

Research Article

# Nationalism Narrative and the State Policy on Hizbut-Tahrir in Indonesia

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## Abstract

*After enjoying free and open political conditions for a long time, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, a transnational political Islamist movement, had to face the government's coercive response in 2017 when the government decided to disband this movement in consideration of violations of state principles and threatening the Republic of Indonesia. This paper tried to elaborate on the country's stigmatization efforts against HTI to create a negative picture of this group. The concept used is a stigmatization approach in the study of social movements as one of the state's strategies in repressing a movement that is considered threatening. The method used is qualitative, with data taken from books, journals, and online media sources. This article concludes that the Indonesian government has successfully used the stigmatization method to inhibit the influence of HTI in Indonesia. Stigmatization is carried out through various narratives against this movement, especially related to threats to ideology and political traditions in Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *Hizbut-Tahrir, Indonesia, Stigmatization, Transnational, Movement, Nationalism*

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of Islamism since the event of the 212 movement 2016 attracted a lot of attention from the academics, many studies emerged to explain that phenomenon such as Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi (2016) explaining the factors that occurred in the mobilization of the 212 movement that occurred in 2016. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, Mietzner and Muhtadi refuted the claims of some authors who stated that there had been an increase in radicalism that impacted the action of 212. Quantitative data shown in mietzner and Muhtadi's article shows the opposite, that there has been a decline in radicalism in Indonesia through a survey conducted between 2010 - 2016. Mietzner and Muhtadi Explained that the potential emergence of the 212 movement is more because in the previous regime the FPI and other Islamist movements were accommodated so that they were stronger institutionally; then in the Jokowi era, Jokowi's political attitude became a reason for the FPI to move and oppose Jokowi's government (Mietzner and Muhtadi, 2018).

Concerning state policy towards the Islamist movement, various studies that emerged focused on highlighting the state's attitude which is considered as a democratic regression. They acknowledge the threat of these Islamic movements to democracy in

Indonesia, but government policies are also considered undemocratic and become a boomerang for democracy in Indonesia itself (Mietzner, 2018; Power, 2018; Warburton and Aspinall, 2019). Other works specifically discuss in specific the state policy on the Islamist movement, such as Gustrieni Putri (2022) wrote about the state repression strategies on Islamic defender front (FPI) from 2016 – 2021 that are including arrest the members; creating bad narratives on FPI's ideology and activities, and dissolving the movement (Putri, 2022). Prihandono Wibowo (2020) specifically discussed the state securitizing process toward the idea of Khilafah in Indonesia. It argues that various government officials used *speech act* to securitize the ideas so that the people can understand the existential threat constructed by the government and make the government easily take emergency actions toward people indicated attached with the idea (Wibowo, 2020).

This article will focus to discuss the state stigmatization's effort toward Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). This group has existed around 20 years and worked to persuade Indonesian people to follow its idea. During 212 movement, HTI also actively involved since 2016. But, in 2017, state decided to dissolve this group with the security narratives.

## METHOD AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This work uses a descriptive method to understand how the state constructs its narratives about the threat posed by Hizbut-Tahrir in Indonesia. Descriptive analysis is a type of research in qualitative method that focuses on finding out the nature of object of study such as the actors, process, or the perspective of the actor (Lambert and Lambert, 2013). Through descriptive method, this study will explore how the state used stigmatization strategy to create bad narrative toward Hizbut-Tahrir in Indonesia since 2017 before this group was dissolved by the state and after. To understand the state efforts, it will identify the government institutions who involved and identify their efforts to construct the narratives on HTI. The data of this research is collected mainly from literature, books, journals, and news articles. The concept used to analyse this study is the concept of stigmatization in the social movement study.

Stigmatization is the part of state repression that the state can take to confront a movement considered a threat to the state or political stability. Generally, State repression is a variable in the theory of political opportunity structures (POS) along with political structure, elite alignments condition, and elite alliance existence (McAdam, 1996). POS discussed the political context that can influence the dynamic of social movement.

From its forms, state repression can be varied; it can be through arrest, intimidation, or dissolving of an organization. On the other hand, it can be by stigmatization or creating a bad narrative against the character and reputation of the figures, activists, and movements with the target of weakening the solidity of the followers or individuals who participate in the movement; creating a bad reputation in the community, and preventing the joining of new members (Boykoff, 2007).

Mass media can do stigmatization through negative framings, such as describing a movement as violent or disturbing. The state policy to dissolve or ban a movement or to

arrest the activists can also contribute to creating a negative image of a movement if covered by the media. Once the stigmatization is going on, it can decrease the self-confidence of a movement or disturb the unity or the movement's collective identity. As a result, it can influence the recruitment and mobilization of people in the movement agendas. This stigmatization, according to Boykoff, "*has the overall effect of putting social movements on the defensive, on the ever-unfolding path of self-explanation, justificatory back-tracking, and damage control*" (Boykoff, 2007, p. 297).

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Political Islam and the State in Indonesian History

Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia is the part of the global Hizbut-Tahrir led by Sheikh Atha bin Khalil Abu Rasytah. This group was founded in Palestine by Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, in 1948 and declared a legal party in 1953 in Jordan. This group works to re-establish the Islamic Khilafah state that is said to be the only legitimate in the Islamic teaching by changing the existing modern states. Up to now, HT has branches in more than 40 countries across the continents: Asia, Africa, America, Europe, and Australia.

In Indonesia, this group has been active for around 20 years since the 1980s by carrying out various events such as seminars, dialogue, conferences, campaigns, and demonstrations. Likewise, to publish books, magazines, tabloids, leaflets, websites, and social media. These all things persuade Indonesians to follow or support its religious and political missions. It has members from various kinds of society level: civil servants, students, university students, businessmen, Muslim preachers and scholars, peasants, and other levels of society. This group, however, was dissolved by the government under the special law called regulation in lieu of law issued in July 2017 (Perppu Ormas 2017). The government contended that HT failed to contribute positively to Indonesian lives, even only creating a threat with its anti - Pancasila and NKRI ideology.

After reformasi 1998, Hizbut-Tahrir in Indonesia has not faced any conflict with the government, including the Muslim organizations and figures in Indonesia. There is indeed rejection and criticism of its ideas, but it is only limited to the discourse level. HTI even got legal status as a legal social organization in Indonesia in 2004, and some of its main figures became part of MUI from 2005 to 2010. In its events, HTI used to invite Indonesian political elites, party members, intellectuals, and government officials. So, in this sense, HT seemed to be accepted as a normal Islamic movement in Indonesia despite its transnational character and vision.

The relations between the state and HTI changed after the issue of religious blasphemy in 2016 when Ahok (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama), governor of Jakarta and a Chinese – Christian, mentioned something on Islamic issues regarding political leaders. Since then, there have been many protests led by GNPF – MUI with several Islamic groups, including Islamic Defender Front (FPI), FUI (Forum Umat Islam, and HTI. As a result, Ahok was decided guilty and imprisoned for two years. He was also defeated as an incumbent candidate in the 2017 gubernatorial election (West, 2018).

Along with the Islamist protests and political mobilization, the narrative of counterradicalism, counter-intolerance, and safeguarding NKRI and Pancasila was echoed by the Joko Widodo government. Mietzner (2018) has put that the government has taken three steps of criminalization to counter the opposition during the heightened 2016 Islamist mobilization.

The first step was taken the night before the 212 (2 December) Demonstration 2016 in Monas, where several activists, main nationalists, were arrested because of suspicion of insult and treason against the government. Those activists were Rahmawati Soekarno Putri, Ratna Sarumpaet, Eko Suryo Santjojo, Adityawarman Thahar, Kivlan Zein, Firza Huzein, Alvin Indra and Ahmad Dhani (Mietzner, 2018).

The second step was when the police filed a criminal case against the main leaders of the 212 movements with issues unrelated to the demonstrations: Habib Rizieq Shihab was investigated for allegedly insulting Pancasila and creating and spreading pornographic chatter. It made Rizieq leave Indonesia for Saudi Arabia in 2017 – 2020. Also, Munarman, the Secretary General of the FPI, was named as a suspect in a case in which he allegedly slandered Balinese militias. GNPF-MUI coordinator (the *National Movement* for Defending Fatwa, Bachtiar Nasir was investigated for money laundering. And the chairman of the Islamic People's Forum (FUI), Muhammad Al-Khaththath, was also arrested for the issue of rebellion (IPAC, 2018; Mietzner, 2018).

The third step is the government took steps originally designed to challenge the Islamist group's unconstitutional platform of working with young militias under the auspices of the NU to dissolve the FPI and HTI events that began in March 2017. And the last or fourth step is the dissolution of Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (Mietzner, 2018).

Not only taking a legal approach to this movement, but the government also used the ideological narrative to strengthen Pancasila and NKRI through the slogan "I am Indonesia, I Am Pancasila (*Saya Indonesia, Saya Pancasila*).". The government also established a special institution, the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPPI), which is considered an effort to stem Islamic groups' increasingly powerful and influential narrative. Protecting Pancasila and NKRI, since then, became the main government narratives facing the Muslim political mobilization and are used to take steps against Hizbut-Tahrir.

It was not an easy process for the government to dissolve HTI as there is no written point in regulation that is fitted to punish this group. Regarding ideology, only Marxism, communism, and socialism are considered against Pancasila. Furthermore, following the process of giving punishment through the existing law takes a longer time. Therefore, considering the inadequacy of existing regulations and emergencies, the government, on July 12, 2017, issued a special law on Social Organization, and it then became a tool to revoke the legal status of HTI on 19 July 2017.

In the announcement of the dissolution, the government emphasized three important reasons for the dissolution of HTI: First, HTI does not perform a positive role as a legal entity to participate in the development process to achieve national goals.;

Second, The activities carried out by HTI are strongly indicated to have been counterproductive to the goals, principles, and characteristics based on Pancasila and the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, as stated in Law No. 17 of 2013 on social organization (*Ormas*) regulation, And the third, the activities carried out by HTI are believed to cause clashes in the community that can threaten the security and order of the Indonesian people and jeopardizes the integrity of NKRI. (Erdianto, 2017b).

Before the decision, in May 2017, President Joko Widodo mentioned that Pancasila is the only Indonesian ideology and should not be challenged anymore. If a group tried to disturb this principle, including the UUD 1945, NKRI, and state diversity (*Kebhinnekaan*), it would be a fundamental issue for Indonesia where the state would surely not be silent. The president insisted that "*Kalau ada ormas yang seperti itu, ya kita gebuk*," or "If there is an organization like that, then we will crush it" (Andwika, 2017).

According to Minister of Coordinator of Politics, Law, and Security (*Menkopolhukam*) Wiranto, there has been much evidence that HTI is pursuing to change the public opinion in order to support HTI's ideas to transform Indonesian from Pancasila and UUD 1945-based state of being Khilafah state. Wiranto argued that despite HTI claiming to be a da'wah movement, in reality, it has a political mission to establish Khilafah. So, the decision to dissolve HTI, for Wiranto, is a realistic and rational thing considering its threat (Stefanie, 2017). If this group is not dissolved, it could be a powerful movement. Even after the decision, still, the members will actively spread HTI's ideas, so Wiranto warned to keep watch on the effort to disseminate the ideology (Ristianto, 2019).

The ministry of defense, Ryamizard Ryacudu, even hardly asks HTI to step out of Indonesia and find other countries to live in. He said, from the first president to now, Pancasila has become the only Indonesian ideology, including the Indonesian people's ideology. Only those who support Pancasila can stay and live in Indonesia, and those who are against it are suggested to leave Indonesia (Andwika, 2017).

Ministry of Internal Affairs, Tjahjo Kumolo even brought Hizbut-Tahrir's recorded video to one of its events to exemplify the kinds of deviant organizations in his agendas in various places. That video contained a political speech by a Hizbut-Tahrir leader that called for Indonesian to take off nationalism, and people made laws to change it with Syariah Islam under the Khilafah state led by Khalifah to unite the Muslim Ummah (Putra, 2017).

Tjahjo Kumolo asserted that the dissolution of HTI does not mean that the government is against Ormas (social organization); indeed, the state allows it to develop as long as not against the state principles or adheres to a deviant belief, teaching, or ideology. In fact, Tjahjo maintained that Indonesia is a friendly country for any group, which has been home to around 380.908 groups (kumparanNEWS, 2018). He emphasized everyone should commit to protecting the Indonesian principles that have already been final from the threat of radicalism and terrorism (Antara, 2018).

After becoming the ministry of Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform, (MENPAN-RB) Tjahjo Kumolo warned the Indonesian civil servant



not to join illegal groups like PKI (Indonesian communist party, HTI, and FPI (Islamic defender front), including taking part in these groups activities and use the group's symbol. Those who violate it will be punished by the government (Mustafa, 2021). The minister of religion also had the same opinion as other ministries, that HTI was not solely a religious movement, but a political movement with political ideas that were contradictory to Indonesian principles, and HTI wanted to change the state ideology (Sarwanto, 2017).

The Indonesian courts also supported the government's position toward HTI. After the dissolution, this group tried to challenge the policy by submitting it to the constitutional court, Jakarta administrative court (PTUN Jakarta), the higher Administrative court (PTTUN) until the supreme court (Mahkamah Agung); however, these four courts did not accept HTI's appeal to delegitimize the state policy even, these courts agreed that HTI had violated Indonesia law by adhering ideas against state principles.

From the legislative member's perspective, some members condemned that decision, especially opposition parties such as PKS (Justice and Prosperous Party), PAN (National Mandate Party), and Gerindra, which argued that there is improper treatment of the state toward HTI. For them, the state should prove the HTI's violation in court before deciding on this group (Sarwanto, 2018). But these parties in the legislative are not loud enough to counter the state efforts to delegitimize HTI as the majority of legislative members are in coalition with the ruling party, PDI – P (The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle).

At the Muslim society level, Nahdlatul Ulama was the main supporter of this policy along with its under bow groups such as Banser and GP Anshor. Indeed, Banser dan GP Anshor was involved in clashes with HTI members several months before the state issued the dissolution. It happened when HTI held a yearly event to commemorate the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate on 3 March 1924. Greg Fealy (2018) assumes that there is an indication of the NU movement to confront HTI and that the state's decision to dissolve this group was under systematic coordination or cooperation (Fealy, 2018).

Despite that, NU members and leaders have been the most critical of HTI's ideas for a long time. Abdurrahman Wahid, Hasyim Muzadi, and Said Aqil Siradj, the former leaders of NU, have mentioned their stance opposing the idea of the Islamic state. For them, no single command from Islamic sources obligates a single kind of state. Hence, State in Islam is about *ijtihad* or religious interpretation. For them, Pancasila and NKRI is a final agreement and should not be changed anymore. Therefore, any movement propagating to replace this final principle is an imminent threat to Indonesia (Aswar, 2016). Besides, Some NU intellectuals have written books to respond to the ideological narratives of HTI, such as Nadirsyah Hossein (Member of NU special branch Australia), who wrote *Islam Yes Khilafah No* (Hosen, 2018), and Idrus Ramli with his book, *Hizbut Tahrir Dalam Sorotan* (Ramli, 2013). On NU Online, an official NU Website, there are thousands of articles regarding Khilafah and the responses of NU to it. It shows that NU has a clear stance on the existence of HTI and its ideas in Indonesia. To respond to the HTI's dissolution, Nahdlatul Ulama also praised it. They mentioned that it was supposed

to be a step taken by the state to protect Indonesia from any ideological threat (Redaksi We Online, 2018). To signify the state stigmatization of HTI, three ministers (*Mendagri, Menkopolhukam, and Jaksa Agung – Attorney General*) have declared a three ministers' common decision letter (SKB 3 Menteri) after the dissolution to foster the ex-HTI members to create a good awareness and support to Indonesian principles, besides throwing away their deviant ideologies (Tribunnews.com, 2017).

### **The Impact of the Stigmatization**

Stigmatization created a bad image of the object or social movement. As a result, it can threaten the internal solidarity or collective identity, disturb the capability to maintain the member's loyalty, recruit people and gather support. It also will be distracted from its main target and vision to protect the movement's image by creating counter-narratives and to protect its internal cohesively to prevent the disastrous effect of the state's stigmatization strategy (Boykoff, 2007).

The impact of the state decision toward HTI is that this group suddenly disappeared as a legal organization, including its symbols, secretariats, and media publication. On the other hand, the state policy also made this group focus its energy on responding to all the states' narratives toward this group. For example, HTI argued that the government's move did not have a strong legal basis to take action against HTI. This group has existed for more than 20 years to carry out its da'wah activities in an orderly and procedural manner. According to HTI, da'wah is the activity of conveying Islam in all aspects, including politics or the Khilafah idea. Since Khilafah is part of Islam, none can say that it is illegal teaching in Indonesia. Nothing is also mentioned in the existing regulation that Islamic teaching is contrary to Pancasila. Accordingly, for HTI, the ideology promoted by HTI did not conflict with Pancasila, and this group has a constitutional right to share its ideas (Erdianto, 2017a).

On the other hand, HTI also mobilized its members and followers to conduct any event and protests against the state's so-called criminalization of Muslim activists and groups. After the policy, there were suddenly increasing protests in many places in Indonesia to condemn and reject the state policy through demonstrations by young activists or by statement principles declared by Muslim figures.

The counter-narrative strategy also is carried out through social media in which there were trending topics on Twitter around the time of the state policy to support HTI, such as #KamiBersamaHTI (#We are with HTI), #HTILanjutkanPerjuangan (HTI to continue its struggle; #7MeiHTIMenang (7 May HTI win; #HTILayakMenang (HTI deserves to Win), #UmatBersamaHTI (the Ummah is with HTI), #IslamSelamatkanNegeri, (Islam save the country), #KhilafahAjaranIslam (Khilafah Islamic Teaching) #HTIdiHati (HTI in our heart), #AdvokatBelaHTI (lawyer defends HTI); and #HTISiapBanding #HTIReadyToAppeal). These hashtags on Twitter were trending after the state dissolved HTI, and during HTI, appealed to the court to challenge the state policy in 2017 and 2018 (Aswar, bin Mohd Yusof and Binti Abdul Hamid, 2020).

Furthermore, the impact of the policy on Indonesian responses, a survey showed that most Indonesian people supported the state policy and opposed the effort to change Indonesian ideology. CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), for example, found in its survey in September 2017 that of the 1,000 respondents, 52.7% said they did not agree that the state basis was changed, and 32.7% said they did not agree, as many as 49.8% of respondents agreed with the dissolution of HTI (Simbolon, 2017). Saiful Mujani Research Center (SMRC) found the same result in June 2017 after surveying 1350 respondents, 68.8 percent rejected HTI's struggle, and 78.4 percent agreed with the government's decision to dissolve HTI (Wardah, 2017).

Another impact of the policy, according to some observers, is that it can weaken the idea of Khilafah that HTI has proposed for a long time. It would be a negative term in the Indonesian mind after the state narrated it as a dangerous and radical idea (Siregar, 2017). Besides, it also can open wider opportunities to all levels of Indonesian people to prevent and contain the HTI's revival efforts after the dissolution. Such as several rejections of HTI's preachers in many places and the NU & Muhammadiyah efforts to structurally tackle this group infiltration in its institutions and communities or members (Affan, 2017; BBC News Indonesia, 2017).

However, the effect of state repression or stigmatization is not always positive. Noorhaidi Hasan argued that from the Middle East experiences, movements that are banned by the regimes would change their tactics, for example, by working underground to rebuild or strengthen their power until the regime changes and they revive again (Artharini, 2017). Amnesty International has an opinion with Hasan on the future impact of HTI after the dissolution (Amnesty Indonesia, 2017). Even according to this Amnesty, HTI would be difficult to control after dissolution. On the other hand, Hasan maintained that just giving legal space for HTI will make it easier for the state to watch and control it, such as the experience of allowing Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia is the way to approach and negotiate the jihadist's networks. The state policy toward HTI will even create a chance for this group to justify its narratives that the state limited the political aspiration by arbitrary action. It can decrease the state image of the Indonesian people (Artharini, 2017).

It is proven by the study conducted by Hasbi Aswar (2021) that after the state's dissolution in 2017, HTI changed its strategy to safely work in Indonesia without its official name. Its members and figures are easily found in their social media activities with the same narratives and propagation that always criticize the secular system and ideology and call for a changing system to implement sharia and establish Khilafah. Through this changing strategy, HTI can still counter the state narrative and weaken it and open space for HTI to increase its engagement with the Indonesian people; recruit members, and invite people to its politics and ideological agenda (Aswar, 2021). This is also confirmed by Essi Ramadanti & Hisbullah (2020) who studied HTI in South Sulawesi and Yunarman (2022) on HTI in Bengkulu, who found that despite being dissolved, HTI still keeps working to disseminate its idea, approaches, and recruits people with varied strategies either through the offline and online medium (Ramadanti and Hisbullah, 2020; Yunarman, 2022).



## CONCLUSION

HTI has existed since around 20 years ago, the 1980s, and is actively involved in Indonesia's political and social life with various agendas it succeeded to do such as seminars, conferences, discussions, published books, magazines, tabloids, and websites. However, in 2017, the government decided to revoke its legal status after giving free and open fields to this group in Indonesia. This policy came along with the stigmatization strategy of the state apparatus on this group, such as HT is not truly doing da'wah but political activities. Its idea contradicts Indonesian principles, Pancasila and NKRI, threatening the Indonesian political integrity with the Khilafah ideas. This narrative also is supported by the Muslim groups in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and the Indonesian Ulama Council. The stigmatization strategy proved to work as the HTI then was distracted to respond all the offensive narratives toward it. Also, of the stigmatization, the Indonesian people tend to agree with the state policy and reject HTI's ideology. But, these impacts still cannot be used as a single measure to conclude that the state has succeeded in containing or weakening HTI, as this group can find other strategies to counter the state's narratives and still work in Indonesia.

This study aims to fill the gap of many discussions on Indonesian democracy after 2016 in which there was a higher involvement of Islamic political movement as oppositions to Joko Widodo's regime. Research related to stigmatization and social movements is very broad. This research only focuses on the state's stigmatization of HTI. In the context of stigmatization, this activity is carried out not only by the state but also by other social movements that are opposed to HTI, including the media. Future research could look into how the anti-HTI movement stigmatizes HTI as well as the role of the media in doing so. It is interesting to carry out these studies in the future to see in full the various dynamics related to the existence of HTI in Indonesia.

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