



## President Yudhoyono's Response to Violence against Ahmadiyah and Shia: Interplay between Agency and Structure

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### Abstract

The era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono saw rising intolerance and even violence against minority congregations, Ahmadiyah and Shia; in the forms of attacks to places of worships; attacks to houses belonging to minorities, forced eviction targeting minorities and banning against religious activities. This article looks at what factors that contributed to President Yudhoyono's response to the rising violence against the minority congregations during his two terms at the office (between 2004 and 2014). Scholars criticized the president for his seemingly in action in addressing the violence. Some scholars argued it was the agency of President Yudhoyono that contributed to his indifference toward the violence. Other scholars pointed out at more structural factors that they argued to have caused President Yudhoyono for being indecisive, ignorant or slow in making actions toward the rising intolerance, such as his childhood experience and family background and the revival of corporatist metaphor in the post-New Order era that impeded the president for making bold measures to fight for the minority rights. Through the case study of President Yudhoyono's response to the violence, the article aims to contribute to Indonesian perspective on the classic debate about whether structure shapes the agency, or agency shapes the structure. In light of the arguments that the scholars proposed in the preceding paragraph, I would argue that we need to think of beyond binary opposition between agency and structure. Scholars, especially the essentialists, had the habit to determinatively point out at either agents or structures, which were held responsible for the occurrence of events, but, omitting either factor would ignore some aspects that had the potentials to enrich our understandings about what motivates the agents in making social actions.

**Keywords:** Violence, Ahmadiyah, Shia, Minority Rights.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono won direct presidential elections two times (2004 and 2009) with strong mandates, and hence, public were confident that he would be able to live up to people's expectations, including in the area of promoting minority rights. But, his era saw rising intolerance and even violence against minority congregations, Ahmadiyah and Shia; in the forms of attacks to places of worships; attacks to houses belonging to minorities, forced eviction targeting minorities and banning against religious activities. Human right group, Setara Institute, reported 135 cases of intolerance and violence against the minorities in 2007, 265 in 2008, 200 in 2009, 216 in 2010 and 244 in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Other group, Wahid Institute, reported that 234 cases of human right violations occurred in 2008, down to 35 in 2009, but steadily rose to 64 in 2010 and 93 cases in 2011.<sup>3</sup>

This article looks at what factors that contributed to President Yudhoyono's response to the rising violence against the minority congregations during his two terms at the office. The president's practices deserve to be given special space, given that the governance affairs related to the incidents of religious violence - namely religious, domestic security and judiciary - were still in the hands of the central government, in which the president topped its structure.<sup>4</sup> The Indonesian president had the vast power to mobilize bureaucracy and security resources to prevent or to curb incidents of religious violence.<sup>5</sup> President's policies bore repercussions down to the village level. When President Yudhoyono was considered to have failed to address the rising violence against Ahmadiyah and Shia congregation, scholars began to question his seemingly inaction in response to the violence.

Then, what propelled President Yudhoyono to act or to be in action in cases related to the incidents of religious violence? Some scholars argued it was the agency of President Yudhoyono that contributed to the violence. Robin Bush, for example, suggested that the president was complicit in the violence, because he "was not an innocent bystander to the deterioration of minority rights and religious pluralism during his presidency, but made conscious choices that contributed to it" (Bush, 2015, p. 241). Other scholars pointed out at more structural factors that they argued to have caused President Yudhoyono for being indecisive, ignorant or slow in making actions toward the rising intolerance. Such these factors were, among others, his childhood experience and family background (Fealy,

2015, pp. 50-51; Takwin&Karim, 2004, p. 241), and the revival of corporatist metaphor<sup>6</sup> in the post-New Order era that impeded the president for making bold measures to fight for the minority rights (McCoy, 2013, p. 297).

Through the case study of President Yudhoyono's response to the violence, the article aims to contribute to Indonesian perspective on the classic debate about whether structure shapes the agency, or agency shapes the structure. In light of the arguments that the scholars proposed in the preceding paragraph, I would argue that we need to think of beyond binary opposition between agency and structure. Scholars, especially the essentialists, had the habit to determinatively point out at either agents or structures, which were held responsible for the occurrence of events (Fuchs, 2001, p. 24), but, omitting either factor would ignore some aspects that had the potentials to enrich our understandings about what motivates the agents in making social actions. To support the argument, the article is arranged in the following structure: **the first section** is to discuss key arguments behind the debate between the proponents of structuralism and rational actor theory, which give framework to my analysis on the president's response to violence against the minority congregations. **The second section** is to explain Yudhoyono's education and family background, which would be useful to assist us in making sense about Yudhoyono's dispositions when he was in office. It will be followed with **the third section** that discussed the patterns of Yudhoyono's response to violence against Ahmadiyah and Shia congregations. **The fourth section** will discuss on the limits of structural and rational actor theory to explain the agency of President Yudhoyono in response to the violence against the minority congregations. The section is to discuss on the interplay between agency and structure, which reconcile the opposing arguments between the structural and rational actor theory. The fifth section is to discuss the study cases of President Yudhoyono responding to violence against Ahmadiyya and Shia. The section will show that the interplay approach is more sensible to explain the president's disposition in responding to the violence. **The sixth section** is the conclusion.

### **The agency versus the structure**

I will begin the article with explaining the debate between the proponents of structural and rational actor theory. In regard to the practice of human being in social system, structuralist scholars believed that human being performed social functions based on habit. Claude Levi-Strauss, among others, argued human beings were duped by social structures, and hence, "the extraordinary resistance offered to even minimal departures

from custom is due more to inertia than to any conscious desire to maintain usages which have a clear function” (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 19). Social structures were considered as constraint; which impeded human beings from making social actions against the structure. Given the sturdy shape of the structure, small changes might occur, but the big ones, such as revolution that changed radically the structure were hard to occur. The structure hindered such revolution to happen. Numerous other scholars showed the structure influenced the agents in performing social actions, such as Max Weber, who showed that how Protestant ethics shaped and gave spiritual force for Protestants in the Germany to accumulate capital (Weber, 2001).

This frame of thinking, which considered human beings as merely automatons to perform their functions in society, ignored human being’s capacity to think and to act in rational manner. In contrast to Max Weber’s argument, Peter M. Blau argued that the agency shaped the structure, albeit indirectly. It was individual economic behaviour that shaped the capitalist structure in the society, through the unintended consequence of their rational behaviour (Blau, 1997, p. 21). In other subject, for example, the social religious subject, we might think about the capacity of the individual to change the deep seated social and culture structure. For example, the influence of the Prophets that shaped the life of subsequent generations provided testaments about how an actor had considerable power that materialized profound change in the society’s social systems. Through their charisma and their claims to be the representative of the Divine Force, the Prophets did not only help change the social system where they lived, but through their disciples, their teachings or their models of behaviour; they radically changed the structures of society elsewhere around the world from one to subsequent generations. Although, in most cases, the structure influenced and shaped the attitude and even the rational thinking of the agents and his or her power to transform the society; but, the evidence that I just presented about the Prophets showed that the individual had the capacity to transform or even to change radically the existing social structure and turned it to new ones.

Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu supported the notion about relatively stable structure, but the two scholars opposed the deterministic fashion of the structuralist. Instead of arguing that the structure shaped or transformed agency and vice versa, Giddens argued that they mutually reinforced each other. According to Giddens, the structures constituted social actions; however, the social actions produced by the agents then reinforced the structure. People produced social actions following the laws;

but when people did the social actions obeying the laws, they reproduced the laws and strengthened the laws' existence. In contrast to structuralist argument that the structure was constraining factor to produce change in the structure, Giddens argued that the structure was not merely constraining, but it was also becoming enabling factors (Giddens, 1984, p. 162). Social context needed to be taken into account to determine whether the social structure was constraining or enabling. For example, labour contract, as rule-resource set, shaped the way workers work and usually favoured the employers. However, on the other hand, the labours had the capacity to change the contract to serve their interests. Labours were dependent to the employers' resource, and the labour relations produced mutual economic benefit between worker and his or her employer (Giddens, 1984, p. 177).

Giddens' account is compatible to Bourdieu. Both aimed to reconcile prolonged debate about agency versus structure, however, in comparison to Giddens' version about the role of agents, Bourdieu's thought implied less conscious agents. The agent's past experiences - especially through education or social exposure and immersion in certain class, gender or race - structured his or her mental structure (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 53-54). This mental structure drove the agent's inclination to act; although in some cases, the agents were conscious enough to resist the mental structure and hence, he or she was able to act against the routines. Bourdieu's argument was in response to the structuralist's deterministic tendency that emphasized that the structures influenced the agent; and the unconscious agent did what the structures dictated. According to Bourdieu, agents had subjective dispositions to balance the demands of the structure (Chaffe & Lemert, 2009, p. 136), and the continuous process of adjustment between the agents and the structure resulted to the production and the reproduction of relatively stable structure.

The frameworks that Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens proposed were to reconcile subjective and structuralist views about what motivated the actions of human beings. The frameworks were useful to assist researchers or social observers to avoid being followers of the deterministic nature of the structuralist, which could let them for being one-sided in their quest of explaining the causes that motivated human beings to act. The middle-way that Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens proposed helped produce more holistic and balanced research frameworks. This is useful because social phenomenon occurred due to the contributions of variety of factors. However, on the other hand, the frameworks were too accommodative to the variety of factors that prompted

the agents to act in certain circumstances. It resulted to their failure to produce bold explanations about social phenomena that the researchers were investigating. The frameworks that they discussed were the open ones, in a sense that the answers to social phenomena were not definite, but infinite; which depended on temporality and geography; and hence, they would lose the power of generalization that became the hallmark of the structuralist. Despite the shortcoming, Giddens and Bourdieu accounts remained useful to serve as framework for me to explain what prompted Yudhoyono to act in cases related to the incidents of religious violence. This article does not intend to seek for the most prominent cause, but aims to show the limitations of the deterministic mode of the structural frame of thinking. To understand the president's practice, we need to seek for more holistic picture, so that we could explain better and capture more nuances in the president's practice in preventing and handling incidents of religious violence during the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

#### **Yudhoyono's education and family background – secular and moderate**

One of ways to understand about Yudhoyono's dispositions – especially related to his responses to the incidents of religious violence in the duration of his presidency – can be gauged through his family background and education. The way his parents raised him in the family, and the influence of education and professional occupations that he pursued, shaped his responses to the violence against Ahmadiyya and Shia congregations. Greg Fealy (2015, pp. 50-51) argues Yudhoyono was raised in un-happy family, which created the sense of insecurity in the later period of Yudhoyono's life. The sense of insecurity contributed to Yudhoyono for being indecisive person, which was reflected in Yudhoyono's response to the violence. Psychologists Bagus Takwin and Ninik L. Karim (2004, p. 241) argues that Yudhoyono, being the only child in the family, was in constant need of attention. A person of this type tended to avoid conflicts and to perform actions popular to people, so that he remained to be loved (Takwin & Karim, 2004, p. 241). The following paragraphs will show that those arguments have some merits.

Yudhoyono was born in poor regency of Pacitan, situated in East Java province. He was the only son of Soekotjo, a low rank military officer and Siti Habibah, a house wife. As a child, Yudhoyono endured un-happy family life. His father and his mother divorced when he was studying at junior high school (at the age of 15 or 16). The divorce left great mental scar to Yudhoyono, and he vowed that he would work hard to be someone to change his unfortunate life (Fealy, 2015, p. 39; Hisyam, 2005, pp. 56-57).

Besides being driven to attain success, Yudhoyono was known to love being in the spotlight. When he was student, he formed a music group (*Gaya Taruna*), in which he was becoming bassist. He also wrote poems; the practice that he continued doing in his professional and political career. Given that people's attention was important for Yudhoyono, he tried to be seen perfect and loved to gain sympathy and support from people. Journalist WisnuNugroho, who served as the State Palace correspondent for influential *Kompasdaily* when Yudhoyono was in reign, recalled that wanting to be seen perfect was one of Yudhoyono's distinct traits. As a result, Yudhoyono was also careful and always had second thoughts before making decisions. The combination of these traits often led him to be portrayed as "indecisive and sluggish in making actions or decisions" (Nugroho, 2004, p. 232).

Related to religious outlook, Yudhoyono had mixed upbringing, although secular outlook was apparently more dominant. His mother was religious. She taught Yudhoyono "to pay more attention to the faith and the devotion to the God" (Hisyam, 2004, p. 39). In contrast to his mother, his father had secular orientation, although he graduated from Gontor Islamic boarding school in East Java province. While his mother taught him about the religion (Islam), his father taught Yudhoyono about the secular discipline and good work ethics (Hisyam, 2004, p. 39).

His parents' different religious orientation was also easily known through their different choice of education for their children. His mother wanted Yudhoyono to be sent to Tremas Islamic boarding school in the village to pursue Islam education, but the father insisted that he was sent to secular, public school. At the end, his father won the arguments, and Yudhoyono was sent to secular schooling. The domination of secular environment continued after he graduated from the senior high school. His life after high school education indicated that he was heavily exposed to secular environment. He entered the technical and teacher institute, before he ended up being cadet in the military academy. He had courtship with the daughter of prominent military man, who was coming from secular background, and finally married her. His professional life at the Indonesian military strengthened his secular outlook, given that the institution imposed secular and centrist ideological outlook to their members. The institution often claimed that it strove to be glue that holds the heterogeneous country together.

Yudhoyono moderation in politics was result from personal trait. In regard to personal trait, Yudhoyono did not like confrontation. The moderation was reflected in politics when he got older. During his days at

the military, Yudhoyono remained in the neutral faction of the Indonesian military during the New Order era, dominated by Green and Red-White factions, inspired and influenced respectively by PrabowoSubianto and Benny Moerdani. He was unlike Benny Moerdani, the traditional Indonesian soldier, or PrabowoSubianto, who was easily kow-towing with the conservative Muslims. He kept distance from the politics and believed on the merit of democracy; and professional soldiership.<sup>7</sup>

Yudhoyono's involvement in the politics began after he prepared for his presidential bid in the run up to the 2004 election. Given that he was lacking in Islam credential, he started to play Islam card to win the presidency. He was trying to be acceptable among Muslims. For example, given the popularity of *dzikirakbar* (collective remembrance of God) in Indonesia in early 2000, Yudhoyono established his own *dzikir* council, called MajelisDzikirYudhoyonoNurussalam (Light of Peace Yudhoyono'sDzikir Council).<sup>8</sup> The *dzikir* council initially held regular function in Yudhoyono private residence in Cikeas, Bogor regency every Thursday night. But, as the 2004 election was approaching, the functions were expanded to other cities, including the Yudhoyono's hometown of Pacitan regency, East Java (Hasan, 2013, p. 119). The function (*dzikirakbar*) was strategic effort to galvanize support for Yudhoyono as it was usually attended by hundreds or even thousands of people. At least, the *dzikirakbar* could be used to polish Yudhoyono Islam credential, which could make Muslim voters feel comfortable towards Yudhoyono. The *dzikir* was also campaign instrument for Yudhoyono, in which during the *dzikir* functions, the preachers often inserted prayers and subtle calls for people to vote for Yudhoyono in the 2004 presidential election.

After he assumed presidency, he continued to play the Islamic card to maintain support among Muslims to stay in power and to seek for re-election. At times, he was even doing politics adventure, by courting prominent Muslim group (the Indonesian Council of Ulema or MUI), which was becoming more conservative in the post-New Order era.<sup>9</sup> However, his outlook remained moderate, inclusive and plural; for example, he regularly attended religious functions of other religions; despite criticism from some conservative Muslims. Adherents of Christianity and Hinduism and non-Javanese were given key positions at the Democratic Party. Yudhoyono attempted to appear inclusive, by attracting all politics spectrums. Yudhoyono used religious nationalism as his party platform, which established his moderation credential and his tendency for more balanced, inclusive and un-confrontational outlook. The platform was the manifestation of Yudhoyono's wishes for the Democratic Party to have



“convenient ideological platform” (Artha, 2009, p. 83). The ideology was middle way response to the nationalist party line perpetuated by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), in which the critics often considered it too secular and undervalue the role of religion. On the other hand, the religious nationalism was to respond to parties that promote religious conservatism such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the United Development Party (PPP). The ideology was pursued to cement “party’s carefully balanced position on the political role of Islam” (Mietzner, 2013, p. 174). The centrist platform was also meant to be inclusive tool for the Democratic Party to garner more support from all walks of life of the Indonesians. Yudhoyono long wished for the end of segregating Indonesians into secular-nationalist and religious camps. The Democratic Party’s religious nationalism platform envisaged that it would end such segregation and accommodate all Indonesians from the opposing politics outlooks (secular-nationalist and religious camps) (Artha, 2009, p. 83).

Yudhoyono upbringing, formal education and military career shaped Yudhoyono’s politics dispositions when he was president. He claimed that there was no single ideology that shaped his politics beliefs, saying that various factors influenced his political outlooks. Yudhoyono mentioned Islam being the first factor that influenced his politics outlooks, but he also did not hesitate to acknowledge that Western democracy took important part in guiding his politics. Yudhoyono wrote: “my faith was shaped and influenced by variety of things: Islam, Javanese and Eastern cultures, local wisdoms, common-sense, the can-do spirit, soldiership value and orientation, democracy and universal values, practical and theoretical order of politics, law and order, and may more” (Yudhoyono, 2014, p. 674). The multiple social, religious and political outlooks that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono followed suggested that he was trying to be inclusive; but it was also signal that he had no firm ideologies. His statement showed his centrist and un-confrontational character, which was reflected in his practice as the President.

I have discussed about Yudhoyono’s family and education background that may affect his dispositions in affairs related to minority rights and the incidents of religious violence. But, what prompted President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to resort to certain practices? Was his action shaping the structure or being shaped by the structure? I will address the questions in the following section.

### **Past experiences, ideological factors versus rational actor**

In earlier sections, I elaborated about the vast power of the Indonesian president, and then followed with President

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's dispositions, influenced by his past experiences. These two sections were correlated. Given the vast presidential power and the people's strong mandate, public expected that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono would be firm and resolute in supporting the minority rights by combating the growing acts of intolerance during his two terms of presidency. When the incidents of religious violence were on the rise in the duration of his reign, the critics pointed out at his failure to mobilize the bureaucracy and security resources (Bush, 2015, p. 248).

Some scholars argued that Yudhoyono's indecisive traits were behind his slow and weak response to the rising intolerance, which led to the incidents of religious violence. The scholars explained that the traits were coming from structural factors. Through psycho analysis method, Greg Fealy argues Yudhoyono's actions were based on childhood background (Fealy, 2015, p. 50-51). His analysis centres on argument that Yudhoyono was raised in un-happy family, and it created the sense of insecurity throughout the life of Yudhoyono. The sense of insecurity contributed to Yudhoyono for being indecisive person. Other scholars also produced analysis about Yudhoyono actions through psychologist perspectives, which provided further justification that this kind of method was useful to explain Yudhoyono's dispositions when he was in office. In their analysis, Bagus Takwin and Ninik L. Karim argued that Yudhoyono, being the only child in the family, was in constant need of attention. A person of this type tended to avoid conflicts and to perform actions popular to people, so that he remained to be loved (Takwin & Karim, 2004, p. 241). Meanwhile, Mary McCoy argued that the structural constraint - namely, the revival of corporatist metaphor - impeded the state officials, including President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, to speak out and to combat religious intolerance. Due to the strong current of corporeal metaphor rhetoric in the post-reform era, the president (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono), and leaders of all type in Indonesia, were "reluctant to critique certain justifications for religious intolerance....and forging such absences by allowing a small minority of religious fundamentalists to use physical intimidation to enforce purification and to manipulate fears for being labelled as "anti-Islam", silencing critics and thereby controlling the conversation" (McCoy, 2013, p. 297).

The structuralism view that I presented above considered that the structure is the constraint; namely that first, the childhood background prevented Yudhoyono for being more progressive in promoting pluralism; and second, the corporatism metaphor prevented the leaders, including Yudhoyono, to follow progressive stance and to stand up against the rising

intolerance. However, these deterministic views were inadequate to present more holistic picture of the president's practices. In contrast, Pierre Bourdieu argued that the social actors had the capacity to resist and negotiate the social structures (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). As I elaborated earlier, president Yudhoyono was rational actor that chose to perform some actions to win the presidency and to stay in power. His actions were often measured. He did calculations, and at times, he did it masterfully to avoid him being target of public criticism. He could be indecisive (*peragu*). The indecisiveness can be detected and spotted when he was confronted with the spontaneous event; however, in many other events, he had ample of time to decide and took decision when the time was right after consulting with others and surveys. Hence, it was not right if we say that all of his actions were driven by the indecisive trait, because when he had sufficient time and information to decide, he could produce firm and measured decisions to advance his own interests. Robin Bush argued that Yudhoyono was a rational actor that promoted self-interests. Yudhoyono was "not an innocent bystander to the deterioration of minority rights and religious pluralism during his presidency, but made conscious choice that contributed to it" (Bush, 2015, p. 241). Yudhoyono contributed to the rising incidents of religious violence at the expense of adherents of Ahmadiyah and Shia through appointment of conservative individuals, which became key figures during his administration; his kow-towing to intolerant organizations and was not doing hard enough or was being ignorant to the production of intolerant regulations and legislations during his two terms (Bush, 2015, pp. 246-251).<sup>10</sup>

Although the preceding paragraphs show that the rational actor theory was convincing in explaining President Yudhoyono's dispositions, it is not necessarily that we omitted the structural arguments. The structural arguments remained influential in explaining human being dispositions. I already discussed some structural arguments, presented by some scholars in the earlier paragraphs of this section. Scholar Jeremy Menchik discussed other convincing argument about how the structural factor gave orientating role for human being to act. He, for example, explain how godly nationalism<sup>11</sup> contributed to the escalating violence (Menchik, 2014, p. 294). Hence, when we analyse human disposition, especially related to President Yudhoyono's response to violence against Ahmadiyah and Shia congregations, we need to strike the balance between the two factors that I aforementioned.

In preceding paragraphs, I show limits of structural and rational actor theory to explain about the agency of president Yudhoyono in dealing with

the incidents of religious violence. In the following section, I will discuss a more sensible approach in understanding what factors that affected President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's dispositions in response to the rising incidents of religious violence during his terms of presidency, drawn from the interplay between agency and structure point of view.

### **The interplay between agency and structure**

Anthony Giddens believed that in most cases, human being actions were routine actions, perpetrated in unconscious mode of actions. As Giddens has it: "much of our day-to-day conduct is not directly motivated" (Giddens, 1984, p. 6). However, in unusual circumstances, human beings are capable of overcoming the structure and hence, are acting in rational ways. In the case of Yudhoyono, Yudhoyono's natural style of indecisiveness influenced by past experience might come up (during spontaneous acts) when he came across with certain events. However, many governance affairs did not require spontaneous acts to respond. In other cases, Yudhoyono had time to consult with his subordinates and even surveys, and hence, he would be able to come up with measured and rational decisions to overcome the structure (his past experience that resulted to his indecisiveness, or his internal structure; and his external structure, namely godly nationalism). Yudhoyono often came up with measures acts and statements. Before he appeared in front of public or before he held press conference, he produced meticulous preparations, which aimed to enhance or to maintain public support.

Yudhoyono was conscious that in the era of direct election, public support was important for his staying in power or for leaving untarnished legacy after he left office; hence, he often relied to opinion polls before he made decisions (Fealy, 2015, p. 48). He was often accused for being indecisive; for example, he was often silent although people waited for his comments, after incidents of religious violence occurred, and hence he was often portrayed as indecisive and ignorance to the plight of the minority. However, was it ignorance? Was it his deliberate attempt to wait for the right momentum to digest any information about the event, and then after he obtained all the necessary information, he will come up with statements?

Bourdieu gave similar tone such as Giddens. Bourdieu believed that past experiences and class shaped the character and attitude of the individual. However, Bourdieu also believed that, despite the mental structure or *habitus*, human being could improvise. As Bourdieu has it: "it is never ruled out that the responses of the *habitus* may be accompanied by a strategic calculation tending to perform in a conscious mode that the

*habitus* performs quite differently, namely an estimation of chances presupposing transformation of the past effect into an expected objective” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Human being is capable of adjusting mental structure to the present situations in the field, in which the present situations could be different with “the constraints and the opportunities are similar to those present during the formative period of the *habitus*” (Swartz, 2002, p. 66). Yudhoyono's habit in using pollster in his second term of presidency to gauge public sentiment was evidence that the agent had the capacity to improvise.

### **Case Studies: President Yudhoyono's Responses to Violence against Ahmadiyah and Shia**

The event that describes that the interplay framework was more relevant to explain President Yudhoyono's disposition was the establishment of the Joint Ministerial Decree on Ahmadiyah in 2008, or the year when Yudhoyono was campaigning for re-election. The event began when Yudhoyono administration faced mounting demands from conservative Muslims to disband Ahmadiyah, which they considered heretical.<sup>12</sup> There were series of negotiations among the government representatives, Ahmadiyah board of executives and groups that represent conservative Muslims. However, the negotiations were going nowhere and any agreement was never reached.

A major incident near the State Palace on 1 June 2008 expedited the central government's decision to issue a decree on Ahmadiyah. The incident began when some 1,500 activists of pluralism (AKKBB) held function in the National Monument (MONAS) compound to commemorate the birth of Pancasila. The function ended up in chaos as hundreds of people wearing uniform of the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) attacked the activists and hence, 34 people were hospitalized. In rare gestures, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono issued strong statement and ordered for the attackers to be apprehended. He also used strong language: “the state should not be afraid. The state should not lose (against those who tarnished pluralism)” (Nasution, 2012, p. 105). The police responded to the President's gesture, and arrested two executives of FPI. But, about a week later (June 9, 2008), protesters from several groups that demand the disbandment of Ahmadiyah descended to the State Palace and threatened the government that they would take law into their own hands if the government failed to disband Ahmadiyah.

But, Adnan Buyung Nasution, who served as Yudhoyono advisor during Yudhoyono's term of presidency, wrote in his book that long before

the incident, Yudhoyono actually already made up his mind about his decision on Ahmadiyah. During an informal wedding reception event in Bandung, West Java, Yudhoyono revealed his stance about how to resolve controversy about Ahmadiyah. Yudhoyono told Adnan Buyung in private that his ministers would come up with the government decree to address Ahmadiyah issue (Nasution, 2012, pp. 100-101). The Ministers (Minister of Religious Affairs, Minister of Home Affairs and the chief of Prosecutor's Office) drafted the decree under Yudhoyono guidance, but the draft of the decree never took effect. The decree was issued only after the big protest took place in front of the State Palace on June 9, 2008.

The decree content suggested that the central government was pursuing middle way. The decree was crafted to accommodate the anti-Ahmadiyah groups and their opponents, the liberal camp that supported the minority congregation. For example, through the decree, the government accommodated demands by anti-Ahmadiyah groups by ordering Ahmadiyah leaders and members to stop doing activities that were considered to be challenging the mainstream interpretation of Islam, such as disseminating faith that Mirza Ghulam Achmad is the last prophet, instead of Muhammad.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the decree did not mention about the disbandment of Ahmadiyah. It means that the decree item still recognizes the legal presence of Ahmadiyah in Indonesia, despite mounting pressures from the anti-Ahmadiyah groups to disband Ahmadiyah. Hence, this decree item was to accommodate the minority and human rights groups, who fought for Ahmadiyah legal existence in Indonesia, which was seen as important to ensure the congregation's rights to practice their faith.

The preceding paragraphs showed that the whole process leading to the issuance of the decree revealed about Yudhoyono dispositions. Yudhoyono's tendency to avoid confrontation was seen through his being reluctant to handle the case by himself, although Yudhoyono stated Ahmadiyah case was one of most important case to be settled in his presidential career.<sup>14</sup> Yudhoyono claimed that Ahmadiyah case was among few cases where he handled directly (Yudhoyono, 2014, p. 568).<sup>15</sup> However, instead of producing the presidential decree, he delegated the task to his ministers. By doing that, Yudhoyono retreated from the spotlight, which allowed him to escape potential scrutiny from the opposing sides: anti-Ahmadiyah groups (who were silently backed by big Muslim organizations such as Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah), and on the other side, the human right activists and liberal media.

The content of the decree was the reflection of un-confrontational and accommodating traits of President Yudhoyono. However, on the other

hand, the way he handled the decree's deliberation showed his meticulous rationalpolitical calculations. Avoiding the scrutiny is important to maintain his popularity, in the run up to the 2009 elections. Had he followed godly nationalism, he would have allowed his ministers to ban Ahmadiyah.<sup>16</sup> Instead, he instructed his subordinate to pursue for middle-way, in a sense that in one hand, the joint ministerial decree was to ban Ahmadi from disseminating and practicing their faiths, while on the other hand, theYudhoyono government recognized the presence of Ahmadiyah despite mounting oppositions from anti-Ahmadiyah groups.

Although Yudhoyono was raised in environment where the education and the way he was brought up were to support godly nationalism view; but as social actor, as the story in the preceding paragraphs has showed, he had the capacity to act strategically against the structure. He did not all the time succumb to the past effect, but he was capable of acting in rational way. At times, Yudhoyono was capable of doing quick and decisive actions. Yudhoyono reacted quickly and demanded security and government officials to take strong response against the burning of houses belonged to Shia residents in Nangkernang and GadingLaok hamlets in Sampang regency, East Java province in 2012. The incident - where Sunni residents clashed and overwhelmed much smaller band of their Shia neighbours - claimed the life of a Shia resident, resulted into at least 12 Sunni and Shia residents were injured and 49 houses of Shia residents spanning in two hamlets were burned down. The incident attracted attention of the domestic and international media, given that the massive scale of the incident is unprecedented. It fuelled public concern because it confirms earlier fear among public that Shia would be the target of attacks and vandalism following frequent similar acts that targeted Ahmadiyah adherents in other parts of Indonesia during the post-New Order era.

Less than 24 hours after the incident, President SusiloBambangYudhoyono convened a limited cabinet meeting that involved cabinet members with security portfolios. The meeting was followed up with a press conference where the president ordered security officials to take stern measures against those who were held responsible during the incident. In a rare public gesture, the President bluntly blamed State intelligence officials of the police and the Indonesian military for being incapable of preventing the incident from happening. He said the police and military intelligence should have been able to anticipate and to prevent the incident, moreover that the incident was not the first of its kind (TindakTegasPelakuKekerasanSampang/Take Stern Measures against

Perpetrators of Sampang Attacks, 2012). The President's tough statement led into swift follow up by top level State security officials. Few hours after the cabinet meeting, then Chief of the National Police Gen. TimurPradopo held separate press conference and announced that seven people were arrested for their respective roles in the incident, while three others were still at large (SBY: Lack of Intelligence Let Down Shia Victims, 2012). Then, TimurPradopo joined high-powered team of State security officials touring into the conflict area. Also included in the tour were then Chief of the Indonesian military, Admiral AgusSuhartono and chief of the Indonesian Intelligence Agency (BIN), Maj. Gen. Marciano Norman.

In other case, the president swiftly ordered the police to arrest top executives of the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI), after their members attacked a group of people campaigning for religious tolerance in the National Monument on June 2, 2008.<sup>17</sup> The police responded to the order and arrested the FPI's two executives two days later. The executives were brought to court and served jail sentence one and a half years each. The evidence shows that when the situation required, the president could be decisive and quick in producing the strong response. However, the attitude was not consistent, and hence, such gestures failed to produce deterrence effects, which resulted to frequent incident of religious violence.

## **Conclusion**

I have explained the key debates between the supporters of the structuralism and rational actor theory. By using the case study of President SusiloBambangYudhoyono's response to violence against minority congregations, Ahmadiyya and Shia, I show the limits of the two theoretical frameworks. The Indonesian case study suggests that the interplay between agency and structure was more forceful in explaining social phenomena. The framework reconciles the opposing arguments between the structural and rational actor theory. The research that focused on studying either side would tend to lose holistic picture about what factors that motivated or prompted the president to act or to react toward rising religious intolerance that led to growing incidents of religious violence during SusiloBambangYudhoyono's two terms of presidency. As I show through the study case, what we learn from the episode of SusiloBambangYudhoyono as president was that he was human agent whose actions were limited by the structure. However, on the other side, he was also rational actor that performed measured actions to pursue his own interests.



## Endnotes:

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<sup>2</sup> The data was generated from compilation of annual surveys held by Setarabetween 2007 and 2011. Sample of such reports can be found at Setara Institute Report (2011). Can be accessed at: [http://setara-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Laporan-KBB-2011\\_Politik-Diskriminasi-Rezim-SBY\\_Setara-Institute.pdf](http://setara-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Laporan-KBB-2011_Politik-Diskriminasi-Rezim-SBY_Setara-Institute.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Wahid Institute started the similar annual survey in 2008. Sample of such report can be found at Wahid Institute Report (2011). Can be accessed at: [http://wahidinstitute.org/wi-eng/images/upload/dokumen/laporan\\_kebebasan\\_beragama\\_wahid\\_institute\\_2011.pdf](http://wahidinstitute.org/wi-eng/images/upload/dokumen/laporan_kebebasan_beragama_wahid_institute_2011.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Law No. 32/2004 on Regional Governments stipulates that the regional governments manage governance affairs that are under their authority, except in the affairs of international relations, defense, security, judicial, the national monetary and fiscal affairs; and religious affairs.

<sup>5</sup> After reform movement in 1998, the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) – which concerned about abuse of power for 32 years by then President Soeharto – amended the constitution and limited the power of president. The amended constitution rules that the President cannot dissolve the parliament. The president and the DPR's positions are equal. The president needs to seek for DPR's approval before the bill he is proposing is passed into law (although vice versa, the DPR needs president approval when they propose bills to the president). Although the president retains final say in appointing Indonesian ambassadors for foreign countries, but before the decisions are taken, the ambassador candidates have to participate in the fit and proper tests conducted by the DPR. However, despite the amendment, the office of the president still has considerable power. According to the amended 1945 constitution, the president is the chief of the Indonesian military. The chief of the National Police – who deals with the domestic security and law enforcement – is responsible to the president. The president has the power to produce governmental regulations in lieu of law (*Peraturan Pemerintah Pengganti Undang-Undang/Perpu*), when the situation requires it, by passing the House of Representatives (DPR). The president is vested with the power to grant amnesty and abolition. The House of Representatives has the right to propose bills to the president; but, if the president disagrees with the bills, the bills cannot be proposed again during the same term of the House.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the structuralism works of Mary Douglas on purity and danger, Mary McCoy argues that it was common practice among state officials in Indonesia to "construct the nation as corporeal entity" (McCoy, 2013, p. 277). The metaphor extends communitarian value; however, it justifies purification practice in all sectors, which aims at allowing people to grab or to stay in power. In the New Order era, Soeharto used the state ideology, Pancasila, to quell his critics. The history repeated itself, albeit with the different actors. In the post-New Order era, the oppressive actors were the radical religious leaders, who collaborated with the state official, to advance their power agenda. As Mary has it: "both radical and mainstream religious leaders, backed by allies in government and state security, are again using a harmony-and-stability rhetoric to justify repression, arguing that

certain religious groups are threatening public order by proselytizing or otherwise insulting Islam” (McCoy, 2013, p. 277).

<sup>7</sup> His introduction to democracy began in early 1980 when he had opportunity to participate in military training in the United States. During his three decades military stint, Yudhoyono frequently participated in the military trainings in Western countries and even obtained a master degree from an American university, and hence, the education contributed into him being modern and professional soldier. In *SBY: Sang Demokrat*, Yudhoyono acknowledged that the trainings gave him the opportunity to read and to learn about democracy from his international peers, and hence, his participation in the trainings helped internalize democracy values toward Yudhoyono (Hisyam, 2004, p. 270).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, one of SBY’s poems written on Jan. 8, 2004, or in the run up to his presidential campaign, was titled: *Light of Islam*. The poem appeared in one of the acknowledgment pages of his authorized, semi-official biography: *SBY Sang Demokrat/SBY the Democrat*. It was evidence that winning hearts and minds of Muslims was one of SBY priorities in his quest for presidency. The book, published by Dharmapena publishing in March 2004, was written by a team of writers led by senior journalist UsamahHisyam.

<sup>9</sup> Then president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono gave speech in the MUI’s annual congress in 2005, which basically gave acknowledgment that MUI was the premiere religious authority in Indonesia and that the government officials needed to consult or to pay greater attention to MUI’s policies in areas related to the affairs of religion. The statement enhanced MUI’s influence, not only before the public, but also before the government officials, including security and judiciary forces as if it has force of legislation.

<sup>10</sup> However, Robin Bush’s argument had some flaws. The argument implies that Yudhoyono appointed several figures as ministers and advisors to materialize his godly nationalism view, such as Gamawan Fauzi and Suryadharma Ali; but it was not the case. When these ministers were in power, they extended their own conservative views. Gamawan Fauzi, then Minister of Home Affairs during Yudhoyono’s second term administration, was chosen not because he had conservative leaning, but because he was supporter of Yudhoyono and Budiono ticket during 2009 presidential election; and he was also respected and successful regent of Solok and governor of West Sumatra, with strong anti-corruption credential. It was different matter when he eventually endured conservative view when he was serving as minister. Having said that, however, I agree that Yudhoyono was responsible and should have taken necessary step to contain Gamawan’s more conservative leaning when he was serving as Minister of Home Affairs between 2009 and 2014. One of Gamawan’s infamous stances was when he encouraged regional government to collaborate with the Islamic Defender’s Front (FPI) to assist them manage urban affairs of their respective areas. FPI was infamous and notorious for its frequent raids against entertainment establishments and anti-minority stances. Suryadharma Ali, who was staunch anti-Ahmadiyah and Shia figures, was chosen as Minister of Religious Affairs on the ground that Yudhoyono needed politics supports from large party that Suryadharma Ali then chaired, the United Development Party (PPP); and not because his anti-minority stances. However, just like Gamawan, Yudhoyono should be held responsible for Suryadharma’s anti-minority policies when he was serving as Minister of Religious Affairs.

<sup>11</sup> Godly nationalism is defined as an imagined community bound by a common, orthodox theism and mobilized through the state in cooperation with religious organizations in society (Menchik, 2014, p. 294).

<sup>12</sup>Yudhoyono contributed to the mounting demands as his government gave leeway for MUI to assume central role in the country in matters related to the *aqida*(creed) during the MUI congress in 2005, which was followed with prolonged nationwide protest against Ahmadiyah.

<sup>13</sup> The item produced greater repercussions in the regions as anti-Ahmadiyah groups and even regional governments used the decree's item to campaign and to create bylaws that banned Ahmadiyah from practicing and disseminating their faiths.

<sup>14</sup> Then Regent of Kuningan regency, Aang Hamid Suganda, spoke to local newspaper *Radar Cirebon* that then presidential spokesman Julian Aldrin Pasha called him on behalf of president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, asking the Regent about the latest development in Ahmadiyah village of Manislor, following major attacks against Ahmadiyah houses and mosques in the village in the regency in July 2010 (President Tanya Soal Ahmadiyah/President Inquires About Ahmadiyah, 2010). The village is home to some 3,200 Ahmadiyah residents, making it the largest Ahmadiyah village in Southeast Asia. The 3,200 Ahmadi are 70 percent of total village population. The phone call was evidence that SBY paid significant attention to Ahmadiyah issue.

<sup>15</sup> Other case was tug of war between the Indonesian police and the Commission Eradicating Corruption (KPK), polemics about election of Aceh governor, Shia-Sunni conflict in Sampang and clemency for over 100 Indonesians waiting for executions overseas.

<sup>16</sup> The detail about the process of issuing the decree is spelled out in the later section of this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> The group of some unarmed 1,500 people, mostly women - called themselves the Nationhood Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Beliefs (*Aliansi Kebangsaan Untuk Kebebasan Beragamaan Berkeyakinan*) - were commemorating the birth of the state official ideology Pancasila, when some hundreds of FPI members attacked them by using bamboo sticks. Thirty four people were hospitalized after the attacks, which occurred just hundreds of meters away from the State Palace. Ten of them sustained severe injuries.

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