

Faith, Moral Authority, and Politics:  
The Making of Progressive Islam in Indonesia

by

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## ABSTRACT

Several Islamic organizations have experience major changes in their theological frames and political identities away from fundamentalist and revivalist theological orientation to one that embraces a progressive Islamic theology that synthesizes these norms with classical Islamic teachings. What are the factors that explain these theological changes? What are the causal mechanisms that help to promote them? Using the moral authority leadership theory, I argue that Islamic groups would be able to change their theological frames and political identities if the changes are promoted by religious leaders with 'moral authority' status, who are using both ideational and instrumental strategies to reconstruct the theological frames of their organizations. In addition to moral authority leadership, intermediary variables that also affect the likelihood of a theological change within Islamic groups are the institutional culture of the organization – the degree of tolerance for non-Islamic theological teachings - and the relationship between the Islamic group and the state.

This study is a comparative historical analysis of two Indonesian Islamic groups: the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and the Muhammadiyah. It finds that the NU was able to successfully change its theological positions due to the presence of a charismatic moral authority leader, the tolerant institutional culture within the organization, and the ability of the organization to ally with the Suharto regime, allowing the reform to be institutionalized with little intervention from the regime. On the other hand, theological reform within the Muhammadiyah was not successful due to the lack of a leader with moral authority status who could have

led the reforms within the organization, as well as to the dominance of a revivalist institutional culture that does not tolerate any challenges to their interpretation of Islamic theology. The analysis makes theoretical contributions on the role of religious leadership within Islamic movements and the likelihood of Islamic groups to adopt liberal political norms such as democracy, religion-state separation, and tolerance toward religious minorities. It identifies the mechanisms in which theological change within Islamic group become possible.

To my parents, who taught me everything about life  
and are always there for me;  
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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Could Islamic groups embrace liberal sociopolitical ideas such as democracy and religious pluralism? If so, under what conditions would this be possible? How does religious leadership, the institutional structure of the organization, and the interaction among them affect the likelihood of a religious organization to adapt and institutionalize these ideas?

These puzzles have great implications for scholars who study religion and politics: Why do Islamic organizations change their theological frames and political identities from conservative/ revivalist Islamic theological interpretations to one that supports the compatibility between Islamic and modern liberal ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism? What exactly is the role of religious leadership in helping to bring about theological change within these groups? Under what conditions religious leaders are more likely to successfully change the theological orientations of their religious organization (e.g., from one that promotes a conservative revivalist interpretation of Islam to one that embraces more liberal/progressive theological interpretation) and under what conditions they are less likely to successfully accomplish such a change?

These puzzles are important for scholars who are analyzing the political resurgence of Islam,<sup>1</sup> a religion with a total of 1.5 billion adherents throughout the

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on global religious resurgence is extensive, but canonical works include Appleby, 2000, Casanova, 1994, Juergensmeyer, 1993 & 2008, Marty and Appleby, 1991, and Toft, Philpott, and Shah, 2011.

world. It is often perceived by some as a religion which promotes a conservative and revivalist-oriented theology, advocates for the establishment of a state based on the principles of Islamic law (*shari'a*), and the promotion of intolerance and violence against other religious groups.

For some scholars (e.g., Huntington, 1996, Lewis, 1993, 2003), Islamic social movements are generally assumed to support the establishment of an Islamic state as well as the institution of social policies that are supported by Islamists. Such policies range from the implementation of the shari'a law as the constitutional foundation of the state, the exclusion and subjugation of women from the labor force and public sphere, to the persecution against religious minorities and smaller Islamic sects within that state.

However, scholars tend to overlook the fact that Islamic groups do not always promote and support religious fundamentalism, intolerance, and shari'a-based Islamic state. In some Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Islamic groups have helped to promote democratic transitions after decades of authoritarian rule by secular military-backed regimes. Islamic groups in these countries have not only advanced democracy and civil society; in some cases, they have accepted and promoted new ideas that are identical with liberal political ideas. The synthesis between Islamic teachings and Western political thought that are supportive of democracy and other related liberal values result in the creation of what I called “progressive Islam” – Islam which supports, seeks to promote, and institutionalize modern sociopolitical values such as democracy, human

rights, religion-state separation, and tolerance toward religious minorities within their respective organizations and societies.<sup>2</sup>

Why do these Islamic groups decide to alter their theological foundations from a theology that promotes fundamental Islamic values and a *shari'a*-based Islamic state into one that promotes the progressive ideas mentioned above? In this study, I argue that the role played by key religious leaders of these organizations and the institutional structure of the organizations are integral to the process of theological and political changes within these groups. I refer to these religious leaders as moral authority leaders. This is because they are responsible for initiating and encouraging attitudes that reflect theologically and politically progressive interpretations of Islam. I further argue that these leaders play a very important role as innovators and promoters of new religious ideas/theology. After inventing these ideas, they attempt to implement and institutionalize them within their respective religious groups, using both ideational and instrumental strategies. Some of these leaders are successful in having their ideas institutionalized by their organizations, changing their organizations' theology and political strategies in the process, while others have less success in their reform efforts.

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<sup>2</sup> This definition builds on the term 'liberal Islam' defined in Kurzman (1998). However, it differs from Kurzman's definition because it assumes that progressive Islamic thought studied in this dissertation are developed by reform leaders in their own terms rather than as in response to the incentives and/or pressures from their counterparts from the Western world. See chapter 2 (pp. 57-58) of this study for further details.

Previous works in the field of religion and Islamic politics are guided by several theoretical approaches, including political culture/modernization theory and rational choice theory. However, the culturalist approach is limited from its fixed conception of ideology and culture, which tend to held religious groups, especially Islamic groups constant and incapable of changing their theological outlook. Rational choice scholars produce an elegant and parsimonious explanation on how structural constraints can shape religious actors' costs and benefits calculations and in turn determine the political strategy that they are choosing. However, their explanation tend to (but not always) focus on the instrumental (e.g., power) or material-oriented goals over ideational goals. It needs to be merged with social constructivist theory in order to fully account for the instrumental and ideational goals and strategies of religious actors in politics.

Culturalist/modernization theory scholars (e.g., Huntington, 1996, Lewis, 1993 and 2003) tend to argue that the political action of religious (Islamic) groups can be predicted from ideologies and theological teachings that are shared by members of these groups. They tend to portray Islam as a fixed and static religion that seldom, if ever, changes its theological frames. They argue that Muslims tend to see Western intellectual ideas such as democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance as threats to the fundamental teachings of Islam and thus, reject these ideas as incompatible with Islamic beliefs. As a result, Islamic groups are often portrayed as fundamentalist and radical groups, whose political goal is to impose a strict version Islamic law (*shari'a*) in all Muslim-majority societies, and to use non-democratic means such as authoritarianism and violence in order



to impose and enforce the shari'a to the rest of the population. Their portrayal of Islamic groups tends to reinforce the popular view that stereotypes them as fundamentalist, intolerant, and hostile toward liberal political values such as democracy, human rights, and religion-state separation.

Today, most political scientists no longer subscribe to culturalist/modernization-centered theories of culture analyzed above. Some have attempted to create a definition and assumption of culture that is more flexible, subject to contests by multiple actors, and more adaptable to structural as well as contextually based changes, including Wedeen (2002). One of them is social constructivist theory, which holds culture and ideologies as socially constructed variables subject to change and alteration based on the actions of human agents and how they handle structural constraints in the form of culture, ideology, or institutions, a process it calls mutual constitution. It is a theoretical approach that seeks to create a more nuanced treatment of culture as well as its products: ideas, norms, identities, and deeply held theological beliefs. It takes these variables seriously as independent variables that could influence political actions that are socially constructed, subject to political contestation, and are amendable to change over a period of time and space. At the same time, constructivism also develops clear concepts, hypothetical assumptions, and measurements about culture, ideas, and identities that could be turned into theoretical generalizations, unlike the more "uncertain, ambiguous, and messy" conceptualizations of these variables by interpretivists-oriented scholars (e.g., Wedeen, 2002, p. 726).

On the other hand, scholars using rational choice (rationalist) approach (e.g., Gill, 1998 & 2008; Kalyvas 1996) are able to provide an elegant and parsimonious explanation of the behavior of religious and political actors based on the preferences and goals of these actors and the constraints that they face in their attempts to achieve these preferences and goals. The specific contents of these preferences are undetermined, but they could be instrumental, ideational, and in most cases, both, depending on the assumption of individual scholars. (Gill 2008, p. 28). However, there are divergent ways in which rational choice scholars treat religious ideas as a potentially causative variable within their own works. The first generation of rational choice scholars often dismissed ideas as merely “hooks” used to justify or legitimize the actions of political groups that might have been grounded in instrumental (power-seeking) or materialist interests (e.g., Shepsle, 1985). The next generation rational choice scholars offer more nuanced theoretical arguments which incorporate ideas as potential mechanisms that help to shape the groups’ preferences, incorporating both instrumental and ideational preferences in their theoretical explanations. Works by these scholars carefully mapped the sets of possible constraints facing religious groups in their efforts to implement their goals and preferences, in the forms of historical legacy, institutional structure, and leadership, which help to determine the strategic choices they made (e.g., Warner, 2000, Gill, 2008). The explanatory power of rational choice theorists tend to be more convincing and persuasive when it incorporates some, if not all of these constraints simultaneously. These works argue that both instrumental and ideational preferences are involved in the

decision-making process of each political actors, making the analyses of their decisions more credible, nuanced, and highly contextualized.

However, most (but not all) works of rationalist scholars still privilege instrumental goals and preferences (e.g., maximizing their denominations' memberships, seeking greater influence/power vis-à-vis other denominations) even when ideational or theological goals are also at play as well. The question that remains unanswered in much of these works is the balance between ideational and instrumental preferences of these actors. Many rational choice scholars still privilege instrumentalist and materialist preferences, over ideational ones in shaping the choices and actions of political actors (Checkel, 1998, p. 327). This is a potentially serious limitation because sometimes, ideational variables such as theological frames can significantly influence the action of political actors. This is especially so in the case of religious groups. While a growing number of scholars of rational choice theory are trying to take ideas seriously in their theoretical explanation,<sup>3</sup> more scholars need to fully take into account both instrumental and ideational preferences when we study the political actions of religious actors. Both factors need to be treated with equal consideration by scholars, regardless

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<sup>3</sup> The primary work utilizing this approach is Carolyn Warner's *Confessions of an Interest Group* (2000). In this work, she shows how various constraints such as historical trajectory, institutional structure, and leadership help to shape the preferences and actions of the Catholic Church in three European countries: France, Italy, and Germany. It offers a nuanced and highly persuasive account on why the church chose to pursue different sets of alliances with Christian Democratic Parties in these three countries, fully supporting it in the case of Italy, partially in the case of Germany, but not supporting it in the case of France.

whether they are coming from rational choice, constructivist, or other theoretical perspectives.

As an alternative to these theoretical frameworks, I have developed the moral authority leadership theory - a new theory based primarily on the social constructivist theory, but is also informed by the Weberian charismatic leadership theory as well as rational choice theory. This theory, grounded on constructivist principles, argues that ideas and other “social facts” (e.g., norms, identities), play an important role in politics by constituting, and sometimes primarily causing the transformative change in the political goals and strategies of religious groups. I argue that the primary preference of moral authority leaders in promoting their new theology is their desire to have their ideas implemented and institutionalized within their own organization, because they believe these ideas would have changed and strengthened their organization. By adopting this new theology, they are hoping that their organizations could be made more compatible with modern sociopolitical ideas such as democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance. Borrowing from Weberian charismatic leadership theory, I argue that the primary agents of theological change in these organizations are moral authority leaders, whose theological expertise and charismatic attributes give them strong leadership stature that enabled them to attract and convert potential supporters necessary to institutionalize their ideas. Lastly, from rational choice theory, I deduce moral authority leaders and their followers to have instrumental preferences and behave strategically to turn these preferences into political actions. They weight the cost and benefits of their reform efforts and use a variety

of means to increase support and minimize opposition against their reforms from within and outside of their organizations. However, while they are behaving strategically to promote their reforms and to ensure the survival of the reform efforts in the face of institutional and external opposition, their primary goals and preferences are primarily ideational, which is to promote and institutionalize their theological ideas within their respective organizations, because they believe that their ideas are normatively correct for the organization and its members to follow. They take theological ideas seriously and their primary goal is the institutionalization of these ideas within their respective religious group.<sup>4</sup>

Constructivists believe that theological frames, political identities, and actions of religious groups are socially constructed. They will be constantly amended, reinterpreted, and renegotiated by members of religious groups, based on the historical, cultural, and institutional contexts facing them. Constructivists recognize that religious and political ideas often originate from influential religious leaders, whom they called ‘norm entrepreneurs.’ These leaders propagate their ideas because they believe such ideas would change and transform their groups by embracing new sets of political norms and values that once are

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<sup>4</sup> This theoretical assumption is identical to the works of rational choice scholars in religion and politics such as Gill (2008) and Warner (2000). As a matter of fact, it is complementary to their theoretical assumptions, despite its primary focus on ideational and normative goals. My theory does not seek to replace or supplement the theoretical assumption of these rational choice works. Instead, it seeks to complement them by showing how ideational and instrumental preferences work together in constructing the preferences and political goals of religious actors, such as the two Islamic groups that are analyzed in this study.

successfully institutionalized, grounded their future political actions. Instead of portraying religious groups to have fixed and static theological frames like culturalists, constructivists tend to portray religious groups to have constantly changing theological and political preferences that are subject to social reconstruction. However, unlike rationalist-oriented scholars, who tend to attribute changes in theological and political preferences primarily to instrumental and material factors, constructivists tend to focus on the ideational and normative goals that proponents believe would have resulted in positive changes for the organization as a whole.

I hypothesize that the ideational and political changes made by religious organizations are determined by the “moral authority” leaders who achieved this status through their theological expertise and charismatic attributes. This status enables them to gain credibility from their followers to implement and institutionalize their theological ideas within their organizations (hypothesis #1). Moral authority leaders and the reforms they promote are more likely to be successful in their effort to create theological and political changes if they meet most, if not all, of the following conditions:

1. The presence of an institutional organizational culture that historically tolerates new religious ideas, customs, and traditions, which helps to justify support for reform among sympathetic members and discourage the force of opposition against these reforms (hypothesis #2); and

2. A peaceful relations between the religious group and the state, which minimizes the likelihood of political repression against the religious group and its members, allowing reformers to implement their reforms inside their own organization (hypothesis #3).

Together, the combination of these hypotheses will construct the theoretical framework that explains how Islamic leaders and their theological ideas influence the process of change within their respective groups. My theory does not claim to explain the action of all religious leaders in all times and places. Rather, it is a middle-range theory that maps out the causal mechanisms in which new religious ideas could gain support within and outside Islamic groups and the conditions that give rise to their successful institutionalization within these groups.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, it specifies the process how religious leaders who promote these ideas use a combination of ideational (e.g., speeches/sermons) and instrumental (e.g., coercion, material benefits) incentives in order to implement and institutionalize them within their organizations.

I argue that there are two possible causal pathways in which the interaction between the primary independent variable of this study - moral authority leadership, and the two intervening variables - institutional culture of the

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<sup>5</sup> Even though the theory could potentially be applied to explain the actions of all religious groups, in this study it is limited to the study of Islamic groups. The degree of success of progressive reform within each group are conditioned on the presence of independent and intermediary variables named above: moral authority leadership (independent variable), tolerant institutional culture (intermediary variable #1), and peaceful relations between religious group and the state (intermediary variable #2).

organization and the relationship between the state and the religious group, results in different outcome that determines the success or failure of a religious organization to institutionalize the reforms advocated by these moral authority leaders and their supporters. First, under the successful reform pathway, moral authority leadership works together with a tolerant institutional culture and a peaceful relation between religious group and the state to produce the successful institutionalization of progressive theological reforms. However, under the unsuccessful reform pathway, theological reform is unlikely to be successful due to the intolerant institutional culture within the religious organization. In this situation, the reformers encounter a strong opposition from the conservative-leaning factions within their group. If reform opponents manage to develop a strong unsuccessful reform campaign against the reforms, they would be able to block the reforms and prevent them from being institutionalized within the organization.

By detailing these mechanisms and explaining how they work, I seek to develop a new understanding on how interaction between human agents (moral authority leaders) and the institutional structure within a religious organization have resulted in causing significant theological changes within the organization. In turn, such changes have broader implications for the organization's theological frame that guides its political identities and preferences. This frame helps to determine whether the religious group will adopt political strategies that could either be peaceful (e.g., participating in democratic institutions such as elections)



or conflictual (e.g., rejecting democratic institutions and supporting the *shari'a* law).

In order to show how these mechanisms work empirically, I have chosen to conduct a comparative historical analysis of two Islamic movements, each representing the two possible causal pathways outlined in this study: the *successful reform pathway* (causal mechanism #1) is represented by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) movement, while the *unsuccessful reform pathway* (causal mechanism #2) is represented by the Muhammadiyah movement. These two movements are chosen because, as shown by Liddle and Mujani (2009), they have attracted a large number of followers within their respective countries, and all of them have historically played significant roles in the Indonesian public sphere. Both have been active participants in the national and local politics of Indonesia last several decades, and all have suffered from political repressions and persecutions. They have played a major role in the democratic transition and consolidation that has occurred in Indonesia during the last decade and a half.<sup>6</sup>

The two different pathways explored in this study represent the different outcomes between the independent variable - moral authority leadership, with the two intervening variables of this study – organization's institutional culture and the relationship between the state and the religious groups. Under the successful reform pathway, theological reform within the NU has been successful. Reform within the NU was headed by the charismatic moral authority leader

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter 2 (pp. 82-85) for further justifications of my case selection method.

Abdurrahman Wahid, who led the organization from 1984 to 1999. Wahid had an established credential as an expert in both classical Islamic thought (*fiqh*) as well as in Western philosophical and sociopolitical thought. He developed his progressive theology as a synthesis of both intellectual streams, and sought to develop a liberal and pluralistic Indonesian Islam that tolerates localized Islamic customs and traditions and respects the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities. Lastly, Wahid's status as a charismatic leader with a direct lineage to the NU's founders and perceived supernatural abilities has helped his efforts to reform the organization. Wahid's moral authority status has made the institutionalization of his reforms easier to be carried out.

Wahid and other reformers within the NU were able to implement the theological reforms they propagated because of the tolerant institutional culture of the organization. The NU historically tolerates the practice of non-canonical Islamic customs and traditions that are not prescribed in the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* as well as local religious customs and traditions that predated the arrival of Islam in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> Due to this institutional culture, it becomes easier for the NU to adopt Wahid's progressive ideas which promotes the compatibility between Islam, democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance. Lastly, due to the more

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of these non-canonical Islamic customs include the cult worship of major deceased *ulama* (saints), pilgrimage to religious shrines and tombs of saints, while example of localized religious customs include the use of shadow puppets (*wayang*) as a mean to spread Islamic teachings, previously practiced by the Hindu tradition that used to dominate Indonesia until the arrival of Islam in 15th century CE.

peaceful relationship between the NU and the Indonesian state, the reforms were not blocked by the Suharto regime. The regime even welcomed Wahid's agenda to promote democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism within the NU, since his reform agenda was perceived by the regime as the moderate alternative to the ideas advocated by more conservative Islamic political groups during the 1980s and early 1990s. As a result, Wahid was able to promote and institutionalize his reforms within the NU during the late 1980s with little intervention from the regime. The regime only started to oppose Wahid and his reform around 1990, when it became clear that Wahid intended to spread his ideas outside of the organization. By this time, however, his reform had been successfully institutionalized within the organization.

The clearest evidence that Wahid's ideas were successfully instituted within the NU is the fact that under the leadership of Wahid and his successors, the organization has made a significant change from a conservative, pro-Islamic state organization from the 1950s until the 1970s, to one that has embraced progressive ideas such as democracy, human rights and religious tolerance/pluralism in Indonesia. The NU also distanced itself from the promotion of Islamic state and shari'a law advocated by revivalist Islamic group. Instead, since the mid-1980s NU accepted the secular nationalist state ideology *Pancasila* as the primary ideological foundation of the Indonesian state. Most of these ideas were advocated by Wahid, as well as other reform activists within the NU (Bush, 2002; Kadir, 1999; Ramage, 1995). After Wahid stepped down from his leadership position in 1999, the NU did not reverse its support for democracy,

human rights and religious pluralism. Instead, these ideas have been further consolidated by several of Wahid's close associates and confidants within the organization. This is a sign that these reforms have gained a strong constituency from within the NU (especially among the young generation of NU activists) and that they have been largely institutionalized within the organization.

The unsuccessful reform pathway is illustrated by the case of the Muhammadiyah. In this case, progressive theological reforms have been hindered by a strong opposition from the intolerant institutional culture of the organization, which historically does not tolerate new theological teachings that differ from the revivalist Islamic theology long advocated by the organization. Because its founding mission was to purify Islam in Indonesia from any customs, rituals, and traditions that it perceived to be heretical innovations (*bid'ah*), it has historically expressed less tolerance for new, non-canonical Islamic teachings that are not prescribed in the Qur'an and the Hadith. It also was generally hostile against localized rituals and traditions that predated the Islamic period in Indonesia (unlike the NU).

Within the Muhammadiyah, two moral authority leaders who attempted to introduce and institutionalize progressive theological reforms were Nurcolish Madjid and Ahmad Syafii Ma'arif. Nurcolish Madjid was the leading Indonesian Islamic theologian who initiated much of the progressive Islamic thoughts that was propagated within the Muhammadiyah. However, he introduced these reforms outside of the Muhammadiyah and did not consider them as a vehicle to reform and rejuvenate the organization. As a result, his ideas did not gain popular

following within the Muhammadiyah. Instead, the organization embraced increasingly conservative and revivalist theological positions. Although his ideas were influential within a small group of progressive-minded intellectuals within the Muhammadiyah, they never gained the same level of support enjoyed by the reforms proposed by Abdurrahman Wahid within the NU. Attempts to promote and institutionalize Madjid's theological ideas within the Muhammadiyah only came during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Syafii Ma'arif took over the position of Muhammadiyah chairman in 1998. However, Ma'arif's reforms were challenged by a strong unsuccessful reform faction within the Muhammadiyah, which was led by other Muhammadiyah leaders such as Din Syamsuddin. This revivalist faction embraces a conservative interpretation of Islam and considers any form of deviations from their literal interpretation of Islam as a heresy (*bid'ah*). This faction has a stronger following within the Muhammadiyah. Its members are very critical of the progressive activists' efforts to promote religious tolerance and pluralism from within the organization. In the end, the revivalists managed to prevent much of these reforms from being implemented within the Muhammadiyah and expel reform activists from key leadership positions within the Muhammadiyah, immediately after Ma'arif had stepped down from his position in 2005. The organization's current views on human rights, citizenship, and religious tolerance/pluralism tend to be much more conservative and resemble fundamentalist Islamic theology compared to its counterparts, the NU.

As predicted by the successful reform pathway, the NU made a complete transformation from a conservative ulama-dominated movement that until two

decades ago supported a *shari'a* based Islamic state into a progressive Islamic group it is known for today. These reforms were initiated beginning in the mid-1980s by its charismatic former chairman Abdurrahman Wahid. However, as predicted by the unsuccessful reform pathway, reform efforts within the Muhammadiyah were not successful because the progressive reformers were not able to overcome a strong revivalist counter-movement, which was also supported by many of the leaders of the organization. Supporters of the revivalist faction managed to prevent the reform ideas from being institutionalized within the Muhammadiyah, despite the strong support of two religious leaders who initiated and supported the reforms, Nurcolish Madjid and Syafi'i Maarif, and the generally peaceful relationship between the Indonesian government and the organization.

The moral authority leadership theoretical framework makes the following theoretical contributions. First, it seeks to better understand the role of theological ideas and moral authority leaders who support these ideas to promote ideational change within Islamic groups. It questions alternative theoretical perspectives offered by the culturalist approach, which portray these groups as theologically fixed and static fundamentalist groups who are unwilling to move from the conservative interpretation of the Islamic doctrine, or as groups largely (but entirely) motivated by instrumental instead of ideational considerations. Instead, I show that it is possible for Islamic groups to change their theological frames, political identities, and preferences. These changes take place due to the process of mutual constitution through a combination of agency-based and structural

variables that together help to shape the conditions that make the reform promoted by these religious leaders to either be successful or not successful.

Second, the theory highlights the importance of the role of theological ideas in shaping Islamic groups' initial political preferences as well as the degree in which new theological ideas could be introduced and institutionalized within the group. Islamic groups led by charismatic moral authority figures, which also have an institutional culture that tolerates new or unorthodox theological ideas and have peaceful and co-operative relations with the state, are more likely to be successful in institutionalizing the reforms these leaders are advocating. Once the reforms have been fully institutionalized, these groups are more likely to adopt democratic norms and institutions, acknowledge separation between religion and the state, and respect human rights, especially the rights of non-Muslims minorities. Knowing the difference between groups that are theologically progressive versus those that are theologically more fundamentalist/revivalist in orientation could help scholars and policymakers to determine which Islamic groups are more likely to embrace genuine democracy and human rights versus those that are genuinely hostile toward these ideas or are adapting them only for strategic and opportunistic purposes.

Third, this study makes a new contribution to the Islamic politics literature by outlining the possible pathways for institutionalizing progressive theological ideas to promote theological and political change within an Islamic group and how reform leaders and activists within these groups could promote this change and implement them within their respective organizations. Lastly, the project will

contribute to the literature on political leadership, by outlining how moral authority leadership could influence theological and political changes both within their own organizations and their respective societies.

The following is the overview of the next chapters in the study. Chapter 2 outlines the research questions, a review of literature of previous works in the study of religion and politics, the theoretical framework, and its methodology. In this chapter, first I present an overview of the competing theories: political culture (culturalist) approach and rational choice (rationalist) approach, social constructivist theory and Weberian charismatic leadership theory. Next, I develop the concept of moral authority leadership, outlining the theoretical argument for the theory, and the independent, intervening, and dependent variables. Then I detail the causal mechanisms and pathways that make the reforms advocated by moral authority leaders and their supporters to become successfully or unsuccessfully institutionalized, detailing the interactions between the variables that resulted in these mechanisms. I then outline the two case studies which illustrates the two potential pathways that could have been taken by the reformers in their reform efforts. Lastly, I describe the data sources and the method I employ to analyze and verify this data.

The next two chapters are the empirical analysis of the two case studies. Chapter 3 analyzes the successful reform pathway within the NU. It analyzes the theological reform within the NU under the leadership of Abdurrahman Wahid. It shows how the combination of Wahid's moral authority, the tolerant institutional culture within the NU, and the relatively peaceful relations between the NU and



the Indonesian state contributed to the successful reform outcome and transformation of the NU. In less than three decades, the organization changed its theological frame, political identity, and preferences, from an Islamic group with conservative theological frame as reflected in its support for the implementation of the shari'a law and other Islamic-related to one that today has adopted the progressive Islamic ideas promoted by Wahid, namely its supports for democracy, human rights for all Indonesians, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance/pluralism.

Chapter 4 discusses the unsuccessful reform pathway represented by Muhammadiyah. It shows how progressive theological reforms within Muhammadiyah that are carried out by Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif ran into strong resistance from the revivalist/conservative wing of the organization, which has dominated the organization's leadership for the past several decades. Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing the findings of this study and show how these findings lend support to the theoretical framework introduced in this study. I also discuss the theoretical contributions of this study and outline a future research agenda.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORY, AND METHODOLOGY**

This chapter contains the theoretical framework and research design of this study. It is divided into the literature review, theoretical overview, methodology, and data sources sections. The literature review section assesses and critiques the main theoretical approaches that are widely used in the scholarship on religion and politics within the last few decades, namely the political culture/modernization theory, rational choice theory, social constructivist theory, and Weberian charismatic leadership theory. It will then propose an alternative theoretical framework: moral authority leadership theory, which combines the perspectives of social constructivist theory, charismatic leadership theory of Max Weber, and rational choice theory. It then makes an argument on why this theoretical framework could better explain the behavior of Islamic moral authority leaders and social movements studied in this study than the other theoretical approaches above.

After the literature review, the next section contains the outline of this study's theoretical framework on moral authority leadership, along with a list of theoretical hypotheses that guides this research. The last section of this chapter outlines the research methodology used in this study and explains why the case study method utilizing comparative historical analysis is the most appropriate method for this research project. It also outlines the two case studies of Islamic social movements that will be analyzed in this study and why they are chosen for this study. Lastly, the methodology section details the justification of these case

studies, the data sources collected during the fieldwork for this study and steps that are taken to increase the reliability and validity of these data sources and means to prevent the possibility of selection bias in the analysis of these data.

### **Review of Competing Explanations**

This section presents an overview of the competing theories that have been commonly used in the field of religion and politics and Islamic politics over the last three decades: political culture (culturalist) approach, rational choice theory, social constructivist theory, and Weberian leadership theory.

**Political culture (culturalist) approach.** The political culture (culturalist) approach has its roots in modernization theory that dominated the field of comparative politics from the 1950s to the early 1970s (e.g., Deutsch, 1961; Lerner, 1958), although some scholars continued to use this framework until the mid-1990s (Huntington, 1996). It assumes that the culture of a given society predetermines the political behavior of its citizens. Further, culture is assumed to be a fixed and static variable for the most part and is not assumed to be receptive to political change at least in the short or medium term. Lastly, culture is perceived as a variable that gives each society its own “primordial cultural identity” and helps determine “major differences in political and economic development among civilizations” (Huntington, 1993, pp. 22).

A branch of the political culture tradition that is commonly used to explain political Islam and Islamic social movement is civilizationist/modernization theory. The theory assumes that different societies could be classified based on the unique ways their members view state-society relations, commitment to

particular religious or ideological beliefs, view on social order and dislocation, and so forth (Wilson, 2000, p. 255). Civilizationist theory uses religion as a proxy for culture of a given civilization (Huntington, 1996, p. 59; Wilson, 2000, pp. 255-256). The primary methodology of the civilization approach is based on the literal reading of religious texts to explain a religious group's impact in the sociopolitical life in a given society (Kuru, 2009, pp. 16-17). In the case of Islam, for instance, it is viewed as the “blueprint of a social order, which holds a set of rules that exists, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men.....These rules are to be implemented throughout social life” (Gellner, 1983, p. 1, cited in Kuru, 2009, p. 17).

Civilization/modernization theory portrays Islam as a fixed, static, and backward religious tradition that seeks to reassert its dominant role in Muslim societies and is hostile toward Western intellectual ideas such as modernization, liberalism, and democracy. Thus, Islam is perceived as “an integrated totality that offers a solution to all of the problems of life” and “has to be accepted in its entirety and to be applied to the family, the economy, and to politics” (Ayubi, 1991, p. 63). Civilization theorists therefore tend to be skeptical about the compatibility of Islam with Western political ideas such as democracy and liberalism. They argue that efforts to introduce democracy to the Islamic world would merely be a futile exercise (Huntington, 1996; Lewis, 1993 & 2003). Indeed, civilization theorists tend to alarmingly view political Islam as a potential threat not just to the development of democracy in the Muslim world, but also to

the liberal democratic order in the Western world (e.g., Gellner, 1983; Lewis, 1993 & 2003; Huntington, 1993 & 1996).

Civilization theorists tend to portray extremist Islamic groups such as the Wahabbi of Saudi Arabia and Hamas and Hezbollah of Palestine as the primary (and often the only) representatives of political Islam in the Muslim world. They ignore “other Islamic groups that have pursued more moderate political goals and used peaceful political strategies (e.g., participating in elections) to achieve their goals” (Chernov-Hwang, 2007, p. 17). They tend to view Islamic movements, regardless of their theological outlook, political orientation, and geographical location, as those advocating for a political agenda that calls for “the complete and holistic nature of revealed Islam, so that, according to them, it encompasses the three famous ‘Ds’ (*din*, religion; *dunya*, life; and *dawla*, state)” (Ayubi, 1991, p. 63). Specifically, these movements believe that

Islam is an integrated totality that offers a solution to all problems of life. It has to be accepted in its entirety, and to be applied to the family, to the economy, and to politics....the realization of an Islamic society is predicated on the establishment of an Islamic state, that is, an ‘ideological state’ based on the comprehensive precepts of Islam (Ayubi, 1991, pp. 63-64).

In sum, culturalist/modernization theory tends to view political Islam as a single unilateral group that promotes extremist and revivalist religious ideas that run counter to Western political values, such as democracy, human rights, and religious freedom. Furthermore, it is willing to use violent means if necessary, in order to establish an Islamic state based on the *shari’a* law, while ignoring the ideological, theological, as well as geographical diversity of Islamic movements within the Muslim world (Sadowski, 2006, pp. 216-219, Wilson, 2000, p. 256).

The culturalist approach suffers from its fixed assumption of ideas and culture that ignores the possible ideological or theological differences among members of the same religious group as well as its deterministic predictions that assign blame for a society's predicaments (e.g., prevalence of authoritarianism in Muslim-majority countries) by attributing them to cultural factors.

Today, most political scientists no longer subscribe to culturalist or modernization theory. Some scholars have attempted to create a definition and assumption of culture that is more flexible, subject to contests by multiple actors, and more adaptable to structural, historical, and socio-cultural changes, including Wedeen (2002). Social constructivist theory, which held culture and ideologies as socially constructed, subject to reinterpretation and reinvention based on the actions of human agents, is another theoretical approach working in the same spirit with these scholars. It is an effort to create a more nuanced treatment of culture, ideas, identities, and deeply held theological beliefs. It takes these variables seriously as potential causal variables that could influence political actions that are socially constructed, subject to political contestation, and are amendable to change over a period of time and space. At the same time, constructivism also try to develop clear concepts, assumptions, and measurements about culture, ideas, and identities that could be turned into theoretical generalizations, unlike the more “uncertain, ambiguous, and messy” conceptualizations of these variables by interpretivists-oriented scholars (e.g., Wedeen, 2002, p. 726).

**Rational choice (rationalist) approach.** Another theory commonly used in political science literature to explain the actions of religious groups is the rational choice theory. Rational choice theory assumes that all humans form their preferences based on how they weight their varying needs and desires. The content of these preferences are undetermined and the theory itself has little to say about it (Gill, 2008, p. 28). It is up to the scholars who are doing the investigation to make an assumption on whether these preferences are instrumental or ideational in nature, and in most cases, both types of preferences could be utilized at the same time.

Rational choice theory does assume that

...given those preferences, people will try to achieve their goals (i.e., their preferential needs and desires) in the least costly manner possible, given the various environmental and strategic constraints that they face....As these constraints change, so do the cost-benefit incentives faced by different individuals, and hence the strategic choices they make (Gill, 2008, p. 28).

Since the basic premise of rational choice theory stated above is simple and parsimonious, it emerges as a leading theory in the social sciences over the last three decades or so. During this period, it has evolved greatly in order to develop a more nuanced explanation about political behavior that assumes rational behavior of human actors that is also contextualized in a given history, culture, institution, or other structural and historical contexts. Its view on the role of ideas in influencing the behavior of political actors has also evolved as well. The first generation of rational choice scholars rejected cultural and ideational-based explanations of group behavior altogether. They argued that fulfilling instrumental interests is the primary, if not the only, rationale for a group's

political behavior, often defined as the desire to gain material wealth and/or political power. These interests were shaped by structural factors (i.e., social class, international system, etc.) that dominated these groups' political behavior and squeezed out any ideational considerations that these groups might have held (Philpott, 2001, p. 59). For many first-generation rational choice scholars, ideas and culture were at best secondary causes of social phenomenon. Often, they only served as the *ex post facto* justifications (or 'hooks') that are used by these groups to cover up their real instrumental interests (Gill, 2008, p. 57, also see Shepsle, 1985, cited in Philpott 2000, p. 217, fn. 34). In the view of first generation rationalists, political and religious actors are cloaking their power-seeking or material interests with ideational rhetorics and narratives – for instance, the Protestant rulers' support for Protestant Reformation during the 16th century could be interpreted by these scholars as a ploy to seize the power and the wealth of the Catholic within their respective territories (Philpott, 2001, p. 137).

The first generation of rational choice scholarship immediately faced strong criticisms from scholars who were advocating for ideational based explanations of political behavior. One major criticism was its instrumentalist assumption. Because often it proposed *a priori* assumption privileging the instrumental and material considerations as determining factors for a political actor's interests, it had difficulties accounting for non-instrumental/ideational factors such as norms, values, and identities that might also shape the preferences of this actors as well. Critics argued that while many political actors were using ideas merely as a cloak to mask their real instrumental or political interests, not all



of them were using them in these manners. Other actors, religiously-inspired ones in particular, might have adopted ideas and norms as their genuine preferences to pursue their political goals (e.g., to change/reform their religious groups).

However, hard-core rationalists usually assumed away this possibility in order to retain the theoretical parsimony of their theories (Philpott, 2001, pp. 86-87).<sup>8</sup>

The next generation of rational choice scholarship attempts to answer these criticisms by incorporating ideas as potential mechanisms that help to determine the choices of political actors or as potential preferences that can complement the instrumental preferences of these actors. For instance, Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane argue that ideas could serve as “road maps” that help determine actors’ preferences or to help them understand the relationship between their goals and alternative strategies to reach them (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993, pp. 12-13). Under this framework, ideas serve as a causal mechanism that helps political actors to channel their action into specific choices/tracks and to exclude other policy choices and options (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993, p. 12).

Contemporary rational choice scholars also offer a more nuanced theoretical argument which incorporates ideas as potential mechanisms that help

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<sup>8</sup> One example of such criticism is Daniel Philpott’s criticism Anthony Gill’s theory on the origins of religious liberty in the United States for excluding the impacts of ideologies such as Protestant Reformation and secular Enlightenment philosophy as motivators for the enactment of religious liberty clauses in the United States Constitution (Philpott, 2009, pp. 194-195). Anthony Gill’s analysis of this case could be found in Gill, 2008, ch, 3 (pp. 60-114).

shape the groups' preferences. Works by these scholars carefully specify the possible constraints, such as historical legacy, institutional structure, and religious leadership, which together determine the choices religious groups made in different cultural and societal settings. Unlike the first generation of rationalist scholars, they no longer simply reduce the primary preference of these actors as the pursuit of power or material interests. Instead, they simplify it as a mechanism to maximize a certain goal, which are agnostic in nature and are determined by the scholar who conducts the investigation. For instance, Anthony Gill assumes that the preferences of religious leaders in his work include maximizing the market share of their denomination's converts/followers and maximizing the advantage of their status under the law, depending on whether they are a hegemonic religious majority or a religious minority (Gill 2008, p. 44-45). This assumption is more nuanced and sophisticated compare to those made by first generation rational choice scholars, who simply assumed that all political actors were having the same sets of preferences (e.g., gaining political power or collecting material benefits).

Contemporary rational choice scholars tend to examine in detail the complex causal mechanisms and scope conditions which explain why religious actors under different historical political settings are pursuing different sets of strategies in order to achieve their political goals. Examples of work using this approach include Anthony Gill's comparative studies of relations between the Catholic Church and the state in Latin America. Gill finds that the church is more likely to have a more distant relationship with the state and support democracy in

countries where it faces a higher degree of competition from Evangelical Protestant denominations (e.g., in Chile and Brazil). On the other hand, the church is more supportive and is closer to the authoritarian regime where it does not face Protestant competition (e.g., in Argentina) (Gill, 1998). In another study comparing the development of regulations promoting religious liberty in colonial America, Mexico, Russia, and the Baltic states, Gill finds that religious liberty is more likely to be promoted in countries with a higher level of religious pluralism and a government that wishes to generate higher economic growth and trade openness (Gill, 2008).

Another study that uses this approach in the field of religion and politics is Carolyn Warner (2000), which examines how did the Catholic Church hierarchies in three European countries – France, Italy, and Germany – chose whether to ally with emerging Christian Democratic parties at the end of the Second World War II. She argues that the church's hierarchy made its decisions through cost-benefit calculations based on the hierarchy's perception of which political parties could best deliver the church's preferred policies within each of these countries. However, the costs and benefits calculations of the church were also shaped by the history of the church's political engagements and alliances within a specific country, the structures of the church hierarchy, as well as the leadership of the church hierarchy (Warner, 2000, pp. 35-38). The differing historical relationships, institutional structures, and leadership within the three national churches resulted in a varying sets of alliances with Christian Democratic parties in each countries in post World War II: developed close alliance with the Italian Christian

Democrats, developed co-alliance with the Protestants in the Christian Democratic Party of Germany, but abandoned the alliance with the Popular Democratic Front (MRP) in France. Through this highly contingent and contextualized research design, Warner is able to develop an explanation for the diverging forms of support of the Catholic Church for Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe that is nuanced and persuasive, as it incorporates all the historical and institutional constraints that affected how these preferences were formed in the first place. It certainly serves as a model on how future works on religion and politics utilizing a combination of rational choice theory and comparative historical analysis should be conducted.

The sophisticated theoretical explanation developed by rational choice scholars in the above works has certainly given us a better explanation on how political groups, specifically religious groups, developed their political preferences based on highly contextualized costs and benefits calculations. Ideas, conceptualized for instance as “world views” (e.g., religious beliefs) and principled beliefs (e.g., normative beliefs such as human rights) (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993), certainly could influence the preferences and goals of political actors. In addition, the highly contextualized sets of preferences in recent rational choice works on religion and politics means that it is highly likely that both instrumental and ideational preferences are involved in the decision-making process of each political actors, making the analyses of how these preferences are established and their sociopolitical implications more complex, nuanced, and highly sophisticated.

The question that remains unanswered is how to strike the proper balance between ideational and instrumental preferences in future rational choice works. While the works reviewed above shows that a growing number of scholars of rational choice theory are trying to take ideas seriously in their theoretical explanation, more scholars need to fully take into account both instrumental and ideational preferences when we study the political actions of religious actors. Most importantly, the role of ideas, culture, and identities of the religious group being studied, while are incorporated by contemporary rationalists in their works, are generally still underplayed and under-valued, in contrast to instrumental or material-based preferences based on the strategic calculation of members of these movements.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Philpott argues that the lack of ideational variables in rational choice theory makes it difficult for the theory to explain the formation of state policy towards religion, where ideologies play a major role in the political actors' decision either to promote religion (e.g., post-1979 Iranian government) or to severely restrict it (e.g., Turkey under Kemal Ataturk) (Philpott, 2009, p. 195).<sup>10</sup> Timothy Shah criticizes Gill's 2008 study for its exclusive focus on the role of government regulation in determining the level of religious freedom within

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<sup>9</sup> This does not imply that all rational choice works always underplay ideational-based preferences in favor of instrumental-based ones. Work by Warner (2000) is an example that gives an equal weight for the two types of preferences. Stark (2003) is another.

<sup>10</sup> Gill's interpretation on the Protestant Reformation could be found on Gill, 2008, pp. 76-91. He argues that expansion of religious freedom in Britain post-Reformation has more to do with the desire to expand trade and economic prosperity of the country rather than ideational concerns for equality for all Christian denominations (Gill, 2008, pp. 90-91).

a specific society, while ignoring the role of societal regulations, which are likely to be shaped by “an accumulated stock of socially embedded religious ideas and mores” in shaping the level of religious freedom within the same society as well (Shah, 2009, p. 329).<sup>11</sup> Thus, critics of the rational choice theory, while praising recent works that included ideas, norms, and other ideational variables their work, also argue that more needs to be done in order fully incorporate these factors into the analysis of religious groups’ political actions and behavior. They assert that in order to be able to properly explain these, rationalists as well as scholars from other theoretical perspectives, need to gain a better understanding of the theology, institutional organization, history, cultural dynamic, and as the institutional dynamics and changes within these religious groups (Philpott, 2009, p. 198). Both instrumentalist and ideationalist factors need to be equally considered by scholars, regardless whether they identify themselves with rational choice theory or not.

In sum, rational choice theory tends to emphasize the role of cost-benefit calculations, structural incentives, and strategic choices of religious groups at the expense of their ideational or theological rationales. It portrays political actors (including religious ones) as strategically calculating actors with undefined sets of preferences. While most rational choice scholars emphasize instrumental and

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<sup>11</sup> However, rational choice scholars are beginning to study the impacts of societal regulations on religion. This research finds that social regulation of religion does play a significant role in increasing religious persecution, because societal pressure/restrictions against religious minorities are often formalized to become government regulations against these minorities. This is especially so in Muslim-majority societies (Grim and Finke, 2007; see also Grim and Finke 2010).

material interests in their research, some also acknowledges the role of ideas. This is especially so for contemporary rationalist scholars who are taking religious ideas, culture, and leadership of religious groups as important intermediate variables in their works (e.g., Gill, 2008, Warner, 2000). However, other rationalists are still underplaying the potential role of ideas, culture, and identities as potentially constitutive, if not causative, variables that help to explain such actions. In doing so, rational choice scholars risk the possibility of ignoring the detailed analyses of doctrine, theology, rituals, and institutional structure of religious groups that might play a factor in explaining their political behavior (Philpott, 2009, p. 193). While it is important for scholars to understand the instrumental preferences of religious groups that serve as the basis for their political actions, a full theoretical understanding of these groups need to take into account for both the ideational and theological preferences that have inspired these groups' preferences and actions in the first place.

**Social constructivist theory.** In response to the rational choice theoretical arguments outlined above, some scholars have responded that political scientists need to have a better understanding of the role of ideas, norms, and identities, in generating political actors' preferences and actions, and how they adapt to the changing sociopolitical structures and conditions. They made a counter-argument that rational choice theory tends to simplify religious actors' interests by assuming that they primarily originate from instrumentalist/materialist preferences. By making such an assumption, rationalists often (but not always) overlook the normative social fabric of politics that might also serve as potential

sources of these actors' interests and preferences as well (Checkel, 1998, p. 324).

As an alternative to rational choice theory, constructivists propose that by studying social fabrics such as ideas and norms, and explain how they help to constitute actors' political identities and interests, they could "develop new and meaningful interpretations of international politics" (Checkel, 1998, p. 325).

Social constructivist theory attempts to explain "how does the interplay of actors, social structures, as well as material and ideational factors constitute, inform, and explain our social life" (Burch, 2002, p. 61). While constructivists are far from being a coherent group of scholars,<sup>12</sup> there are three main ontological propositions that are broadly shared by them: 1) an emphasis on "social facts" (i.e., ideas, norms, and identities) as major, if not the primary, determinants of identity formation and political action of actors, 2) an agreement that such actions are based on the interpretation of social meanings that are shared intersubjectively by a group of sociopolitical actors, and 3) an agreement on the mutual constitutionality of social structure and human agents in helping to constitute (or

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<sup>12</sup> Substantial disagreements exist between mainstream and critical/postmodernist constructivists. While mainstream constructivists question the material epistemological assumption of their rational choice counterparts, they remain committed to the idea of a positivist social science inquiry and believe that science should be a value-neutral enterprise. On the other hand, critical constructivist question both the ontological and epistemological foundations of positivist social science, advocating a pluralistic and interpretive approaches to generate knowledge, reject value neutral theorizing, and question the role of science in helping to promote the domination of powerful groups against the rest of the humanity. For further details on the similarities and differences between mainstream and critical constructivists, see Guzzini (2000), Hopf (1998), and Price and Reus-Smit (1998).



cause) a given political outcome (Price and Reus-Smith, 1998, pp. 268-269; Klotz and Lynch, 2007, ch. 1). In short, constructivists believe that any meaningful human action (including political action) is only possible within an intersubjective social context, in which actors develop their interests, preferences and goals based on their relationship with other actors. Together, they are social facts that have specific meanings to their respective organization or society (Hopf, 1998, p. 173).

Social facts are norms, rules, identities, languages, cultures, and ideologies that help to create actors' identities, shape their interests, and guide their actions as well (Checkel, 1998, p. 325; Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 7). Constructivists argue that rationalists often do not consider social facts that are highly complex and contextualized to be the primary explanatory variables for their theoretical assumptions, in order to achieve theoretical parsimony. They argue that complex social facts are difficult to be explained using unidirectional causal chains, but instead should be understood as social construction, in which human actions are at once constrained and enabled by a complex mix of social facts, such as norms, culture, language, and ideologies (McCann, 1996, p. 463). In turn, these social facts become part of an intersubjective understanding by a collective of actors that go beyond simple aggregate beliefs of individuals (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 8).

Constructivists also believe that complex social structures (e.g., culture, institutions, the state) and human agents mutually constitute their actions, each are shaped and being shaped by the other. Unlike culturalists, who favor structure over agency, or rationalists, who favor agency over structure, constructivists

argue that complex social phenomena are difficult to explain with unidirectional causal chains, but that they instead should be understood as “constitutive” social construction, in which human actions are at once constrained and enabled by a complex mix of social facts (e.g., norms, culture, language, and ideologies) that should be understood as constitutive, rather than independent and exogenous, determinants of political action (McCann, 1996, p. 463).

According to Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, social facts such as ideas, norms, and identities do not emerge on their own, but are “actively built by agents having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 896). They put a significant role on what they called 'norm entrepreneurs' - a person or an organization that promoted the norm in the first place, using both persuasive and coercive tactics to convince the majority of states in the international system to accept the norm and institutionalize it into their domestic legal and constitutional frameworks (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, pp. 896-901). States decided to adapt and institutionalize these norms within their territory due to a combination of factors such as: pressures from 'norm leaders' states, the desire to enhance their international legitimacy, and the desire of state leaders to improve their self esteem (i.e., their political image/ legitimacy) in front of their domestic constituency (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 895).

One of the main research interests of constructivist scholars is on the role of identity and how it influences domestic and international politics. Constructivists believe that the identity of a political unit helps to shape its

interests, preferences, and political actions. They believe that identities are a type of “social relationship between agents and structures that change over time and across contexts” (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 65). Because they are conceptualized as continuously evolving relationship between agents and structures, constructivists believe that “identities are not immutable characteristics of individuals or groups,” but they are instead constantly being produced and reproduced in their interactions with other individuals, groups, or states (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, p. 65). Thus, constructivists recognize that new identities could emerge to reframe and reconstruct any pre-existing ones. Such identities are perpetuated through the active interactions between agents and structures who managed to promote and institutionalize these ideas within their political organizations.

There are some important criticisms against social constructivist theory. First, some have argued that constructivism has focused too much attention on the role of structure rather than that of agency. Since constructivists put a priority on how collective and intersubjective norms influence the behavior of states and other political institutions, they often neglect the role of individual agency, which might have been very important, especially at the beginning stage when these institutions were first founded. Thus, constructivists should be attentive to the process of social construction both at the individual and at the collective/ institutional level (Checkel, 1998, p. 340). /

Next, critics of constructivism also argue that it is more of a meta-theoretical framework than a middle-range theory that could be applied and tested

for a variety of sociopolitical problems. Constructivist arguments often do not detail the causal mechanisms and scope conditions that explore the causal link between ideas and political actions being investigated (Checkel, 1998, pp. 342 & 346). Rationalist critiques of constructivism argue that while ideas might have some influence on the actions of political actors, ideas are also vulnerable from the manipulation and selective uses of these actors, which justify their political actions. Thus, while ideas might have initially inspired these political actors, often “it is the rational calculation of these actors that plays the leading role to motivate actions taken by these actors” (Checkel, 1998, p. 346). To strengthen this component, constructivists should specify “the processes and mechanisms in which actors are more likely to adapt rationalist calculations in their preferences and under which conditions they are more likely to be influenced by ideational concerns and use these ideas to either constitute or shape the preferences of these actors” (Checkel, 1998, pp. 345-346).

Finally, another major criticism of constructivism lies on its emphasis on studying certain norms or over others. While constructivists have used the theory to analyze numerous topics and problems in political science,<sup>13</sup> there is only a small number of constructivist scholars who are studying religiously-inspired norms and how they have impacted domestic and international politics.

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<sup>13</sup> These work range from the creation and institutionalization of human rights norms (e.g., Keck and Sikkink, 1998), the cultural foundations of national security policy (e.g., Katzenstein, 1996), the social construction of democracy in non-Western societies (e.g., Schaffer, 1998), and the role of neoliberal ideology in shaping the policies of international financial institutions (e.g., Weaver, 2008).

Nevertheless, the number of constructivist scholars working in this field is certainly growing. This includes the works by Ferrari (1998), Hassner (2007 & 2009), Hurd (2008), Juergensmeyer (1993 & 2008), Philpott (2001 & 2009), and Toft, Philpott, and Shah (2011). The lack of constructivists (as well as by other political scientists) work in religion and politics/international relations could have been attributed to the prevalence of secularist, “Westphalian presumption,” that was commonly shared among social scientists, which presumes religion as a set of privately held doctrines or beliefs, rather than as a community of believers that could potentially be active in the public sphere. As a result, many international relations scholars have failed to grasp the nature of religion as a potential social order in international relations (Thomas, 2000, pp. 820-821).

In conclusion, constructivism has its strength and weaknesses. While its focus on ideational variables such as ideas, norms, and identities enables scholars to investigate the origins of ideational preferences that specific political actors or groups might have held. It gives equal attention to the roles on human agency and social structure, and how the two could work together to either cause or prevent an idea or a norm from being institutionalized within a political group. At the same time, it also has several key limitations: it tends to privilege ideational over instrumental interests, it tends to prioritize structure over agency, and it tends to study certain (often “good”) norms over others. However, despite these limitations, constructivism has a great potential to make significant new contribution in the study of religion and politics, due to its focus on studying social facts, which also includes religiously-based ideas, doctrine, and theology.

In addition, its intersubjective ontology and its emphasis on the mutual constitution between structures and agents also has the potential to better account the role of religious ideas and norms in motivating political actions, compared to culturalists who tend to assign fixed primordialist identities against religious groups and rationalists who tend to ignore the ethical motivation of religious actors in favor of instrumentalist/materialist motivations (Lynch, 2009, p. 388). Thus, while it is relatively under-utilized in the study of religion and politics, constructivism has the potential to develop a more nuanced understanding on how theological ideas are being reframed and/or reconstructed by religious leaders who serve as norm entrepreneurs within these religious groups and how their structures and agencies help to influence the likelihood of these ideas from being implemented. Furthermore, its weakness in under-theorizing the instrumental preferences of a political group as well as its lack of attention on the role of leadership and agency can be remedied by incorporating elements of rational choice theory and Weberian charismatic leadership theory, which will be analyzed below.

**Weberian charismatic leadership theory.** The last theory reviewed in this study is the charismatic leadership theory developed by German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). In his landmark work, *Economy and Society* (1978 [1922]), Weber asserts that there are three types of authority that political leaders use to gain support and legitimacy among prospective followers: charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal (bureaucratic) authorities. Charismatic authority is based on “the quality of an individual personality” that makes him/her to be

considered to have “supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber, 1978 [1922], p. 241). Traditional authority is based on “the established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them” (Weber, 1978 [1922], p. 215), while rational-legal authority is based on “the belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority)” (Weber, 1978 [1922], p. 215).

What makes charismatic authority unique compared to the other two types of authorities is the fact that it is based not on the power of the office that the individual leader holds or on the status that s/he has, but instead comes from the ability of the leader to “arouse and maintain belief in himself or herself as the source of legitimacy” (Willner, 1984, p. 4). According to Weber, charismatic leadership comes solely from the personal attributes of the leader, not from the virtue of holding a political office or from formal legal rules. Instead, Weber asserts that the only basis of legitimacy for a charismatic leader is “personal charisma so long as it is proved, that is, as long as it receives recognition from their followers and as long as [they] proved their usefulness charismatically” (Weber, 1978 [1922], p. 244). Due to this charisma, charismatic leaders have the capacity to generate personal loyalty toward themselves among their followers, which sets apart from any other potential leaders within their organizations (Willner and Willner, 1965, p. 77).

The authority of charismatic leaders is accepted by their followers based on their ability to “believe in the statements made and ideas advanced by their

leader simply because it is [the leader] who has made the statement or advanced the idea” (Willner, 1984, p. 6). This is because the leader is perceived by his/her followers to have special or extraordinary powers that most other persons do not have. The followers’ faith on their leaders’ special powers is the primary source of the leader’s charismatic authority. Due to this perception, the charismatic leader has the capacity to build and sustain unconditional loyalty and support from his/her followers on the basis of his/her personality, apart from any offices or status s/he might have held (Willner and Willner, 1965, p. 79).

Scholars who have extended Weber’s charismatic leadership theory have mapped out the causal mechanisms that contribute to the emergence of a charismatic leader, which are the following: 1) the emergence of a crisis situation<sup>14</sup>, 2) increasing social distress among the population/potential followers, and 3) the emergence of a new leader with a given doctrine or idea, who promises to resolve the crisis and restore order and prosperity to his/her society (Willner, 1984, p. 43). Because of the tendency for charismatic leaders to emerge during the time of a crisis, they have the potential to become a powerful revolutionary leader within their group or society. They could then lead their followers to “transform all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms” (Weber, 1978 [1922], p. 1115). The ideas that are proposed by these charismatic leaders could transform an organization or a society if they managed to prevail against any opposing

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<sup>14</sup> What Weber calls a “crisis situation” is similar to the concept of “critical juncture” used by institutionalists within the field of comparative politics. For further details on critical juncture, see Collier and Collier (1991) and Capoccia and Kelemen (2007).



forces in the struggle to resolve the crisis. They are more likely to be more influential when they lead newly founded or newly reformed/reconfigured institutions that have weak or nonexistent countervailing power structures that could have challenged their power and authority (Grindle, 2007, pp. 87, 92-93, cited in Van Cott 2008: 59).

Charismatic leadership plays a significant role to motivate the action of religious groups. In the literature on Islamic social movements, scholars have argued that charismatic leadership plays an important role to legitimate the political actions of Islamic groups. For instance, Ashour (2009) finds that efforts to de-radicalize Islamic groups in Egypt and Algeria from pursuing violent actions and instead favoring non-violent political engagement are more effective if the charismatic leaders are brought on board to lend their support toward the de-radicalization efforts. In Ashour's study, support from charismatic leadership, combined with other incentives such as material (jobs/employment) and non-material inducements (pardon/early release from imprisonment), helped to ensure that radical Islamic activists were no longer pursuing violent political actions in these countries. Thus, the charismatic leadership of religious leaders seems to have played an important role in helping to change the political discourse of religious leaders from one direction to another (e.g., from radical to more moderate/peaceful political engagement). Further research needs to be done to confirm this proposition.

However, scholars who study charismatic leadership using Weberian charismatic leadership theory also tend to under-emphasize the role of ideas and

doctrine as a primary catalyst responsible for the emergence of a new charismatic leader. They tend to put more emphasis on the personal characteristics of the leader themselves (e.g., physical appearances, gestures and mannerisms, speech/rhetorical styles, etc.) as the primary reason for gaining a mass following rather than to the ideology or doctrine that are promoted by that particular leader (Willner, 1984, pp. 58-59 & 63). They do not theorize whether the ideology or doctrine plays any role in generating the popular support that the leader receives from his/her supporters.

In contrast to the arguments presented by Weberian charismatic leadership theory, I argue that while the moral authority leaders' personal attributes and charisma may have enhanced their reputation among their followers and might have propelled them into prominence, it is the ideas or theology that they are promoting that serves as the primary base of the popular following. This is because moral authority leaders' primary mean to transform themselves as advocates for their moral ideas is the wide recognition of their status as experts of theological norms, along with the ability to synthesize pre-existing theological ideas within their religious groups (e.g., Islamic theology) with other ideas coming from the outside (e.g., Western sociopolitical thought). In addition to this theological expertise, they also have charismatic attributes that further enhances their credibility as moral authority leaders among their followers.

Lastly, Weberian scholars do not theorize whether these charismatic leaders serve as actors who can behave strategically and use the power of their charisma for instrumentalist reasons. There is a need to theorize charismatic

leaders as strategic actors who use their charismatic power and influence to promote their instrumental and ideational goals. By incorporating elements of both constructivism and rational choice theory, Weberian charismatic leadership theory can be updated so that it can incorporate all potential preferences and goals of any political or religious leaders. Together, the syntheses of these theories help to form the moral authority leadership theory, the theoretical framework I shall use in this study. I shall elaborate on how I define the concepts outlined in this theory, the hypotheses, and the causal mechanisms predicted by this theory in the following section.

### **Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

This study is an effort to develop an understanding of the social conditions that make Islamic organizations embrace progressive theological frames and political identities. This study asks the following research questions: Why do Islamic organizations change their theological frames and political identities from formerly revivalist Islamic theological interpretations to one that supports the compatibility between Islamic and modern liberal ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism? What is the role of religious leaders to help bringing about theological change within these groups? Under what conditions religious leaders are more likely to successfully change the theological orientations of their religious organization (e.g., from one that promotes a conservative revivalist interpretation of Islam to one that embraces more liberal/progressive theological interpretation) and under what conditions they are less likely to successfully accomplish such a change?

The theoretical framework of this study is eclectic and is influenced by the three theoretical approaches that were analyzed at great length in the previous section: social constructivist theory, rational choice theory, and Weberian charismatic leadership theory. Social constructivist theory influences this theoretical framework through its emphasis on the potentially causative role of theological ideas in constituting, if not causing, theological and political changes within Islamic groups. Through the perspective of social constructivism, I argue that the primary preference of moral authority leaders in promoting their theology is their ideational preference. In this study, this preference is to have their theological ideas successfully implemented and institutionalized within their own organization, because they believe they are normatively the most appropriate ideas for their organization to address the contemporary sociopolitical problems the organization are currently facing. The new ideas could also potentially transform the theological frames and political identities of the organization from one theological and political position to another. When the new ideas are articulated by moral authority leaders to amend or replace the older theological frames, the process of social reconstruction is taking place within the organization. The outcome of this process is determined by the interaction between agency (moral authority leadership) and structure (institutional culture and relationship between religious groups and the state) that together mutually constitute the outcome of the reforms, whether it is successful or unsuccessful.

Using the premise of rational choice theory, I argue that moral authority leaders and their followers are also behaving strategically and have instrumental

goals in addition to ideational ones. They weight the cost and benefits of their reform efforts and use a variety of means to increase support and minimize opposition against their reforms both within and outside of their organizations. This is achieved through alliances with friendly state actors in order to promote their reforms and protect it against opposition from both inside and outside of the organization. Sometimes, they could also resort in coercive means (e.g., purging their opponents from the leadership positions of the organization and the use of material incentives to increase support for and reduce opposition against their reform efforts). Lastly, using the Weberian charismatic leadership theory, I argue that the primary agents of theological change within these organizations are moral authority leaders, who used their theological expertise and charismatic leadership status to convert potential supporters and convince them to support the theological reforms they promote within their respective organizations.

In short, moral authority leaders and their supporters are behaving strategically in the short and intermediate run to deal with any opposition against their reforms and ensure their organization's survival (as well as their own) from the forces of these opposing powers. However, they have a long-term goal for their reforms that is ideational in nature – to see that their proposed theological ideas are implemented by the organization because it would enable the organization to meet the changing sociopolitical problems it is currently facing. Moral authority leaders and their supporters take their theological ideas very seriously and that they use the institutionalization of these ideas within their groups as well as societies as the primary political goals that they seek to have.

However, while moral authority leadership is a necessary condition for a major theoretical reform to occur, it is not a sufficient condition, since these leaders are facing constraints against their reform efforts, both from other factions within the organization as well as from outside of it, primarily from the state authorities. The opposition against the reforms comes from rival factions from within the organization who challenges the compatibility of progressive political ideas that are promoted by moral authority leaders and their supporters with the conservative Islamic theological frame that have guided their organization for a long period of time. In addition, the opposition from state authorities could come from two possible rationales: 1) opposition against the liberal ideas promoted by the moral authority leaders because it threatens the authoritarian rule of the regime who run the state, or 2) opposition against a more active role for religious groups to actively participate in the political life of their respective societies, because it threatens the tradition of separation between religion and the state that are promoted by the state.

In order to overcome both the institutional and external (state) opposition against these reforms, The success of moral authority leaders and their supporters also depends on their ability to : 1) rely on a tolerant institutional culture that historically tolerates new religious ideas, customs, and traditions and helps to encourage or discourage opposition from the status theology against the reforms, and 2) establish a peaceful and cooperative relationship between the religious group and the state, within that particular society, that would enable the reformers

to carry on with their reforms without facing any repressive intervention from the state.

**Conceptualizing political Islam.** This study rejects the argument made by culturalist/modernization theorists, who made a generalization about political Islam and Islamic social movements from the perspective of radical/extremist Islamic movements, such as the Wahhabi from Saudi Arabia or Hamas from the Palestinian Territory. It does not assume that all Islamic movements have a singular agenda to promote a revivalist/fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, demand the establishment of a *shari'a* based Islamic state, and aim to achieve political power through violent means. Instead, the theoretical framework that I propose accounts for the diverse theological basis, political goals, and cultural differences of different Islamic movements. It also recognizes the domestic as well as international economic and sociopolitical conditions that might have given rise to these movements in their particular geographic location.

I reject the assumption of first generation rational choice scholars that religious, particularly Islamic, ideas and identities, are merely masks used by religious actors to cover up their instrumental or material interests. However, I acknowledge the theoretical argument made by contemporary rational choice scholars. I share their assumption that rationalist logic is applicable in explaining the political behavior of Islamic groups. Even though the primary theoretical foundation of my theory is social constructivism, which argues that ideas, culture, and identities help to shape the interests of these political actors, I also recognize that in order to be effective as variables that help to change the previous

ideological and cultural preferences within these Islamic groups, these ideas will need to be used strategically by their promoters in their effort to replace the previous preferences within these groups and institute a new sets of preferences based on these new ideas. However, what differentiates my framework from the standard rational choice framework is that I argue that we cannot reduce the preferences and goals of the reform leaders within these groups to their instrumental interests and strategic calculations alone. Instead, these promoters ('moral authority' leaders) form their preferences primarily based on the virtue of their ideas and because they believe these ideas will transform their groups to become more compatible with the needs of modern and democratic societies, which increasingly are the societies in which these groups are based upon.

I also argue that the theological ideas and religious identity of these groups serve as the primary motivators for their political actions. This is especially true for actions that do not produce immediate political payoffs and at least in the short run, enormous material costs and personal risks to the group and its members. These include opposition to the legitimacy of a well-entrenched authoritarian state or support for a new regime that better promotes and respects democracy and human rights in a society where these ideas have not historically taken significant roots. I argue that the actions of religious actors can be better explained through social constructivist theory rather than by rationalist paradigm alone, although the latter can be useful in specifying the strategies of the actors whom have ideational preferences as conceived by constructivists.



I assert that Islamic social movements do not necessarily have similar theological foundations and political goals. Furthermore, their members do not necessarily agree to similar means on achieving them. While some Islamic activists and movements do seek an Islamic state based on the *shari'a* law and do not tolerate the religious freedom of non-Muslim citizens, others might only wish to promote a greater role for Islam in the political life of Muslim society. Islamic groups that seek to establish an Islamic state do not necessarily endorse violent means to achieve this goal and instead are working to achieve them via peaceful and democratic means. In fact, there are some Islamic groups who reject the creation of a *shari'a*-based Islamic state in favor of a state that is politically secular and respects the rights of its citizens to practice their own religious beliefs, whether it is based on Islamic principles or not. They also support the largely liberal interpretation that all citizens are entitled to have universal human rights and have freedom to practice and choose their own religious beliefs. These two Islamic groups are totally distinct from each other, each have their own different interpretation of Islamic theology and legal jurisprudence. In turn, these interpretations result in two separate identities for these Islamic groups, which are outlined below.

Muslims who subscribe to the more liberal interpretation of Islam are followers of *progressive Islam*. I define it as an interpretation Islam which synthesizes the basic Islamic theological and legal foundations specified in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with intellectual ideas derived from Western social theory (e.g., democracy, human rights, and

religious liberty/pluralism). In contrast, other Muslims embrace a different path of reform by following revivalist/conservative Islamic perspective. *Revivalist* or *fundamentalist Islam* is an interpretation of Islam that promotes reform by returning to the living example and the formal/scripturalist rules formulated by Prophet Mohammed and his companions. Both progressive and revivalist Muslims are not theologically static. Both use the process of innovation, reframing, reinterpretation, and renegotiation to create what in their view is the ideal version of Islam that fit into their respective organization and society. After these ideas have been invented, it frames the strategy of these Muslims actors as they try to promote these ideas among their followers and institutionalize them within their respective groups.

In many ways, the values reflected by the concept of progressive Islam are similar to those expressed by the concept of *liberal Islam* (Kurzman 1998).<sup>15</sup> However, I choose to use the term ‘progressive’ instead of ‘liberal’ Islam because: 1) Most Islamic thinkers who advocate ideas and values widely considered as ‘liberal’ do not identify themselves as such (at least in similar ways with their Western counterparts) and do not wish to be labeled as liberal

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<sup>15</sup> *Liberal Islam* is defined as “Islamic thinkers and organizations that has publicly endorsed and lent support to liberal ideas and values such as opposition to a *shari’a*-based Islamic state, support for democracy, protection of human rights, especially for women and ethnic/religious minorities, freedom of thought and expression, recognition of religious liberty or at least, religious tolerance, and belief in the potential for human progress” (Kurzman, 1998, p. 4).

Muslims.<sup>16</sup> 2) Most importantly, even though these Islamic thinkers are advocating similar values that are commonly shared by liberal thinkers from the West and their works are often influenced by Western social theory, their version of progressive Islam is constructed and promoted in their own terms, in order to address timely domestic sociopolitical conditions, rather than to please any potential constituencies or supporters from the Western world. I argue that the term ‘progressive Islam’ better reflects the efforts of these moral authority leaders to introduce ideas/values adopted from the Western liberal tradition such from democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance, while doing so in their own time and terms.

**Theorizing moral authority.** The primary explanatory (independent) variable for spreading these ideas is the moral authority leadership of religious leaders. Hypothesis No. 1 makes the following assumption.

Theological and political changes within religious groups (e.g., from conservative into more progressive/liberal direction) are primarily attributed to the words, actions, and other deeds of religious leaders, who through their theological expertise and charismatic attributes, are able to persuade, coerce, and convert other members of their group to support the theological ideas they are advocating. These ideas shape their preferences

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<sup>16</sup> This is due to the negative connotation of the term “liberal” in much of the Islamic world, where the term refers to Muslims who are either being suspected as collaborators of foreign (Western) powers or have endorsed secularism or atheism (Kurzman, 1998, p. 4),

and help inform the strategies that they choose in order to implement and institutionalize their ideas successfully.

Lisa Ferrari defines *moral authority* as “the ability to speak authoritatively on matters of right and wrong behavior” (Ferrari, 1998, p. 84). Moral authority leaders are well-recognized experts of a specific system of moral norms. They also have charismatic attributes which help to enhance their theological expertise among their prospective followers as well as outsiders. The theological expertise and charismatic attributes of moral authority leaders serve as their primary assets as they promote and implement their ideas within their respective organizations. They are the primary tools these leaders deploy in order to overcome any opposition against their ideas both within their respective organizations as well as from outside actors (e.g., the state).

I argue that there are two ways to measure whether a religious leader could be considered as a moral authority leader or not. First, moral authority leaders should receive popular recognition within their group and society as leading experts of theological and moral norms of a religious group (in this study Islam). This recognition as a religious expert is achieved after years of training as a religious scholar (*ulama*) through a specialized institution that trained members of the religious tradition to become religious scholars - e.g., a graduate of Islamic theological school (*madrasah*)<sup>17</sup> that trained young Muslims to become an *ulama*.

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<sup>17</sup> The *madrasah* is the name in which these *ulama* training institutions are commonly known in most English-speaking countries. Within their respective

Alternatively, they have successfully obtained a Ph.D. in theology, religious, or Islamic studies. In any case, the recognition must be given both by the ulama community from their religious group, as well as from followers within their group who consider them to have extraordinary knowledge of Islamic theological and legal jurisprudence. These followers believe in their ideas because they believe these ideas provide answers to the problems facing their respective societies.

Second, in order to win recognition as a moral authority leader, the religious leader should have *charismatic leadership* attributes that are assigned to them by their followers. This attributes are achieved because the followers believe that their leaders have extraordinary powers, talents, or abilities, which are far beyond what other religious leaders (ulama) could normally offer to the followers. These charismatic attributes are measured by the combination of two or more of the following: 1) an attractive appearance or public personality, 2) an ability to communicate their ideas in a way that generates support, loyalty, and trust from their followers, 3) the ability to listen to different factions and constituencies within their groups and to empathize with the different perspective and needs represented by these different factions, and 4) an intensity or energy that motivate their followers to implement their theological reforms and overcome any

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societies, they are known by their local names such as *pesantren* in Indonesia, or *pondok* in Malaysia.

potential opposition to their efforts to promote these reforms.<sup>18</sup> In addition to these attributes, these leaders could be considered by their followers as charismatic leaders because they are descendant - either directly (family) lineage or indirectly (intellectual) lineage- of previous generation moral authority leaders that are widely recognized from within their religious communities. By having these charismatic attributes and genealogical lineages, these religious leaders are able to be recognized as charismatic leaders that enable these leaders to command strong loyalty and obedience from their followers that enable them to win the power struggle over their proposed theological reforms and successfully institute their reforms within their respective organizations.

I argue that moral authority leaders are able to get their theological ideas implemented by their groups when they promote their ideas using both ideational and instrumental strategies. They accomplish this by engaging in the process of ideational promotion in order to convert potential followers – through making sermons and speeches, authorship of books and op-ed articles, as well other activities designed to spread their theological ideas. The followers trust the theological ideas propagated by moral authority leaders because they are perceived as talented and credible religious leaders, due to their theological expertise and charismatic attributes.

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<sup>18</sup> This operationalization of charismatic attributes come largely from the operationalization made by Donna Lee Van Cott in her work on the role of local mayors to promote “radical democracy” in Ecuador and Bolivia (Van Cott, 2008, p. 65).

In addition, moral authority leaders are acting instrumentally when they use their followers to implement and institutionalize the theological ideas within their organizations. They will use any economic and political resources at their disposal in order to ensure that their theological reforms will be successfully implemented by their religious groups. By engaging in alliances with the state, buying off opponents, and other strategic activities, moral authority leaders and their followers are hoping to change the existing theological frame and political identity of organization in favor of new theological ideas they are advocating (e.g., democratization, rejection of *shari'a*-based Islamic state, tolerance toward religious minorities, etc). However, what differentiates this explanation from the standard rational choice explanation is that they are being used by leaders who are primarily motivated by the desire to promote their ideas among their followers to transform their religious groups by incorporating these ideas into the prevailing ideological frames within their respective groups (Philpott, 2001, p. 58).

I propose the following primary causal mechanism (Figure 2.1) to explain the process of how moral authority leaders are able to use the invention or reinterpretation of theological ideas to win converts and then use these converts to further promote theological and political change within their respective religious

organizations.



*Figure 2.1.* Basic causal mechanism on moral authority leadership and successful theological reform

Table #2.1 below is the detailed summary of the moral authority leadership theory that I have outlined above. It also fully describes the criterias and conditions I use to measure the presence (or absence) of moral authority leadership as well as how I operationalize each of these measurements.



Table 2.1

*Measurement and Operationalization of Moral Authority Leadership*

Independent Variable	Measurement	Operationalization
Moral Authority Leadership	I. Theological Expertise Widely recognized status as a leading expert of Islamic theology and jurisprudence (law)	a. Oral and written statements recognizing the theological expertise of a religious scholar (ulama) by other ulama as well as his followers (for traditionalist scholars)  b. The attainment of a doctoral (PhD) degree or an equivalent in Islamic theology, philosophy, or legal jurisprudence (for modernist scholars)
	IIa. Charismatic Attributes #1 Combination of attractive appearance and personality, effective communication and listening skills w/different factions within their group, and extra intensity and energy which motivates potential supporters to follow and enact their reform ideas	a. Oral and written statements from members of the religious group testifying that their leader possesses a combination of these attributes and skills, which inspires them to follow and implement the reforms sought by the leader
	IIb. Charismatic Attributes #2 Family and/or Intellectual genealogy with leading ulama from previous generations	a. Oral and written statements establishing family relationship with leading ulama from the previous generation b. Oral and written statements from moral authority leader paying tribute and recognizing the influence of leading ulama from the previous generation

*Sources:* Author's conceptualizations based on Ferrari (1998) on theological expertise; Van Cott (2008) and Weber (1978) on charismatic leadership authority.

**Intervening variables.** The presence of a widely respected, charismatic moral authority leader is a necessary condition for a successful change in the theological and political orientation of religious groups, from a theologically conservative group into one that is more progressive both theologically and politically. However, by itself it is not a sufficient condition to fully explain the change. Moral authority leaders and their followers are facing some constraints that work against their ideas to change and transform the existing theological

frames within their religious organization. There are factions within their religious groups who oppose the reforms both for ideological as well as instrumental and material reasons. In addition, the ideas promoted by the reforms (e.g., democracy, human rights, religious tolerance, etc) might also be opposed by the political regime which runs the state in which these religious groups are located. This is either because these ideas are challenging the authoritarian rule promoted by these regimes or because they are challenging the policy of strict separation between religion and the state that are promoted by these regimes. The ideas promoted by these moral authority leaders would be successfully institutionalized within their respective groups only after they have overcome these oppositional constraints.

In order to overcome these oppositions and successfully implement their reform ideas, the presence of the following intervening variables, combined with the presence of a moral authority leader, would have led a religious group to embrace a major theological and political change. There are two intervening variables that would have increased the likelihood of successful reforms within these groups: 1) the presence of an inclusive institutional culture within the religious group that promotes the integration or at least tolerates new theological ideas, customs, and rituals, rather than rejecting them as forbidden heresies for members of the religious group, and 2) the presence of a positive and conducive relationship between the religious group and the state, achieved through strategic alliances between the moral authority leaders and members of the ruling political regime which help to diminish the likelihood of state-sponsored crackdown/repression against the moral authority leaders and their followers. I

will elaborate on the rationale for these two intervening variables and how they help to increase the chance of the reform proposed by the moral authority leader from being successfully institutionalized.

***The institutional culture of the organization.*** Hypothesis No. 2 purports that

moral authority leaders are more likely to successfully institute theological reforms within their religious organization if the organization has an inclusive institutional culture that tolerates new, innovative, and unorthodox theological ideas. Their effort is less likely to be successful if the organization has an exclusivist and intolerant institutional culture that rejects the ideas propagated by these leaders as heretical innovations that should be rejected by the organization.

The first structural feature that constraints moral authority leaders and their efforts to reform their respective religious groups is the “institutional culture” of the organization. In this study, culture is conceptualized as “an interconnected set of collective, intersubjective understandings such as ideologies, rules, rituals, and paradigms” (Autesserre, 2010, p. 24). It is a form of shared knowledge commonly held by members of a community or an institution that reflects their understanding of generally accepted ideas, rules, and norms within that entity (Bukovansky, 2002, p. 2). The institutional culture of a religious organization is the prevailing ideological frame within a religious group which helps to shape the collective understanding of its members. In turn, it helps to establish the parameters of acceptable behaviors as well as possible reforms and

changes that are considered to be possible within the organization (Autesserre, 2010, p. 11). It is important for us to understand the institutional culture of a religious organization, because it helps us to determine the likelihood whether newly articulated theological ideas introduced by the moral authority leaders are going to be accepted by other followers of their organizations. This determines the likelihood that the organization would accept and incorporate these ideas into the official theology of the organization or reject them as heretical innovations.

Different religious organizations have different levels of tolerance and acceptance toward new theological innovations, localized rituals and customs, and other forms of practices that might have contradicted the basic theological beliefs of that organization. Some religious organizations have a history of tolerating new theological ideas, even those that are considered to be “syncretic” and “unorthodox” for the organization, while other groups consider most if not all new theological ideas to be heresies that need to be rejected by members of the religious organization. The institutional culture of the organization helps to determine the likelihood of the theological reform proposed by the moral authority leader to be successfully instituted within their religious group. It also helps us to predict the strength of any opposition to the reforms advocated by the moral authority leader within his or her group. This opposition needs to be overcome by the moral authority leader and his/her supporters before they could successfully implement and institutionalize their reform.

In this study, I predict that religious groups that have a more inclusive and tolerant institutional culture towards new and “unorthodox” theological

innovations are more likely to implement reforms propagated by a reformist moral authority leader than those who have less tolerant and more fundamentalist institutional culture. The degree of tolerance is measured via an ordinal variable that ranges from ‘fully tolerant’ towards new theological innovations or “fully hostile/intolerant towards them. Within the Islamic tradition, theological reforms are more likely to occur within Islamic groups/sects that have a higher degree of tolerance toward syncretic/unorthodox customs and rituals versus. This is in contrast to Islamic groups that have a more conservative or revivalist-oriented theological orientation that considers every religious rituals, customs, and traditions that are not prescribed by the Qur’an and the Hadith as heresies (*bid’ah*) that should be eradicated from Islam, by the use of force if necessary.

Understanding the institutional culture of a religious organization will help us to predict the level of support for pre-existing theological traditions that would oppose the reform proposals advocated by the “moral authority” leader and his/her supporters. If the religious organization has an institutional culture that historically tolerates new theological ideas, its members are more likely to accept the ideas proposed by the reformers, even if it is perceived to be unusual, unorthodox, or even contradictory to the prevailing theology within the organization. Consequently, the introduction of new theological ideas would not generate much opposition from other members of the organization. However, if the organization has an institutional culture that historically has resisted the introduction of new theological ideas, condemned them as heresies, and effectively sanctioned or punished anyone who propagates such reforms, then the

ideas would have encountered strong opposition from members of the organization and would be difficult, if not impossible, to be enacted by the organization.

Moral authority leaders' effort to implement new theological ideas within their respective organization will be strengthened if they fully understand the institutional culture of their respective organization. By understanding it, they are able to strategically frame the arguments and discourses for their reform ideas as a continuation of the prevailing theological frames/culture of their respective organizations instead of promoting them as ideas that are unfamiliar or alien to these prevailing theological and cultural frames. Doing so enhances the likelihood that their reform ideas would be successfully implemented within the organization and quell the opposition challenges and counter-narratives that these ideas are contradicting the institutional culture of the organizations.

Table #2.2 below summarizes how I measure and operationalize the institutional culture of religious groups in this study.

Table 2.2

*Measurement of the Institutional Culture*

Intervening Variable #1	Measurement	Operationalization
Institutional Culture of the religious group	An ordinal indicator of whether religious group tolerates new religious ideas or does not tolerate them at all (ranging from "fully tolerant" to "fully intolerant" against these new ideas)	Narrative accounts and statements from primary and secondary sources remarking on whether the organization members accept the new theological idea or resist it and how this change over time

*Sources:* Author's conceptualization based on definitions of culture by Autessere (2011) and Bukovansky (2002).

***Relations between the state and the religious organization.*** Hypothesis

No. 3 make the following assumption.

The degree of success of “moral authority” religious leaders and their supporters in promoting and instituting their reforms is also determined by the relationship between the state and the religious organization in the society where the reforms are taking place. The reform is more likely to be successfully institutionalized if the state refuses to intervene against the reform due to the historically peaceful and co-operative relationship between the two entities. On the other hand, reform is less likely to occur if the state frequently intervenes within the religious organization due to the historically conflictual relationship between the two entities.

The success of the reform efforts by moral authority leaders is also dependent on the historical relationship between the religious group where the reform is taking place and the state. Religious group needs to develop peaceful relationship with the state in order to ensure that the latter would not intervene against their efforts and repress the reforms and their supporters (e.g., arrest and imprison the leader and his supporters, intimidation and other repressive actions against them, etc.). State intervention against reform supporters could have produced negative implications against the reform and at worst, could have extinguished it before it even started.

The state opposes efforts to promote theological reforms promoted by moral authority leaders because of two possibilities. An authoritarian regime considers the progressive ideas promoted by the reform (e.g., support for liberal

democratic ideas, human rights, religious tolerance, etc.) as potential sources for opposition against its rule. Thus, the regime seeks to repress the ideas and the reformers who advocate them in order to minimize the potential threat against itself. Second, the state could oppose the reform efforts within these groups because the ideas propagated by the reform would have challenged the strict separation religion-state separation policy that has been institutionalized by the state for some period of time. In some societies, the state restricts any expressions of religion in the public sphere, imposes penalties, and persecutes any religious groups who are trying to express themselves in the public sphere of these countries. In states with a strict policy of religion-state separation, religious groups have few avenues to openly express their political opinions in the public sphere, as any actions they took to express and promote themselves publicly might risk potential state reprisal against them in the forms of new restrictions against the religious group and potential arrests and imprisonment of these leaders.

However, if the religious group and the state could successfully negotiate a truce or an alliance between themselves, there will be more opportunities for moral authority leaders and their supporters to successfully implement their reforms. This is because there is more room for the reformers to develop a strategy to ease state repression against them if the opposition is based on just one of the above rationales rather than if it is based on both. This strategy is based in the formation of temporary alliance (or truce) between the religious group and members of the ruling regime. If such an alliance is successfully established



between the two parties, state repression against the religious group, and against the reformers would have ceased, opening a pathway for the reforms to go ahead and increase the likelihood that it will be successfully implemented. In order to successfully negotiate this truce/alliance, the reformers develop a short-term goal that is instrumentalist in order to gain the best deal with the state so that the latter would have ceased its intervention against the religious group as well as its repression against its leaders. However, the long-term goal of the reformers remained ideational in orientation, since their main preference is the implementation of the ideas that they have sought to propagate and institutionalize within their own groups.

In this study, the relationship between religion and the state is measured as an ordinal variable measuring the nature of state-religion relations within a particular society, which is defined on a scale between ‘fully peaceful/cooperative’ and ‘fully conflictual’ relations between religion and the state. More peaceful relationship between the state and the religious group enhances the likelihood of reformers to promote theological reforms within their respective group. Under this condition, the state apparatus is less likely to intervene and repress the reformers, thereby increasing the likelihood of that the reform could be successfully implemented by the moral authority leader and their supporters. On the other hand, more conflictual relationship between religious group and the state increases the likelihood of state intervention and the likelihood of state reprisal against the religious group and their leaders as well. Under this condition, the state is more likely to intervene and take repressive actions against moral

authority leaders and their followers. If these reformers are repressed, the reforms can be squashed before they can take hold within their respective religious groups. Consequently, state intervention and repression against the leader and his/her followers could derail the prospect of reforms within these groups.

Table #2.3 below summarizes how I measure and operationalize the relationship between religious group and the state in this study.

Table 2.3

*Measurement of Relationship between Religious Group and the State*

Intervening Variable #2	Measurement	Operationalization
Relationship between religious group and the state	An ordinal indicator that indicates whether a particular state has a peaceful coexistence with religious groups or has a hostile/conflictual relations with them (ranging from "fully peaceful/cooperative relations" to "fully conflictual relations")	Narrative accounts and statements from primary and secondary sources indicating the nature between the relationship between the religious group being studied and the state, with an emphasis of the history of state intervention/repression against religious group and the alliances/truces negotiated between the two entities over the time period being studied

*Sources:* Author's conceptualization based on definitions of state-religious group relations by Kuru (2009).

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable of this study is the theological and political changes of the religious group in which the moral authority leader promotes his/her reform. A successful reform outcome occurs when moral authority leaders and their supporters are able to gain significant support that enables them to implement and institutionalize the reforms they are advocating. Thus, they are able to replace the theological frames and political identities of their group from the old position to the new one advocated by the

reformers. We can observe this when the group we are studying has made a decision to abandon their previously conservative/revivalist theological positions such as the rejection of democracy and democratic political institutions, support for a *shari'a*-based Islamic state, the adoption of Islam as the primary official religion of the country, and religious intolerance toward non-Muslim religious minorities and other Islamic sects. The group will then begin to adopt more progressive theological and political positions, such as the acceptance or tolerance of liberal political ideas such as democracy, human rights, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance/pluralism. In addition, the reform should be considered to be successful if the group that in the past – before the reforms were introduced - had advocated conservative/revivalist theological positions are now – after the reforms have been successfully institutionalized - accept and support progressive theological ideas that were introduced by the moral authority leader into the group. These ideas include democratic political norms and institutions, human rights, religion-state separation, and tolerance toward religious minorities. The reforms would indicate major theological and political changes for the organization from a previously conservative position (e.g., support for a *shari'a*-based Islamic state or the requirement that the head of state must be a Muslim) to a new position that are more progressive theologically, such as genuine acceptance of democracy and democratic political institutions, and the rejection of an Islamic state. These changes would not have been achieved without the strong effort from moral authority leaders and their supporters to change the theological

direction of the organization over a period of time and would reflect genuine ideological and theological changes in the official ideology of the organization.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, the reform efforts should be considered to be unsuccessful if the organization rejects the reforms proposed by moral authority leaders and their supporters, therefore its theological and political positions does not change. The organization remains committed to the ideas associated with conservative/revivalist Islamic theology, such as support for a state that is largely run on based on the *shari'a* law, the promotion of special rights for Muslims over non-Muslims (e.g., only Muslims could become the head of state) , and exclusionary attitudes toward non-Muslim religious minorities and Muslim minority sects. In addition, the group would continue to either reject or seriously question liberal ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religious liberty/pluralism, on the ground that these values are not compatible with Islamic theological and legal principles. Some groups might offer limited acceptance to some of these ideas, but only for as long as they do not contradict these principles. Among these groups, suspicions against these ideas are strong because they are being perceived to be originated from the West, thus are not compatible with the ideas and principles contained in the Islamic theological and political tradition.

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<sup>19</sup> It is assumed here that the shift indicates a genuine *ideological moderation* for the organization rather than *tactical moderation*, which only entails the organization's support of democratic rules and institutions, but little or no actual change in the ideological and theological orientation of the organization (Schwedler, 2007).

I expect to see an empirical confirmation on the validity of the theoretical framework I have outlined above through a close examination of the following data: 1) oral and written statements from the religious followers stating that their political actions they have conducted were done to fulfill the commands, orders, wishes of the religious leader that they have considered as a moral authority leader and 2) evidence of a change in the theological identities and political positions of the religious groups to reflect the theological ideas advocated by the moral authority leader that is sustained over the course of several years or decades, without shifting back into more conservative theological direction. This indicates the existence of genuine ideational change and theological moderation predicted by my theory.

On the other hand, alternative theoretical explanations (political culture/modernization theory and rational choice theory) would find support instead if the following can be observed from the data: 1) oral and written statements from religious followers stating that their political actions were done to gain more political power or material benefits both for their group as well as for themselves, 2) evidence of a shift in the theological and political positions of the group during certain political events (e.g., nearing an election) from conservative to progressive direction, but this shift either stopped or shifted back into the more conservative direction after the event has passed. This indicates that the reform was conducted as a form of tactical and more opportunistic moderation instead of a genuine ideological and theological moderation predicted by my theory.

Table #2.4 below contains the detailed summary of how I measure and operationalize the theological and political change of Islamic groups, the dependent variable of this study.

Table 2.4

*Measurement and Operationalization of Theological/Political Change of Islamic Groups*

Dependent Variable	Measurement	Operationalization
Change in the Theological and Political Orientation of Islamic Groups	<p>I. Changes of theological and political orientation from conservative/revivalist theological position to progressive theological orientation (indicating successful institutionalization of the new theological ideas)</p> <p>II. Maintenance of conservative/ revivalist theological ideas and/or the increasing orientation toward religious fundamentalism within the Islamic group (Indicating unsuccessful institutionalization of the new theological ideas)</p>	<p>Narrative accounts and statements from primary and secondary sources regarding the acceptance of progressive ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance and the rejection of conservative ideas such as <i>shari'a</i>-based Islamic state, religious exclusivism intolerance and political violence.</p> <p>Narrative accounts and statements from primary and secondary sources regarding the rejection of progressive ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance and the increasing support toward conservative theological ideas such as <i>shari'a</i>-based Islamic state, and exclusivism/intolerance toward religious minorities</p>

*Sources:* Author's own conceptualizations.

**Causal mechanisms for successful and unsuccessful theological change.** To map out all the potential causal mechanisms involving the likely outcome of the reform introduced by moral authority leadership, I have developed two possible causal mechanisms/pathways of theological changes promoted by moral authority leadership and is either helped or hindered by the internal culture

of the religious organization and/or the relationship between the religious organization and the state. Under the first pathway, the moral authority leader manages to lead his/her group into a clearly successful reform outcome in which all the independent and intervening variables work positively together to make the reform efforts successful. However, under the second pathway called the unsuccessful reform pathway, the reformers are facing an even bigger hurdle because they are working against the internal culture that historically does not tolerate the emergence of new theological ideas. This results in the emergence of a strong opposition against the reformers, making these changes less likely to occur in a positive direction. Under this pathway, the reformers could have faced two challenges at the same time: a strong theological opposition against their reforms and a hostile state that is trying to repress them and their reform efforts at the same time. The reformers would not be able to successfully change the theological outlook and political positions of their groups.

Under *the successful reform pathway*, the interaction between moral authority leadership, tolerant internal culture, as well as peaceful/cooperative religion-state relations, created a successful pathway for theological change. Since under this pathway, the independent variable (the presence of moral authority leadership) and the two intervening variables (tolerant internal culture and peaceful/cooperative state-religious group relations) are going in the same positive direction, the reformers are able to promote their reforms publicly. As a result, the reform is successfully implemented and institutionalized with the

organization. Under this pathway, these variables form the successful reform causal mechanism, which is summarized in the following figure (Figure 2.2):

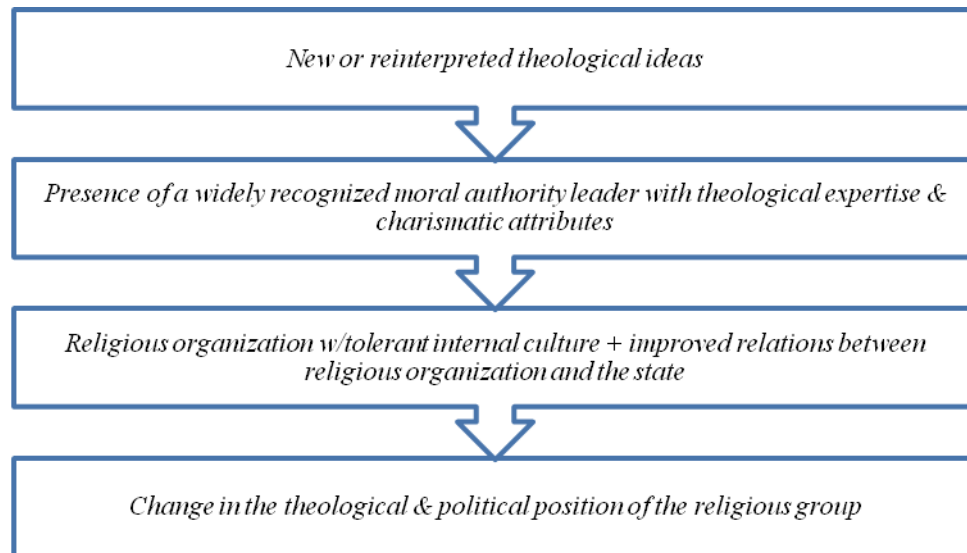


Figure 2.2. Causal mechanism 1: Successful reform pathway

However, under *the unsuccessful reform pathway*, theological reform is unlikely to be successful due to the intolerant internal culture of the religious organization. Under this pathway, the proponents of progressive theological reform within Islamic groups are encountering strong opposition against their reforms from other factions within their group who opposed the institutionalization of the reform on ideological and theological grounds. Due to the prevailing institutional culture of the organization which favors reform opponents, they are able to block the reforms proposed by the reformers and successfully prevent the reforms from being institutionalized within the organization, despite the presence of other positive variables that are conducive toward the reforms such as the presence of a religious (but not a moral authority) leader within the group whom supported the reform and peaceful relations



between the state and the religious group. Under this pathway (Figure 2.3), the causal mechanism that works against reform is the following:

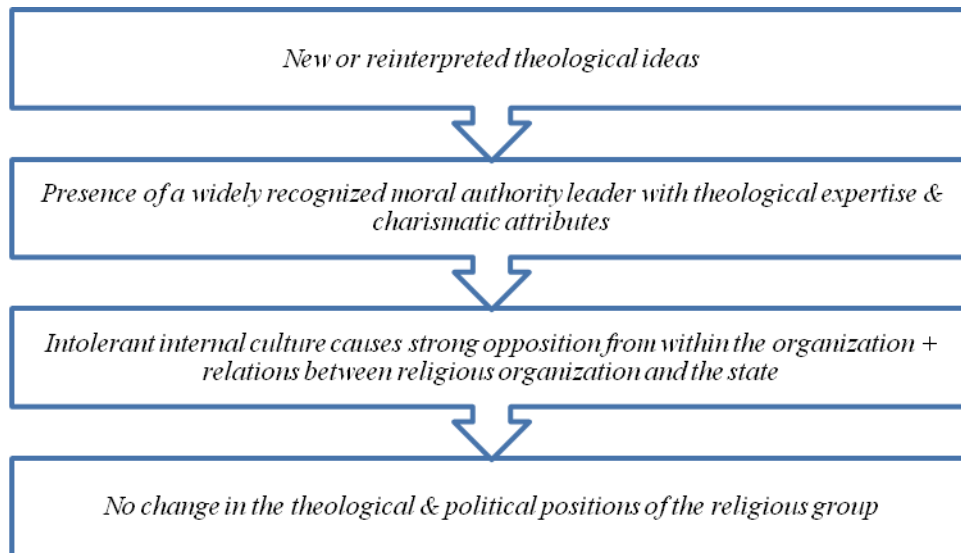


Figure 2.3. Causal mechanism 2: Unsuccessful reform pathway

The two case studies in this study represent each of these two possible pathways: the Nahdlatul Ulama (causal mechanism #1 - successful reform), and Muhammadiyah (causal mechanism #2 – unsuccessful reform). Further details on the three movements and why they were selected as case studies in this study is elaborated in the following section.

### **Research Methodology**

The primary method that will be used in this research is the case study method. Case study is defined as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). It is a form of qualitative research methodology, with the ultimate goal of establishing causality between the explanatory and study (dependent) variables, unlike quantitative methodology, which seeks to establish correlation between

these variables, but not necessarily their causes (Gerring, 2004, p. 348). There are several justifications for this study to use qualitative case study methodology. First, the primary focus of this study is to trace the institutional dynamics and processes operating within Islamic groups that could help us discover causal mechanisms that link together the political theology of an Islamic group with its mobilization strategy and political action. Case study method is most useful for this study in comparison to other research methods such as large-n statistical analysis or quasi-experimental research method. This is especially so because for case study research, the investigator's primary goal is "to discover a set of causal mechanisms that help link a set of variables that establish causality between these variables within a specific context or condition" (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 137). Second, case study method is also very useful when the researcher's primary purpose of conducting the investigation is for theory development, "about which little is previously known or about which existing knowledge is fundamentally flawed" (Gerring, 2004, p. 345). In the study of Islamic politics, currently we know very little about the institutional dynamics of Islamic social movements, the leadership structure of these movements, and the specific role of moral authority leaders in shaping and influencing such dynamics. With these considerations in mind, I believe case study method is the most useful and appropriate research methodology for this study.

**Case selection and justifications.** In this study, I conduct a comparative historical analysis of two Islamic movements, each of them represents the two possible causal mechanisms/pathways I outlined in the previous section. The

successful reform pathway (causal mechanism #1) is represented by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) movement from Indonesia, and the unsuccessful reform pathway (causal mechanism #2) is represented by the Muhammadiyah movement from Indonesia. The two movements have been chosen because they represent the differing outcomes of the theological reforms by moral authority leaders that are predicted by each of the pathways. As predicted by the successful reform pathway, the NU makes a full transformation from a conservative ulama-centered movement that supported a *shari'a*-based Islamic state until the early 1980 into a progressive Islamic group today, thanks to the reforms initiated by its charismatic former chairman Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009). However, as predicted by the counter-reform pathway, reform efforts within the Muhammadiyah failed because the progressive reformers were matched by a strong revivalist counter-movement that dominated the leadership of the organization. Supporters of the revivalist unsuccessful reform within the organization managed to prevent the reforms from being institutionalized, despite the strong support of two moral authority leaders, Nurcolish Madjid (1939-2005) and Syafi'i Maarif (b. 1935) who managed to get a strong and popular following among reformist activists within the organization and the generally peaceful relationship between the Indonesian government and Muhammadiyah.

Each of these movements has also been chosen because they are major Islamic movements with significant number of followers, and both of them have played significant roles as political and civil society organizations within Indonesia. The NU and Muhammadiyah both command a large number of

memberships among the Muslim population in Indonesia. The NU is estimated to have 40 million affiliated members and Muhammadiyah has approximately 30 million affiliated members. Due to their size, some scholars have considered the two organizations as the two largest Muslim organizations in the world (Mujani and Liddle, 2009, p. 6).<sup>20</sup> In addition, the two movements are active participants in the politics of their respective societies for last several decades. Both have suffered from political reprisals and repressions (albeit in varying degrees of severity) at the hand of the state within the last few decades as well. Lastly, both movements have played a major role in the democratic transition and consolidation that occurred in Indonesia during the last decade and a half.

Table #2.5 summarizes the theological and institutional differences between the NU and Muhammadiyah, the different type of leadership exercised by the reform leaders within each of the groups, the institutional culture and state relations with the religious group that each of them have within their respective

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<sup>20</sup> However, these numbers only reflect the potential influence that the two organizations could command in Indonesian politics, since neither the NU nor the Muhammadiyah keeps an accurate record of their actual membership rolls (Mujani and Liddle, 2009, p. 6, fn. 5 & 6). A statistical analysis of Indonesian Islamic voter preferences estimates that 48% of practicing (*santri*) Indonesian Muslims identify themselves with NU and 18% considered themselves as Muhammadiyah followers (Mujani, 2003, cited in Asyari, 2007, p. 21). An affiliation does not automatically mean that they are registered, due-paying members of these organizations. It is estimated that only about 1 million Muhammadiyah members are officially registered with the organization. Only registered members could be nominated as a candidate for a leadership position with the organization and participate in policy-making meetings within the organization (Asyari, 2007, p. 21). Given its similar size, NU is likely to have the same number of registered members as Muhammadiyah.

societies, and summarizes the outcomes of the reforms that each of them undertook within the past three decades:

Table 2.5

*Comparison Between the NU and the Muhammadiyah*

Organization	Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)	Muhammadiyah
Year Active	1926-present	1912-present
Moral Authority Leadership <i>(Independent Variable)</i>	<i>Present.</i> Theological expertise and charismatic attributes of Abdurrahman Wahid manage to dominate the organization	<i>Absent.</i> Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif were recognized for their theological expertise, but not for their charismatic attributes and authority
Institutional Culture <i>(Intervening Variable #1)</i>	Tolerant culture/ Weak opposition from within the organization	Intolerant culture/ Strong opposition/counter-reformation from within the organization
Relations between the state and religious group <i>(Intervening Variable #2)</i>	Conflictual (1966-1984), temporary truce (1984-1990), conflictual (1990-1998), peaceful relations (1998-present)	Peaceful relations throughout the Suharto period (1966-98) and post-democratic transition (1998-present)
Change in Theological/ Political Orientation of the Organization <i>(Dependent Variable)</i>	Successful	Unsuccessful

**Data sources.** Because this study is a comparative historical analysis of three Islamic social movements, the data for this study consists of historical materials, both primary, and secondary historical documents. The primary sources include: Islamic religious texts (the Qur'an, the Sunna, and Islamic legal jurisprudences (*fiqh*)); scholarly interpretations about these texts written by moral authority leaders: books, essays, and other articles written by these leaders to promote their theological viewpoints; policy statements and other official documents issued by their organizations; and other primary documents (e.g.,

speeches and sermons by moral authority leaders, along with other religious scholars and activists).

Many of these data sources are also available at Arizona State University (ASU) library. This is because until 2006, the ASU library was designated as a National Resource Center for Southeast Asian Studies. Consequently, the library holds an extensive collection of original publications on Indonesian politics and Islam in Indonesia that have served as substantial data resources for this study.<sup>21</sup> Even after the library lost its National Resource Center status in 2006, it continues to receive numerous books and other publications on Islam in Indonesia, collected primarily by Professor Mark Woodward of the Religious Studies Program from the university, who lived in Indonesia and has extensive contacts with scholars and activists from both the NU and Muhammadiyah. Other articles and documents about the two religious organizations and their leaders were also obtainable via the Internet, both in English as well as in the Indonesian language.

The secondary materials on the two Islamic movements in Indonesia include previous in-depth studies done about the NU and the Muhammadiyah that were conducted by political scientists, historians, anthropologists, and religious studies scholars, both Indonesian as well as Western scholars. There have been a number of English-language studies done by political scientists and other scholars

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<sup>21</sup> A search on the ASU's online library catalog using the words "Indonesia" and "Islam" reveals 2,042 titles available at ASU library, dating back from the 1950s to the present.

on both NU and Muhammadiyah movements in Indonesia.<sup>22</sup> While most of these works only studied a single Islamic movement within a single country and only a small number of them directly compared two or more of these movements,<sup>23</sup> they also provided rich amount of data and information about these movements and an extensive list of bibliographical sources that can be consulted by other researchers.

In addition to the data sources gathered from the ASU library and the Internet, I also conducted field research in Indonesia during the summer (May – August) of 2010 to gather additional materials about the NU and the Muhammadiyah that were not obtainable through any other means. These included official documents from these organizations as well as rare books and articles written by religious leaders from both organizations that were not easily obtainable on the public domain. Several organizations that were established by the moral authority leaders studied in this study were especially helpful in providing access to these documents. They were the Institute for the Study of Islam and Society (*Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial – LKiS*), the Wahid Institute established by Abdurrahman Wahid (NU), and the Ma'arif Institute established by Syafii Ma'arif (Muhammadiyah).

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<sup>22</sup> For *Nahdlatul Ulama*, see Bush, 2009; Fealy, 1998; Jung, 2009; Kadir, 1999; Leong, 2008; and Ramage, 1995. For *Muhammadiyah*, see Alfian, 1989; Jung, 2009; Leong, 2008; Noer, 1973; Peacock, 1978; and Syamsuddin, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Exceptions include Hefner, 2000; Jung, 2009; and Leong, 2008.

In order to link together the insights provided from these sources to become analytic narratives that serves as empirical data for this study, I use the process tracing method in order to shape the narratives that frame the causal linkages of the variables analyzed in this study. Process tracing (also called “narrative appraisal” by some methodologists, such as Mahoney, 1999) is a method of inquiry in case study analysis where the researcher “examines the data collected to analyze the studied case in order to see whether the causal process hypothesized by his/her theory is in fact evident in the actual data being examined” (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 6). It works by generating numerous observations within a case that are linked together to constitute an explanation for the case (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 207). Process tracing helps “to strengthen comparative historical analysis by helping the researcher to assess whether differences other than those in the variables being investigated might account for the differences in outcomes”(George and Bennett, 2005, p. 81).

Since the data for this study are based on primary and secondary historical sources, care was taken to avoid the possibility of selection bias in the reading and interpretation of historical sources. Political scientists who rely on historiography as their primary research method should be mindful that “our theories and their conclusions....can only be as good as the rules to which [we] adhere for distinguishing ‘accurate’ from ‘inaccurate’ historical monographs” (Lustick, 1996, p. 605). Accordingly, we should avoid selecting sources that shows how events and actors’ behavior largely confirm to the implicit theories we have adopted (Lustick, 1996, p. 607). To avoid such selection bias, I triangulate my



data by using sources from the supporters of moral authority leaders as well as from their opponents. Both groups have put down their arguments for and against the reforms on numerous books, publications, and opinion pieces, so getting the perspectives representing both sides of the conflict is not a difficult task to accomplish. By using triangulation method, an accurate historiography of the reform movements that is theoretically informing and analytically informative can be constructed.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SUCCESSFUL REFORM PATHWAY: THE CASE OF THE NAHDLATUL ULAMA

This chapter analyzes the successful institutionalization of progressive Islamic ideas within the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Indonesian Islamic organization with traditionalist and formerly conservative theological outlook, which now has embrace liberal ideas such as democracy, human rights, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance/pluralism toward non-Muslim population in Indonesia. The NU case is an illustration of the successful reform pathway. Under this pathway, moral authority leadership interacts with tolerant institutional culture and manages to develop peaceful relations with the state relations. Together, they create *the successful reform pathway* in which progressive theological reform could take place within a religious organization. This theory is primarily based on social constructivist theory. It argues that the human agents (“moral authority” leaders) play an important role in changing the shared ideas (the theology) of Islamic groups. This helps to change the group’s political preferences to become supportive of democracy and democratic political institutions, respect the principle of religion-state separation, and recognize the rights of religious minorities to exercise religious freedom within their society. While the theory is primarily inspired by social constructivist theory, it is also

influenced by the works of rational choice theory and the Weberian charismatic leadership theory.<sup>24</sup>

We can find evidence which shows the NU has followed the successful reform pathway when we observe the history of the NU over the past three decades and the theological changes within the organization that have occurred during this period. Before 1984, the NU was widely known as an Islamic organization which supported the theological positions commonly associated with conservative and fundamentalist Islam, such as support for a shari'a-based Islamic state and citizenship rights that privilege Muslims over non-Muslim minorities in from participating in Indonesia's public sphere.<sup>25</sup> However, by the late 1980s and the 1990s, the organization has reversed its theological position from a conservative theological position into a progressive one. Not only did it abandon its call for a shari'a-based Islamic state, but it also asserts the compatibility between Islam and the secularist Indonesian state ideology *Pancasila* by arguing that the latter is not a secular ideology because it recognized the rights of all monotheistic religions (including Islam) as a fundamental human rights. The NU also becomes known for its advocacy for liberal principles such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance, principles that are often challenged and rejected, by many other Islamic groups.

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<sup>24</sup> See chapter 2 for my discussion and analyses on these theories.

<sup>25</sup> This includes the requirement that any Indonesian presidents and key government ministers should come from the Islamic faith. See Fealy 1992, p. 6, cited in Feillard 1994, p. 11 for details.

In this chapter, I argue that the changing theological frames and political preferences of the NU is the result of a reform effort within the organization that began after the organization's national congress (*Muktamar*) in 1984. The primary instigators of the reform were a group of reformers led by an ulama named Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009), who was elected as chairman of the NU in 1984 and who led the organization for the next fifteen years (1984-1999). Wahid was a well-recognized expert in classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). However, he also acquired an in-depth knowledge of Western sociopolitical philosophy. He was a grandson of the late imam Hasjim Asj'ari, who founded the NU in 1926. This family lineage provided a status which brought a wide recognition for Wahid as a charismatic leader among the supporters of reform he had advocated. This status bolstered the reform agenda that he and his reformers promoted within the NU. More importantly, his moral authority status lent weight to his effort to implement and institutionalize his theological ideas within the NU and transform the organization into the progressive Islamic organization it is known as today. Wahid's moral authority leadership, the tolerant institutional culture of the NU, and its improved relations with the Indonesian state during the time the reforms were implemented in the mid-1980s, worked together to ensure the successful theological reform within the NU. It illustrates how the combination of human agency and structure (culture and state institutions) works together to explain the changes in NU's theological frames and political preferences, as predicted by social constructivist theory.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into the following sections. The first section outlines the historical background of the theological reform within the NU that took place under Abdurrahman Wahid's tenure within the organization from 1984 to 1999, the sociopolitical context behind the reforms, and how Wahid emerged to become the leader of the NU during this period.<sup>26</sup> The second section explains Wahid's reforms through the lenses of the moral authority leadership theory developed in this study through the empirical evidences to support this theory. It details how Wahid's moral authority, combined with the two intervening variables of this study (institutional culture and state-religion relations) provides a better theoretical explanation for the NU case compared to the two alternative explanations detailed earlier. The third section analyzes the alternative explanations given by previous scholars to explain this reform, through culturalist and rationalist theoretical perspectives. I reject the culturalist theoretical explanation due to its treatment of culture and ideas as completely fixed and difficult, if not impossible to change variables, therefore denying the possibility that the theological change under Wahid could have occurred in the first place. I also argue that while rational choice theory can explain the instrumental and strategic rationales behind the theological reforms within the

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<sup>26</sup> This study only analyses Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership role as the chairman of the NU from 1984 to 1999. It does not address his political career after his NU chairmanship as the founding chairman of the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* – PKB) or his stint as Indonesia's first democratically elected president from 1999 to 2001. Readers should consult works such as Barton (2002) and Bush (2009) if they are interested to learn more about Wahid's post-NU political career.

NU, it needs to be complemented with the moral authority leadership theory introduced in this study in order to reach a more satisfactory explanation on how both ideational and instrumental factors have shaped the reformers' preferences and their political implications. The final section concludes the chapter with an assessment the moral authority leadership theory along with these alternative explanations, based on the evidences that are presented in the previous section.

### **Historical Background of the Theological Reforms within the NU**

The NU is an organization of Islamic ulama and their followers based in Indonesia. It has a membership of approximately 40 million Indonesians,<sup>27</sup> most of them living in the island of Java. It is considered as a traditionalist Islamic organization because they believe in the special authority of religious scholars (*ulama*), who received absolute obedience from their followers (*taqlid*). The NU ulama are experts of classical Islamic legal jurisprudence (*fiqh*), particularly the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence (*mazhab*). It was founded as a reaction against the reformist Islamist movement that called for the rejection of the ulama's authority in favor of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) by individual Muslim believers. In Indonesia, Islamic reform was promoted by several modernist and revivalist-oriented organizations, including the Muhammadiyah, which was founded in 1912. The traditionalist ulama founded the NU in 1926 as a way to promote the

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<sup>27</sup> However, these numbers only reflects the potential influence that the two organizations could command in Indonesian politics, since both NU and Muhammadiyah do not keep accurate and reliable records of their actual membership rolls (Mujani and Liddle, 2009, p. 6, fn. 5 & 6).

need for the ordinary *umma* to listen to and obey their teachings. In the process, the organization was also established to protect their authority against the criticisms from modernist and revivalist groups such as the Muhammadiyah.<sup>28</sup>

Besides their expertise of this legal jurisprudence, many NU ulama and their followers also practice numerous customs and rituals that are not considered as fundamental Islamic teachings prescribed in the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet).<sup>29</sup> Scholars who have studied the NU have taken the existence of these customs and rituals as evidence that the organization has an institutional culture that tolerates new or syncretic teachings and customs, as long as they do not directly contradict fundamental Islamic teachings. As we will see in the next section, this tolerant institutional culture helped the reformers to find significant support for progressive-leaning theological reform from within the NU during the 1980s and 1990s.

From the 1950s to the early 1980s, the NU was known as a conservative Islamic movement which supported a political agenda that reflected the theological frame commonly expressed by other conservative and revivalist Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as the Muhammadiyah. During this period, many NU ulama wanted that the shari'a law to be recognized as the

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<sup>28</sup> For an analysis of Muhammadiyah's theology and how it reacted to liberal political ideas, please see chapter 4.

<sup>29</sup> This include customs and rituals such as visitations of holy shrines and graves of famous ulama, feasts and offerings in memory of deceased family members (*selamatan/kenduri*) and the use of charms/amulets (*azimat*) that are believed to protect their bearers from evil spirits (Noer, 1973, pp. 300-301; Kadir, 1999, pp. 91-92; Van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 37)

primary source of the Indonesian Constitution. They endorsed the Jakarta Charter, a proposed amendment to the 1945 Indonesian Constitution (later scrapped by secular nationalists), which would require all Indonesian Muslims to observe the *shari'a* law in their daily lives (Fealy, 1996, p. 19). The NU's platform in 1952 called for the state to "institute the *shari'a* law and giving clerics (*ulama*) a privileged role in the highest level of [Indonesian] government" (Leong, 2008, p. 181). This position was further strengthened in its 1954 platform, which explicitly stated that the organization was founded to "firmly establish the *shari'a* law according to the one of the four [Islamic] schools of law" (Madinier and Feillard, 1999, p. 15). It also declared that the position of Indonesian president and most cabinet ministers should only be occupied by Muslims (Madinier and Feillard, 1999, p. 16). In 1968, the NU renewed its support for the Jakarta Charter. It argued that while the enactment of the Jakarta Charter would not automatically result in the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia, it would "require the state to enforce *shari'a* law among Indonesia's Muslims and ensure no legislation contravened Islamic law" (Leong, 2008, p. 276). From this evidence, we can establish the conservative theological frame the NU used to subscribe to during the 1950s to the 1970s.

Nevertheless, the NU's conservative theological frame was tempered by its pragmatic political strategy. It was willing to work with secularist-oriented political parties, which dominated Indonesian politics during the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, the NU developed a close alliance with the secularist Indonesian National Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia* – PNI) led by Indonesia's first



president, Sukarno, throughout much of the 1950s and the 1960s (Bush, 2009, pp. 50-51).<sup>30</sup> In addition, the NU leadership supported Sukarno as he assumed authoritarian rule between 1959 and 1966, arguing that “all-out opposition [against Sukarno] would merely result in NU being excluded completely from the structures of political power” (Bush, 2009, p. 52). The need for patronage opportunities was widely attributed as the rationale for NU’s support for the Sukarno regime. Through its control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it managed to provide extensive financial support for its religious schools (*pesantren*), and provided employment for many of its followers in both government-sponsored Islamic schools (*madrasahs*) and in the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 71).<sup>31</sup>

However, NU’s pragmatism during this period should not be interpreted as a sign that the organization was inconsistent in its theological commitment to

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<sup>30</sup> As a result of this alliance, the NU was given control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which gave the organization control over the Indonesian government’s policy on religious affairs and served as a resource for financial patronage and government contracts for NU supporters (Bush, 2009, pp. 46-47; Fealy, 1998, p. 85).

<sup>31</sup> NU’s control over the Religious Affairs Ministry ended in 1972, when Suharto appointed a modernist Muslim without any organizational or political affiliations as the new Minister of Religious Affairs, ending a two-decade tradition to award the ministership position to NU ulama. With this appointment, NU also lost its control over the administration of the ministry. Most importantly, it also lost its most important patronage funding resources. NU *pesantren* schools and universities no longer received significant subsidies from the government. With the loss of these subsidies, NU-affiliated ulama also lost most of their sources of power and legitimacy within their respective communities, a problem that became one of the catalyst for the theological reform within the NU in the 1980s and 1990s (Kadir, 1999, pp. 184-186).

conservative Islamic principles it had promised to promote and upheld. After General Suharto ousted Sukarno in a military coup in 1966 and began his 32-year authoritarian rule in Indonesia, the organization established a reputation as a leading opposition group and a primary defender of conservative Islamic theology against Suharto's rule (Bush, 2009, p. 67). The NU and the Suharto regime were involved in several major political clashes during the 1970s. In 1973, it was able to block a secularist-oriented marriage bill that sought to limit polygamy as well as the authority of Islamic courts to legalize marriage (Bush, 2009, p. 68). In 1978 it led opposition to the government's legislation that would have declared the Javanese animistic religion (*aliran kepercayaan*) as a new official religion of the Indonesian state. In both instances, the organization argued that these legislations violated the Islamic teaching that Muslims should only worship a monotheistic God instead of man-made entities (Kadir, 1999, pp. 180-182; Van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 95-96). Lastly, during the 1970s NU ulama and activists frequently argued that the secularist national ideology *Pancasila* was a man-made ideology, and that it contradicted the Islamic belief in a monotheistic God (*tauhid*). Thus, they asserted that the Suharto regime's effort to propagate Pancasila to the entire Indonesian population instead of Islamic teachings was a case of apostasy (*murtad*) against the Islamic belief (Kadir, 1999, p. 181).

The conflict between the NU and the Suharto regime reached its climax in 1982, when Suharto issued a decree that required all sociopolitical groups and civil society organizations to adapt the secularist national ideology *Pancasila* as their sole ideological foundation. The decree also declared any organizations that

opposed the implementation of the decree would lose their legal status and be classified as illegal organizations (Kadir, 1999, p. 198). It was clearly aimed to discipline Islamic organizations such as the NU and threatened them with the possibility of losing their legal recognition if they failed to comply with the decree (Kadir, 1999, p. 198).

At about the same time, the NU faced a fierce internal struggle over whether its conservative theological frames, political identities, and preferences remained relevant for the majority of its members and whether a different theological frame is needed so that the NU could become an organization that is more receptive toward democracy, religion-state separation, and tolerance toward non-Muslim minorities. A new generation of NU activists emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They raised questions about the organization's insistence to promote conservative Islamic agenda, such to the establishment of a *shari'a*-based Islamic state, which it had promoted ever since its founding in 1926. These activists also argued that that NU's involvement as a leading opposition organization against the Suharto regime had brought few actual benefits to the members of the organization and only benefited a small number of NU leaders and politicians living in Indonesia's capital Jakarta (Bush, 2009, p. 70).

Many of these young NU activists came from prominent NU families and were either the sons or grandsons of leading NU ulama. Most, but not all of them, tend to be come from professional backgrounds such as doctors, lawyers, or social

activists rather than from ulama background (Bush, 2009, p. 69).<sup>32</sup> However, these activists were not complete strangers to the organization either, because many of them were the children, grandchildren, or other close relatives of leading NU ulama. As these young activists began to voice their criticisms against the organization's conservative theology, they outlined a reform agenda that would have transformed NU into a different direction both theologically and politically.

Specifically, the activists advocated several reform proposals for their organization. First, they recommended that the NU withdrew from formal politics and from its affiliation with the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*–PPP)<sup>33</sup> to become a civil society organization that focuses on the provision of religious propagation, social services to the needy, and social justice advocacy. In addition, the reformers accused the NU leadership of focusing too much attention in opposition politics against the Suharto regime and that the

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<sup>32</sup> Members of the pro-reform faction within the NU included Abdurrahman Wahid, Masdar Masudi, Mahbub Djunaidi, Fahmi Saifuddin, Slamet Effendy Yusuf, Ghaffar Rahman, and Rozy Munir (Ida, 1996, p. 90, cited in Bush, 2009, pp. 69-70). Later on they were joined by reform-minded NU ulama such as Sahal Mahfudz and Mustofa Bisri, who became important allies in Wahid's effort to promote his theological reform within the NU (Bush, 2009, p. 73).

<sup>33</sup> In 1973 NU was forced to merge with three smaller modernist Islamist parties to form the PPP, under heavy pressure from the Suharto regime. While arguably it had gathered the largest number of popular votes among all Islamic parties in the last election (18.64% in 1971), the NU had occupied a smaller proportion of key leadership positions within the PPP, most of which were occupied by members of the government-backed Indonesian Muslim Party (*Partai Muslimin Indonesia – Parmusi*) (Kadir, 1999, p. 177; Bush, 2009, p. 66). By the early 1980s, young NU activists started to question the organization's continued involvement in the PPP, arguing that the relations between NU and PPP had become so dysfunctional that they did not produce any tangible benefits for the rank-and-file NU members (Haidar, 1998, p. 195, cited in Bush, 2009, p. 72).

leadership had based most of its policy decisions based on their narrow political interests rather than the interests of the organization's rank-and-file members (Bush, 2009, p. 72).

Most significantly, the activists called for the reframing and reconstruction of NU's long-standing theological frame and political identity, from one that advocated the implementation of a shari'a-based Islamic state and the rejection of secularist ideologies such as the *Pancasila* to one which recognizes the compatibility of the *Pancasila* with Islamic principles and abandons its call for Indonesian Muslims to establish an Islamic state (Barton, 1996a, pp. 123-125). By adopting this new theological frame, the activists argued that the NU would have acquired a new political identity as an organization which encouraged liberal political values such as democracy, human rights, and tolerance against non-Muslim minorities. In the process, the NU would be known as an organization that is willing to promote progressive democratic values as opposed to the Suharto regime, which had rejected them (Hikam, 1994 [2010], pp. 136-137).

In order to successfully implement these reforms, the NU activists also demanded a change of leadership within the organization, from an older generation of leaders whom had led it since the 1950s to a new generation that would be more receptive toward their reform demands. The older generation NU leaders, while committed to a conservative theological position, also tended to practice political pragmatism in their dealings with both the Sukarno and the Suharto regimes, both of them were problematic in the eyes of the younger reformers. Conservative NU leaders such as its long-term chairman Idham Chalid

(1922-2010), developed cooperative relationship between with both the Sukarno and Suharto regimes, much to the chagrin of many rank-and-file NU members.<sup>34</sup>

The activists concluded that in order to move forward, the NU needed a new leadership that would be more receptive toward their theological and political reforms and shares their long-term vision for the organization (van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 106).

The young activists received the support of some senior NU ulama who were dissatisfied with how the NU leadership ran the organization during the period. These included senior NU ulama such as As'ad Syamsul Arifin (1897-1990), Ali Ma'shum (1915-1989), and Achmad Siddiq (1926-1991). The activists formed an alliance with these older ulama since they did not have enough influence within the NU to implement the reforms they advocated on their own (Kadir, 1999, p. 195). The alliance was also necessary to address the fact that only a small number of these young activists had background and training as ulama. The NU remained a traditionalist-oriented organization dominated by its ulama and the reformers did not wish to change this organizational orientation. They were aware that only an ulama with strong charismatic appeals could have

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<sup>34</sup> For instance, in 1964, Chalid founded the Fire of Islam Foundation (*Yayasan Api Islam*), a NU-linked organization which publicly endorsed and legitimized Sukarno's authoritarian rule and policies by stating that his actions and deeds were "fully inspired by God" (Federspiel, 1976, pp. 99-100). In 1973, Chalid approved the "shotgun marriage" between NU and three other modernist Islamic political parties to form the Suharto-sanctioned PPP party without consulting any other members of NU leadership board (Van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 104).

commanded significant influence and support among the approximately 35 to 40 million NU members.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the reformers concluded that whomever they nominated as the new leader of the NU needed to have sufficient moral authority within the organization so that their reform ideas would have the best chance to be implemented and institutionalized within the NU. In order to do so, the new leader needed to have the theological expertise informed by classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Western sociopolitical thought. He also needed to have strong personal charismatic appeals to be able to unite the largely fragmented and decentralized NU ulama.<sup>36</sup> Finally, since the possession of intellectual and family genealogies are important variables that help to determine whether the leader and the ideas he promoted would gain widespread popularity among members of the organization, the leader must also be related to the family of imam Hasjim Asj'ari, the ulama

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<sup>35</sup> It was fresh in the reformers' mind that when a previous leader of the reform faction, Subchan, Z.E. (1930-1973) tried to challenge the leadership of Idham Chalid during the early 1970s, despite his reputation as a bold and unorthodox NU activist with a pro-reform mindset, he was not able to replace Chalid and was later ousted from the NU leadership board. Subchan's inability to win the NU chairmanship was attributed from the fact that he was not able to attract enough supporters from most NU ulama and activists due to his lack of direct familial and genealogical relationship with imam Asj'ari or other senior NU ulama (Kadir, 1999, pp. 166-167).

<sup>36</sup> Charismatic authority is important within the NU because it is well established within the organization that "the supremacy of ulama (*kyai*) authority serves as the example for all his students (*santri*) and, accompanied by the respect that his reputed magical powers... makes the *kyai*'s omnipotence impregnable and his authority indisputable" (Ward, 1974, p. 92, cited in Kadir, 1999, p. 96).

who helped to found the organization in 1926.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally within the NU, only members of the Imam Asj'ari family (indicated by having the title "Gus" added before his first name) were considered to have these characteristics. NU activists whom do not have familial or intellectual genealogical relations with imam Asj'ari's family or his descendants would not have much of a chance to raise unto the leadership rank within the organization.<sup>38</sup>

In the end, they found their candidate in the person of Abdurrahman Wahid (commonly known among the NU ulama as "Gus Dur"). Wahid was born on September 7, 1940 in Jombang, East Java. He was the grandson of two senior traditionalist ulama who founded the NU in 1926 HeHasjim Asj'ari (1871-1947), and Bisri Syansuri (1886-1980). He was the son of Wahid Hasjim (1914-1953), a leading NU ulama who served as Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs during the early 1950s. In 1957, Wahid started his study of classical Islamic jurisprudence in a NU Islamic school (*pesantren*). He quickly won the recognition

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<sup>37</sup> Not even pro-reform senior NU ulama such as Ali Ma'shum and Achmad Siddiq, widely respected ulama who were also students of Imam Asj'ari, were considered to possess the moral authority characteristics acceptable to the NU community.

<sup>38</sup> Within the NU, this familial relationship is established if an ulama has the title "Gus," which signifies that he is the son of a prominent NU ulama (Kadir, 1996, p. 96, fn. 49). Prominent NU ulama includes imam Hasjim Asj'ari and his sons, and other ulama whom helped to found the organization in 1926, such as Wahab Chasbullah (1883-1971), Bisri Syansuri (1886-1980) and others. Abdurrahman Wahid, the grandson of imam Asj'ari, held the honorific title "Gus Dur," which became his nickname both within the NU community and later with the general Indonesian public as well (Kadir, 1996, p. 96, fn. 49).



from other NU ulama and activists as a leading classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) expert in his own right. However, during his childhood Wahid also received instructions in classical and modern Western literature, history, and philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he grew up with a strong curiosity to learn about Western science and sociopolitical thought, in addition to classical Islamic jurisprudence (Barton, 2002, pp. 48-49).<sup>40</sup>

After finishing his *pesantren* education in 1963, Wahid pursued his advanced study of *fiqh* at the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. After returning to Indonesia from his studies in the Middle East, Wahid began his rise in the leadership ranks of the NU. From 1974 to 1980 he served as the Secretary General of the Tebuireng *pesantren* in Jombang, the largest and most prestigious NU *pesantren*, which was founded by his grandfather imam Asj'ari (Barton, 1996b, p. 193). In 1979, Wahid was appointed as the Secretary General

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<sup>39</sup> Wahid's biographer Greg Barton credits his exposure to Western literature and political thought to the efforts of his father Wahid Hasjim. Hasjim's mother was the daughter of a Javanese aristocratic family (*priyayi*) who wanted her son to become a member of the Javanese elite aristocracy rather than an NU ulama. Thus, she hired a Dutch tutor who taught her son Western literature and philosophy, as well as Dutch and English languages. In turn, Wahid Hasjim exposed his children to a similar Western-style education in addition to giving them traditionalist Islamic education (Barton, 2002, pp. 42; 48-49).

<sup>40</sup> At the *pesantren*, Wahid also read the works of revivalist Islamic reformers such as Sayyid Qutb, Hassan al-Banna, and Said Ramadan. However, Wahid decided to reject revivalist and literalist Islamic Wahid soon decided to reject revivalist and literalist Islamic thought, arguing that they were "contrary to the true spirit of Islam." Instead, he believes in Islam that promotes freedom of thought, pluralism, and tolerance for non-Islamic religious practices, customs, and traditions, as long as they are not directly contradicting the basic tenets of Islamic belief in the oneness of God (*tauhid*) (Barton, 2002, p. 60).

(*chatib aam*) of NU's ulama council (*syuriah*). This was a very strategic position within the NU, since it allowed him to develop relationships and contacts with key NU ulama who sat on the *syuriah* board, many of whom later supported his candidacy as NU chairman in 1984.

Beginning in the 1970s, Wahid began to establish a reputation as a 'norm entrepreneur' for progressive Islamic ideas within the NU. During this period, he was a prolific writer who wrote frequently in various newspapers and popular journals on a variety of sociopolitical issues. The issues included Islamic theological reform, democracy, human rights, tolerance for religious minorities, and the role of Islam in Indonesian politics (Barton, 1996b, p. 198).<sup>41</sup> In his writings, Wahid sought to bridge the long-standing divisions between secular nationalists and Islamists in Indonesian political discourses. He argued that Islam could make a positive contribution to Indonesian politics and accept elements of liberalism and secularism. Scholars whom have extensively analyzed Wahid's writings were impressed by his frequent references to both the classical Islamic and Western political philosophers as well as the consistency of his ideas on

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<sup>41</sup> During the 1970s, Wahid began to write extensively, first in leading Indonesian academic journal *Prisma*, and later on in leading Indonesian newspapers and news magazines such as *Kompas* and *Tempo* about the virtue of *pesantren* education (Barton, 1996b, pp. 195-196; Barton, 2002, p.103). Later on, Wahid's writings branched out to include a variety of sociopolitical issues ranging from Islamic theological and legal reform, democracy and human rights (especially for religious minorities), religious tolerance, and the role of Islam in Indonesian politics (Barton, 1996b, p. 198).

democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance in the numerous articles he wrote between the early 1970s and the late-2000s.<sup>42</sup>

There was a consensus among members of the pro-reform faction within the NU that Abdurrahman Wahid was their best candidate for the new NU chairman. They felt that Wahid was someone who could bridge the gap between the young NU reformers who wanted to promote a fundamental change in NU's theological and political orientations and the older ulama who were either cautious against these proposed reforms or openly resisted them. Based on his writings, Wahid was considered as a reform proponent with an in-depth knowledge of classical Islamic jurisprudence and Western social theory. He also had developed close relationships with other pro-reform NU activists, secular civil society activists, as well as government officials who supported the leadership change within the NU (Ramage, 1995, p. 51). On the other hand, as the grandson of NU's founding father imam Hasjim Asj'ari, signified by his title "Gus Dur," Wahid possessed a strong family genealogy that enable him to have the "blue blood" within the NU. This status enabled him to become an effective

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<sup>42</sup> For instance, Wahid asserts that the secularist Indonesian government gives a guarantee to the Muslim community to protect their religious freedom by incorporating Islamic monotheism (*tauhid*) as the first principle of *Pancasila* – Belief in the One Supreme God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*) when Indonesia declared its independence in 1945. In Wahid's view, this has made the Indonesian government fully legitimate. Unless the government decides to turn *Pancasila* into an alternative religion that seeks to replace the basic tenets of Islam, all Indonesian Muslims are obliged to honor and obey its authority and must reject any other forms of alternative governments that sought to replace it, including an Islamic state (Wahid, 2010, pp. 157-159).

moral authority leader within the NU (Kadir 1999, p. 96). Lastly, Wahid had close relationship with senior NU ulama such as As'ad Syamsul Arifin and Ali Ma'shum, whom supported the young activist's demand for leadership change within the NU but were cautious, even opposed, the theological ideas proposed by the young reformers (Ida, 2004, p. 111-112). In the end, Wahid was considered among the reformers as someone with a strong "moral authority" claims that few others within the NU could have claimed. The reform activists were nearly unanimous in their support for Wahid to become the new NU chairman to replace the conservative Idham Chalid.

The 1984 NU national congress handed out a landslide victory to members of the pro-reform action. The delegates endorsed the resolution that accepted *Pancasila* as the NU's sole ideological foundation, making it as the first major Indonesian Islamic organization that had agreed to implement it.<sup>43</sup> They endorsed the reforms advocated by the reformist faction to end NU's participation in formal politics and to return to its function as a religious organization not affiliated with any political parties. Lastly, the delegates elected Abdurrahman Wahid as the new chairman of the organization's central leadership (*tanfidzyah*) board (Van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 114-116 & 120-125; Bush, 2009, pp. 74-78). At the same

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<sup>43</sup> The 1984 amendment to the NU's bylaws signifying this change was actually very short. The amended bylaws included a new short clause that declared Pancasila as NU's sole ideological principle. However, NU retained another clause that has been included in its bylaws since its founding in 1926: that it is an Islamic organization that operates based on ulama's consensus ("*ahli sunnah wal jama'ah*") and requires its members to follow one of the four *mazhabs* of Islamic religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (Van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 122 & 289-292).

time, former chairman Idham Chalid and other members of the conservative faction were expelled from the NU new leadership board (Van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 125).

After assuming the NU chairmanship, Wahid started to implement the reforms he had proposed. He instituted reforms that were intended to change the NU's theological frame and political identity, from one that has historically promoted conservative theological positions (e.g., supporting the shari'a law) into an Islamic organization which saw the compatibility between Islam and liberal values such as democracy, human rights, and social justice within the Indonesian society as a whole. From the time Wahid assumed office in 1984, the NU began to move away from its conservative theological orientations that called for the implementation of a *shari'a*-based Islamic state in Indonesia. Instead, he began to publicly expressed support for the secularist national ideology *Pancasila* as well as support for ideas such as democracy, human rights, social justice, and the protection of disadvantaged economic groups in the Indonesian society. Lastly, Wahid developed alliances and cooperation between the NU, the Suharto regime, and secularist-oriented Muslims to keep the influence of revivalist-oriented Muslim groups in check (Ida, 2004, pp. 89-90).

Wahid believes that Muslims should adopt democratic political principles because despite revivalist Muslims' claim that God mandates the creation of an Islamic state in lieu of a democratic one, he could find no textual support both within the Qur'an and the *fiqh* texts that could support this claim. While Islam calls for Muslims to obey and follow the *shari'a*, it does not have any formal

teachings about the nature of the state and whether the state should be based on Islam. Wahid argues that:

Islam does not specifically call for an Islamic state, but only calls for the improvement of human society. A society that already practices Islam wholeheartedly and thus, already follows the rules specified by the *shari'a*, does not need to establish an Islamic state (Wahid 2006a: 102-103).

Wahid asserts that “because there is no scriptural texts that call for the establishment of an Islamic state, Muslims are not required to establish one. Instead, they are called to build a society that promotes democratic values that are compatible with Islam. However, this could be done without establishing an Islamic state” (Ridwan 2010: 63).

Wahid also resolves the long-standing contention between the NU and secular nationalists in the Suharto regime over the nature of the Indonesian state, whether it should be a secularist nation-state based on the Indonesian national ideology *Pancasila* or should be a *shari'a*-based Islamic state. He argues that the resolution to this contention could be found in the classical *fiqh* teaching on the relationship between Muslims and the state. According to Wahid’s interpretation of the *fiqh*, “Muslims must submit to all forms of authority that has given them a guarantee to protect their rights to worship the one true monotheistic God (*tauhid*)” (Ridwan 2010: 38). He asserts that the secularist Indonesian state has given this guarantee to the Indonesian Muslim community by incorporating *tauhid* as the first principle of the *Pancasila* – Belief in the One Supreme God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*) when Indonesia declared its independence in 1945. In Wahid’s view, this has made the Indonesian government fully legitimate:

Unless the [Indonesian] government decides to turn the *Pancasila* into an alternative religion that seeks to replace the basic Islamic principles, all Indonesian Muslims are obliged to honor and obey the government's authority and must reject any other forms of alternative political regimes that sought to replace it, including an Islamic state (Wahid 1985 [2010]: 157-159).

Lastly, Wahid recognizes the reality that Indonesia is so religiously diverse that the country could only survive if no single religion is privileged over the others.<sup>44</sup> In his mind, this demographic reality serves as the basis for the NU community to reject an Islamic state in Indonesia, since:

Indonesians who are non-Muslims as well as those who are only nominally Muslims have shown their strong objections against the establishment of an Islamic state [in Indonesia]... Instead, they want to establish a state that is not based on any specific religious confession (Wahid, 2006a, p. 104).

In short, Wahid believes in a cultural and ethical interpretation of Islam, but not a political one. In his view,

There is nothing written in the Islamic tradition which mandates the establishment of an Islamic state. Even though I am a Muslim and the majority of Indonesians are also Muslims, there is no desire in my part to dominate Indonesia in the name of Islam... What I am trying to establish [in the Indonesian society] is a cultural Islam, not a political one (Islamlib.com, 03/10/2006).

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<sup>44</sup> While 88 percent of Indonesian population are Muslims, there are a number of sizable religious minorities living in Indonesia as well: Christians (9 percent of the population), Hindus (1 percent), Buddhists (1 percent), and Confucians (1 percent). The Indonesian Muslim community is also divided among traditionalist NU, modernist Muhammadiyah, several revivalist groups, and numerous small syncretic Islamic sects (e.g, the Ahmadiyah). In Wahid's view, this extraordinary religious diversity "necessitates the need for a secular state, since it is the only one that would unite all members of these religious traditions under a single state" (Wahid 2006a: 104).

Wahid opposes the implementation of the shari'a law in Indonesia because he believes that it will result in religious segmentation that will privilege Muslims (especially revivalist Muslims) over other religious groups in Indonesia.

Thus, Wahid rejects the Islamic state because:

Our nation is very heterogeneous in its way of life, thus the state should not only serve the interests of the Muslims alone. Many Indonesian Muslims, myself included, have rejected the Islamic state in Indonesia. Their beliefs and opinions, along with those of Indonesians who are not Muslims (represents more than 10 percent of Indonesia's population), should be respected. It is foolish to assume that the concept of an Islamic state is accepted by all Muslims in this country, just because Islam is the majority religion in Indonesia (Wahid 2006b, p. 50).

To preserve the climate that supports inter-religious tolerance and pluralism, Wahid argues that Muslims should engage in continuous dialogue among themselves, with non-Islamic religions, and with the greater human community. He cites a teaching issued by his mentor Achmad Siddiq, arguing that NU members should practice three forms of 'ecumenic dialogues' (*ukhuwwah*) with other religious and civil society groups: 1) dialogue with fellow Muslims, especially with Muhammadiyah members (*ukhuwwah Islamiyah*); 2) dialogue with all Indonesians, especially with non-Muslims (*ukhuwwah wathaniyah*); and 3) dialogue with the rest of humanity (*ukhuwwah basyariyyah*). He believes that practicing *ukhuwah* is necessary because "while different religious and civil society groups have their own distinct theological and cultural perspectives that differ from one another, this does not mean that they could not live in harmony with one another" (Wahid, 2003, also see Van Bruinessen 1996, p. 187).

Nevertheless, the theological ideas proposed by Wahid and other reform supporters above encountered a strong opposition from within the NU from



several different factions within the organization. Some NU ulama opposed the reforms due the diverging theological interpretations. However, others opposed them on instrumental ground, because the reforms reduced the power and special status of the ulama in comparison to the lay NU activists. Senior NU ulama, such as Kyai As'ad Syamsul Arifin, whom at first supported Wahid's campaign for the NU chairmanship, also began to oppose him because they disagreed with his reforms (Kadir, 1999, pp. 224-225). In addition, NU politicians such as Wahid's uncle Yusuf Hasjim, who lost their parliamentary seats thanks to Wahid's decision for the NU to stay away from partisan politics also opposed his reforms (Barton, 2002, p. 152). Lastly, a number of NU businesspeople who were closed to Suharto and other key Indonesian government officials also opposed Wahid. They argued that Wahid's frequent criticisms against the Suharto regime were hurting their chances of obtaining lucrative government contracts for their businesses (Hefner, 2000, pp. 171-172).

Opposition to Wahid's reforms was especially strong during the first term of his chairmanship (1984-1989). However, by the time Wahid won his third term as the leader of the NU in 1994, he had managed to overcome this opposition and successfully institutionalized most of his reform proposals. Thus, Wahid was able to change the theological frame and political identity of the NU from a formerly conservative theological position into one that fully reflected his progressive theological ideas. The success of the reforms is attributed to these factors: 1) Wahid's moral authority leadership and charismatic attributes, 2) the tolerant institutional culture of the NU which was conducive toward new theological

ideas, particularly those which were promoted by Wahid and his supporters, and 3) the relatively peaceful relationship between the NU and the Suharto regime, which helped Wahid to enact his reforms during the mid to late 1980s with fewer threats of reprisal and persecution from the regime. All of these are analyzed in the following section.

### **Analysis of Theological Change within the NU**

**Abdurrahman Wahid's moral authority leadership.** The highly decentralized structure of the NU means that individual NU ulama has a high amount of personal autonomy within the organization. He could run his own Islamic school (*pesantren*) like a mini-kingdom, with little or no accountability to the senior NU leadership above him (Kadir, 1999, p. 95). As a result, rank-and-file NU ulama had a wide discretion to either comply or ignore the decisions made the NU leadership board (Kadir, 1999, p. 99). In order to overcome the ulama's autonomy and their resistance against the NU leadership board, they needed to be persuaded by a moral authority leader with a combination of deep knowledge of Islamic theology, charismatic attributes, and genealogical linkages with the families of the leading ulama who first founded the organization. If this leader, through a combination of persuasive and coercive powers, succeeds in convincing other members of the NU about the necessity for the organization to adopt new theological ideas and political identities, supporters are more likely to follow and implement the reform ideas promoted by this leader.

Since Abdurrahman Wahid has both the theological expertise as well as perceived charismatic attributes and familial link with the family of NU's

founding father, he was judged by other ulama within the NU as a moral authority leader for their organization. This could be seen from the deep reverence of senior NU ulama who were much older than Wahid, such as As'ad Syamsul Arifin, Achmad Siddiq, and Ali Mahshum, to Wahid, in which they cited their support for his leadership within the NU due to the fact that Wahid was the grandson of their former teacher imam Hasjim Asj'ari (Kadir, 1999, pp. 96-97).<sup>45</sup> The support of these senior NU ulama was crucial in Wahid's success to be chosen as the chairman of the NU in 1984 and was instrumental in his efforts to promote the reform causes he advocated within the NU (Kadir, 1999, p. 98; van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 130-131).<sup>46</sup>

In this section, I argue that Wahid's moral authority and charismatic attributes helped to change the theological frame of the organization from a previously conservative Islamic theological frame. They helped to socially reconstruct the frame of the organization through the institutionalization of the progressive theological ideas he had advocated within the NU community. On an instrumental level, it helped to solidify the support of other NU ulama and

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<sup>45</sup> The late Kyai As'ad Syamsul Arifin even stated in an interview that despite his personal opposition to many of the reforms that Wahid had proposed within the NU, he refused to publicly admonish and criticize Wahid, because he knew that "Wahid was the grandson of his teacher, Kyai Hasyim Asj'ari. Thus, he had to defer to Wahid as he would defer out of respect to his teacher" (Kadir, 1999, p. 96). Arifin deferred to Wahid this despite the strong popular following he used to have among his followers, which made him as a likely contender against Wahid in NU national congress during the 1980s.

<sup>46</sup> See p. 126, fn. 52, of this study for an example of Siddiq's actions which helped Wahid to win his first election as NU's general chairman in 1984.

grassroots followers for the reforms he had advocated, and created significant disincentives for reform opponents to publicly air their opposition against the reform. On an ideational level, it inspired the actions of a new generation of NU activists whom lent their support to these ideas and helped to construct a new theological and political identity within the NU that are conducive toward democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance. They propagated these ideas further through their own writings and through the founding of new non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that help to these ideas both within the NU community and within the Indonesian community as well.

Wahid's moral authority status among the NU community helped to solidify the support of other senior NU ulama. Many of these ulama were linked intellectually with his family since they were either former students of his grandfather Hasjim As'jari or close associates of his father Wahid Hasjim. The most important support Wahid's received from senior NU ulama were from Ahmad Siddiq and Ali Ma'shum. During the 1980s, when Wahid and his supporters began their campaign to reform the NU, the two ulama served as the chief spiritual leader (*rais aam*) of the organization. Thus, they were considered as the most senior ulama within the NU community.<sup>47</sup> Both of them were students

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<sup>47</sup> The spiritual leader (*rais aam*) position within the NU is traditionally given to the most senior ulama within the NU. In the past, the position was the most powerful position within the organization, especially during the tenure of the first *rais aam*, Hasjim Asj'ari (1871-1947) and his successor Wahab Chasbullah (1883-1972). However, today the position is mostly symbolic, given to the senior NU ulama whom had served the NU community for so many decades.

of Imam Asj'ari and Siddiq served as Wahid Hasjim's personal secretary during the early 1950s. Both also served as Wahid's teachers and mentors during the time of his pesantren education during the late 1950s and early 1960s (Kadir, 1999, pp. 97 & 197; van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 130-131). It was Siddiq who managed to convince the other NU ulama to accept Wahid as the new NU chairman and to endorse his idea to declare the compatibility between Islam and state ideology *Pancasila* (Ramage, 1996, p. 246).

The two ulama lent their support for Wahid by invoking his theological expertise that combines classical Islamic thought and Western social theory. They also invoked his family lineage and argued that these attributes serve as the primary justification for other NU members to accept Wahid's leadership over the NU (Kadir, 1999, p. 197). This was combined with their own well-reputed status within the NU community as senior ulama with strong influence among other NU ulama (van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 109-110). In promoting Wahid's reforms among other ulama, they frequently made references to Wahid's family genealogy by invoking the memories of Wahid's grandfather and father.<sup>48</sup> Their support enabled Wahid to protect himself from the criticisms of other NU ulama whom had opposed Wahid and his reform ideas, such as As'ad Syamsul Arifin, Idham Chalid, and Yusuf Hasjim (Bush, 2009, pp. 82-83). In addition to the support of senior ulama such as Siddiq and Ma'shum, Wahid also received support from

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<sup>48</sup> At one point, Siddiq made a statement that he was "visited" by Wahid's father, the late Wahid Hasjim, in his dream, in which the latter urged the NU ulama to support his son's candidacy as the new NU chairman (Kadir, 1999, p. 197, fn. 96).

junior reform-minded ulama such as Sahal Mahfudz (b. 1937) and Mustofa Bisri (b. 1944), both of whom have authored books that further promoted the discourses of the theological reform advocated by Wahid to the NU community (Van Bruinessen, 1994, pp. 118-119).<sup>49</sup>

The support from these influential ulama helped the acceptance of Wahid and his ideas within the NU community. The discourses of these ulama and their influence within the NU were also crucial to convince many grassroots NU members to support his reforms, as they consistently invoked Wahid's theological expertise and family genealogy as their justification to support his reform efforts. Initially, many NU ulama had serious reservations and objections regarding Wahid's theological reforms, since it was a major reconstruction of NU's traditionalist frames and offered different theological visions relative to those that had long been accepted by these ulama (Barton, 2002, p. 159; Bush, 2009, p. 82). However, as more senior ulama within the NU lent support to Wahid's theological reforms in their own discourses and narratives, reform supporters gained significant support from these ulama. Accordingly, it became increasingly

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<sup>49</sup> For instance, Sahal Mahfudz authored a book entitled "Principles of Social *Fiqh*" (*Nuansa Fikih Sosial*), in which he argues that the interpretation of *fiqh* must change from a literalist approach that either allow or prohibit a given course of action into a dynamic interpretation that takes into account contemporary socio-cultural contexts surrounding that action (Mahfudz, 1994, pp. 19-22, cited in Effendi, 2010, pp. 164-166). Mahfudz was elected as NU's spiritual leader (*rais aam*) in 1999 and still holds the position today. Mustofa Bisri was a frequent participant of *halaqah* discussion groups that were sponsored under Wahid's patronage and have made arguments calling for the ulama to consult lay experts such as scientists, doctors, and economists before issuing religious edicts (*fatwa*) that addressed complex issues facing the modern society (Van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 194).

difficult for reform opponents to offer alternative discourses to challenge the reforms within the NU, as doing so became commonly interpreted by other NU ulama as a challenge not only against Wahid's moral authority within the NU, but also against his family lineage as the grandson of NU's founding ulama.<sup>50</sup>

In addition through the support of senior NU ulama, Wahid also enhanced his moral authority status through his strong communication skills, which managed to win over the support of grassroots NU members. This was exercised during his frequent travels to visit NU *pesantren* schools throughout Indonesia. In these visits, he regularly held extensive conversations about the reforms with the local ulama who led these schools. During these conversations, Wahid usually presented his reforms as a continuation of the long-standing tradition within the NU in order to maintain the organization's relevance among contemporary Indonesian Muslims. At the same time, he also listened to their concerns, grievances, and criticisms against the reforms. Wahid's frequent visits, meetings, and consultations with these ulama were credited as important factors that enabled him to win the support of these ulama over his reforms (Barton, 2002, p. 171). He even impressed many of the ulama who opposed his reforms during these visits.

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<sup>50</sup> During the 1989 NU congress, reform opponents were widely anticipated to nominate a candidate to challenge Wahid as he sought re-election to his NU chairmanship. The candidate was Yusuf Hasjim (1929-2006), another senior NU ulama who was also Wahid's uncle. Thus, Hasjim arguably had similar moral authority and genealogical claims vis-à-vis Wahid, as the last surviving son of NU's founder imam Asj'ari. However, despite having these claims, Hasjim was not able to find enough support among NU members for his candidacy, as Wahid managed to retain popular support from the majority of NU ulama and activists who attended the congress, primarily from younger NU members (Barton, 2002, p. 176, Bush, 2009, pp. 82-83).

Even when they remained opposed to his ideas, they were impressed by Wahid's willingness to frequently visit local *pesantren* schools and held conversations with the ulama who ran them.<sup>51</sup>

During the visit to these *pesantrens*, Wahid frequently did not just meet with these ulama. In addition, he also met with their students and followers as well. In these meetings, Wahid made speeches to strengthen his moral authority status among these followers and to build public supports for his reforms. Because they were so impressed by Wahid's knowledge and charismatic attributes expressed in his speeches, many NU followers considered him as a living saint (*wali*). They frequently attended gatherings where Wahid and the local ulama held their meetings in large numbers in order to seek his personal blessing (*barokah*).<sup>52</sup> Most importantly, because these followers considered Wahid as a charismatic leader with ideas that was often perceived to be innovative and unorthodox, his

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<sup>51</sup> For instance, a Central Javanese ulama named Kyai Muntaha stated that while he disagreed with Wahid's liberal reformist ideas, he maintained a deep respect for Wahid and considered him as a leader who serves as the NU's "bridge to a brighter future" (Ramage, 1995, p. 50). Many local ulama also expressed their admiration of Wahid for enhancing the national and international reputation of the NU and for changing the reputation of the organization as a "conservative and traditional organization with no interest in the temporal realm" (Kadir, 1999, p. 229, fn. 29).

<sup>52</sup> An example of the strong enthusiasm of local NU followers to see Wahid was recorded in Suzanna Abdul Kadir's field notes while she followed Wahid's visits to the East Java towns of Jombang and Pasuruan in August 1996. She writes: "...each time Wahid steps out of [his] car, hundreds of NU members, young and old, rush forward to seek [his blessing] by kissing his hand or just touching him... Thousands of NU masses wait patiently in the scorching heat in Pasuruan to hear Wahid speak or even just to see him" (Kadir, 1999, p. 229, fn. 28).



visits helped to solidify the support for the reform ideas he has promoted within his supporters.

Using a mixture of Indonesian and Javanese languages,<sup>53</sup> Wahid was able to convince these lay followers to support his reforms through the simple languages that they would have understood, as illustrated in these quotes:

One of the special talents Wahid possessed was his ability to [articulate his ideas] using story-telling narratives that [most poor and uneducated folks] would have simply understood. This was an ability that few other Indonesian leaders have had. This ability worked in Wahid's favor because he was able to portray himself [and his ideas] not just as an elitist leader, but as a leader who understood the concerns of the common folks. This story-telling ability could generate [the popular support] for his cultural reforms....Wahid's ability to utilize this "cultural resources," such as folk traditions or stories, [as mechanisms to promote his ideas] was the key that enabled him to achieve social transformation within the traditionalist [NU] community (Gusdur.net, 07/18/2011).

Wahid has a unique ability to [communicate], among the intellectual and government elites of Jakarta, New York, and Tokyo, and....among Indonesia's ordinary persons ('*orang awam*') and low-income grassroots Muslims ('*orang Muslim kaki lima*') (Ramage 1995, p. 51).

Wahid's ability to promote the reform ideas, discourses, and implications by utilizing a simple language that rank-and-file NU members could easily understand has helped to enhance his moral authority status among them. Due to Wahid's popularity among the rank-and-file NU members, over time it became more difficult for the other NU ulama to publicly oppose the reforms he promoted and propagated.

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<sup>53</sup> The use of Javanese language was still common among Indonesians who live in rural communities in Java island, a population that is still relatively poor, uneducated, and illiterate, thus have few fluent speakers of the Indonesian language. Typical NU rank-and-file members tend to be poor farmers or small-town traders who lived in these rural Javanese villages.

Most crucially for the reformers, Wahid's ideas and moral authority status attracted the support of a new generation of NU activists who came of age during the 1980s and 1990s. They admired him because of his advocacy of progressive values such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism at a time when the ruling Suharto regime actively tried to repress the propagation of these ideas within the Indonesian society. They admired Wahid's willingness to proceed with the propagation of these ideas despite facing numerous threats and reprisals from the regime during the 1990s (Barton, 2002, p. 158).

These young activists were disenchanted with the views of conservative NU ulama who used to run the organization before Wahid took charge in 1984. These older ulama promoted a strict and literalist interpretation of classical Islamic texts that held little relevance to the rapidly changing Indonesian society during the 1980s and 1990s. They supported Wahid's efforts to construct a new interpretation of classical Islamic texts and to reconstruct them in order to better reflect the historical and sociopolitical contexts of modern Indonesian society, especially to the need to promote greater democracy and human rights within the Indonesian society. Lastly, they wanted the NU ulama to directly discuss contemporary sociopolitical issues in their teachings and preachings, rather than avoiding these issues for fear of potential reprisals from the Suharto regime (Van Bruinessen, 1994, pp.198-199). Wahid's reform ideas, and his willingness to openly question and criticize the regime during the early and mid-1990s, helped to increase the support of his ideas from young NU activists. This was why many

young NU activists became interested in Wahid's ideas and were inspired by them. Some of the commentaries from these young activists are presented below:

In my opinion, Wahid acted as a "window" to the outside world for the NU community....His greatest accomplishment rests on how he inspired so many young [NU] pesantren students. It was through his actions they learned how to think and write critically, using their own words and ideas (Islamlib.com, 03/10/2006).

Wahid's intellectual contributions to the development of a civil society discourse [within the NU], in concert with his more overt political maneuvers, have led many observers to conclude that from the start he intended [his reform ideas] to be an oppositional force [against the Suharto regime] (Bush 2009, p. 91).

There was a mutually constituting relationship between Wahid and young NU activists whom supported his reforms. As Wahid continued to promote his reform ideas within the NU, he relied on the support of young activists these as his primary supporters for the NU chairmanship in 1989 and 1994. Young activists' overwhelming support for Wahid has been credited with helping him win re-election in both terms (Kadir, 1999, p. 226-228, Van Bruinessen, 1994, p. 169). In return, Wahid served as the primary defender of these young activists against attacks and criticisms from conservative ulama within the NU as well as from the Suharto regime apparatus who often intervened and intimidated the works of these activists (Barton, 2002, p. 158).<sup>54</sup> A young NU ulama described Wahid's role to protect the young activists in these words:

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<sup>54</sup> Examples of Wahid's defense of "second-generation" NU activists was his support for the efforts of P3M activists to host critical readings and discussions of classical Islamic texts that came under strong criticisms from older, more conservative ulama, as well as his support for NU activists who protested against

Wahid served as a window [of ideas] and a protector for young NU activists [who are inspired by his ideas]. When these young folks were criticized by other NU ulama, he talked to them and explained their actions using the narratives commonly used by the ulama. He also protected them using other means as well (Islamlib.com, 03/10/2006).

In time, through the works of the NGOs that they have established, the activists were able to promote and institutionalize Wahid's reforms within the NU. Thus, the alliance between Wahid and the young NU activists had produced mutual benefits for both parties. Nevertheless, Wahid's relationship with the young activists was more an ideational level with them rather than institutional. He engaged in regular meetings and discussions with these activists and through his ideas, activities, and moral authority status within the NU he helped to inspire their thoughts. However, for the most part he did not directly guide their actions and did not give any specific directives on how they could reconstruct the theological framework of the NU and institutionalize his ideas both within the NU community as well as within the Indonesian society (Barton, 2002, p. 160). In the words of a young activist:

Wahid has never been interested to develop a core group of followers or cadres. He never considered himself as the absolute leader [of an Islamic social movement]. What he was interested in developing was enlightened ideas, which inspired his close associates so that they became motivated to follow and continue his struggles (Gusdur.net, 07/18/2011).

The motivation of the young activists to promote and implement Wahid's ideas was clearly seen in the establishment of numerous NGOs that were founded both within and outside of the NU community during the 1980s and 1990s. The

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the construction of the Kedung Ombo Dam that had displaced villagers living in Central Java in the late 1980s (Barton, 2002, pp. 158-159 & 165-166).

goal of these NGOs was to promote and socialize Wahid's ideas and put them into action both within the NU as well as within the Indonesian society as a whole. However, these NGOs were not directly founded by Wahid or by the NU leadership board. Instead, they were founded by the NU activists who were inspired by his ideas on democracy, human rights, and religious pluralism and wanted to promote them further within the NU community (Barton, 2002, p. 161; Bush, 2009, p. 94).<sup>55</sup> This shows how Wahid's status as a leader and moral authority figure within the NU inspired a new generation of young NU activists who were influenced by his ideas and in their own way were assisting him to promote and implement them within the NU.

Over the long run, the NGOs established by these activists served as a venue to recruit a new generation of pro-reform leaders who share Wahid's commitment to fully transform the NU to become a progressive-leaning Islamic organization through their own innovative theological ideas. Prominent members of the "next generation" NU reformers include Masdar Masudi (b. 1954), former director of P3M whom have articulated his own theological interpretation of the compatibility between the Islamic system of religious alms and tithes (*zakat*) with

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<sup>55</sup> NGOs founded by these activists to further promote his ideas within the NU community include the Association for the Development of Pesantren and Society (*Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat - P3M*), the Institute for the Study and Development of Human Resources (*Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia – Lakpesdam*) and the Institute for the Study of Islam and Society (*Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Social – LKiS*) (Bush, 2009, pp. 87-88).

modern income tax system (Barton, 2002, p. 161), Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (b. 1967), who helped founded the Liberal Islam Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal* – JIL) in 2001, an NGO that promoted a liberal interpretation of Islam “which is compatible with democracy, human rights, neoliberal economics, secularism, and religious freedom” (Bush, 2009, pp. 179-181),<sup>56</sup> and Imam Aziz, founder and former director of LKiS, who was recently appointed as a member of NU central leadership board (Bush, 2009, p. 88). In turn, the innovative thought and support from this new generation of NU leaders, as well as from tens of thousands of other NU activists, for Wahid reforms, has helped to further consolidate and institutionalize of the reform ideas he had promoted within the organization.

By the 2000s, Wahid’s ideas were firmly institutionalized within the NU. The organization has actively promoted his concepts of democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance and pluralism through both words and deeds. We could see evidence of this institutionalization for instance, in 2002, when there was a new series of amendment introduced to the the 1945 Indonesian constitution, the Jakarta Charter amendment, which would have required the establishment of *shari’a* law in Indonesia was reintroduced by a small number of revivalist Muslim parties in the parliament. However, NU representatives in the Indonesian

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<sup>56</sup> JIL was an Islamic movement founded by a group of second-generation traditionalist and modernist reformers in 2001. The group wishes to cross the theological divisions that have long divided their respective groups to promote a “liberal Islam” which is compatible with democracy, human rights, neoliberal economics, secularism, and religious freedom (Bush, 2009, pp. 179-181). For in-depth accounts on the foundation of JIL, the theological and political ideas it has advocated, and reactions from revivalist Muslims against JIL, see for instance Ali (2005) and Harjanto (2003).

parliament rejected it outright, unlike their counterparts during the 1950s and 1960s. The NU representatives worked together with representatives of Muhammadiyah, secular-nationalist, and Christian parties in the Indonesian parliament to defeat the Jakarta Charter amendment in a landslide margin (Howell, 2005, p. 474).

The NU also retains its commitment to promote religious freedom, tolerance, and pluralism. During his NU chairmanship, Wahid initiated frequent meetings and dialogues with the leaders of religious minority groups in Indonesia (e.g., Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) as part of his agenda to promote religious tolerance and pluralism among the NU community. His successors as NU chairmen – Hasyim Muzadi (1999-2010), and Said Agiel Siradj (2010-present), continued this tradition and hosted regular meetings with their non-Muslim counterparts. The purpose of these meetings was to show the NU's commitment to promote religious tolerance and pluralism, as well as to show its opposition against the agenda promoted by its revivalist counterparts that encouraged the formalization of *shari'a* law, Islamic fundamentalism, and religious violence/terrorism (Badri, 07/20/2011).

Inter-religious dialogue was Hasyim Muzadi's special concern during his NU chairmanship, in which he helped to found the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS), an international NGO with a mission "to promote Islam as blessing for universe (*Islam rahmatan lil alamin*) and "to promote world peace on the basis of universal values of Islam" (ICIS, 2011, "Background" ). The organization was also established as "the main capital of the NU to promote Islam

as *rahmatan lil alamin* more widely in both national and international levels” (ICIS, 2011, “Background”). Siradj, the current NU chairman, states that the NU will continue to promote religious dialogue with non-Muslim religions as part of its promotion of Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin* which is “tolerant, opposes religious exclusivism and separatism, and recognizes the religious plurality and diversity within the Indonesian society” (Cathnewsindonesia.com, 07/18/2011). He condemned recent attacks against minority Islamic sects at the hand of revivalist-leaning organizations, such as the Ahmadiyah and Shiite minority sects, and has pledged that his organization will continue to condemn violent acts against religious minorities (Wahid Institute, 03/22/2011, Tempo, 01/27/2012). He credits Wahid’s decision to initiate regular dialogues with religious minorities as contributing to develop good relations between the NU and non-Muslim religions in Indonesia (Cathnewsindonesia.com, 05/10/2010). The actions of the recent NU leadership shows how far the NU has progressed from an organization that in the past supported the implementation of *shari’a* law and did not have good relations with non-Muslim religious groups to become one that currently opposes the implementation of the *shari’a* and works hard to improve its relations with religious minorities in order to promote religious tolerance and pluralism.

In sum, Wahid’s moral authority leadership has transformed the NU in significant ways. The following quote best captures the fundamental transformation of the NU under Wahid’s leadership with this observation:

Before the 1980s, the NU was commonly perceived as a traditionalist Islamic organization which resisted reform and freedom of thought within its ranks, and was very negative in its views of modernity. It was stereotyped as a backward, conservative, and anti-progress organization.



However, NU's reputation improved significantly since the mid-1980s, after Abdurrahman Wahid began to lead this organization....He has successfully changed the NU from an organization that was "conservative" and "backward-thinking" into one that promotes dynamic and progressive [Islamic] thought today....In the process, Wahid became a symbol for democracy, human rights, freedom of thought, and religious pluralism. He has transformed NU's image to become a modern [Islamic] movement that is religiously pluralist, tolerant, and embraces progress and modernity (Assyaukanie, 01/11/2010).

Without an innovative, theologically eclectic, politically savvy, and charismatic moral authority leader such as Wahid at the helm of the NU, it would have been difficult to foresee the organization's transformation within a short period of time (less than three decades). While there were pro-reform activists within the NU who had started to propose progressive Islamic ideas within the organization as early as the early 1970s (e.g., the late Subchan, Z.E), they were not successful in promoting these ideas because they lacked the theological expertise, charismatic attributes, and family genealogy with the founding fathers of the NU. Only someone with an ulama background who is proficient in both Islamic and Western political thought, has perceived charismatic attributes, and is a direct descendant of NU's founding father, could be successful in the daunting task of reframing and reconstituting the theological frames and political identities, and preferences of a traditionalist-leaning Islamic organization such as the NU. While there are instrumentalist reasons to promote these reforms within the NU as well, it is difficult to explain NU's theological transformation over the past three decades without also taking into account the role of progressive theological ideas, how they were articulated by a leader with moral authority characteristics, and how the leader then inspires thousands of young activists to work together to

implement these ideas within the organization. This is why social constructivism, which emphasizes the role of ideas and how they help to promote sociopolitical change within an organization through the combination of conducive institutional structure and innovative and entrepreneurial human agents, could better explain the NU transformation than the culturalists, who deny the possibility of ideological change and innovation within the NU and could complement the instrumentalist explanations about the reform offered by rational choice theories.

**Tolerant institutional culture within the NU.** While Wahid's exercise of moral authority leadership and his charismatic attributes were very crucial to explain the transformation of the organization over the past three decades, his success was also greatly assisted by the institutional culture of the NU which acted as an incubator for new and sometimes unorthodox theological ideas to grow within the organization.<sup>57</sup> This tolerant institutional culture helped Wahid and his followers to promote and institutionalize his theological ideas within the organization and prevented the emergence of a strong counter-reformist movement from within the NU that would have stopped the reform before it has taken roots within the organization.

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<sup>57</sup> The "institutional culture" discussed in this section complements the theoretical explanation of rational choice institutionalists. My analysis accepts the rationalist argument that changing historical and sociopolitical contexts would change the calculations of different factions within a religious group – in this case the NU – so that a proposed reform might either be more or less costly to be implemented by the group (e.g., Gill, 2008, Warner, 2000). I believe my approach could enrich this argument further by clarifying the process in which a relatively coherent constantly changing institutional culture of a religious group could help or hinder theological reforms within a particular religious organization.

Among the NU ulama, it was a widely accepted belief that they should actively propagate Islam within their respective communities while at the same time respect the pre-existing local religious customs and traditions that pre-dated the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, including those originated from Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, many NU ulama and their followers practiced rituals commonly associated with Islamic mysticism (Sufism) that historically tolerates doctrines and rituals originated from Hindu and Buddhist traditions, even syncretic animistic religions (Pringle, 2010, pp. 33-34).<sup>58</sup> As a result of this Sufi influence, NU ulama usually do not seek to eliminate these local customs and traditions, but instead sought to incorporate them within the rituals of their organization. They justify this practice by stating that the NU should “conserve the old traditions that are good, while adapting to the new ones that are better” (*al-muhafadzoh alal qodimisshalih wal akhdzu bil jadid al-ashlah*) (Badri, 07/20/2011). According to the late Achmad Siddiq, former NU’s spiritual leader (*rais aam*) and a Wahid supporter, the NU’s theology of “the middle path” (*tawassuth*) means that NU members should “avoid fanaticism” and promotes “the balanced use of reason and tradition based on revelation” (Kadir, 1999, p. 93). Thus, in accordance to the *tawassuth* principle, NU members must “tolerate

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<sup>58</sup> Examples include the practice of prayers/visitations to the graves of deceased loved ones (*ziarah kubur*), visitation to the graves of notable NU ulama (*wali* - saints), and communal prayers to celebrate the lives of deceased relatives (*haul*). Many of the rituals and traditions practiced by the NU, including the hereditary succession of ulama who ran *pesantren* schools by their first-born sons, and the reverence/devotions toward notable NU ulama whom have deceased, could be traced to the practices within Sufism as well (Pringle, 2010, p. 34).

other religions and cultures as long as they do not explicitly reject the basic teachings of Islam” (Kadir, 1999, p. 93). The *tawassuth* principle becomes the basis for the NU reformers to develop a culture of tolerance and syncretism within the organization.

Reformers within the NU used the culture of tolerance within the organization as a justification for the organization to adopt the theological reforms they are advocating. They argued that new ideas such as democracy and religious tolerance would not threaten the long-standing traditions of NU community, because the organization had long-standing tradition of adopting and institutionalizing other customs and traditions. Thus, they argue that the NU has an institutional culture which adapts to new theological ideas and rituals by reinterpreting and reconstructing the existing ones in order to meet contemporary sociopolitical challenges (Qomar, 2002, p. 99).

For instance, Wahid frequently asserted that the idea of democracy had existed within the Islamic tradition since the formation of the first Islamic community in Medina. This in his view justifies “an inclusive form of political Islam which focuses on the Islamic substantive values such as justice, equality, freedom, and democracy (*shura*)” (Wahid, 2011). Wahid believes that democracy is well ingrained within the NU’s practices and rituals and should not be considered as an alien idea imported from the West. He also argues that “the concept of religious tolerance is not an alien concept for the NU because the organization was founded on the principles of *tasamuth* (tolerance), *tawassuth* (moderation), and *tawazun* (seeking a balance) with other religious customs and

traditions” (Badri, 07/20/2010). These are the principles that the organization always followed when it institutionalized new customs and traditions. Thus, they should be the ones that it should follow when it faced with new theological ideas that are promoted by Wahid and the other reformers.

Using these assertions, Wahid and his supporters argue that because the institutional culture of the NU had historically tolerated the presence of non-Islamic customs and traditions and successfully incorporated them within the organization, it should not be a problem for the organization to accept new ideas derived from Western sociopolitical theory such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism. In addition, the adoption of these ideas also facilitated a pro-reformist political identity during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the NU faced challenges from the Suharto regime. By reconstructing the NU from its conservative Islamist image prior to the 1980s and reframing it as an advocate of democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance, the organization made significant gains in public popularity, because it was perceived as the champion of these ideas. In contrast, the Suharto regime often paid lip services to these ideas. However, in practice it suppressed any expression of opposition against its rule, violated the human rights of its own citizens, and imposed “divide and conquer” policies to make different religious groups in Indonesia in constant conflict with each other, so that they would not be able to form a lasting alliance against the regime.

Because the reformers were making these arguments, they were able to find significant support both within the ulama as well as the rank-and-file NU

members. The tolerant institutional culture of the NU is one that is shared among its members, regardless whether one supports or opposes the proposals propagated by the reformers. Within the NU there were few proponents of the strict and literalist interpretation of Islam that were commonly associated with fundamentalist Islamic groups. Reform supporters and opponents were clearly divided over issues such as how far and how fast the reform should have taken place, the appropriate balance between classical Islamic texts and contemporary socio-cultural contexts related to the reforms, and the appropriate role of the ulama under a new and reformed NU. Nevertheless, they generally have an agreement on the NU's main theological premises and sources, which solidifies the organization's institutional culture.

In sum, the tolerant institutional culture of the NU has been very conducive to the successful efforts of Abdurrahman Wahid and his supporters to promote their theological reforms. By invoking NU's Sufi roots and its history of toleration toward non-Islamic, even syncretic, religious ideas, Wahid and his supporters were able to convince most members of the organization to adopt the theological reforms they had advocated within their organization.

**NU's relations with the Indonesian state.** Rationalist scholars as well as others who emphasize the instrumental consequences of Wahid's reforms were correct to point out that some NU members did support Wahid's theological reforms for opportunistic reasons to seek accommodation and to seek patronage opportunities from the Suharto regime (Feillard 1994, p. 40-42, Kadir 1999, pp.

202-209, Leong, 2008, pp. 358-361).<sup>59</sup> However, while these accounts help to explain the instrumental rationales as well as benefits to Wahid and his supporters within the NU, they only formed a partial explanation of the complex reality of this alliance. In order to fully explain the rationales and implications of the NU alliance with the Suharto regime, we would need to analyze the normative rationales behind this alliance. It is to safeguard the reforms from potential state intervention that could have strangled it before it was able to take roots within the NU. In this section, I present evidence showing Wahid and the other reformers did not form the alliance to collaborate with or to legitimize the Suharto regime. Instead, I argue that the alliance was conducted to create an opportunity for the reformers to successfully implement their reforms within the NU.

When Wahid and the reformers first took over the NU in 1984 and introduced the reforms soon afterwards, they also created a positive by-product for the organization in the form of a temporary truce between the NU and the Suharto regime, which lasted until the late 1980s. Through this alliance, the reformers were able to promote and implement their reforms within the NU while facing little intervention from the Suharto regime. By the time this truce ended around 1990, Wahid and his supporters were firmly in control of the NU. It

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<sup>59</sup> The most significant example of an NU leader who made this move was Slamet Effendy Yusuf, a major leader of the young reformers who was promoted as the head of the Jakarta branch of Golkar's youth wing immediately after Wahid's reforms were adopted by NU (Bush, 2009, p. 81). Wahid and other reform activists recognized that one of the biggest obstacles facing their reform efforts came from NU ulama who preferred to maintain long-standing "patron-client" relations with national and local government officials rather than defending their constituencies from potential government reprisals (Kadir, 1999, p. 252).

became impossible for the regime to remove Wahid and his associates from the NU leadership board, because doing so would have incurred a significant cost to the regime, by risking the wrath of millions of NU followers whom had become strong supporters of Wahid and his reforms during this period. As a result, the regime allowed the reform to take hold within the NU with few direct interventions from within the organization.

The NU and the Suharto regime had been at loggerheads with each other for over a decade by the time Abdurrahman Wahid took over the NU and begun to institute his reforms in 1984. The rise of Wahid to the top of NU's leadership created a positive externality for the regime, because it temporarily removed the NU as a major opposition force against the regime. Since Wahid's advocacy of progressive theological ideas also included an opposition against a *shari'a*-based Islamic state and the acceptance of the secular nationalist ideology *Pancasila*, which the regime sought to promote during the 1980s, Wahid's arrival at the helm of the NU was perceived as a development that would have benefited the regime significantly and ensured its ability to hold on to power in Indonesia.

The regime granted several benefits for the NU and its members. These included increased subsidies to the NU *pesantren* schools and other forms of patronage for NU ulama and activists who were willing to support the regime and become members of its political arm, the Golkar Party. Rational choice scholars were correct to point out that some NU ulama and activists did take the financial incentives from the regime for their own personal benefits. However, I argue that the most significant benefit the regime offered to Wahid and his supporters was



not material in nature. Instead, it was in the form of guarantees from the regime not to intervene in the institutional affairs of the NU and assurances that it would not arrest Wahid and other key reform activists for advocating the reforms they were instituting within the organization. This ‘temporary truce’ enabled Wahid and his supporters to consolidate their power within the NU and implement their reforms without facing any significant intervention from the Suharto regime and its institutions, such as the Indonesian military.

During the late 1980s, Wahid developed a close relationship with Suharto and his then army Chief-of-Staff, General L.B. Moerdani. By cultivating these relationships, he received assurances from the two that the regime would not intervene against the reforms that he and his supporters were implementing within the NU. Both men were even willing to tolerate some criticisms from Wahid, provided that they were done within certain limitations (Barton, 2002, p. 154). Wahid used this ‘limited tolerance’ to criticize some of the regime’s policies during the late 1980s. For instance, its decision to build the Kedung Ombo dam in Central Java, which displaced tens of thousands rural villagers, many of whom were NU followers (Barton, 2002, pp. 158-159). However, Wahid was also very careful not to overstep his boundaries and at least publicly, affirmed his desire to continue “inter-dependent relations” with the Suharto regime that would not be based on active opposition against the Indonesian state (Kadir, 1999, p. 260).

On the other hand, Suharto was willing to tolerate Wahid’s reforms and his criticisms against the regime because he was aware that Wahid was a Muslim leader with moderate to progressive political outlook, committed to a secular

nationalist Indonesian state based on the *Pancasila* ideology, which was heavily advocated by the regime during this period. The regime viewed Wahid as a much better Islamic leader compared to conservative/revivalist Islamic leaders who sought to replace the secularist military-backed regime with an Islamic state (Barton, 2002, p.158).

However, the regime did not anticipate that once Wahid and his supporters had firmly instituted their reforms within the NU, they would their reform efforts beyond the NU and extended it toward the Indonesian society as a whole. Beginning in the early 1990s, Wahid and his supporters within the NU began to seek what it called as “autonomy vis-à-vis the state” (Bush, 2009, p. 90) and began to openly called for the regime to adopt the ideas advocated by the reformed NU theology: democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance (Hikam, 1998, p. 13, cited in Bush, 2009, p. 91). They also criticized Suharto’s decision in 1990 to abandon the secular nationalist positions he undertook from the 1970s to the mid-1980s and to seek close alliances with conservative and revivalist Islamic groups. Wahid criticized this policy change by arguing that it promoted the Islamization (*Islamisasi*) of the Indonesian society and would have threatened the political and citizenship rights of non-Muslim minorities in Indonesia (Bush, 2009, pp. 92-94). By the early 1990s, the truce between the NU and the Suharto regime was over and the two entities renewed their oppositional discourses that were temporarily ended during the time of their truce during the late-1980s.

By granting a reprieve for Wahid and his supporters which enabled them to enact their reforms without facing any intervention and persecution from the

regime, the regime indirectly empowered an opposition force that was later credited for helping to bring about the regime's decline and destruction during the mid to late-1990s. By the time the regime realized what it had actually done, Wahid and his reforms were firmly entrenched within the NU and the regime could not simply attempt to remove them without risking the ire of the millions of NU members. By the early 1990s most NU ulama and activists had accepted Wahid as their leader and accepted his reform agenda as well. In the words of Wahid's biographer Greg Barton:

With perhaps as many as 35 million members, NU....possessed the most extensive social network outside of the Indonesian state and military. Suharto knew that the organization's sheer size could make it, if sufficiently antagonized, impossible to control, even with his considerable resources. Consequently, heavy-handed intervention into NU affairs by the regime....was risky (Barton, 2002, p. 151).

With one notable exception,<sup>60</sup> the Suharto regime did not make much of an effort to oust Wahid from his chairmanship position during the 1990s, although it did try to weaken the NU using coercive tactics against its rank-and-file members and against some of the junior activists who worked under Wahid's

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<sup>60</sup> In 1994, Suharto supported the campaign of Abu Hasan, an NU businessman with no ulama background, to replace Wahid as the general chairman of the NU. Hasan received substantial financial and logistical support from Suharto and key officials within the powerful Indonesian military (Hefner, 2000, pp. 172-173). In the end, however, Wahid was able to beat Hasan's challenge, holding a narrow lead of 174 delegate votes over Hasan's 142 votes (Barton, 2002, p. 205). It turned out that Wahid received crucial last-minute support from senior NU ulama, who initially backed Hasan's bid to replace him. They later switched their support back to Wahid because they saw the regime's unprecedented effort to oust Wahid as an inappropriate interference in NU's affairs (Hefner, 2000, p. 173).

patronage to promote his theological ideas within the Indonesian society.<sup>61</sup>

However, knowing how influential Wahid and his reform ideas had become during this period, it didn't make much effort to stop Wahid from promoting his theological ideas both to the NU community and to the general public. This has significantly helped the successful institutionalization of these ideas within the NU and transformed it to become the progressive Islamic organization it is known for today.

### **Alternative Explanations on the Theological Reforms within the NU**

The two alternative explanations that challenges the moral authority leadership theory are political culture (culturalist) approach and rational choice (rationalist) theory. The culturalist/modernization theory denies the ability of Islamic groups to change from a conservative, fundamentalist interpretation of Islam into one that is more progressive and more compatible with modernity. It tends to portray all Islamic groups, past and present, as social movements that have developed inherently hostile attitudes toward Western-based sociopolitical ideas and always reject them in favor of fundamental theological ideas developed from Islamic scriptures such as the Qur'an and the Hadith. It also portrays Islamic groups and leaders who promote progressive-oriented ideas as insincere in their theological beliefs. Alternatively, culturalists portray them as modernizers who

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<sup>61</sup> One of the most sinister means initiated by the regime to weaken Wahid's reform efforts was by staging a series of communal riots within the town of Situbondo (East Java), a major NU stronghold, in which Christian churches and stores owned by Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority were looted and destroyed. It then arrested and tortured several local NU activists, one of whom later died during the detention (Hefner, 2000, pp. 190-192).

wish to imitate the West but deny that they these groups/leaders are inspired from Islamic ideas.

The second alternative explanation comes from scholars who follow rational choice theory. Rational choice theory is based on assumptions that are simple and parsimonious – that all human actors primarily based their political preferences on their instrumental and/or material interests. These preferences are modified based on the opportunities and constraints faced by these groups. Some rationalists (e.g., Shepsle, 1985) even went so far to argue that theological ideas only serve as a cover to hide instrumentalist (interest-seeking) or materialist preferences and goals of Islamic groups and their leaders. Others (e.g., Gill 2008, Kalyvas, 1996, Warner, 2000) have developed more nuanced explanations on how these preferences are formed, based on broader and more complex sets of assumptions that often incorporate theological ideas into their explanations. Nevertheless, often ideas at best only constitute a secondary explanation of these groups' political preferences and actions, after those that are based on instrumentalist goals and preferences.

Since a group of political scientists and other scholars of Indonesian politics have written in-depth case study analyses on the NU and its role in Indonesian politics for the past three decades,<sup>62</sup> they have used one of these theoretical frameworks to explain the theological and political changes within the

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<sup>62</sup> See for instance Bush (2009); Fealy (1998); Jung (2009); Kadir (1999); Leong (2008); Liddle (1996b); Ramage (1995); and van Bruinessen (1994).

NU. The theoretical arguments of each theories and how they differ from the moral authority leadership theory developed in this study are outlined below.

**Culturalist explanation of the NU reform.** Works by culturalist and modernization theory-oriented scholars<sup>63</sup> on the NU tend to recognize the ideational impact of the theological reforms within the NU and the role of reform leaders such as Abdurrahman Wahid in the propagation and institutionalization of reform ideas within the organization. However, culturalist explanation of the NU reform diverges from social constructivist theoretical explanation in several ways. First, culturalists tend to emphasize the role of modern Western sociopolitical philosophy of NU leaders such as Wahid as the major source of their reform ideas, while downplaying the role of Islam in influencing the formation of these ideas. For instance, in his portrayal of progressive-oriented Indonesian Islamic intellectuals such as Wahid, Liddle asserts that these intellectuals “did not necessarily know about Islam – they were Western school-educated and their skills were organizational and political rather than Islamic intellectual” (Liddle, 1996a, p. 167). He further asserts that many of these intellectuals also have

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<sup>63</sup> The label “culturalist” in this study largely refers to the study of culture in political science that was based on modernization theory, which tends to hold cultural and religious ideas to be largely fixed and constant, with little possibilities of change in the near or immediate future. I recognize that this view of culture is no longer prevalent both in political science as well as in other disciplines. Scholars working from cultural anthropology and post-modernist perspectives (e.g., Wedeen 2002) has developed an alternative definition of culture as a socially constructed idea that is more nuanced and amendable to change and I fully agree with this definition. However, modernization theory remains an alternative theoretical explanation widely used in contemporary study of religion and politics (e.g., Kuru 2009), so I believe it is still worthy to include it as an alternative explanation of this study.

‘cultural’ resources from outside Indonesians – such as former teachers, education mentors, and friends who were based in Europe and North America (Liddle, 1996a, p. 167). Thus, Liddle seems to argue that it is the modern ideas and sociopolitical skills gained by these intellectuals that play a role in the formation of their ideas rather than Islam.

Second, while acknowledging that NU reformers such as Wahid do have Islamic credentials in addition to their modern sources of knowledge from the Western world, culturalists tend to argue that it is the modern ideas and viewpoints held by NU reformers such as Wahid and their ability to gain power and prominence within the NU that explains why he managed to institutionalize the reforms within the NU and develop an alliance with the Suharto regime after he took over the organization in 1984 (Liddle, 1996a, p. 167). Even though culturalist scholars recognize the Islamic identity of reformist intellectuals within the NU, they believe that it is their modern, Western education background and that helped to shape the development of their theological ideas to reform the NU. They tend to ignore the role of the Islamic political thought and legal jurisprudence that also serves as the intellectual sources for these reformers.

Thus, while culturalists might be able to explain the role of modern sociopolitical ideas as a motivation for Wahid and his supporters to carry out their reforms within the NU, I argue that this explanation could not fully account for why this reform occurred. The reformers would not be successful in their reforms within the NU if they were to rely solely on the modern ideas they had brought from Western sociopolitical theory. This is because within an Islamic

organization, the primary source of theological ideas within the organization is Islamic theological and legal jurisprudence. A theological reform that relies primarily on modern ideas originated from the West would be quickly rejected as a heresy by the conservative ulama whom have traditionally run the NU. Instead, Wahid and his supporters had to show their reform was compatible with the classical Islamic legal tradition that was widely practiced by members of the NU community. They had to invoke the Islamic theology that connects the new theology and the classical Islamic jurisprudence. This process of theological reconstruction is often ignored by culturalists, who either assumes that Islamic and Western ideas are totally incompatible with one another or that Western ideas are replacing Islamic (traditionalist) ideas within these organizations.

Unlike culturalists who tended to emphasize the role of these modern ideas to replace traditional Islamic ideas which are incompatible to modern Western sociopolitical values, the moral authority leadership theory used in this study argues that these ideas were reframed and reconstructed by Wahid and his supporters within the NU by emphasizing the compatibility between Islamic theological ideas, the tolerant institutional culture of the NU that has historically been open to new interpretation of these ideas, and Western sociopolitical values, by arguing that they are fully compatible with one another and together would form a new theological frame within the NU which supports democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance/pluralism. Unlike the culturalist's fixed and static assumption of theology, moral authority leadership theory assumes that the NU's theological frame is subjected to constant reframing, reconstruction, and



reinterpretation, in order to take into account the changing sociopolitical contexts facing the NU and the Indonesian society.

**Rationalist explanation of NU's theological reform.** The rationalist account on the theological reform undertaken by the NU under Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership tend to emphasize the role of instrumental and material interests as the two main motivators for the reform rather than ideational and theological commitment to promote liberal values. Rationalists offer a simple and parsimonious account of the reformers' rationale: the NU was committed to do the reforms not necessarily because there was a need for ideational change among NU ulama and activists in order to incorporate changing sociopolitical contexts. Instead, the reforms were enacted and implemented so that the NU could develop an alliance with the Suharto regime. This alliance resulted in the increase of government subsidies for NU *pesantren* schools, as well as other forms of financial patronage for NU ulama and activists after the reforms were enacted in 1984 (Leong, 2008, pp. 360-361). They enacted these reforms because it improved the organization's access to material resources and because conservative ulama within the NU received a 'side payment' in the form of higher subsidies for their Islamic schools in exchange of them dropping their opposition against the reforms (Leong, 2008, p. 358).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Of the works on the NU reviewed in this section, only Leong took an explicitly rational choice theoretical approach in her comparative study of the NU and the Indonesian modernist groups (including the Muhammadiyah) (Leong 2008, pp. 16-24). However, other works reviewed here (e.g., Bush, 2009, Feillard, 1994, Kadir, 1999) also largely explains the theological reforms within the NU to be

Rationalist scholars argue that the reforms were introduced as a response to the Suharto regime's policy to suppress the political activities of the NU beginning in the 1970s, which cut off state subsidies to NU-affiliated *pesantren* schools. This policy left the NU ulama to have serious political and financial difficulties. In the 1970s, the Suharto government began to cut subsidies for the *pesantren* schools and rural development programs in districts dominated by the NU. As they were primarily dependent on government subsidies for running their religious schools (*pesantren*), it was a challenge adequately run these schools and provided adequate supplies for their students after the regime had cut off funding (Bush, 2009, p. 70).

As a result of this policy, many NU ulama felt that their authority over their *pesantren* schools and local communities became increasingly threatened by the Suharto regime's policies against them, which were in effect for as long as they continued their resistance against the regime (Leong, 2008, p. 345).

Grassroots-level NU ulama began to demand that their leadership abandon its resistance against the regime and develop new alliance with the regime in order to restore the lost subsidies and other patronage that was lost during its opposition against the regime in the 1970s (Kadir, 1999, p. 191 & 195; Leong, 2008, p. 347).

As the NU senior leadership under Idham Chalid failed to fulfill this demand, many NU ulama turned their support to the reform efforts led by Abdurrahman

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motivated primarily instrumentalist (developing a better relationship with the Suharto regime) and materialist (financial patronage for NU ulama) considerations, even though they did not formally adopt rational choice theoretical framework in their works.

Wahid. An alliance was then formed between the NU and the regime just before the 1984 NU national congress took place: the ulama then agreed to support Wahid for the NU chairmanship and supported his reforms in exchange for a promise by the reformers to restore the government subsidies for their *pesantren* schools and other patronage projects (Bush, 2009, p. 71, Leong, 2008, pp. 357-358). As the result of this alliance, Wahid successfully won his first election as NU Chairman in 1984 and managed to successfully enact his reform proposals (Kadir, 1999, p. 203).

To support these claims, rationalists presented evidence that there was a substantial increase in government subsidies for the *pesantren* schools (up to five folds for some schools) as well as substantial increase in funding for its other rural development and other projects. (Feillard, 2010, p. 40). In addition, some of the reform activists also joined Suharto's sponsored Golkar Party, thereby giving them access to potentially lucrative patronage resources (Bush, 2009, p. 81, Leong, 2008, p. 364). Numerous government officials were also appointed into NU leadership boards, especially at provincial and regional level (Feillard, 1994, p. 35). The warm relationship between NU and the regime lasted until the early 1990s, when Suharto decided to take a more Islamist positions to co-opt modernist and revivalist Muslims to join the new modernist-oriented Islamic association he had helped founded. Wahid then decided to break the NU's alliance with Suharto and began to show more open criticism against the regime. Rationalists argue that Wahid and the NU could afford to do this in the 1990s because the NU's material conditions had improved significantly from their cash-

strapped situation during the mid-1980s. At this time, the NU was able to survive without Suharto's financial patronage any longer (Leong, 2008, p. 395). Thus, rationalists argue that the NU's theological reform under Wahid's leadership is grounded on instrumentalist and materialist rationale rather than ideational.

Rationalists do not deny that the reform leader Abdurrahman Wahid has moral authority status and that this moral authority status helped Wahid to win support from many NU ulama and activists (Leong, 2008, p. 367). However, according to rationalists, the NU's need to reestablish the financial resources that were cut off by Suharto regime during its years of opposition against the regime during the 1970s was the primary motivator beyond the theological reform. Ideational and normative concerns at best only played a secondary role to explain why the reform took place in the first place. In her analysis, Leong concludes that:

The repeated emphases of NU leaders, clerics, and activists on the desire for material resources left little doubt that it motivated the NU's accepted of the proposed [reform] agenda. The NU's developing tolerance... toward the [secularist ideology] *Pancasila* also came about because it provided a handy explanation for the organization's abrupt and self-interested departure from formal politics. For those who thought the NU's surrender of its political role was a mistake, material incentives went some way towards mollifying [their opposition] (Leong, 2008, p. 358).

The instrumentalist explanation made by rationalist-oriented scholars has the merit of showing that the rationales of reform supporters were not grounded in ideational and normative rationales alone. It shows how the instrumental and material constraints created by the Suharto regime during the 1970s and 1980s forced the NU to abandon its conservative theological positions during this period and replaced it with new theological positions that were more accommodative toward the regime. This occurred especially during the initial first few years of the

reform (1984-1990), as the Wahid and his supporters assumed control within the organization. The NU adopted an alliance with the Suharto regime in order to end the retaliatory actions from the Suharto regime. The alliance was necessary in order to enable the reformers from implementing the reforms without any further intervention from the state as well as to provide access for the NU ulama for state subsidies and other forms of patronage, something they had demanded in exchange for their support for the reform ideas propagated by Wahid.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, I concur with rationalists that instrumental and material considerations did play a role in the promotion of the reforms within the NU. However, I do not share their assertion that the desire to promote theological reforms within the NU at best only played a secondary role to the instrumental and material preferences of Abdurrahman Wahid and his supporters. Instead, I argue that we need to complement the instrumentalist explanation of the rationalists with the constructivist-inspired moral authority leadership theory in order to fully explain why progressive theological reform within the NU was successful. I also argue that the theory offered by rational choice scholars do not adequately explain why the promotion and institutionalization of Wahid's reform ideas continued to persist after Wahid no longer served as NU chairman in 1999.

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<sup>65</sup> For instance, senior NU ulama As'ad Syamsul Arifin decided to back Wahid and other reformers because he wanted a greater amount of patronage and government subsidies for his pesantren in Situbondo. His relationship with Wahid later deteriorated Wahid refused As'ad request for more patronage opportunities (Van Bruinessen 1994: 165; Bush 2009: 82). In 1989, As'ad opposed Wahid's bid for a second term as NU chairman as the real significance of the reforms (e.g., less power and authority for NY ulama) became clear to him and other conservative NU ulama (Kadir 1999: 224-225; Van Bruinessen 1996: 144-145).

Because rational choice theory privileges instrumentalist rationales over ideationalist ones, it has difficulties to predict why the NU maintained its support for democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance long after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. As indicated in the previous section, these positions are retained by subsequent chairmen of the organization who succeeded Wahid in 1999 after he had stepped down from his position after he was elected as Indonesia's first democratically-elected president. The NU's refusal to return to its previously conservative theological positions and its continued support and advocacy for progressive theological values listed above indicates that the theological reform within the organization was motivated by ideational rather than instrumentalist or materialist concerns and thus, rational choice theory is not sufficient to explain this theological change by itself.

The moral authority leadership theory could complement rationalist explanation of the NU reforms by showing that the progressive ideas introduced by Wahid were not just adopted merely as pragmatic responses to avoid further state repression and to seek financial patronage from the Suharto regime. Instead, the constructivist-inspired moral authority leadership theory introduced in this study shows that these reforms were promoted by Wahid and his supporters as part of a long term systemic changes in the theological frames and political identities of the organization in order to position itself as a pro-democratic Islamic organization that accepts religion-state separation policy in Indonesia and tolerates the numerous religious minorities in the country as well. In short, they envisioned the NU to become an Islamic organization that is conducive toward

liberal and multi-cultural values in our increasingly globalized world instead of one that rejected these values in the past. After the reforms were successfully institutionalized by Wahid and his supporters, the organization was transformed to become one of the leading pro-democratic social movements in Indonesia during the 1990s. Within the next decade, it helped to usher in an Indonesian state based on democratic, secularist, and religiously tolerant principles. The reform transformed the NU to become known as an organization which embraces liberal ideas such as democracy, human rights for all citizens, and religious tolerance/pluralism, without compromising its traditionalist Islamic principles based on classical Islamic jurisprudence.

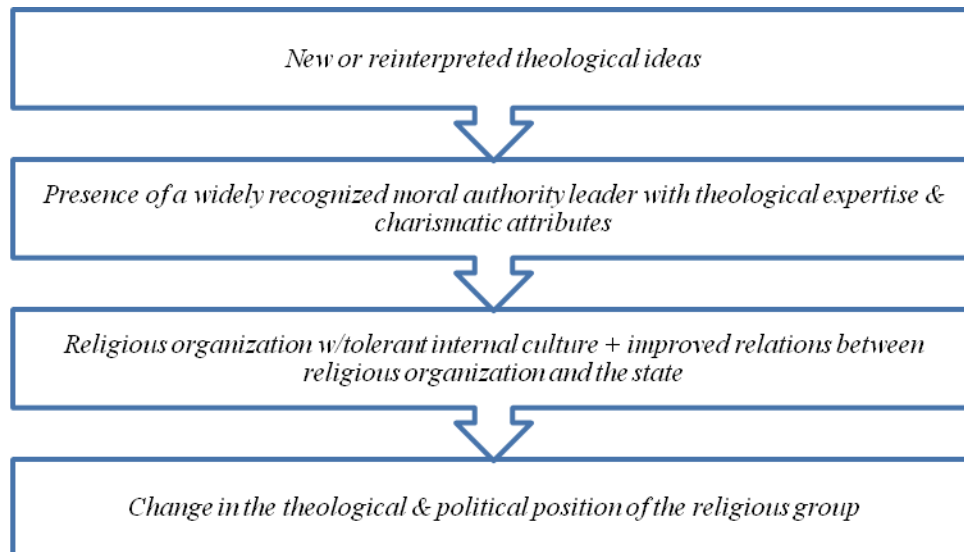
### **Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed the case of Abdurrahman Wahid's theological reform within the NU has provided us with ample evidences to support the constructivist-based moral authority leadership theory that I introduce in this study. Wahid's moral authority leadership; combined with an institutional culture within the NU that historically tolerates syncretic religious rituals, and theological innovations; and a peaceful state-religion relations that was achieved through the temporary truce he negotiated with the Suharto regime; was responsible for the successful institutionalization of his reform within the NU.

The mutual constitution between agency (Wahid's moral authority leadership and structural factors (institutional culture and religion-state relations) helps to reconstruct the theological frames of the organization and transform the organization from a formerly conservative Islamic organization that was identical

to the many revivalist Islamic organizations in the world today into a progressive-leaning Islamic organization it is widely known for today. This case serves as evidence of the successful causal mechanism pathway that was developed as part of the moral authority leadership theory that I develop in this study. For review, see Figure 3.1 below.

This is how the successful reform pathway works in the NU case: using his expertise of classical Islamic jurisprudence and Western sociopolitical theory, Wahid began to promote his ideas through his sermons and writings during the 1970s. The promotion of these ideas continued from the time he assumed the NU chairmanship in 1984 and lasted until they were fully institutionalized by the time he left his NU chairmanship in 1999.



*Figure 3.1. Causal mechanism 1: Successful reform pathway*



Wahid was able to reconstruct the theological frames of his organization from one that until the late 1970s were still advocating the establishment of an Islamic state that is based on the *shari'a* law into one which now affirms that a democratic Indonesian state should not be based on Islamic principle and endorses the principles of human rights, religious tolerance, and pluralism.

Wahid was able to implement and institutionalize these reforms because he was perceived by his followers as both a leading expert of Islamic theology, a charismatic moral authority figure with extraordinary abilities and empathies toward the rank-and-file NU members, and direct family relations with the founding fathers of the organization. Because he was perceived by his supporters to have these attributes, he was able to bring together the normally autonomous, decentralized, and disorganized ulama within the NU. In addition, he attracted the support of a young generation of NU activists who came of age during the 1980s and 1990s and was attracted to Wahid's ideas to promote democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance both within the NU and the Indonesian society in general. Together, they have assisted Wahid to institutionalize his ideas within the organization. They were willing to follow his reforms because they believe Wahid has moral authority within the organization, which was signified through his expertise on the classical Islamic jurisprudence as well as his status as a direct descendant of Hasyim Asj'ari, the famous ulama who was considered by NU members as the person who helped founded the organization back in 1926. The Wahid's moral authority leadership was supported by a tolerant institutional culture within the NU which historically tolerates new and unorthodox customs

and traditions and a temporary truce with the Suharto regime that enabled Wahid and his supporters to institute the reforms without facing any reprisal or persecution at the hand of the state. In the end Wahid was able to institutionalize his progressive theological ideas within the NU within a period of less than three decades. In the process, he transformed the organization from a conservative and traditional Islamic organization into one that has a progressive Islamic organization that it is known for today.

The case of the NU illustrated *the successful reform pathway*. It shows how the moral authority leadership theory can better explain the process of theological change within Islamic organizations. I assert this theory can better explain the theological transformation of the organization compared to the two alternative hypotheses considered in this study: political culture and rational choice theories. Culturalist scholars tend to view Wahid's reforms as a mere exercise to "modernize" and "Westernize" the NU in order to make it more liberal and secular, so that it escaped further repressions from the Suharto regime. However, they failed to consider the possibility that it was as a genuine theological change for democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance within their organization. They also failed to take into account the fact that Wahid and his supporters primarily relied on Islamic theological resources in addition to the Western sociopolitical thought. In doing so, they did not primarily rely on the standard justification to adopt democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance that could be found in the Western political thought. Instead, they were constructing a theological synthesis from both Islamic and Western sociopolitical

ideas to advocate for these values. Through this synthesis, Wahid and his supporters were able to make a convincing argument that enable the institutionalization of these ideas within the NU.

Rational choice scholars tend to interpret the reforms within the NU from an instrumentalist perspective, although some might also incorporate theological ideas into their arguments as well. In their explanation, Wahid and other reform supporters chose to promote and implement his progressive theology because they were either seeking to gain political power from the Suharto regime or to gain state subsidies and material benefits for themselves and other members of their organization. They argued that the primary rationale for Wahid to advocate the reforms is to improve the organization's access to state power and material resources by striking an alliance with the Suharto regime. For rationalists, the real purpose of the reform was to ensure that the NU could have survived the persecution from the Suharto regime and that it would continue to have access to the instrumental and material resources needed to retain its influence within the Indonesian Muslim community, not necessarily to promote and cultivate new theological ideas and visions that would have transformed the organization from a conservative to a progressive-leaning Islamic organization.

Rational choice scholars may be correct to argue that some NU ulama and activists did support the reforms for instrumentalist and patronage-seeking reasons and that the NU did try to seek a temporary alliance with the Suharto regime during the 1980s. However, a closer look at the desire of Wahid and his supporters to institute their theological ideas and reconstruct the theological

frames of the NU provide a better explanation for the institutionalization of progressive theological reforms within the NU. I argue from a constructivist perspective that a desire to promote theological change from conservative to progressive Islam was at the heart of Wahid and his supporters' efforts to develop a new theological frame and political identity for the NU. They wanted to promote the ideas of democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance through the NU so that they could change the theological frame of the organization that used to support the *shari'a* law and wish to exclude non-Muslims from Indonesia's public sphere. In lieu of this conservative frame, they wanted to construct a new theological frame and political identity for the NU, which takes into account democratic ideas and institutions, supremacy of secular over Islamic principles in politics, and the religious diversity of the Indonesian society and to make the NU as an even stronger oppositional force against Suharto's authoritarian rule. The reformers pushed ahead with their commitment to enact the reforms despite the significant opposition from more conservative NU members as well as from the Suharto regime. While there were NU ulama and activists who supported the reform for instrumentalist and materialist purposes, many of the younger NU activists were pursuing the reforms because they believed that traditional Islamic principles can be reframed and reconstructed into a nuanced understanding of Islam which accepts democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism. The reforms occurred under the mutual constitution principles set up by constructivists, through the combination of human agency (Wahid's moral authority leadership) and structure (the tolerant institutional

culture within the NU and the temporary alliance with the Suharto regime which prevented the reforms from being repressed prematurely by the regime)

The successful reform pathway illustrated in this chapter is only one of two possible pathways for the moral authority leadership theoretical framework. The second pathway is the *unsuccessful reform pathway*, represented by the case of the Muhammadiyah organization from Indonesia (chapter 4), theological reform failed to be successfully institutionalized within the organization due to the prevalence of an intolerant institutional culture within the organization. In this case, the reformers encountered a fierce opposition against the reforms they were advocating for. Conservative Islamists within the Muhammadiyah was able to block the reforms proposed by the more progressive reformers within their group and successfully prevented the reforms from being institutionalized within the organization. In addition, neither Madjid nor Ma'arif had the same degree of moral authority stature within the Muhammadiyah similar to what their counterparts Abdurrahman Wahid from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This is because even while they received wide recognition as leading Islamic theological experts, they did not have the charismatic authority based on familial or intellectual genealogy with previous generation of Muhamadiyah leaders, unlike Wahid within the NU. This pathway will be analyzed in more depth in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE UNSUCCESSFUL REFORM PATHWAY: THE CASE OF THE MUHAMMADIYAH

This chapter analyzes the case of the Muhammadiyah, an Indonesian Islamic organization with a modernist/revivalist theological orientation. Led by two reform-minded religious leaders, Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif, pro-reform activists had attempted to implement and institutionalize progressive Islamic ideas within the organization. However, strong opposition from revivalist activists within the Muhammadiyah blocked the implementation of these reforms. The case of the Muhammadiyah illustrates *the counter-reformation pathway* outlined in the moral authority leadership theory introduced in the chapter 2 of this study. Under this pathway, the proponents of progressive theological reform within Islamic groups are encountering strong opposition from other factions who opposed the institutionalization the reform on ideological and theological grounds. In this scenario, the organization's institutional culture does not favor the reformer's values and theological positions and prevents its institutionalization within the Muhammadiyah.

The Muhammadiyah was established in 1912 as a modernist, yet also revivalist Islamic organization that wanted to purify Islamic theology, rituals, and practices in Indonesia. The group did not approve of syncretic rituals/practices that predominated Indonesian Islam in the early twentieth century or the influence of the traditionalist Islamic ulama who demanded absolute obedience from their followers during this period. The revivalist aspect of the group's founding mission

was strengthened during the 1930s as a new generation of revivalist preachers who were educated in the Middle East took over the organization's leadership. After their reign, their ideological descendants retained control of the Muhammadiyah for the next five decades.

Beginning in the 1970s, a new faction within the Muhammadiyah began to emerge. Members of this faction advocated a new set of Islamic theological ideas that would have reconstructed the conservative theological orientation of the organization into a moderate one. Reformists argued that the group should incorporate modern sociopolitical ideas such as democracy, human rights, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance/pluralism. Originally proposed by a reform-minded Indonesian theologian named Nurcolish Madjid, these ideas gained the support from a group of young activists within the Muhammadiyah. They believed that the revivalist orientation of the organization did not allow it unable to response to response to the rapid economic and sociopolitical changes facing the modernist Indonesian Muslim community that constituted the majority of Muhammadiyah followers.

Madjid served as a 'norm entrepreneur' for these ideas when he founded a university which spread his ideas among young modernist intellectuals during the 1980s and 1990s. While formally he was not part of the Muhammadiyah's leadership structure, these ideas gained the official support of the Muhammadiyah's leadership in 1998, after the election of Syafii Ma'arif, who was a colleague of Madjid. As chairman of the organization, Ma'arif attempted to promote and institutionalize them within the organization. To accomplish this,

Ma'arif used his theological expertise and leadership position to persuade supporters within the Indonesian modernist community to promote these reforms. In the process, he mobilized his supporters within the Muhammadiyah to implement them within the organization.

However, despite the initial success of the reformers in their efforts, they were never able to consolidate and institutionalize their ideas from within the organization. This is due to the following reasons. First, neither Madjid nor Ma'arif was considered as leaders with moral authority status similar to their counterparts Abdurrahman Wahid from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) had. This is while they were each widely recognized as leading Islamic theological experts, they did not have the charismatic authority based on familial or intellectual genealogy with previous generation of Muhammadiyah leaders, unlike Wahid within the NU. Their legitimacy rested on their reputations as theological experts but not on any charismatic attributes that they might have had. On the other hand, there were many influential conservative theologians and activists within the Muhammadiyah who strongly disagreed with the reform ideas they had proposed. They were able to mobilize support against the reforms by invoking the historically puritanist institutional culture within the group that rejects new and innovative theological ideas that were not compatible with the revivalist's interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet. By invoking this puritanist culture conservative activists within the group were able to develop a counter-reformation campaign against the reform and even managed to win the support of many grassroots-level activists of the organization.



Syafii Ma'arif's retirement from the Muhammadiyah chairmanship position in 2005 resulted in the loss of a reform leader whom used his position to promote the reforms and protect other reform supporters. Eventually, pro-reform supporters were and marginalized from within the organization. By the time field research for this study was conducted in 2010, progressive Islamic reforms and their supporters were sidelined from Muhammadiyah and the organization was in the firm control of the conservative/revivalist faction.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into the following sections. The first section is a brief historical background of the theological reform movement within the Muhammadiyah, which started in the early 1970s Nurcolish Madjid begun to promote his reforms within the Indonesian modernist Muslim community. The second section details the evidence to support how the moral authority leadership theory provides a more nuanced theoretical explanation for the Muhammadiyah case. The third section analyzes alternative theoretical explanations given by previous scholars to explain the reform efforts within the Muhammadiyah, through culturalist and rationalist theoretical perspectives. It explains why these alternative theories are insufficient to explain the political behavior of the Muhammadiyah reformers and why the theoretical claims based on the moral authority leadership theory developed in this study could best explain it. Finally, the final section concludes the chapter with an assessment on the moral authority leadership theory's application to the Muhammadiyah's case, based on the evidences that are presented in this chapter.

## **Historical Overview of Theological Reform within the Muhammadiyah**

The Muhammadiyah was founded on November 18, 1912 by an Indonesian ulama named Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (1868-1923). The organization's original purpose was to eradicate syncretic but popular Islamic customs and rituals. These included the cult worship of famous ulama or preachers (saint worshipping), prayers before the graves of deceased relatives, Sufi-style mystic rituals, superstitious beliefs, and other practices that are not specifically prescribed within the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Puritanists within the Muhammadiyah called its members to reject syncretic form of Islam and return to a pure Islamic faith based on the principle of strict monotheism (*tauhid*) (Puar, 1989, pp. 19-21; Peacock, 1978, p. 6). Even though originally the Muhammadiyah encouraged the use of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) as a method to interpret Islamic texts and legal jurisprudences, during the 1930s, the Muhammadiyah began to take an even more conservative turn as a new generation of leaders who studied in the Middle East began to take leadership roles.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, the organization was known its official theology that, which involved the purification of syncretic customs and traditions commonly performed by their traditionalist counterparts. It also promoted the *shari'a* law to become both the moral and constitutional foundation of the Indonesian state. In his analysis of Muhammadiyah's theological frame during this period, Federspiel concluded that:

The Muhammadiyah philosophy.....maintained that the establishment of an Islamic society in Indonesia was the essential features of an Islamic

state...Once this ideal society has been instituted, the Islamic state would follow automatically as a consequence. The spirit generated by an Islamic society would determine that the constitution and the law established in the nation would reflect the commands and prohibitions of God, as contained in the Islamic scripture. In such a “right-guided society,” all laws legislated by the government would then be made on the basis of right or wrong according to the principles of Islam as interpreted for the contemporary era (Federspiel, 1970, p. 77).

The political implication of the Muhammadiyah’s theological frame is that:

...the Muhammadiyah still favors the establishment of Islamic law (*shari’a*) in Indonesia, but for practical reasons this goal is regarded as the responsibility of the Muslim parties which the Muhammadiyah supports and where Muhammadiyah members participate as they wish. At the same time, the Muhammadiyah’s activities can continue to be directed toward the construction of an Islamic society (Federspiel, 1970, p. 79).

However, during the 1970s, the Muhammadiyah suffered from a new round of political repression by the Suharto regime. In 1970, the regime had managed to purge Muhammadiyah leaders from a political party that was meant to represent its positions in the Indonesian public sphere, in favor of more cooperative, pro-regime modernists (Hefner 2000, pp. 98-99). For the next two decades (from the 1970s to the first half of the 1990s), Muhammadiyah downplayed its role in Indonesian politics. During much of this period the organization was led by Kiai Haji A.R. Fachruddin (1916-1995), who believed that Muhammadiyah should avoid any potential confrontation with the Suharto regime, since doing so would only lead to more political restriction and repression against the organization (Suwarno, 2002, p. 73, cited in Fachruddin, 2005, p. 66).

By the early 1990s, a new generation of activists within the Muhammadiyah began to criticize Fachruddin’s leadership. Critics stated that under his leadership, the organization had failed to condemn the regime’s

repressive policies and its frequent human rights violations against ordinary Indonesians (Fachruddin, 2005, pp. 66-67). There was a growing call from the Muhammadiyah's activists to reverse the organization's two-decade policy that promoted political neutrality and avoidance of controversial political issues. These activists were more willing than their predecessors to openly criticize the Suharto regime's lack of political freedom, human rights abuses, corruption, and other excesses (Fachruddin, 2005, p. 70; Muzakki, 2004, p. 64).

These activists further argued that Muhammadiyah needed to become responsive to the demands of an increasingly modern and complex Indonesian society, thereby it could have showed itself as a credible alternative to Suharto's authoritarian rule. They believed that the organization should promote the compatibility of Islam with modern sociopolitical values as democracy, religion - state separation, and tolerance for non-Muslim minorities. They began to take a closer look at the ideas of Nurcolish Madjid (1939-2005), a modernist Islamic social philosopher and theologian. Madjid received training in classical Islamic jurisprudence as well as in contemporary Islamic thought from traditionalist *pesantren* schools. Like his reformer counterparts, Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU, he was versed in Islamic thought but also in Western socio-political theory, and has fluency in English, French, and Arabic, as well as in Indonesian (Barton, 1997, p. 49; Hefner, 2000, p. 115). From 1978 to 1984, Madjid pursued his doctoral study in Islamic philosophy at the University of Chicago, under the

supervision of Pakistani-born American Islamic philosopher Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988).<sup>66</sup>

Madjid was convinced that the future of Islam in Indonesia was not reliant on the promise of revivalist Islamic theology and the establishment of a *shari'a*-based Islamic state. Instead, he believed that to remain relevant in the modern Indonesian world, the Muhammadiyah should adopt and promote the synthesis of Islamic theological ideas and Western socio-political theory in order to resolve the numerous socio-economic and political problems facing contemporary Indonesian society. He became a norm entrepreneur within the Muhammadiyah, who attempted to reconstruct the theological frames and political identities of the organization through the teaching and propagation of his ideas.

Madjid asserted that the Muhammadiyah “has become more interested in promoting the literal and rigid interpretation of Islamic theology to their followers rather than constantly reinterprets Islam to take into account of new socio-economic and political conditions facing an increasingly modern society” (Madjid, 1998 [1970], p. 285). He was very critical against the organization, asserting that while the Muhammadiyah was originally founded to promote theological reform through the use of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), by the late 1960s, it had ceased to promote new theological innovations. Instead, it was

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<sup>66</sup> Rahman was a leading Islamic theological reformer in his own right, who introduced a new Islamic theology called *neo-modernism*, which is based on an extensive study of classical Islamic jurisprudence, the use of *ijtihad* to apply the classical teachings to resolve problems of the contemporary world, as well as the acceptance of new knowledge derived from Western intellectual tradition, especially from the social science and humanities (Barton, 1997, p. 67).

promoting a puritanist version of Islam that was theologically rigid (Madjid, 1998 [1970], p. 288).

Madjid developed a new theological interpretation which in his view would have to reconstruct the prevailing revivalist theology within the Muhammadiyah, by accepting democratic political ideas and the separation between religion and politics, which was not accepted by most revivalist-oriented Muslim thinkers.<sup>67</sup> He argues that “secularization,” as opposed to “secularism,”<sup>68</sup> has a foundation within the Islamic tradition. In his interpretation of the Qur’an, God left no specific instructions for mankind on how to deal with purely worldly issues, such as how to run a state/government. Instead, Madjid believes that:

God leaves ‘worldly’ problems for humans to resolve on their own, by using their God-given ability to think and make independent judgment based on the *ijtihad* (Madjid, 1998 [1970], pp. 288-289; Hefner, 2000, p. 118).

Through this interpretation, Madjid constructs a new theological justification for religion-state separation within the Islamic tradition, something conservative and revivalist-leaning Muslims do not recognize in their interpretation of classical Islamic jurisprudence.

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<sup>67</sup> Madjid’s defense of secularization process was a provocative idea that helped to secure his reputation as a leading progressive Islamic “norm entrepreneur” and theologian in Indonesia. It also explains why his theological ideas become very controversial, especially among revivalist Muslims even today, four decades after he gave his landmark speech (Kurzman, 1998, p. 284).

<sup>68</sup> Madjid argues that while secularism is an ideology that seeks to replace and substitute religious faith, something that he completely rejects, ‘secularization’ is acceptable within the Islamic tradition, since it serves as “the ‘normalization’ of human actions that deal with worldly affairs and make it distinguishable from those that are purely religious in nature” (Madjid, 1998 [1970], pp. 286, 288-289).

Madjid believed that there was no need for Muslims to declare an Islamic state in Indonesia (Madjid, 1998 [1972], pp. 294-295). He argues that:

...it is impossible for the state to manage and regulate the religious affairs of their citizens, and it is also equally impossible for any religious institutions to manage and regulate the temporal affairs of the state (Madjid, 1998 [1972], pp. 296-297).

Thus, Madjid rejected the view of many revivalist Muslims that the Indonesian state has to be based on Islamic law (*shari'a*) in order to be considered as legitimate by them. Instead, he believed that Indonesian Muslims should actively promote democracy within their society, since he believes that Islam is fully compatible with democracy. He argued that contemporary Muslims should make decisions about political and state matters through a process of consultation and deliberation (*mushawarah*) modeled after the deliberative council created by Prophet Muhammad in Medina during the early period of Islam. He argued that:

...any ruler who does not honor the right of Muslims to practice their right to participate in public consultation and deliberation should be considered as a dictator and be treated as an enemy of society (Madjid, 1995, p. 195).

In 1985, Madjid solidified his status as a norm entrepreneur of progressive Islamic thought in Indonesia when he founded Paramadina University, a new Islamic higher education institution.<sup>69</sup> This institution became the primary vehicle for Madjid to advocate and promote his progressive Islamic theology. Paramadina

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<sup>69</sup> The name Paramadina refers to the ancient Medina Charter that set up the governance of the city of Medina that was governed jointly by Muslim forces under the command of Prophet Muhammad and the city's Jewish, Christian and pagan minorities (Pringle, 2010, p. 102). It highlights Madjid's commitment to promote his modernist, democratic, and religiously plural, theological principles.

offered courses in Qur'anic and Hadith interpretations, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Islamic theology (*kalam*), Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*), Sufi meditation (*tasawuf*), and modern Islamic thought (Kull, 2005, p. 171). The most popular course offered by Paramadina was a monthly seminar taught by Madjid himself on current issues in contemporary Islamic thought and its relations to modern values, ranging from democracy, human rights, and economic justice. It was held regularly from the first time class instructions at the university began in October 1986 until his death in August 2005 (Barton, 1997, p. 52).<sup>70</sup>

During the early 1990s, Madjid served as a member and senior adviser to the Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* – ICMI). The Suharto regime created ICMI after he made his “Islamist turn” in 1990 to win support from modernist and revivalist Indonesian Islamic groups. It promoted public policies that accommodate the concerns of revivalist Muslims (e.g., the appointment of revivalists in key government agencies, the wearing of headscarves in public schools and public institutions, etc.). Some critics of the Suharto regime, including former NU chairman Abdurrahman Wahid, considered ICMI as no more than a tool of the Suharto regime and refused the regime’s invitation to join it. They criticized modernist intellectuals like

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<sup>70</sup> The monthly seminar taught by Madjid was the most on-demand course offered by Paramadina, attracting up to 400 attendees for any given session. Prominent guest speakers were also invited to give lectures at the seminar. In its latter years, as Madjid became more interested in the issue of religious tolerance and pluralism, it also included speakers from non-Islamic religious traditions as well as unorthodox Islamic preachers such as those representing various Sufi *tarekats* (Kull, 2005, pp. 175-176).



Madjid for joining the group. However, Madjid argued that his involvement with ICMI as an effort to promote reform and democracy “from the inside” rather than fighting the regime as an opposition leader, as pursued by his fellow reform counterpart Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU. He believed Suharto’s authoritarian rule should be challenged through persuasion and cooperation rather than through coercion and intimidation (Hefner, 2000, pp. 114-115).

By the early-1990s, the theological ideas propagated Nurcolish Madjid and his supporters, such as separation between religion and temporal (including political) affairs, rejection of a *shari’a*-based Islamic state, and the compatibility between Islam and democracy, had generated much discussion among the Indonesian Islamic community, particularly among a new generation of modernist Muslim intellectuals and activists. While they attracted much criticisms and condemnations from conservative/revivalist-leaning groups,<sup>71</sup> they also gained support from modernist-leaning intellectuals, academics, and government officials. Numerous upper and middle class Muslim professionals were also attracted by Madjid’s theological attempt to reconcile Islam, democracy and other liberal sociopolitical values.

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<sup>71</sup> Numerous books and pamphlets had been written by various revivalist authors during the 1970s and early 1980s to criticize, challenge, and condemn Madjid’s ideas. Chief among them were written by Hassan (1982) and Rasjidi (1972). Muhammadiyah intellectuals who adhered to revivalist theology also challenge Madjid’s argument that secularization is a separate process that is different from secularism. For instance, former Muhammadiyah chairman Amien Rais argues that there is no difference between secularism and secularization. While secularization might not necessarily try to make religion irrelevant in public life at first, as the process continues, it will require the removal of religion from the public sphere (Rais, 1998a, p. 77, cited in Muzakki, 2004, p. 148).

Nevertheless, by 1994 it was clear that despite his previous promises, Suharto was not going to move Indonesia into a more democratic political trajectory. Instead, the regime was adopting more restrictions and repressive tactics against any movements that tried to challenge it. Consequently, Madjid became more assertive in publicly criticizing the regime. For instance, he made a speech in 1994 stating that a healthy political regime would not just benefit from regular practices of public consultation and consensus, but would also benefit from the formation of a “principled political opposition” (Hefner, 2000, p. 144). Madjid also criticized ICMI’s campaign to remove members of Indonesia’s religious minorities (especially Christians) from their positions as cabinet ministers and high-ranking civil servants (Hefner, 2000, pp. 143-144). Instead, he wrote a landmark article that argued Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and even the “Eastern” religious traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintoism) share a common ground with Muslims by recognizing the existence of a single monotheistic God (*tauhid*). As a result, Madjid argues that “it is unacceptable for Muslims to promote exclusion and discrimination against non-Muslims. Instead, they should tolerate the existence of these minority religions and work together with their adherents to promote the common good” (Madjid, 1994, pp. 74-76). As the Suharto regime fell in May 1998, Madjid played a major role in Indonesia’s transition into democracy as a member of a committee of a leading Islamic intellectuals (along with Abdurrahman Wahid) who met with Suharto to seek his “controlled and dignified” resignation from the office of the

presidency during the final days of his rule in May 1998 (Eklof, 1999, pp. 202-214, cited in Kull, 2005, p. 83).

Madjid's closest counterpart within the Muhammadiyah was the life-long Muhammadiyah activist and scholar Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif (b. 1935). A historian by training, he was Madjid's classmate at the University of Chicago, who obtained a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies in 1985, also under Fazlur Rahman's supervision. Unlike Madjid, who was always committed to promote progressive Islamic thought since his youth, Maarif started out as a believer in revivalist/puritanist Islamic theology. Earlier in his life, he supported a *shari'a*-based Islamic state, as prescribed by revivalist theologians such as Abu Ala Maududi, Hasan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb (Ma'arif, 2006, pp. 209 & 225). However, Ma'arif's theological views changed dramatically while he studied at the University of Chicago. His mentor Fazlur Rahman believes that the *shari'a* was largely a set of ethical principles rather than a set of formal rules and regulations. He also believes the *shari'a* was constructed under the authoritarian rule of numerous Islamic Caliphates and monarchs during the medieval period. It should be reinterpreted to reflect the experiences of contemporary Muslims living in modern nation-states that are largely run based on liberal democratic principles (Ma'arif, 2006, pp. 228-229).

Influenced by Rahman's interpretation of the *shari'a*, Ma'arif made a radical shift in his political and theological outlook. Ma'arif believes that Indonesian Muslims should not develop their society based on an "idealized" conception of past Islamic societies that had serious flaws and shortcomings.

Instead, they should build them according to the realities of modern lives in Indonesia (Ma'arif, 2006, pp. 229-230). He believes that the Islamic principle of mutual consensus (*shura*) is fully compatible with modern democratic principles, since both grant equality for all participants to have a voice the decision-making process that affects society. This is denied to citizens of the so-called "Islamic state" because in these societies it is the ruler, not the people, who makes all political decisions in the name of God, without any public consultation or deliberation (Ma'arif, 2006, p. 235). Ma'arif believes that none of the Islamic states established during the 20th century (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Sudan) could serve as models on how modern Islamic societies ought to be run, because they were established by individuals and groups who used Islam to justify their authoritarian and repressive rule over their own peoples (Ma'arif, 2006, p. 231).

Unlike revivalist-oriented scholars and activists within the Muhammadiyah, Ma'arif believes in the equality of all citizens of a Muslim-majority society, including non-Muslims. He believes that as long as all citizens agreed to respect each other's religious beliefs and to work together to promote the common good, they all should have equal citizenship rights (Ma'arif, 2006, pp. 232-233). Finally, Ma'arif developed deep skepticism against the expressions of Islamic political activism advocated by his revivalist counterparts. He prefers Islamic intellectuals to focus their energy on promoting Islam through their writings and teachings rather than through the establishment of political parties and active public advocacy of the *shari'a* law (Ma'arif, 2006, pp. 232-233).

Upon his return to Indonesia in 1985, Ma'arif resumed his activity within the Muhammadiyah and gradually rose through its leadership rank. In 1998, he was finally elected as the chairman of the organization by its central leadership board. Upon his election, Ma'arif embarked on an ambitious reform to transform the theological frames and political identity of his organization, from a conservative and ideologically rigid Islamic organization it has been known for several decades to one that would have embraced the progressive Islamic theology. Encouraged by Ma'arif's leadership, many young activists saw him as a leader who could finally turn Muhammadiyah away from its conservative and puritanist theological outlook into a more progressive and inclusive direction. During Ma'arif's seven-year term as Muhammadiyah chairman (1998-2005), he and his supporters worked tirelessly to promote the progressive Islamic theology within the organization.

Ma'arif's theological reforms concentrated on efforts to change the institutions within the Muhammadiyah that were responsible for issuing theological interpretations to other members of the organization. This included the Doctrinal Opinion Council (*Majelis Tarjih*), which issued theological rulings (*fatwa*) and determines whether unorthodox Islamic customs, rituals, and traditions are either considered to be compatible with fundamental Islamic teachings or should be treated as heresies (*bid'ah*) by other members of the organization. Ma'arif appointed Amin Abdullah, a professor of Islamic classical philosophy, as the chairman of the council, with the hope that he would move the council away from the long domination of conservative clerics and activists who supported a strictly

literalist interpretation of Islamic scriptures. Abdullah also supported the usage of hermeneutics, a methodology to interpret religious texts contextually, that has become the standard practices in religious studies departments of most Western universities. He also believed the use of hermeneutics would bring a more nuanced approach to the interpretation of classical Islamic texts and would develop new interpretations of these texts that are more flexible toward modern sociopolitical contexts (Boy, 2009, hp. 86). Hermeneutics was more in tune with the reformers' project to reconstruct Muhammadiyah's theological frames and political identity.

Under Abdullah's leadership, *Majelis Tarjih* issued an innovative legal ruling (*fatwa*) that encouraged inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. This interpretation was noteworthy for its approach that calls for religious inclusion, tolerance, and pluralism rather than the standard interpretation that tended to view non-Muslims to be religiously inferior compared to Muslims (Asyari, 2007, p. 23).<sup>72</sup> In 2000, Ma'arif promoted Abdullah as a member of Muhammadiyah central leadership board. In addition, Ma'arif also promoted two other progressive reformers, Dawam Rahardjo and Abdul Munir Mulkan (Ma'arif, 2006, p. 327).<sup>73</sup> These promotions signaled Ma'arif commitment to

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<sup>72</sup> The theological justification of this *fatwa* was the propagation of the Medina Constitution by Prophet Muhammad was an early act of Muslims to recognize religious pluralism since it gave equal citizenship status to Muslims and People of the Book (Jews and Christians) and legitimized marriages between a male Muslim and a female Jew or Christian (Biyanto, 2009, pp. 115-116).

<sup>73</sup> Dawam Rahardjo (b. 1942) was a member of a study group which became the precursor of many of the neo-modernist Islamic thought propagated by Nurcolish

transform the Muhammadiyah to become a more progressive-oriented theologically through the promotion of fellow activists whom shared his modernist theological outlook.

Ma'arif also encouraged the establishment of new institutions to accommodate the interests of progressive-minded activists within Muhammadiyah. He encouraged reform activists to found their own organization, which was finally established in 2003. It was called the Young Muhammadiyah Intellectuals Network (*Jaringan Intelektual Muda Muhammadiyah – JIMM*). Its purpose is to help the Muhammadiyah's leadership to reconstruct the Islamic theological frame within the organization and to defend these activists from criticisms from conservative/revivalist-leaning activists within the organization. It also aims to challenge the organization's preference for "ritualism, formalism, and structuralism" in favor of progressive ideas that would have rejuvenated the organization's theological frame (Boy, 2009, pp. 83-84). JIMM was formed by activists who frequently used hermeneutics and critical social theory in their work. These theories served as the intellectual resources for the pro-reform to challenge and deconstruct conservative theological teachings within the Muhammadiyah. They were supposed to integrate Islamic theology and Western

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Madjid and his colleagues during the 1970s and 1980s. He was a close associate of Madjid and was active in the promotion of progressive Islamic thought himself, mainly by establishing *Ulumul Qur'an*, a peer-reviewed journal with regular articles promoting progressive Islamic thought and their relevance to contemporary sociopolitical problems of Indonesian Muslims (Liddle, 1996b. p. 161). Abdul Munir Mulkhan (b. 1945) is a sociologist who studied the roots of Muhammadiyah in traditionalist Javanese Muslim communities and argues that local Javanese customs and traditions should not be considered as heretical innovations (*bid'ah*) that should be cast out by Muhammadiyah.

social theory and connect Muhammadiyah with the socio-economic problems facing contemporary Indonesian society (Abdurrahman, 2003b, p. 196). JIMM's willingness to challenge the predominantly revivalist theology in the Muhammadiyah was evident in its first publication, a volume edited by reform activist Moeslim Abdurrahman entitled "Muhammadiyah as a Cultural Tent" [*Muhammadiyah Sebagai Tenda Kultural*] (Abdurrahman 2003). The volume was noted for its frank criticisms of revivalist Islamic theology within the Muhammadiyah, the organization's propagation method (*da'wah*), which they considered to be exclusivist and were promoting forced conversion into revivalist Islam, and the revivalist's prolonged hegemony within the organization. Instead, the book advocated that Muhammadiyah should start promoting religious tolerance/pluralism and democratic political norms (Abdurrahman, 2003a; Asyari, 2007, p. 24, fn. 8).

However, Ma'arif's attempt to engage in theological reform activities within the Muhammadiyah to adopt their reformist theology encountered fierce resistance from puritanist/revivalist opponents from within the organization. Revivalist activists, led by Muhammadiyah Deputy Chairman Din Syamsuddin (b. 1958), argued that the reform activists and their organizations under their umbrella (e.g., JIMM) are promoting ideas not compatible with Muhammadiyah's long-standing theological principles. They did not share the positions taken by the reformers, which argue for ideas such as equal citizenship rights for all Indonesians, human rights, religious tolerance, and pluralism. Instead, they argue these ideas were derivations from liberal secularist principles, which sought to



separate religion from the realms of the state; something revivalists believe is rejected by Islam, which taught that there is no separation between the two realms.

Revivalist Muslims also reject the concept of religious pluralism. They argue that it advocates for the validity of truth for all religions. This is something many revivalists considered as a heresy (*bid'ah*), because for revivalists, there is only one religion that represents God's ultimate truth for all humans, and it is Islam (Budyanto, 2009, pp. 122-123, Boy, 2009, pp. 168-169). In their view, pluralist supporters only weaken the faith of young Muslims (Asyari, 2007, p. 33). Revivalists believe that local cultures and traditions could not be integrated into the Muhammadiyah, because they contained so many heretical and superstitious (*tahyul*) elements that would only weakened the faith of pious Muslims (Asyari, 2007, p. 28, fn. 16). Lastly, they criticize progressive reformers for receiving financial assistance from international donors such as the Asian Foundation and the Ford Foundation, which for the revivalists, proved that their agendas are part of the Westerners' effort to weaken Islam in Indonesia. In their mind, progressive Islam is nothing more than a Western-sponsored plot to advance Christianity, Western capitalism, and Orientalist scholarship, which would threaten the unity and cohesion of the Indonesian Islamic umma (Asyari, 2007, p. 29 & 33).

Revivalists within the Muhammadiyah had dominated the organization's leadership and rank-and-file activists for decades. Their numbers swelled throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as their ranks were strengthened from activists who formerly belonged to other revivalist organizations such as the Indonesian

Council for Islamic Propagation (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia – DDII*).<sup>74</sup>

These organizations considered progressive Islamic theology propagated by Nurcolish Madjid, Syafii Ma'arif and their supporters as a heresy, that strayed far from the basic teachings of Islam contained in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the *shari'a* (Hefner, 2000, p. 113; Liddle, 1996b, pp. 270-271). They rejected the reforms propagated by these progressive thinkers in favor of "clear and simple" revivalist theology articulated in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Liddle, 1996b, p. 281). The increasing popularity of revivalist teachings articulated by the DDII among the rank-and-file members of the Muhammadiyah creates a major obstacle for progressive Islamic activists to promote their ideas within Muhammadiyah.

Ma'arif's decision in 2005 to retire from his Muhammadiyah chairmanship created a power vacuum within the organization. The revivalist faction used it to seize control of the organization and expel progressive activists from their leadership positions within the organization. A large number of regional Muhammadiyah branches were controlled by revivalist activists opposed to the reforms advocated by the progressive activists (Asyari, 2007, pp. 37-38). Thanks to the support of activists in regional branches, Din Syamsuddin was won an overwhelming support and was elected as the new Muhammadiyah

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<sup>74</sup> Founded in 1967, the DDII spreaded its message through direct proselytization (*da'wa*) activities conducted throughout Indonesia, the recruitment and trainings of revivalist preachers, the publication of the *Media Dakwah* magazine, which content is full of revivalist theological ideas and criticisms and polemical attacks against groups that are perceived to be its opponents (i.e., the Suharto regime, Western governments, Christian missionaries, and progressive Islamic thinkers) (Liddle, 1996a). The majority of its funding came from Middle Eastern donors from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Kuwait (Hefner, 2000, p. 109).

Chairman to succeed Ma'arif (Asyari, 2007, pp. 36-37). Revivalist activists also took over the selection committee for the central leadership board. After they seized control, Muhammadiyah's board members who represented the pro-reform faction within the organization, such as Amin Abdullah, Abdul Munir Mul Khan, and Dawam Rahardjo, were removed from the board and were replaced by activists representing the revivalist faction (Burhani, 2005, p. 186).

With the removal of these progressive-leaning board members, reform activists lost the support of sympathetic board members, including former chairman Ma'arif. As a result, the progressive activists' attempt to reform the Muhammadiyah was vanguarded. Today, progressive activists within the organization still persist in their reform causes and their supporters remain active in promoting their agenda by sponsoring lectures and writing opinion articles in newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, they are now marginalized within the Muhammadiyah. The dominance of revivalist activists on the organization's leadership board has left little chance for reform to stand little chance from being adopted by the organization.

What factors help to make the efforts to introduce progressive theological ideas within the Muhammadiyah to be unsuccessful? What halted the process of reform within the organization? In the following section, I trace the reasons why theological reforms within the Muhammadiyah are not successful and why the organization's structure seems to have prevented the agency of the reformers within the organization from successfully implementing their reforms. I argue that the mutual constitution process within the Muhammadiyah did not occur, unlike

in the NU case, due to the following factors: 1) The lack of presence of any strong moral authority leaders within the Muhammadiyah, and 2) The institutional culture of the organization which was more conducive toward the puritanist/revivalist Islamic theology.

### **Analysis of the Theological Reform within the Muhammadiyah**

#### **Religious leadership of Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif.**

According to the moral authority leadership theory introduced in this study, religious leaders are considered to have a moral authority by their supporters if they are considered as leading theological experts within their own religious group as well as perceived charismatic attributes perceived extraordinary or supernatural powers by among their supporters. Both Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif were widely recognized as leading Islamic theological experts within the Muhammadiyah. This served as basis of their credibility among their supporters and potential followers. Their closest supporters portrayed them as intellectuals with in-depth knowledge about both classical Islamic and Western sociopolitical thought. By the virtue of their theological expertise, they had acquired in-depth understanding of Islamic theology that few others within the Muhammadiyah community have managed to acquire.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> For instance, Fachry Ali, one of Madjid's first students who later served as his long-time personal assistant at Paramadina University, argues that Madjid should be considered as a spiritual leader (*resi*) whom have mastered Islamic religious knowledge that are highly important for the contemporary Muslim society in Indonesia (Kull, 2005, p. 212). Ali asserts that Madjid could be considered as a "teacher of the Indonesian nation" (*Guru Bangsa Indonesia*).

However, because their credibility as religious leaders rest largely on their theological expertise, but not necessarily based on any charismatic appeals or having intellectual genealogies with the previous generation of Muhammadiyah leaders, they are not considered as moral authority leaders. As a result, their ability to influence and persuade other members of the organization (especially those with different theological or educational background from their own) were also limited as well. In the case of Madjid, he was more comfortable speaking among fellow Islamic scholars and intellectuals rather than activists and rank-and-file Muhammadiyah members who did not necessarily have the same theological outlook and intellectual curiosity with him (Kull, 2005, p. 215).<sup>76</sup>

Madjid's theological promotion strategy was not like Abdurrahman Wahid within the NU. The latter regularly held public meetings, speeches, sermons for rank-and-file ulama and followers. In these speeches, Wahid's popular speaking style and charismatic persona served as important assets than enabled him to convert his audiences to support the ideas he promoted. Instead, his preferred strategy to promote his ideas was largely centered around small-scale seminars and lectures for a group of upper and middle-class Indonesian Muslims. In turn,

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<sup>76</sup> Due to his lack of leadership position within the Muhammadiyah, Madjid was widely perceived as an independent thinker who through his ideas, managed to win the support of many progressive-minded activists who "gather around him voluntarily, not because he is the leader of a large [Islamic] organization or party, but instead just [to listen] to his ideas" (Kull, 2005, p. 214).

he hoped that these cadres would find ways to spread his ideas on Islam which is democratic, inclusive, and pluralist to the Indonesian society (Kull 2005, p. 266).

However, some Madjid's supporters have questioned the effectiveness and the viability of this strategy, noting that while it successfully won over a large number of upper-middle-class intellectuals, these ideas did not attract much support among the average Muhammadiyah members. Azyumardi Azra, a former student of Madjid, asserts that Madjid was not able to articulate these ideas through mediums that were easily accessible for the general Indonesian Muslim population. Thus, he missed the opportunity to attract more supporters into his cause (Azra, 1993, pp. 152-153, cited in Kull, 2005, p. 220). Another reformist intellectual, Moeslim Abdurrahman, believes that Madjid's movement was based on abstract ideas that lacked solid grounding in the 'real' world. This made it difficult for Muhammadiyah members outside of Madjid's core supporters to relate his theological ideas to their own life experiences. As a result, they were reluctant to adopt and accept them (Kull, 2005, p. 223).

Furthermore, Madjid's lack of formal leadership position within the Muhammadiyah served as another liability that worked against the effective propagation of his ideas within the organization. Because he was not part of the Muhammadiyah's formal leadership structure, he had difficulty finding support among members of the organization's leadership, who came from revivalist theological background. Only after his colleague Syafii Ma'arif was elected to the Muhammadiyah's leadership board in 1992, then became its chairman in 1998, did Madjid's reform find a strong supporter from within the organization. Finally,

Madjid spent little time to directly engage Muhammadiyah's leaders on the necessity of the organization to adopt his theological ideas, which would have attracted the support of a new generation of Muhammadiyah members. Instead, he preferred to propagate his theological ideas through his own university, Paramadina, which limits itself primarily to Islamic higher education activities. Even within Paramadina, he surrounded himself with a small-group of like-minded activists who shared his theological ideas and beliefs, which left him vulnerable to the charges of being an elitist (Kull, 2005, pp. 222-223).

Syafii Ma'arif also largely relied on his theological expertise to support his leadership claims within the Muhammadiyah. Despite his popularity among the progressive activists circle within the organization, he was not perceived by most Muhammadiyah members as a charismatic leader.<sup>77</sup> Muhammadiyah historically based the leadership authority of the organization on the talents and accomplishments of its members not by having familial or intellectual genealogy with previous generations of leaders. Thus, Muhammadiyah leaders could only persuade other activists based on the merits of their arguments, not through their charismatic appeal, family genealogy, or personalities. This applies to Ma'arif as well as to other leaders of the organization.

Since neither Madjid nor Ma'arif had charismatic leadership attributes within the Muhammadiyah, the reforms within the organization attracted a limited

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<sup>77</sup> Observers have noted how Ma'arif's public speeches and sermons contain no charismatic appeals at all, unlike the appearances of charismatic leaders such as Abdurrahman Wahid of the NU.

amount of support in comparison to the reform efforts of their counterparts within the NU. Most of the supports toward the reform ideas were concentrated in major urban cities such as Jakarta and Yogyakarta, where there was a large number of upper-middle class Muhammadiyah members with high intellectual capabilities to comprehend and understand the implications of the reform for the organization. These ideas have gained little attraction from the majority grassroots Muhammadiyah activists elsewhere in Indonesia, who lacked advanced education in classical Islamic thought and Western social theory that these reformers had. In addition, despite Ma'arif's popularity within the progressive activists circle, he was not perceived by other Muhammadiyah members as a charismatic leader that could persuade rank-and-file members to adopt the reforms he advocated simply by his charismatic appeal and attributes alone.<sup>78</sup> Due to these drawbacks, progressive reformers had difficulties consolidating their reforms within Muhammadiyah and to keep the momentum of their reforms going beyond their circle of intellectual supporters.

In conclusion, because the key leaders and key norm entrepreneurs who promoted the reforms from within the Muhammadiyah did not have similar level of moral authority status compared to their counterpart, Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU, they had problems articulating and promoting their ideas beyond the small number of core supporters within the organization. As a result, reform

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<sup>78</sup> Observers have noted how Ma'arif's speech and public appearances contains no charismatic appeals at all, unlike the appearances of reform leaders in other organizations like Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU.



supporters had more difficulties explaining how the social reconstruction of Muhammadiyah's theological frames and political identities resulted from the reforms would have affected the rank-and-file members of the organization. As a result, it became more difficult for the reformers to institutionalize their reforms within the Muhammadiyah and to keep the level of support for their reforms going beyond the immediate circle of supporters within the organization. Lastly, they preferred to focus their propagation activities among members of Indonesia's upper-middle class elite. This has severely limits the spread of progressive Islamic ideas to the majority of Indonesian Muslims, most of them are coming from lower-class background.

**The impacts of puritanist/revivalist institutional culture.** The struggle to implement progressive theological reform within the Muhammadiyah was basically a struggle over different theological interpretations of classical Islamic teachings and over the political identities of the organization which are closely related to the prevailing theological frames that are institutionalized within the organization, be it puritanist/revivalist-oriented or liberal/progressive oriented. The leading hurdle facing the progressive reformers within the Muhammadiyah was the strong opposition from more conservative, revivalist-oriented ulama, clerics, and activists from within the organization. Conservative/revivalist Islam have stronger theological roots within the organization, which can be traced to the time it was founded in 1912. Originally, the Muhammadiyah was established because its founders wished to purify Islamic rituals, customs, and practices followed by their traditionalist counterparts, who often mixed elements of Islamic

beliefs with local animistic customs and traditions. For Muhammadiyah members, such practices are against the fundamental beliefs of Islamic faith as prescribed in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Thus, they should be considered as heresies (*bid'ah*). To deal against these syncretic and unorthodox practices, Muhammadiyah adopted a theological platform that sought the eradication of superstitions (*tah'yul*), heresies (*bid'ah*), and myths (*khu'rafah*) (Puar, 1989, pp. 19-21)<sup>79</sup>.

This conservative theological platform underscored the preferences of many of its members to the interpretation of Islam that promotes literal reading of the Qur'an and the Hadith, as well as the rejection of any theological interpretations they perceived as contradictory to this literalist interpretation. This revivalist theological preference was strengthened during the late 1920 and early 1930s, after a new generation of Muhammadiyah activists who received theological training from the Middle East began to assume leadership positions within the organization.<sup>80</sup> Under their leadership, the Muhammadiyah began to take more assertive stand to defend Islam against those it considered as either opponents or enemies of the Islamic faith. These included traditionalist Muslims

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<sup>79</sup> As part of a strategy to eradicate *tahyul*, *bid'ah*, and *khu'rafah* (commonly nicknamed "TBC"), revivalists believe that the Muhammadiyah should eradicate syncretic but popular Islamic practices such as worship of the cult of famous ulama or preachers (saint worshipping), worship of statues and icons, prayers before the graves of deceased relatives, Sufi-style mystic rituals, superstitious beliefs, and other practices that are not specifically prescribed within the Koran and the Hadith (Puar, 1989, pp. 19-21).

<sup>80</sup> These activists include figures such as former Muhammadiyah Kyai Haji Mas Mansur (1896-1946), Muhammadiyah chairman from 1935 to 1942, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo (1890-1954), Muhammadiyah chairman from 1942 to 1953, and A.R. Sutan Mansur, Muhammadiyah chairman from 1953 to 1959.

as well as Christian minorities (Alfian, 1989, p. 205). Under their leadership, new institutions such as the Doctrinal Opinions Council (*Majelis Tarjih*) were founded to promote the “correct” theological interpretations and eliminate heretical rituals and practices within the Indonesian Muslim community. Progressive-leaning activists within the Muhammadiyah had long complained that institutions such as *Majelis Tarjih* tend to emphasize a narrow and more rigid interpretation of Islamic theology and rituals rather than interpretations based on independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) that takes into account new sociopolitical realities, local customs, and practices that do not contradict fundamental Islamic beliefs. Consequently, the Muhammadiyah discourages its members from promoting new theological innovations that do not have roots within the Qur’an and the Hadith (Burhani, 2006, pp.10-11).

In addition to institutions such as *Majelis Tarjih*, the leadership recruitment and selection process within the Muhammadiyah tends to favor activists with revivalist theological leanings rather than those who favor progressive theological leanings. Candidates for top leadership positions within the organization were not directly elected (unlike the NU), but are instead chosen by a selection committee, which was tasked to select members of the central leadership board as well as heads of numerous autonomous boards and institutions within the organization. This committee helps to eliminate many prospective candidates who do not share the revivalist theology that prevails within the organization (Asyari, 2007, p. 36). As a result, it tends to promote the selection of conservative, revivalist-leaning candidates into Muhammadiyah’s

leadership, rather than those who are more inclined to promote progressive theological reforms within the organization.

As a new wave of Islamic revivalism spread to Indonesia during the 1970s and 1980s, the revivalist theology within the organization was strengthened significantly through the activities of Muhammadiyah activists who were also affiliated with revivalist propagation organizations such as the DDII. Long-time Muhammadiyah activist Lukman Harun (1934-2001) who served in the Muhammadiyah leadership board during the 1980s and 1990s, started his career in the DDII as a revivalist activist during the 1960s. The DDII was known for its numerous causes that condemned and attacked other groups who were opposed to the revivalist's goals to make Indonesian society more Islamic. These include secularist politicians, Christians and other non-Muslim minorities, and progressive-oriented Muslims (Liddle, 1996b, pp. 271-272). As a Muhammadiyah leader, Harun helped to promote many of these causes as well. For instance, he helped to found the Indonesian Committee for Solidarity with the Islamic World (*Komite Indonesia Untuk Solidaritas dengan Dunia Islam – KISDI*), a group that highlights the plight of Muslims in numerous troubled hotspots in the world, in order to recruit young Muslims to support revivalist and potentially radical, revivalist causes (Hefner, 2000, pp. 109-110).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Both KISDI and its parent organization, DDII (*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*) were alleged to have collaborative relationship with the Suharto regime in the 1990s and was used by the regime as a vehicle to threaten potential opposition representing secular nationalists, progressive-minded Muslims, and non-Muslims (Hefner, 2000, pp. 179-180).

Due to the long prevalence of revivalist institutional culture within the Muhammadiyah, it was not surprising that when progressive activists led by Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif began to introduce their progressive theological interpretations within the Muhammadiyah and sought to institutionalize them through the reform of the *Majelis Tarjih*, establishment of JIMM, and other reform initiatives, a counter-reformation movement immediately rose up to challenge them. The counter-reformation campaign against the reforms was widely believed to be lead by Din Syamsuddin, deputy chairman of the Muhammadiyah during Syafii Ma'arif's term as chairman of the organization. A protégé of Lukman Harun, Syamsuddin was considered to be close to hard-line revivalist organizations such as the DDII (Hefner, 2000, p. 260, fn. 30; Asyari, 2007, p. 37). He was also connected with radical Islamic organizations such as *Laskar Jihad*, which was fighting a violent conflict with Christian minorities living in the island of Maluku from 1999 to 2001 (Asyari, 2007, p. 37). Lastly, Syamsuddin was perceived to be responsible for the issuance of a legal opinion (*fatwa*) issued by the Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia – MUI*)<sup>82</sup>, of which he served as its General Secretary, that considered religious tolerance/pluralism, secularism, and liberalism, as forbidden heresies within Islam

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<sup>82</sup> The Indonesian Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia - MUI*) was the official state-sponsored Islamic organization that issues *fatwas* and other legal advice that are related to Islam as well as other contemporary social problems, in the name of the entire Indonesian Islamic community. The council was staffed by ulama from Muhammadiyah, NU, and other smaller Islamic organizations. However, its rulings are not considered as binding/mandatory by these organizations, which are concerned about losing their authorities to a state-sponsored institution such as MUI. For further details on MUI, see Hosen (2004).

(Asyari, 2007, p. 38). This *fatwa* was directed against the progressive faction within the Muhammadiyah in order to reduce the popular support for the reform initiatives they had advocated within the organization.

In addition to Syamsuddin, other revivalist activists such as Adian Husaini also participated in numerous public discourses to discredit the proposals of the progressive faction. Husaini criticized the progressives' call to promote religious tolerance and pluralism as an effort to "equalize Islam" with all other religious faiths in the world and reject the exclusive 'truth' of Islam as propagated by the Qur'an and the Hadith." (Biyanto, 2009, pp. 167-169). He believed that the MUI *fatwa* against the propagation of these ideas was appropriate in order to prevent other Muslims, especially Muhammadiyah members, to follow these 'heretical' teachings. Lastly, senior Muhammadiyah leaders such as former Muhammadiyah chairman Amien Rais (b. 1945), also lent their support for the counter-reformation movement.<sup>83</sup> As Muhammadiyah's chairman from 1995 to 1998, Rais was widely known for his political activism as one of the leader of the opposition movement against Suharto (along with Abdurrahman Wahid). However, he was also firmly committed to retaining the revivalist theology that had long prevailed within the Muhammadiyah.<sup>84</sup> Unlike progressive reform leaders such as Madjid

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<sup>83</sup> For instance, Rais wrote the foreword of several publications written by revivalist activists that condemn the reformers efforts to promote 'secularism' and 'liberalism' within the Muhammadiyah (e.g., Rais, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Like most revivalists, Rais believes that Islam constitutes a complete way of life for Muslims in both the spiritual and the temporal realm, so it does not recognize any form of separation between religion and the state. Due to this fundamental difference between Islam and secularism, he believes that the two are

and Ma'arif who preferred elite-level theological discourses with a small group of reform supporters instead of giving popular speeches for the rank-and-file Muhammadiyah members, Din Syamsuddin and Amien Rais were known within the organization for their popular sermons and speeches in which they were able to convince their audience to support their ideas. These clearly helped revivalist activists to counter the reforms among rank-and-file members of the Muhammadiyah as well.

In the end, the efforts of reformers to reconstruct the conservative theological frames and political identities of the Muhammadiyah was inhibited the revivalist-oriented institutional culture within the Muhammadiyah. It was much stronger than the progressive theological ideas that sought to replace rigid and literalist theology within the organization with one that is more democratic, inclusive, and tolerant against syncretic Muslims and non-Muslims. Revivalist Islamic theology has been an integral part of Muhammadiyah's institutional culture over the past century of its existence. Since it frames the theological ideas and norms of most Muhammadiyah activists, the revivalist faction has far more ideological and instrumental resources within the organization to counter the efforts of the progressives to implement their reforms in the Muhammadiyah. As shown in this empirical analysis, the revivalists were able to marginalize the reformers by excluding them from the organization's leadership positions and

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irreconcilable (Rais, 1995, pp. xxi-xxii, cited in Muzakki, 2004, p. 149). Rais also believes that Muslims should have received a special status in Indonesian politics by occupying high political offices such as the presidency and key government ministries, while non-Muslims are not entitled to occupy these positions (Abdillah, 1997, pp. 102-106, cited in Hefner, 2000, p. 259, fn. 21).

denying the legitimacy of their reforms by issuing fatwa and other legal rulings that enable the counter-reformers to push the reformers to become marginalized from within the organization at this point.

### **Relations between the Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian State**

Despite the revivalist theological positions it has historically been known for, Muhammadiyah is also known for its political pragmatism. It has historically been willing to develop cooperative relations and alliances with the Indonesian state, including under the Suharto regime. Thanks to the decision made by its former chairman A. R. Fachruddin during the early 1970s to become politically neutral and adopt apolitical positions, the organization retained its importance as one of leading Islamic group in Indonesia throughout the 1970s to the 1990s. It was frequently consulted by the Suharto regime to give its feedback on various policies related to the Indonesian Islamic community.<sup>85</sup> Thus, despite the political limitations imposed by the Suharto regime, Muhammadiyah still has significant political influence that could not be ignored by the regime. In addition, Muhammadiyah members tend to be middle class professionals who worked both in the Indonesian civil service, many Muhammadiyah activists ended up as senior staffs of various government ministries within the Suharto regime, including within key ministries such as finance, development planning, and trade and

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<sup>85</sup> For instance, it had played an important role in shaping the Suharto government's legislations on marriage (1973), registration of civil society organizations (1985), national education policy (1988), and Islamic court (1989) (Syamsuddin, 1995, p. 48).



industry (Effendy, 2003, pp. 84-85).<sup>86</sup> Many members of Muhammadiyah's central leadership board also served as officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs or as faculty members within the Islamic state universities system (Fachruddin, 2005, p. 67).<sup>87</sup> As a result, the organization has developed a close network within the Indonesian state, which served it well especially during the Suharto regime, as the organization potentially benefited both instrumentally and materially from its relationship, for instance, in getting subsidies for its extensive network of primary and secondary schools throughout Indonesia.

Through their *da'wa* activities, Muhammadiyah activists who worked for the Indonesian government gradually shifted the perception of other top officials within the Suharto regime, from more hostile and less tolerant attitudes against Islamic organizations such as the Muhammadiyah during the 1970s, to one that was largely receptive and accommodative toward Islamic groups by the 1990s. In the long run, they contributed to the 180-degree turnaround in Suharto's policy toward Islam and Islamic organizations. It changed from a policy of repression and restriction against Islamic activists in the 1970s and 1980s to one that largely

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<sup>86</sup> Muhammadiyah cadres who became top-ranking officials under the Suharto regime during the 1970s and 1980s included Mari'e Muhammad (former Minister of Finance), Saadilah Moersid (former Cabinet Secretary/Chief of Staff to President Suharto, Bintoro Tjokroamidjojo (former top official at the Ministry of Development Planning (Bappenas)), and Barli Halim (former Director of the National State Oil Company (Pertamina)) (Effendy, 2003, p. 85).

<sup>87</sup> This includes Syafii Ma'arif, who served as a professor of history at Yogyakarta State University (*Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta - UNY*) and Amien Rais, who was a professor of political science at state-run Gajah Mada University (*Universitas Gajah Mada - UGM*).

accommodated conservative and sometimes revivalist Islam during the 1990s (Liddle, 1996c).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Nurcolish Madjid had originally initiated his theological reform proposals as part of his strategy to promote democratic change within the Suharto regime. Madjid and many of his colleagues were skeptical of the ability of mass-based Islamic groups to promote change within the Suharto regime using protests and other confrontational means. Unlike Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU who led his organization to directly confront the regime during the-1990s, Madjid and his colleagues within the Muhammadiyah preferred the less confrontational strategy of dialogue and cooperation with the Suharto regime. Their goal was to gradually persuade the regime to adopt more tolerant attitudes toward Islamic activists and social movements as well as a more open and democratic politics for Indonesian citizens in general (Hefner, 2000, pp. 114-115).

Reformers like Madjid developed alliances with the Minister of Religious Affairs and other officials and acquired some influence on how the ministry's policies on Islamic groups in Indonesia. Their cooperation ensures that the reforms would not run into opposition from the ministry officials as well as from the Suharto regime. During the mid-1980s Madjid worked together with then-Religious Affairs Minister Munawir Syadzali (1924-2003) to implement policies that reflected the progressives thought on Islam and modernity within the state's Islamic higher education (*Institute Agama Islam Nasional* - IAIN) system. The reforms initiated by Madjid and Syadzali during the 1980s tried to integrate

Islamic studies in IAIN with Western-based sciences and institute a new curriculum that promotes the critical study of Islamic theology and philosophy, using *ijtihad*-based methodology reformers (Feener, 1999, pp. 164-165, cited in Kull, 2005, p. 180). Many current faculty members within the IAIN system are influenced by the thought of Nurcolish Madjid and his fellow reformers and tend to be the proponents of their reform initiatives (Barton, 1997, p. 55; Kull, 2005, pp. 180-181).

Rational choice scholars (e.g., Leong, 2008) are interpreting Muhammadiyah's politically neutral and cooperative position during the 1970s and 1980, as well as Madjid's collaboration with the Suharto regime through ICMI and IAIN initiatives as evidence that they were trying to seek greater influence and/or material benefits by maintaining cooperation with a regime that has repressed many Indonesian citizens. Muhammadiyah's moderate and cooperative strategies during the 1970s and 1980s were clearly motivated by the desire of at least some Muhammadiyah leaders and activists to seek instrumental and material benefits for the organization. They also sought to have some influence in the regime's policies toward Islam during this period.

However, this explanation needs to be complemented with an analysis on the ideational rationale in order to fully taking into account the relationship between Muhammadiyah and the Suharto regime during this period. The reformers within the Muhammadiyah pursued cooperative relationship with the Suharto regime to show that first, they did not intend to challenge the regime through either violent or confrontational means, unlike the strategies of other

Islamic groups such as the revivalist DDII or even the NU, which by the 1990s had taken a more confrontational stance against the regime under Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership. They sought cooperative relationships to win allies with officials from within the Suharto regime to ensure that the regime would be less likely to suppress their reform efforts. Madjid himself believed that it was important for his reform movement to develop a relationship with other government officials and Islamic intellectuals within the ICMI, as they might have a separate interests and goals apart from that of Suharto, the chief patron of the organization (Hefner, 2000, p. 143).

I argue that even when collaborating with the Suharto regime, the reformers maintained their commitment to promote democratic and more progressive Islam in Indonesia over the long run. Madjid used his position at ICMI to protect young reform activists that were threatened with repression and retaliatory actions at the hand of the Suharto regime. He also insisted that the involvement of pro-reform activists within the ICMI was a strategy to promote their reform ideas to other Muhammadiyah members and to sympathetic officials within the Suharto regime (Hefner 2000, p. 143). This does not indicate that they are being co-operated or co-opted by the Suharto regime.

In the end, the cooperative relationship between the reformers and officials from the Suharto regime period managed to cultivate a relatively peaceful relationship between reform proponents and the regime, which resulted in the lack of any state-led's efforts to impose restrictions against reform proponents in their efforts to reform the Muhammadiyah during the 1990s. The

relationship developed by Nurcolish Madjid and other reform leaders with officials from key government agencies such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the IAIN system has diminished the government's efforts to repress the reforms before they could gain popular support. Based on these, we could assume that the reform activists and the state managed to develop peaceful relationship between one another that helps to assure that the Suharto regime did not suppress the reforms prematurely. Of course, in the end the reform efforts failed due to the counter-reformation efforts done by revivalist faction within the organization. However, the reformers did not have to encounter repressive campaigns against the reform from the state during the time they were trying to implement them during the 1990s and early 2000s.

### **Alternative Explanations on the Theological Reform within the Muhammadiyah**

There are two alternative approaches that explain why the Muhammadiyah reformers failed to successfully implement their reform: political culture (culturalist) approach and rational choice (rationalist) approach. This section elaborates on these competing theoretical approaches, then analyzed their strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, the section explains why the moral authority leadership theory introduced in this study could provide us with a better theoretical framework than the two alternative theories discussed in this section.

**Culturalist explanation.** Scholars who use culturalist approach based from modernization theory (e.g., Huntington, 1996)<sup>88</sup> tend to portray Islamic groups as social movements with inherently hostile attitudes toward modern Western sociopolitical ideas. This is because they are perceived to be incompatible with Islamic ideas based on the literal reading the Qur'an and the Hadith, and their interpretation which promotes an authoritarian form of governance based on the strict application of Islamic (*shari'a* law). Unlike social constructivist scholars, culturalists argue that it is nearly impossible for Islamic groups to transform themselves from a conservative, revivalist-oriented theological position into one that accepts the compatibility of Islamic theology with modern sociopolitical ideas, while managing to maintain their groups' commitment toward the Islamic faith at the same time.

In the case of the Muhammadiyah, culturalist theorists would have explained the failure of the reformers to implement their reforms within the organization by highlighting that the Muhammadiyah has a rigid puritanist ideology which favors revivalist interpretation of Islamic theology (e.g., Noer,

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<sup>88</sup> The label "culturalist" in this study largely refers to the study of culture in political science that was based on modernization theory, which tends to hold cultural and religious ideas to be largely fixed and constant, with little possibilities of change in the near or immediate future. I recognize that this view of culture is no longer prevalent both in political science as well as in other disciplines. Scholars working from cultural anthropology and post-modernist perspectives (e.g., Wedeen, 2002) has developed an alternative definition of culture as a socially constructed idea that is more nuanced and amendable to change and I fully agree with this definition. However, modernization theory remains an alternative theoretical explanation widely used in contemporary study of religion and politics (e.g., Kuru, 2009), so I believe it is still worthy to include it as an alternative explanation of this study.

1973; Peacock, 1978; etc). This ideology is incompatible with the effort of the reformers to develop a synthesis between the Islamic faith and modern sociopolitical values and norms. This explanation in some ways is identical to the theoretical explanation offered by the constructivist-based moral authority leadership theory that I had developed. This is because culturalists also argue that it is the rigid theological frame of the Muhammadiyah that contributed to the failure of the progressive reformers to successfully institutionalize their alternative Islamic theology within the Muhammadiyah.

However, this is the only similarity between the culturalist and social constructivist theoretical explanations. Culturalist scholars assume that Islamic theology within the Muhammadiyah is conservative and backward, with little possibility of being adapted or reconstructed to adapt to modern sociopolitical ideas (e.g., Peacock, 1978). In their interpretation, members of the Muhammadiyah have “become mere traditionalists and cannot come to grips with the demands of current and future social change” (Liddle, 1996a, p. 150). As a result, reformers within the Muhammadiyah are not able to find much supports for the reforms they are propagating if they were primarily to rely on the textual sources and discourses from Islamic scriptures. Instead, culturalists argue that in order to increase their credibility, the reformers should have bolstered their modern Western sources and credentials over those that are based on Islamic sources (Liddle, 1996a, p. 167).

In response to the alternative explanation offered by the culturalist approach, I argue that there is little evidence to support the theoretical claim of

culturalist scholars that Islam and modern political values are incompatible with one another. Instead, as we could see in the following section, Muhammadiyah reformers frequently asserted the compatibility between Islamic and liberal democratic values. Both Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif have frequently invoked the compatibility between concepts that are frequently found within the Islamic tradition such as *shura* (consensus) and *mushawarah* (deliberation) with liberal democratic practices (e.g., Kull, 2005, p. 140; Ma'arif, 2006, p. 235). They have also frequently cited the Qur'anic recognition for the rights of Jewish and Christian minorities (People of the Book) within the Islamic tradition as precedence for their argument that the Muhammadiyah should respect and promote religious tolerance of non-Muslim minorities in Indonesia. These examples show that the claims of culturalist scholars regarding the incompatibility between Islamic and Western sociopolitical ideas and the inability of Muhammadiyah reformers to connect them together are dubious.

This is compatible with social constructivist explanation offered in this study, which argues that progressive Islamic theology is developed through the synthesis of Islamic and Western sociopolitical thought, which is then used by 'norm entrepreneurs' to reconstruct the theological frames, political identities, and preferences of their group. For instance, the 'norm entrepreneur' behind the Muhammadiyah reforms, Nurcolish Madjid, was well-versed in Western social theory and had publicly stated his admiration toward American democracy and political institutions and he believed they can serve as a positive model for countries undergoing democratic transition like Indonesia (Kull, 2005, pp. 141-



142). However, he also stated that his conception of democracy is primarily based on the principle of consultative deliberation (*mushawarah*) originated from within the Islamic tradition, as well as from the practices developed by the Prophet and his first four successors during the early Islamic period (Kull, 2005, p. 140). Lastly, Madjid did not shy away from openly criticizing United States' foreign policy in the Middle East that in his view has caused a great harm against the global Islamic community. He was a leading opponent of the United States invasion in Iraq in 2003 (Kull, 2005, p. 192). These evidences show that the culturalist argument that the reformers were just trying to imitate Western ideas at face value in their reforms of the Muhammadiyah is false. Instead, they combine Islamic and Western political ideas in their attempt to reconstruct the organization's theological frames and political identities, in order to convince their counterparts within the organization that Islam, democracy, and liberal sociopolitical ideas could be adopted within the organization.

In sum, culturalist explanation offered by scholars such as Peacock and Liddle fails to explain the attempt at theological reform within the Muhammadiyah, due to its simplistic assumptions which presumed the incompatibility between Islam and Western liberal democratic ideas. In contrast, moral authority leadership theory, which is based on social constructivist theoretical framework, offers a better theoretical explanation to explain the failure of the reformists to institute their reforms within the Muhammadiyah. This is because it does not assume the incompatibility of these two ideas but instead assume that both of them are socially constructed norms that could be reframed

and reconstructed by reform proponents so that the two ideas could be made compatible.

**Rationalist explanation.** Scholars who employ rational choice theoretical explanation usually emphasize the instrumental preferences of human actors, although some also try to develop a more nuanced theoretical explanation by combining instrumental and ideational preferences that these actors might have held. Nevertheless, their accounts often prioritize the instrumental preferences, strategies, and actions of these actors, while the status of normative and ideational goals and preferences in rational choice explanations remain ambiguous. However, some scholars (e.g., Gill, 2008; Warner, 2000) do incorporate ideational preferences into their analyses. While scholars who incorporate ideational and instrumental preferences are able to form a more nuanced explanation of religious group's political strategies than those who do not, more work needs to be done to further clarify the role of theological ideas in motivating the political behavior of religious groups and actors.

Rationalist scholars such as Leong argue that the reforms promoted by reformers within the Muhammadiyah is directed toward generating instrumental and material benefits for the movement as well as for the reforms supporters. They argue that while the Muhammadiyah had supported an Islamic state in the past, the reformers were willing to compromise this primary preference if the Indonesian state agrees to "privilege Islamic authority and implement expansive social reforms reflecting Islamic mores" (Leong 2009, p. 297). Some reformers, such as members of the Muhammadiyah- affiliated Indonesian Muslim University

Students Association (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* – HMI), which Madjid used to chair during the late 1960s and early 1970s, even compromised these secondary preferences in order to promote their instrumentalist goal to gain economic and political benefits by developing alliances with Suharto and other regime officials (Leong, 2009, p. 297).

To support this argument, rationalists noted Madjid’s involvement with Suharto-linked institutions such as the State Islamic State Universities (*Institut Agama Islam Negeri* - IAIN) system as further evidence to support their claims (Kull, 2005, p. 172). They also cited his university’s major supporters who were either high-ranking officials or wealthy businessmen closely connected to the Suharto regime as evidence for their theoretical explanation. For instance, the presence of four high-level Suharto government officials in the opening of the university in 1986 and the presence of eight government ministers in its inaugural board of advisors indicated that the major donors of the university were not just “the middle class, but especially the elite class” (Hefner, 2000, p. 125).<sup>89</sup> As a result, rationalists argue that the primary motive for Nurcolish Madjid to propose these reforms is to gain influence among the Suharto regime and members of the political elites as well as to seek state patronage. On the other hand, his ideational goals such as promoting democracy and religious tolerance at best only take a

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<sup>89</sup> As a matter of fact, this argument is not just made by rationalist scholars. Many of Madjid’s critics, especially those from the revivalist Islamic background, have long accused him and his colleagues with political and financial opportunism (e.g., Hassan, 1982, pp. 121-123, cited in Hefner, 2000, p. 255, fn. 51).

secondary priority after the more instrumental preferences such as gaining political influence and material benefits.

Rational choice scholars correctly pointed out that reform leaders such as Nurcolish Madjid did develop a close relationship with the Suharto regime during the 1980s and early 1990s. While this relationship might have resulted in some material gains and patronage opportunities for Madjid and other reform supporters, I argue that this explanation can only partially account for the rationale for introducing and promoting the reforms in the first place. In order to fully explain the motivations of the Muhammadiyah reformers, we need to look at them through the moral authority leadership theory. Under this theoretical framework, the reformers were pursuing alliance and cooperation with the Suharto regime not primarily because of the desire to seek political power or material benefits. Instead, these alliances and partnerships were done in order to prevent Suharto from repressing the reform activists before they were able to generate adequate support for their reform within the Muhammadiyah.

Evidence to support the claim of the moral authority leadership theory could be found from the fact that although Madjid and other reform supporters developed a close relationship with the Suharto regime, they were not hesitant to condemn and criticize the regime when it violated the reform principles they advocated. For instance, in an interview conducted in October 1998, Madjid revealed his disdain for Suharto and stated that he always remembered Suharto's harsh repression against his mentors such as the revivalist Islamic scholar and

politician Muhammad Natsir (1908-1993)<sup>90</sup> after he had assumed power in 1966. Since then, he had considered Suharto as a ruthless dictator since then (Friend, 2003, pp. 1-4, cited in Kull, 2005, p. 83). This interview clearly indicates that while Madjid did work together with some officials from the Suharto regime during the time he began to promote his reforms, he had never held Suharto in high regard from the time Suharto assumed power in 1966 until he stepped down in 1998.

Another example that demonstrates Madjid's commitment to the his reform was his consistency to promote his thought on democracy, human rights, and religious pluralism, while he was active as a leading member of Suharto's sponsored Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia – ICMI*) in the 1990s. If Madjid were to join this Suharto-linked organization with the goal of seeking to increase his influence within the regime, as many of his revivalist critics had long pointed out, he would have toned down his criticism against Suharto and his regime as he developed closer alliances with regime officials. However, Madjid continued to speak up and write on the subjects of Islam and democracy, human rights, and religious pluralism throughout the early and mid-1990s.<sup>91</sup> Madjid did not tone down his promotion of

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<sup>90</sup> Natsir had mentored Madjid when he was a young student activist in the 1960s, although they parted company as Madjid started to promote his "progressive Islamic ideas in the 1970s.

<sup>91</sup> As a matter of fact, many of the landmark books Madjid had written on these subjects were published in the 1990s, during the time he was also active within the ICMI. These include: *Islam, Doctrine, and Civilization: A Critical Study of*

progressive Islam, in spite of the fact that some of his ICMI colleagues actively supported revivalist form of Islam to lend legitimacy to Suharto's authoritarian rule (e.g., Hefner, 2000, pp. 140-141, 149-152).<sup>92</sup>

Lastly, while there were key Suharto-era government officials whom have made significant financial contribution to the university he had founded, Paramadina University, it received no financial support from the Indonesian government. The university prides itself on the fact that its independent status (both legally and financially) means that it is not affiliated or dependent on any sociopolitical groups within the Indonesian society (Kull, 2005, p. 264). In the process, Madjid acquired a reputation as a person who lives simply with a strict moral conduct, unlike that of many Indonesian government officials, politicians, and even prominent NGO activists whom have acquired enormous material wealth from dubious sources (Kull, 2005, pp. 213, 269-270).

To complement the explanation offered by rational choice theory, I argue that the struggle within the Muhammadiyah between the progressive reformers and their revivalist opponents primarily are based on two different theological

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*Faith, Humanism and Modernity* (Madjid 1992), *Islam, Democracy, and Indonesianness: The Thought of 'Young' Nurcolish Madjid* (Madjid 1993), and *Islam, The Religion of Humanity: Building A New Tradition and Vision for Indonesian Islam* (Madjid 1995).

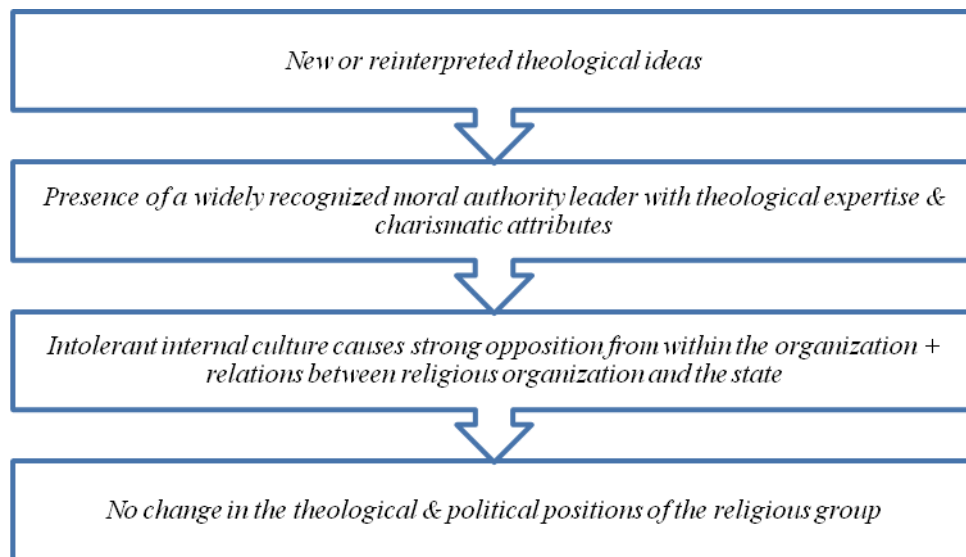
<sup>92</sup> In response to the agenda of revivalist activists within ICMI, Madjid made a speech in October 1992 in which he argues that Muslims should promote tolerance toward non-Muslims, especially Christians and Jews, because God's revelations in the Qur'an do not abrogate previous revelations and the revealed truth within these religious traditions but instead affirms and confirms their validity. He made the speech knowing well that he would be condemned and threatened by some members of the revivalist community for promoting these ideas (Hefner, 2000, p. 144).

frames about the role of Islam in the Indonesian society, one is based on puritanist and more conservative interpretation of Islam, while the other is based on the synthesis of Islamic and Western sociopolitical thought. Moral authority leadership theory can offer a more nuanced theoretical explanation than rational choice theory because it takes into account the role of Islamic theological ideas and how they were used by reform supporters to reframe and reconstruct their political goals and preferences within the Muhammadiyah. Unfortunately, they encountered a strong opposition from the revivalist faction within the organization, which in the end were able to successfully block the reforms from being implemented within the organization.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed the progressive theological reform efforts within the Muhammadiyah through the lenses of the moral authority leadership theory and explains why it failed to be institutionalized in this case. Unlike the theological reforms within the NU, the reform in Muhammadiyah failed because it was not able to overcome the counter-reformation campaign initiated by the revivalist opposition against the reform. The reformers efforts were successfully blocked by the revivalist faction who believes that these reforms were undermining the puritanist Islamic theology that has long dominated the theological discourse within the Muhammadiyah.

The Muhammadiyah case serves as a negative case to test the moral authority leadership theory introduced in this study. It shows how progressive theological reformers fail to materialize, when the ideas promoted by the religious leader faces an institutional barrier in the form of intolerant institutional culture and/or conflictual relationship with the state. For our review, this causal mechanism works as follows:



*Figure 4.1. Causal mechanism 2: Unsuccessful reform pathway*

Specifically, the counter-reformation pathway works like the following in the Muhammadiyah case: the ideas originally propagated by Nurcolish Madjid starting in the 1970s began to gain popular following from within the Muhammadiyah during the 1980s and 1990s. A new generation of pro-reform activists was interested in changing the theological trajectory of their organization. They sought to change it from one that historically promotes the revivalist interpretation of Islamic theological texts and the eradication of syncretic and unorthodox Islamic customs and traditions; to one that promotes



democratic political practices and institutions, human rights for all citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Their predecessors within the Muhammadiyah had wanted to establish an Indonesian state that would have been influenced by the formal rules of Islamic law (*shari'a*), with potentially negative repercussions for groups who did not wish to follow the *shari'a*, such as syncretic Muslims and non-Muslim minorities. In lieu of this theological frame, Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif, two reform leaders within the Muhammadiyah, decided to promote a different set of theological frames and political identities from one that was articulated by their predecessors within the organization. They believed that the Muhammadiyah should abandon their theological ideas and political identities to seek a state based on Islamic principles in favor of a state that followed the principle of religion-state separation. Under such a state, all Indonesians, irrespective of their religious beliefs would have an equal citizenship status, as well as equal political rights. Lastly, the Muhammadiyah should recognize and respect the religious beliefs of all Indonesians, irrespective of whether they are Muslims or not.

However, despite the efforts of the progressive activists, they failed to achieve their ultimate goal to reform Muhammadiyah, the main modernist Islamic group in Indonesia. I argue that the negative outcome of reform within the Muhammadiyah occurred due to the following reasons. First, despite their widely recognized theological expertise, Madjid and Ma'arif did not possess the necessary charismatic attributes that would have inspired rank-and-file

Muhammadiyah members to change their theological positions and political preferences. The revivalist theological interpretations within the organization and the dominance of revivalist-oriented leaders in the organization's leadership board serve as counterweight to the voice of progressive reformers within the Muhammadiyah. In addition, the lack of a charismatic moral authority figure who could have overcome revivalist's resistance against the reform proposals, serve as another stumbling block for progressive reformers to successfully implement and institutionalize their reforms within the organization.

There are two potential alternative explanations for the motivation of progressive Islamic reformers within the Muhammadiyah. On the one hand, scholars from the culturalist perspective could argue that reformers were only trying to imitate Western liberal ideas. Along this line of thinking, they would not be truly successful in their reforms as long as they were still embracing Islamic ideas as justifications for their reforms instead of fully embracing secularist ideas. As I have shown in this study, since Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif, the two norm entrepreneurs who introduce progressive theological ideas within the Muhammadiyah, used a synthesis from both classical Islamic principles as well as Western social theory as they promoted their ideas to the prospective supporters, this culturalist explanation, which ignores the possible compatibility between Islamic and Western political thought, could be safely rejected and dismissed.

On the other hand, rational choice scholars argue that the reformers' promotion of these progressive ideas were part of an attempt to seek accommodation with the Suharto regime, in order to gain instrumental and/or

material benefits. For instance, since reform leaders such as Nurcolish Madjid were also members of Suharto-sponsored Islamic association such as ICMI, the theological reforms he had promoted were primarily done to seek political accommodation as well as financial support/patronage from the regime. However, the ideational and normative components of this alliance that were not appropriately accounted by adopting a rationalist theoretical approach. Instead, I argue that in order to fully account the failure of progressive theological reform within the Muhammadiyah, we need to combine both rationalist and constructivist theoretical explanations, which are incorporated in my moral authority leadership theory.

This combination is reflected in the moral authority leadership theory introduced in this study. I argue that progressive reform leaders such as Madjid and Ma'arif are trying to promote a new theological frame for the Muhammadiyah that would have installed modern socio-political ideas such as democracy, religion-state separation, and tolerance toward religious minorities. If adopted, this new frame would have reconstructed the political identity of the organization from a conservative, puritanist Islamic organization to a progressive-oriented one. The primary goal of these leaders was to promote and institutionalize these ideas from within the Muhammadiyah. To pursue this goal, these leaders and their supporters utilized both instrumentalist strategies (e.g., developing alliances with officials from the Suharto regime) as well as normative ones (e.g., using their leadership status to promote the reconstruction of the

Muhammadiyah's theological frames and political identities to reflect their progressive theological orientation).

This normative goal was the primary goal of their efforts to change the theological frame of their organization. The moral authority leadership theory suggests that the failure of these reforms to take hold within the Muhammadiyah was due to the counter-reformation movement within the organization generated by the revivalist-oriented leaders and activists from within the organization. Their opposition was bolstered by the long-standing institutional culture of the organization which stresses a literal interpretation of Islam. This interpretation does not tolerate any other forms of interpretations, customs, and traditions within the organization. Since the number of revivalist activists within the Muhammadiyah were much larger than the pro-reform activists and their leaders managed to organize a stronger counter-reformation campaign with more supporters and resources than the progressive reformers were able to mobilize, they were able to defeat the reform proposals introduced by these progressive activists. Here, the process of mutual constitution predicted by social constructivist theory works to block the reform efforts, since they did not have moral authority status that would have enabled them to overcome the opposition against the reforms (an agency-based variable) and that they were facing a revivalist institutional culture that opposes the reforms they were proposing (a structural-based variable).

In the concluding chapter (chapter 5), I will summarize the findings of my study and assess their theoretical implications for the moral authority leadership

theory I have developed in this study. The broader lessons from the different causal pathways theorized in this study and their applications based on the study of the two Islamic groups that are studied in this study will also be assessed as well. Lastly, the conclusion will assess the main theoretical contributions that could be made based on this research as well as the future research agenda that would further extend the theoretical framework developed in this study in the study of other Islamic social movements elsewhere in the world.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the relationship between moral authority leadership and the theological, institutional, and political changes within Islamic social movements, with an empirical focus on two Islamic movements from Indonesia, the NU and the Muhammadiyah. The study focused on whether Islamic organizations are able to change their theological frames, political identities, and preferences and under which conditions they will be able to do so. I suggest that the role of moral authority leadership in influencing such a change is further intermediated by institutional culture and the organization's relations with the state. The findings of this study are summarized below. I also discuss the main theoretical contributions of this study, highlighting the importance of theological ideas, the role of religious leaders in promoting and institutionalizing these ideas, and how they use their normative instrumental assets to overcome the cultural as well as structural constraints they face while implementing their reforms. Finally, I highlight the potential future research agenda that could further extend the theoretical framework developed in this study and its application to the study of Islamic politics and Islamic social movements.

#### **Review of Empirical Findings**

The research questions that guided this study are: Why do Islamic organizations change their theological frames and political identities from conservative/revivalist Islamic theological interpretations to one that supports the compatibility between Islamic and modern liberal ideas such as democracy,

human rights, and religious tolerance/pluralism? What is the role of religious leadership in bringing about this kind of theological change within these groups? Under what conditions are religious leaders able to successfully change the theological orientations of their religious organization and under what conditions they are less likely to successfully accomplish such a change?

Regarding the first question, the study finds that Islamic groups can and do change their theological and political positions, because both are social constructions that are amenable to change at the hand of human agents. For this to happen requires a leader who is a norm entrepreneur, is able to synthesize existing theological ideas with new ones, is willing promote and institutionalize them within the group. Such leaders promote the new theological ideas because they believe that theological frames and political identities of their respective groups need to be changed in order to meet the changing sociopolitical conditions of their respective societies. This leader manages to build support for the new theological frames s/he proposes from within the group based on the recognition of his/her theological expertise as well as from the charismatic attributes s/he might have held within the group. S/he serves as the agent of change who synthesizes existing ideas from Islamic theological sources and new ones from Western sociopolitical theory as a new theological frame that would “reconstruct” existing theological frames and political identities within his/her group. In this study, new theological frames are promoting the compatibility between Islamic and liberal political ideas/norms such as democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance. A successful theological reform occurs when the leader manages to persuade and

convince the majority of members of his/her organization about the necessity to reconstruct their organization's theological frame and political identity in order to answer the contemporary challenges facing the organization. In the process, the reformers manage to overcome cultural and institutional constraints against their ideas, through the process of mutual constitution, in which both the agent (moral authority leader and his/her supporters) and existing cultural and institutional structures work together to successfully change the theological frames and political identities of their group, creating new sets of identities and political goals/preferences for the group in the process, in this study, for conservative and literalist Islamic group into one that supports and promotes democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance for non-Muslims.

The two Islamic groups studied in this study – the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, have had conservative theological frames in the past – and in the Muhammadiyah's case, is still the case today. Both were facing major crises that preceded the reform ideas articulated by the moral authority leaders from these respective groups. In addition, the two organizations, in varying degrees, were also facing the threats of further repression and marginalization against at the hand of the Indonesian state. Each of the 'norm entrepreneurs' (Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU, and Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif from the Muhammadiyah) and new theological ideas they proposed had emerged during these crises. They argued that their ideas are potential solutions to the crises facing their respective organizations and argued that both the NU and Muhammadiyah must reconstruct their theological frames and political identities



in order to meet major challenges facing the two organizations during the 1980s and 1990s, including from an authoritarian regime which tried to repress any political dissents against it, including from the two Islamic groups, with a growing number of non-Muslim citizens who wishes to participate equally in the country's public sphere. However, they were facing numerous cultural and structural constraints against the reforms, such as the institutional culture of their respective organizations and the potential state repression against the reforms, since they imposed a challenge against the legitimacy of the Suharto regime. To deal with these constraints, they used different sets of assets ranging from their theological expertise, charismatic attributes, and the ability to negotiate alliances and deals with officials from the Suharto regime. In the process, the leaders used both ideational (e.g., persuasive speeches, familial and intellectual genealogies) and instrumental (e.g., building alliances with regime officials and buying off potential opponents) strategies in order to ensure that the new theological frames and identities they have promoted would be successfully implemented within their organizations. The differing assets (e.g., charismatic attributes) that leaders from the two groups have in their efforts to socially reconstruct their organizations and promote their ideas within them, as well as the differing constraints (e.g., institutional culture) from within each respective organizations help to explain the different outcomes of these leaders in their efforts to promote and institutionalize their ideas within their respective groups, successful in one case (the NU) and unsuccessful in the other (the Muhammadiyah).

What exactly is the role of religious leadership in helping to bring about theological change within these groups? The answer to this question is that moral authority leaders played a very important role in promoting reforms within their respective organizations through the ideas they are articulating. The leaders studied in this research all saw the need for their organizations to make fundamental changes in their groups theological frames, political identities, and preferences from conservative Islamic organizations which promoted Islamic forms of governance, reject religion-state separation, and exclusion of non-Muslims in the public life of their societies into more moderate/progressive theological frame that supports democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance for non-Muslims. Accomplishing these required the social reconstruction of pre-existing theological frames and political identities within their group, from one that have conservative theological orientations into one which accepts the compatibility between Islamic and Western political ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religion-state separation. In order to accomplish this social reconstruction, they used their status as norm entrepreneurs and engaged in persuasive campaigns to promote their ideas within their groups. In the process, they received wide recognition as theological experts by other members of groups, by virtue of their extensive training to be an Islamic scholar (ulama) in the case of Wahid or someone with doctoral degree in theology or religious studies in the case of Madjid and Ma'arif. In addition Wahid also has charismatic attributes through his familial genealogy with his grandfather imam

Hasjim Asj'ari, the founding father of the NU. It further enhanced his leadership authority within the NU, making him to become a moral authority leader.

These 'norm entrepreneurs' used their leadership status to persuade other members of their organizations to accept the theological reforms they were advocating. They utilized a wide range of assets and strategies that they have at their disposal to promote reform within their respective groups, using both ideational (e.g., charismatic attributes, persuasive speaking skills) and instrumental (e.g., networking skills, ability to form alliances and compromises, and financial resources/patronage). While their goal to promote their theological ideas was based on their ideational motivation to promote the new theological frame and political identity that they are advocating their own groups, these leaders were also behaving instrumentally. They used strategic calculation to negotiate and develop alliances with the Suharto regime in order to minimize potential state reprisal against their groups. However, the long-term preferences and goals of these leaders remained the institutionalization of their ideas, due to their normative convictions that these ideas would have changed theological frame and political identity of their group so that it supports democracy and democratic political institutions, respect the human rights for all citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs, recognize the principle of religion-state separation, and promotes toleration for non-Muslims and minority Muslim sects.

Under which conditions religious leaders are able to successfully change the theological orientations of their religious organization and under which conditions they are less likely to successfully accomplish such a change? I argue

that the main theoretical proposition (hypothesis #1) of my theory is that the theological and political changes made by religious organizations are determined by the leadership of “moral authority” leaders who use their status as theological experts and utilize charismatic leadership style in order to implement and institutionalize progressive theological ideas within their organizations. Moral authority leaders and their reforms are more likely to be successful in their effort to create theological and political changes within their religious groups if they could meet most, if not all, of the following conditions: 1) the presence of an institutional organizational culture (hypothesis #2) that historically tolerates new religious ideas, customs, and traditions, which helps to justify support toward the reform among sympathetic members and helps to discourage the force of opposition against the reforms, and 2) peaceful relations between the religious group and the state (hypothesis #3) , which helps to protect moral authority leaders and their supporters from any potential reprisal from the state apparatus, allowing these reformers to implement their reforms with fewer chances of facing persecution or reprisal from the state.

This study uses comparative historical analysis to study two Indonesian Islamic social movements with varying theological orientation: the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the modernist/revivalist Muhammadiyah. These movements are chosen based on their long-time activities in the Indonesian public sphere, the large membership-base of these groups, and because the leaders of these groups have advocated the social reconstruction of these groups theological frames and political identities from conservative/ revivalist theological position

(e.g., support for *shari'a*-based Islamic state and rejection of religion-state separation) into what I called progressive Islamic theology - an interpretation of Islam which synthesizes basic Islamic theological and legal foundations specified in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with intellectual ideas derived from Western social theory (e.g., democracy, human rights, and religious liberty/pluralism).

However, the different cultural and institutional constraints faced by these groups and the different sets of assets and strategies that the leaders have used to deal with these constraints results in the creation of two causal pathways: the successful reform pathway (the NU) and the unsuccessful reform pathway (the Muhammadiyah). The theological reforms within the NU was a successful outcome due to the presence of these causal mechanisms: 1) the existence of a moral authority leader within the organization who advocated progressive theological reforms and used his charismatic appeals to win over the support of potential followers (Abdurrahman Wahid), 2) the inclusive institutional culture of NU that tolerates the promotion of new theological ideas by the reformers, and 3) the relatively peaceful relations between the NU and the Indonesian government that contributed to the lack of state reprisal against reform supporters, thereby enable them to spread their reforms while encountering little state reprisal against them. These mechanisms form the successful reform pathway, in which moral authority leadership works together with a tolerant institutional organization culture and a peaceful/cooperative state-religious to produce the successful institutionalization of progressive theological reform.

From the 1950s until the early 1980s, the NU was widely known as a conservative Islamic organization that had promoted the eventual enactment of shari'a law as the constitutional foundation of the Indonesian state and also rejected the separation between religion and the state separation enshrined in Indonesia's secular nationalist ideology Pancasila. This conservatism shined from the NU's theological frame during the period, which followed the Qur'an, the Hadith and classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as interpreted by the ulama whom have led the organization from the time it was founded in 1926. However, as the organization faced increasing pressures from the Suharto regime, there was a growing demand from a younger generation of NU activist for the organization to change its theological frames, in order to meet the challenges from the regime and to present the NU as a more democratic Islamic organization in tune with the changing sociopolitical conditions in Indonesia during this period. To meet the demands of these activists, a visionary NU ulama named Abdurrahman Wahid decided to run for the position of NU chairman in 1984 and was elected, thanks to the support of the young reformers. From the time Wahid assumed his NU chairmanship in 1984 until he stepped down in 1999, he reconstructed the conservative theological frame of the organization with his innovative ideas which combined classical Islamic jurisprudence and Western political thought on democracy, human rights, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance.

During his 15-year tenure as NU chairman, Wahid successfully transformed the theological frame and political identity of the NU from a conservative traditionalist-oriented Islamic organization into one that today

embraces progressive Islamic principles conducive toward liberal political ideas. He also changed the organization's political preference from one that during the late 1970s advocated the establishment of an Islamic state based on the *shari'a* law and rejected the state ideology Pancasila as a purely secular ideology into one that today affirms the Indonesian state does not to be legally based on the *shari'a* principles and accepts Pancasila as the legitimate foundation of the Indonesian state and. Lastly, NU also endorses the principles of religious liberty, tolerance, and pluralism, arguing that they all the hallmark of the religious diversity of Indonesian citizens that should be respected by all Indonesians.

Wahid was able to implement and institutionalize these theological reforms due to his ideational and instrumental assets. He won the recognition of his followers as both a leading expert in classical Islamic jurisprudence and a charismatic leader by virtue of his perceived extraordinary powers as a living saint (*wali*) for the NU community and his family genealogy as the grandson of the organization's founding father. Wahid propagated his theological ideas through his frequent public sermons, op-ed articles in newspapers and other popular media, and his frequent visits to meet with other NU ulama and rank-and-file members throughout Indonesia. Due to his moral authority status, he was able to bring together the normally self-autonomous, highly decentralized NU ulama and activists to support the theological reforms he advocated. They were willing to follow his reforms because of his moral authority status within the organization. It was these supporters who managed to implement and institutionalize these reformers from within the NU and managed to maintain it

consistently after it has been institutionalized. Through his actions as a norm entrepreneur and a moral authority leader, assisted by his supporters, Wahid was able to brought liberal ideas such as democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance into NU's theological frames and political discourse and instituted them successfully from within the organization.

In addition to Wahid's moral authority leadership, theological reform within the NU was also assisted through the institutional culture of the organization that has historically tolerated and incorporated mystical Islamic (Sufi) rituals as well non-Islamic rituals originated from Hinduism, Buddhism, and animistic local religious traditions. The NU's history of blending Islamic theology and rituals with these non-Islamic rituals made it easier for Wahid and his supporters to advocate their theological ideas within the NU, since they could pointed out to this history of incorporating non-Islamic rituals as rationale for the organization to incorporate Western political ideas that were introduced in their theological reforms. Lastly, the temporary alliance between the NU and the Suharto regime during the late 1980s helped to assure that the reformers did not face any significant reprisal from the Suharto regime. It also enabled Wahid to weaken the opposition against his reforms within the NU by granting reform opponents access to state patronage, thereby ensuring that they toned down their opposition against the reforms. Thus, while Wahid's reforms were inspired by ideational preferences and he deployed ideational strategies and discourses in his reforms, the instrumental alliance between Wahid and Suharto was also beneficial in helping him to implement and institutionalize the reforms. Together, these



mechanisms worked together to ensure the institutionalization of progressive theological reforms within the NU by Wahid and his supporters, This could be seen from the organization's consistent endorsement of democracy and other liberal principles such as tolerance toward non-Muslim religions from the time of Wahid's chairmanship in the 1980s and 1990s to this day.

The case of the Muhammadiyah is the negative case examined in this study. Unlike the NU, the reform efforts within the Muhammadiyah were not successful in changing the theological and political direction of the movement and turned the organization into a progressive Islamic organization. Instead, the organization's theological orientation remains puritanist/revivalist. The negative outcome of reform within the Muhammadiyah occurs due to the following causal mechanisms: 1) The lack of a charismatic leadership - despite their status as a widely respected Islamic scholar, neither Nurcolish Madjid nor Syafii Ma'arif possessed any charismatic attributes or genealogical links with influential NU ulama, 2) the institutional culture of Muhammadiyah is dominated by revivalist/fundamentalist activists who reject alternative interpretations of Islam that they think are inconsistent with the Qur'an and the Hadith, which impedes the spread of liberal reforms within the organization, and 3) this takes place despite the relatively peaceful relationship between Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian state during the time the reforms were first propagated by Nurcolish Madjid in the 1980s and 1990s. These mechanisms constitute the unsuccessful reform pathway, in which theological reform is unlikely to be successful due to the intolerant institutional culture of the religious organization, which enabled reform opponents

to develop a strong unsuccessful reform movement against the reformers, they would be able to block the reforms proposed by the reformers and successfully prevent the reforms from being institutionalized within the organization, despite the presence of moral authority leadership within the group and peaceful relations between the state and the religious group

Norm entrepreneurs within the Muhammadiyah, namely Nurcolish Madjid and Syafii Ma'arif, decided to pursue a different set of theological frames from the puritanist/revivalist theological premises that has long been articulated by their predecessors within the Muhammadiyah. They believed that the organization's theological frame must take into account the contemporary sociopolitical conditions of the Indonesian state in its theological teachings, which called for a more democratic political system in response to Suharto's authoritarian rule as well as paying attention to the increasing religious diversity of the Indonesian society. To address these concerns, they argued that the Muhammadiyah should abandon their ideas for an Islamic state in favor of a democratic state which recognizes a distinction between state and religious realms. In addition, the Muhammadiyah should respect and tolerate the religious beliefs of all Indonesians, including non-Muslims.

Unfortunately, the reform efforts within the Muhammadiyah were not successful due to the following factors. First, the reformers were hampered by their lack of moral authority status. While Madjid and Ma'arif received wide recognition as leading Islamic theological experts, based on their doctoral degrees in Islamic Studies from the University of Chicago, neither one of them have

charismatic attributes and authority like their counterpart Abdurrahman Wahid from the NU. As a result, they failed to promote their reform message beyond the relatively small amount of supporters who support these reforms in the first place. In addition, they made few efforts to broaden the appeal of their reform to the grassroots level Muhammadiyah members. In contrast, under the leadership of Din Syamsuddin, reform opponents had an easier time mobilizing against the reforms. They were also aided by Syamsuddin's popular speaking style that enabled him to articulate his counter-reformation discourses easily to grassroots Muhammadiyah members. Because the reformers were having problems attracting support from rank-and-file members of the organization due to their lack of moral authority status, while the revivalist have an easier time to do so, the latter was able to consolidate their opposition against the progressives among regional Muhammadiyah activists and able to put down the reform efforts of the progressive activists.

In addition, the institutional culture of the Muhammadiyah is more receptive toward revivalist Islamic theology and the practice of purifying syncretic/non-canonical rituals and traditions. As a result, any deviations from what the revivalists saw as fundamental Islamic teachings, such as the integration of Islamic and Western sociopolitical ideas, are open to criticisms and counter-attacks by the revivalist faction within the Muhammadiyah. The revivalist faction has dominated the Muhammadiyah leadership since at least the 1930s, controlling the leadership board both at national and the regional levels. Their dominance of the Muhammadiyah's leadership board has made it difficult for alternative

theologies to successfully emerge within the organization, even when the organization is led by a reform-minded chairman like Syafii Ma'arif. Since revivalist theological frame dominates the theological outlook of many Muhammadiyah's leaders and activists, they have significant resources to counter the efforts of progressive reformers to implement their reforms from within the organization. In the end, they were able to isolate and marginalize the reformers by expelling and excluding progressive activists from the organization's leadership positions after Syafii Ma'arif had stepped down from his chairmanship position in 2005.

These findings are consistent with the theoretical assumptions of moral authority leadership theory, which is based primarily on social constructivist theory, and is also influenced by Weberian charismatic leadership theory and the rational choice theory, which includes ideas into the formation of instrumental and material interests of religiously inspired actors. This theory provides a better explanation to the theological reforms within Islamic groups like the NU and Muhammadiyah compared to political culture/modernization theory. Culturalist/modernization theory is not able to predict these theological and political changes, because culturalists tend to assume that all Islamic social movements have a fixed theological grounding in revivalist Islamic fundamentalist theology, therefore they all would advocate for the imposition of shari'a law and for a state based on Islamic principles, regardless of time, space, and sociopolitical contexts. This belief separate these culturalists from the more nuanced interpretation of cultural and religious changes offered by cultural

anthropologists as well as social constructivists, which believed that culture and ideas are socially constructed and are subjected to continuous reinvention, reinterpretation, and negotiation at the hand of political actors.

As a theory primarily inspired by social constructivist theory, the moral authority leadership theory I introduced here is also an effort to incorporate a more nuanced explanation of ideational and theological changes and how the process of social construction of new ideas change political groups into the analysis of Islamic social movements. Unlike this theoretical approach, culturalists would not be able to explain why the Nahdlatul Ulama, which until the late 1970s had a platform that called for the establishment of a shari'a-based Islamic state in Indonesia, decided to reject this platform and replaced it with one that supports the legitimacy of the secular nationalist Indonesian state from the mid-1980s onwards, under the leadership of the charismatic Abdurrahman Wahid.

While recent rational choice scholarship has incorporated ideational preferences such as theological ideas in their scholarship on religion and politics, other rational choice scholars tend to underestimate or downplay the role of ideational preferences and goals of religious groups in favor of instrumental preferences that privileged interests or material benefits. First generation rational choice scholars tend to dismiss ideational preferences as *ex post facto* explanation made to justify the instrumental preferences of political and religious actors. However, the next generation of rational choice scholars is incorporating both instrumental and ideational preferences in their theoretical explanations. They also detailed the possible constraints facing religious group in their efforts to

implement their goals and preferences, such as historical legacy, institutional structure, and leadership behavior. These works tend to produce more sophisticated and highly contextualized explanation of religious groups' political preferences and strategic calculations and also explain why they differ when they are facing different historical, cultural, and institutional constraints.

Rational choice theory can clearly explain the instrumental rationale taken by religious actors, such their strategic alliances with friendly state actors/politicians in order to win alliances or concessions that had allowed them to spread their reforms without facing state repression or the use of financial resources/patronage to buy support from members of their organization whom might have opposed their reforms otherwise (e.g., as seen through the state patronage given by Wahid to the NU ulama. However, without paying more attention to ideational preferences, rational choice theory by itself might have problems to fully explain the actions of the religious leaders and their supporters, who often rely on ideational discourses and theological frames. These cannot be fully explained if one relies primarily or solely on instrumental explanations alone. For instance, it might have problems explaining the persistence of moral authority leaders and their supporters in advocating their reforms in spite of the stiff opposition and reprisal against them from their opponents without any immediate payoffs or benefits for them in the short or intermediate run. It might also have problems explaining the ability of moral authority leaders to attract the support and the loyalty of a large number of followers – many of them are following their advices, commands and directives solely by believing in the

charismatic attributes (extraordinary powers and abilities, family or intellectual genealogies) that these leaders claim to have. Thus, I argue that the ideational preferences of moral authority leaders and their supporters, and their strong commitment to promote their reforms should be incorporated into the study of religion and politics. Scholars need to fully take into account the ideational as well as instrumental preferences when studying the political actions of religious groups. This approach is illustrated by the eclectic theoretical approaches I develop in this study the moral authority leadership theory, which combines social constructivist, rational choice, and Weberian charismatic leadership theories), rather than relying solely on a single theoretical paradigm.

In sum, the analysis of two Islamic groups in this study provides support for the moral authority leadership theory I had outlined in this study. The presence of moral authority leaders with charismatic attributes, along with the tolerant institutional culture of the organization, and the peaceful relations between religious groups and the state achieved through strategic alliances between the two entities serve as positive conduits for the success of progressive reformers to change the prevailing theology of their respective religious organizations as well as the political orientation of these organizations. In addition to the leadership of moral authority leaders within these two groups, an institutional culture that tolerates new theological ideas allows reformers more space to promote the reforms and convince other members of the organization to join them. It also encourages more senior ulama to publicly support the reform causes as well, as they fear less reprisal from reform opponents. Lastly, peaceful state-religion

relations help the reformers to promote their cause because it creates less intervention from the state that might have thwarted the reform efforts before they have a chance to grow within the organization. These help to explain the success of the reform process within the two organizations. On the other hand, the lack of moral authority leadership, and an exclusivist, intolerant institutional culture, dominated by unsuccessful reform opponents who opposed the theological reform of the reformers within the Muhammadiyah explain the failure of reform supporters to successfully institutionalize their ideas within their organization.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

I identify five theoretical contributions of the moral authority leadership introduced and empirically tested in this study. First, the theory I develop in this study shows that theological frame is not fixed social construct that could not be amended, reformed, or reinterpreted. Instead, it is subjected to constant effort of reconstruction and reframing that occurred through a process of mutual constitution between agency (religious/moral authority leaders) and structure (institutional culture and the relations between the religious group and the state). Through this process, the theological frames, political identities, and preferences of religious group can be changed to adapt to new sociopolitical realities. A religious group that was guided by a conservative and non-democratic theological frame can adopt a new theological and political identity as promoters of progressive values such as democracy, religion-state separation, and tolerance toward religious minorities.



Second, this theory contributes to our understanding of the role of changing theological ideas and religious leaders who promote the reconstruction of these ideas through their actions as norm entrepreneurs and moral authority leaders. It shows how religious leaders could reconstruct the theological frame and political identity of their groups, from a theological frame which is more conservative and rejects the compatibility between Islam, modernity, and democracy, into one which accepts the compatibility between Islamic ideas and modern political values, such as democracy, religion-state separation, and religious tolerance. It explains how the leaders combined ideational goals, persuasion, coercion, and instrumental strategies/material incentives to gain supporters from within their religious organizations and allies from the outside of the organization (especially from the state) in their efforts to implement and institutionalize their ideas within their respective groups. Lastly, the diverging causal pathways illustrated in this study show that successful theological reforms usually takes place due to the presence of charismatic moral authority leadership, supported by inclusive institutional culture which historically tolerates non-Islamic theologies and rituals, and peaceful relations between religious group and state actors in which the two could strike temporary alliances that enabled to reduce the level of state intervention against the religious group and minimize reprisals against proponents of theological reforms. However, reform is less likely to be successful if it lacks the moral authority leaders lack charismatic attributes that enable them to win over more supporters from within their organizations, are facing an institutional culture that does not tolerate new and unorthodox

theological ideas, or is having conflictual relations with the state apparatus that seeks to repress the religious group and reform supporters because they were perceived as threats to the survival against the state.

Third, by using the insights from social constructivist theory, the theory takes a closer look at the origins of new theological ideas at the hand of religious leader who serves as the norm entrepreneurs for these ideas and how these ideas reframe and reconstruct Islamic groups' political identities preferences as well as the role of religious leader in promoting the institutionalization of these ideas within their respective groups. Reformers within Islamic groups with a history of tolerating new theological ideas and have peaceful and co-operative relations with the state are more likely to be successful in institutionalizing the reforms that they are advocating. Once the reforms have been fully institutionalized, these groups are more likely to adapt democratic political strategies, acknowledge separation between religion and the state, and respect the rights of religious and sectarian minorities than groups which historically has strong revivalist theological orientation. Knowing the difference between groups that are theologically progressive versus those that are theologically more fundamentalist/revivalist in orientation could help scholars and policymakers to determine which Islamic groups are more likely to embrace genuine democracy and human rights versus those that are genuinely hostile toward these ideas or are adapting them only for strategic and opportunistic purposes.

Fourth, this study makes a new contribution to the literature on Islamic politics and social movements by outlining the process in which Islamic

movements can embrace democratic norms and institutions, religion-state separation, and tolerance for non-Muslim minorities. It details the possible pathways in which these ideas can be institutionalized within these groups, and how reform leaders and activists within these groups could promote this change and implement them within their respective organizations. Lastly, the study contributes to the literature on political leadership, by outlining how the leadership exercised by religious leaders and the variety of ideational and instrumental preferences that they have could influence theological and political changes within their own organizations.

### **Future Research**

There are at least two potential future research projects that could extend the theoretical framework I have developed in this study. First, the theoretical framework used in this study can be used to study other Islamic movements in other Southeast Asian countries. Besides Indonesia, two other Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia and Brunei are Muslim majority countries. There is also a sizable Muslim minority population in other Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, southern part of Thailand, and southern part of the Philippines. In all of these countries and sub-regions, Islamic groups are facing internal debates on whether or not Islamic theological ideas is compatible with modern political ideas such as democracy, religion-state separation, and religious toleration/pluralism. Many of Islamic groups are facing challenges from both authoritarian rule (Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore) or are facing hostile state apparatus which often represses Islamic political movements because of their tendencies to promote

secession from these states (Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines). By extending my theoretical framework to study the Islamic groups in these countries, we can gain new insights on whether Islamic groups in these countries have the potential to change their theological frames and adopt more progressive theological reforms, thereby moderating their political orientations.

Second, we can extend the theory to study the activities and actions of the NU and the Muhammadiyah specifically on the issue of religious tolerance and violence against religious minorities in contemporary period, instead of during the period in which the events studied in this study largely taken place (the 1980s and 1990s). Religious tolerance towards non-Muslims and Muslim minority sects has become an important political issue in both Indonesia within the last few years. Attacks against religious minorities, both violent and non-violent ones have become more frequent. While the bulk of the attacks were conducted by small revivalist-oriented sects that were unconnected in any way with the Islamic groups studied in this study, there has been little research done on whether the groups studied here think about recent inter-religious violence in Indonesia. It is unclear whether they are actively condemning these acts of violence, condoning them, or takes a more ambiguous position. Extending this research to study how the NU and the Muhammadiyah deal with the rising incidents of religious conflict and violence in Indonesia would give scholars an additional insight on whether the progressive theological ideas promoted within these two organizations are having any impacts on how these groups deal with the problems of rising inter-religious conflicts and violence in Indonesia.

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