

# Indonesia: Political parties clash over sharia-based bylaws

Monday 19 November 2018, by [TEHUSIJARANA Karina](#) (Date first published: 19 November 2018).



*A man is punished with a public caning for violating Aceh's Islamic bylaws, known locally as 'Qanun' in Banda Aceh on March 2, 2016. The man was one of 18 people punished for gambling, consuming liquor or dating. (Antara/Irwansyah Putra)*

Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) chairman Grace Natalie's declaration that her party was against religion-based regulations has reignited the controversy surrounding the proliferation of sharia-inspired bylaws in regions across the country.

"The PSI will prevent the emergence of injustice, discrimination and all intolerant acts in this country. The PSI will never support gospel-based bylaws or sharia-based bylaws," Grace said last week at a celebration of the PSI's fourth anniversary.

Her remarks came as some local politicians in several regions promised to enact "morality" bylaws in what analysts say is an attempt to win votes in the 2019 legislative election, particularly from Muslim constituents.

The statements drew criticism from an Islamist group that has accused Grace of blasphemy and from the older parties within both the ruling coalition and the opposition, which were quick to defend sharia-based bylaws.

"It is fardhu kifayah [a collective obligation] for there to be a political party that is focused on implementing sharia principles in Indonesian laws and regulations," United Development Party (PPP) chairman Romahurmuziy wrote in an Instagram post on Saturday. "That is why we in the PPP will continue to safeguard sharia bylaws because, for us, adopting sharia principles is a reflection of Pancasila as seen in the spirit of Belief in the One and Only God."

Gerindra Party executive Sodik Mudjahid echoed Romy's statement that sharia-based laws were in accordance with the values of state ideology Pancasila.

"The values of Islamic sharia and those of other religions in Indonesia are the soul and pillars of Pancasila's five principles," he told The Jakarta Post on Sunday.

"People who say sharia should be fought because it contradicts Pancasila do not understand the history, essence, philosophy and substance of Pancasila."

Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) executive Suhud Aliyudin also reiterated his party's support for sharia-based laws and regulations, adding that regulations that were considered intolerant could be challenged in court. "If someone does not agree [with a sharia bylaw] or believes it causes intolerance, then they have to prove it in court through a judicial review."

Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) lawmaker and Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin campaign team member Eva Kusuma Sundari, on the other hand, said the PDI-P was against "exclusive" religion-based bylaws that could often lead to discrimination.

"We support sharia bylaws that are universal, such as those that fight against poverty and ignorance. We also support specific but optional bylaws such as those on sharia banking," she said. "But we do not agree with exclusive bylaws that are discriminatory, for example, bylaws that restrict women from being out of the house at night and bylaws that create religion-based segregation."

Golkar Party lawmaker Firman Soebagyo said that the matter was a sensitive one, but that in principle, "regional bylaws should not contradict existing laws and the constitutions".

"Bylaws should safeguard our national unity and diversity."

Sharia bylaws are widely popular among Indonesian Muslims, with 90.9 percent of 1,620 respondents in a 2017 Institute of South East Asian Studies survey saying that there were benefits to implementing sharia law.

Research conducted by University of London political analyst Michael Buehler found that 443 sharia-based regulations had been issued at the provincial, regency and municipal levels between 1998 and 2013. The regulations were enacted by regional heads and legislative councils from both secular and Islamic parties.

In his 2016 book, *The Politics of Shari'a Law*, Buehler argues that politicians' support for sharia-based bylaws and regulations was more the result of political considerations than ideological or religious ones. "State elites in Indonesia are opportunist Islamizers whose affection for Islamic law is less emotional than transactional," he wrote.

A 2015 survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) also found that political interests were primarily responsible for the implementation of sharia bylaws, with most of the bylaws that the study reviewed in Jakarta, Banten and West Java, being passed during local election campaign periods.

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[http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/11/19/political-parties-clash-over-sharia-based-bylaws.html?utm\\_campaign=newsletter&utm\\_source=mailchimp&utm\\_medium=mailchimp-nov&utm\\_term=sharia-bylaws](http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/11/19/political-parties-clash-over-sharia-based-bylaws.html?utm_campaign=newsletter&utm_source=mailchimp&utm_medium=mailchimp-nov&utm_term=sharia-bylaws)

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