populism systematically destroys.

Second, the framework explicitly requires a dimension of digital communication. Platform affordances have reframed the Islamic public sphere in ways that simultaneously empower and endanger Civil Islam. Based on the analysis of network propaganda and its application to Indonesia in Benkler, Faris and Roberts (2018), we suggest to distinguish between organizational digital communication (institutional accounts and counter-disinformation programmes of NU and Muhammadiyah), community digital communication (WhatsApp-based neighbourhood and pesantren groups that circulate both moderate and exclusivist content) and influencer digital communication (the digital ustaz ecosystem largely operating outside the control of mainstream organisations). Future studies needs empirically informed descriptions of the interplay of these three levels and of the determinants of their joint democratizing or polarizing impact.

Third, gender should be a real axis of analysis, not just an add-on. This entails not just empirically bringing women's organisations into view, but also theorising gender relations within the Islamic civil society as a site of democratic contestation in its own right. This is based on Rinaldo's (2013) paradigm of pious activism and Robinson's (2009) study of Islamic feminism. Future research should test empirically whether organizations with greater degrees of internal gender equality as assessed by women's presence in leadership and decision-making also exhibit greater democratic

commitments in the sense of Menchik (2016), notably with respect to religious minority rights.

Fourth, the comparative scope of the framework needs to broaden. The Indonesian experience of Islamic civil society in dealing with post-truth populism provides analytical insights that can be transferred to the Muslim communities in Europe (Cesari, 2004; Koopmans, 2015) and religious civil society groups more broadly in Latin America (Hagopian, 2009). Comparative research should investigate structural similarities and contrasts in the responses of religious associational life to digital populist disruption in the Americas and Europe.

The cross-regional ramifications are worth bringing out. The post-truth communication environment inhabited by Indonesia's Islamic civil society is structurally analogous, though culturally diverse, to that facing religious and civic organizations in Brazil, Poland, Spain and the United States. In each of these cases, platform-mediated disinformation has interacted with religious identity politics to produce polarization dynamics that mainstream civil society organizations have found difficult to moderate. What distinguishes Indonesia is the organizational architecture of NU and Muhammadiyah. Their size, embeddedness in local community life and dual role as religious authorities and civic service providers afford them resources that small-scale religious civil society organizations in European or Latin American contexts may lack. At the same time, this very embeddedness creates vulnerabilities when identity politics mobilizes along Islamic lines, as in the 2016-2019 Ahok affair, organizations whose legitimacy depends on their Islamic credentials face real dilemmas about whether and how to distance themselves from exclusivist mobilizations without alienating their own constituencies.

Habermas's (2006) post-secular perspective is pertinent here. His idea that in post-secular societies both religious and secular individuals must be ready to engage in 'complementary learning processes' that translate their distinctive normative languages into terms accessible to the other translates directly onto the Civil Islam conundrum. The democratic contribution of NU and Muhammadiyah hinges on their ability to convert the Islamic moral resources into a civic language that is accessible to non-Muslim Indonesians and democratic principles into Islamic theological frameworks that are accessible to their followers. Digital populism disturbs this translation project by rewarding communication performances that enact in-group solidarity and out-group animosity rather than cross-cutting discussion. The algorithmic environment, in other words, operates against precisely those communicative behaviors that Civil Islam calls for. This is not merely a problem of technology that improved platform design could fix. It is a symptom of fundamental tensions between the economic logic of the attention economy, and the communication needs of democratic civil society.

Putnam (1993) also makes a useful distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. What platform-mediated Islamic identity politics best cultivates is bonding capital, the trust and solidarity within homogeneous groupings. Civil Islam's inclusive theological commitments are intended to develop bridging capital, the cross-

cutting relationships between social groups that maintain democratic pluralism. The post-truth communication environment systematically increases bonding dynamics and attenuates bridging ones, posing a structural danger to the democratic function of Civil Islam that organizational adaptation alone cannot solve. This analysis shows that any meaningful reaction to democratic backsliding in Muslim-majority and other pluralist nations must include communication policy, including platform regulation, algorithmic accountability, and public investment in non-commercial digital infrastructure.

The Civil Islam framework has normative weight beyond its analytical purposes. In the face of democratic backsliding and post-truth politics, the question is whether religiously based civic society can act as a counterweight to authoritarian populism. Norris and Inglehart (2019) show that strong civil society, whether religious or secular, is among the most potent institutional indicators of democratic resilience. Indonesia's experience indicates that religiously grounded civil society, when energized by inclusive theological convictions in Hefner's sense, can be particularly powerful since it speaks to communities in their own moral terms.

The post-truth communication environment breeds what this essay refers to as the Civil Islam issue. The attention economy progressively devalues the organizational assets that lend NU and Muhammadiyah their democratic credibility – deliberative procedures, scholarly authority, and institutional gravitas. However, the emotive and identity-mobilizing repertoires that 'work' on social media risk recreating the very identity politics that Civil Islam's democratic aim is meant to fight. Dealing with this challenge needs more than organizational change. It calls for fundamental reforms of the platform environment: algorithmic accountability, persistent investment in public-interest journalism, and media literacy programs incorporated inside Islamic educational institutions. These consequences are what lead Civil Islam into the prescriptive realm and link it to contemporary discussions of communication policy in democratic democracies.

CONCLUSION

Two and a half decades of scholarship and the challenges of digital populism, post-truth communication, and democratic backsliding suggest a new understanding of Hefner's Civil Islam paradigm. There are three obvious conclusions.

First, Civil Islam is valid both analytically and normatively. The empirical record continually suggests that NU and Muhammadiyah are meaningful democratic assets, by virtue of their associational density, social-capital creation and devotion to Pancasila. But scholarship since 2000 has muddied this picture, revealing internal tensions over religious minority rights and demonstrating how mainstream Islamic organizations remain sensitive to identity-political and populist influences.

Second, the post-truth environment of digital communication is a structural difficulty that Hefner's original framework was not designed to solve. Platform structures favor emotive, identity-affirming content at the expense of the deliberate, evidence-based communication that Civil Islam's democratic culture requires.

Indonesian Islamic organizations have built counter-disinformation operations, but are fundamentally outgunned in the attention market. Digital communication ecology must be a central analytical concern in any redesigned Civil Islam paradigm.

Third, gender is both a persistent empirical gap and an analytically important feature in its own right. The democratic contributions of Muslim women's organizations and pious activists, key actors in Indonesian Islamic civic life, have been continuously ignored. By treating gender as a structural variable, not an add-on, the analytical picture is altered and new avenues for research are opened. The conclusions has consequences beyond Indonesia. The Indonesian situation highlights the promise and limitations of religiously rooted associational life as a democratic counterweight in an age when populism and post-truth dynamics threaten democratic civil society in the Americas and Europe. The redesigned Civil Islam paradigm for digital communication, gender and contestation at the field level provides a fruitful conceptual tool for comparative academics to examine the interaction of religion, communication and democracy across different geographic contexts. Future research should involve cross-regional comparative designs to investigate whether the Civil Islam dilemma identified here is characteristic of religiously grounded civil society more generally and what policy and organizational conditions facilitate the ability of democratic religious associations to hold their ground in post-truth information environments.

The study has some evident shortcomings. This is a systematic literature review that synthesizes existing scholarship rather than providing new empirical data. To evaluate the arguments made here, primary research is needed, including ethnographic fieldwork in NU and Muhammadiyah digital communities, computational study of Islamic social media networks, and cross-national survey work. However, the focus on English sources in Scopus, while relevant to the publication context, results in the underrepresentation of key scholarship in Indonesian. Future assessments should build multilingual protocols that give sufficient weight to vernacular intellectual traditions. The gender analysis presented here is limited by the relative underdevelopment of gender-disaggregated research on Indonesian Islamic civil society; this gap itself is a research priority.

The practical ramifications for Islamic organizational leaders, communication professionals, policymakers and democracy activists are tangible. Organizations committed to the democratic values of Civil Islam are in a difficult balancing act: they cannot simply adopt the emotional and identity-affirming registers of digital populism without capitulating to the post-truth logic they oppose, but deliberative, pluralist Islamic communication struggles to compete in the attention economy. This means investing in creative digital communication, working with fact-checking organizations, and engaging with platform businesses and regulators to alter algorithmic frameworks that systematically punish civic over partisan material. But communication interventions alone will not be enough; sustained attention to the inequality, precarity, social marginalization of the socioeconomic condition that make identity-political and

populist mobilizations emotionally resonant for significant portions of Muslim communities in Indonesia and elsewhere will be necessary.

The article's broader contribution is to put the Civil Islam discussion into conversation with a rising comparative literature on religion, communication, and democracy in the post-truth era. Religious civil society organizations in the Americas and Europe occupy an equivocal position: They can be democratic anchors in places rarely reached by secular liberal institutions. But they can also be vehicles of identity politics that deepen social differences rather than reconcile them. Indonesia's experience, as interpreted through the updated framework proposed here, presents a grounded and theoretically productive case for this comparative discourse. One of the more important concerns for democratic theory and practice is whether civil society, rooted in religion, can sustain democratic culture in a post-truth communication environment, and under what conditions.

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