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Learning from the Political Wisdom of Indonesia's Founding Fathers: An Analytical Study of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim's Political Thought on Islam-State Relations

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Abstract

This article examines the political wisdom and contributions of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim in the formulation of Indonesia's state foundation and constitution during the BPUPK and PPKI sessions. Drawing on a qualitative, historical-descriptive approach using documentary research, this study analyzes primary sources—including the BPUPK and PPKI deliberations, writings of Wachid Hasjim, and constitutional documents—as well as secondary scholarly works. The findings show that despite being a strong advocate for Islam as the basis of the state, K.H. A. Wachid Hasyim demonstrated remarkable magnanimity by accepting the removal of the Jakarta Charter and several Islamic formulations in the 1945 Constitution for the sake of national unity. This study argues that Hasjim's thought represents a 'symbiotic paradigm' rooted not merely in political compromise but in a substantive understanding of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) that prioritizes public good (maslahah). His approach reflects a broader principle that Pancasila, as a compromise-oriented and accommodating state ideology, provides a framework that guarantees religious freedom while maintaining national cohesion. The study highlights the relevance of his political wisdom in contemporary Indonesia, where political and religious elites often succumb to pragmatism, egoism, and intolerance, contributing to social and religious conflicts. Emulating K.H. A. Wachid Hasyim's inclusive and tolerant leadership can serve as a model for fostering national unity and harmonious religious coexistence in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Introduction

In the decades following the collapse of the New Order's authoritarian regime, Indonesia's democratic landscape has been marked by a persistent and growing phenomenon: the ideologization of Islam. This trend, advancing like a snowball down a hill, manifests in various forms, from the proliferation of radical Islamic organizations vigorously campaigning for the formalization of Islamic law (*shari'a*)¹ to the parliamentary maneuvers of Islamic parties like Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) and Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), which have, at various points, advocated for the implementation of *shari'a* in the public sphere.² A further, more localized manifestation is the rise of regional regulations (*Perda*) inspired by or explicitly labeled as Islamic law, creating a patchwork of religiously-influenced policies across the archipelago.³

Proponents of this ideologization typically advance a tripartite argument. Theologically, they assert that Islamic doctrine unequivocally commands the implementation of *shari'a*, citing Qur'anic verses such as Q.S. al-Mā'idah: 44-47 to argue that governance not based on divine revelation is a form of disbelief (*kufr*).⁴ For them, the establishment of Islam as the state's foundation is a non-negotiable prerequisite for the full implementation of God's law. Politically, this is rooted in the concept of *ad-dīn wa as-siyāsah* (religion and politics are inseparable), viewing Islam as a comprehensive way of life (*kāffah*) that does not recognize a separation between the sacred and the secular.⁵ This perspective is often bolstered by a historical narrative that the Prophet Muhammad himself served as both the religious and political leader of the first Muslim community in Medina, setting a precedent for an ideal Islamic polity.⁶ Finally, they present a pragmatic argument: only through the implementation of Islamic law can Indonesia overcome its persistent multidimensional crises, from moral decay and corruption to economic instability.⁷ This demand is often framed as a logical consequence of the state's perceived failure to uphold law and order, leading some groups to take matters into their own hands through vigilante actions.⁸

While this contemporary surge is significant, it is not a new phenomenon. Its roots trace back to the very birth of the Indonesian nation, during the pivotal deliberations of the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence (BPUPK) in 1945. Then, as now, the demand for an Islamic state met with strong resistance from nationalist factions, resulting in a historical failure that did not, however, extinguish the aspirations of its proponents.⁹ This unresolved tension continues to reverberate through Indonesian society, deemed by some as an encouraging sign of religious revival but by others as a problematic threat to national unity, pluralism, and democratic values.¹⁰ The threat is not merely theoretical; it is evidenced by the widespread acts of violence and intimidation perpetrated by radical groups like the Front Pembela Islam (FPI) and others, who often justify their actions by claiming to defend Islam.¹¹

It is from this contemporary concern that the present study seeks to revisit the political thought of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim (KWH), a key figure in Indonesia's founding generation. While much has been written about the political compromises of the era, this study argues that the intellectual and theological foundations of KWH's approach have been insufficiently explored. Previous scholarship has often categorized him as simply a member of the "Islamic group" whose position was ultimately defeated.¹² This article challenges that simplistic view. **This study will contribute to the existing literature by analyzing KWH's political thought not just as a historical compromise, but as an articulation of a distinct Islamic political paradigm—the symbiotic paradigm—which has deep roots in classical Islamic intellectual tradition and his specific Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)**

background. By doing so, it aims to extract the enduring political wisdom from his thought, offering a model of moderation and substantive Islam that stands in stark contrast to the currents of formalistic ideologization that threaten Indonesia's social fabric today. The hope is that by understanding the depth of KWH's reasoning, contemporary Indonesian citizens—particularly Muslims—can emulate his moderation, presenting Islam in its true form as a mercy to all worlds (*rahmatan lil 'ālamīn*).

Method

This study adopts a qualitative, historical-descriptive methodology with a documentary research design. This approach is chosen because the subject matter—political thought and foundational constitutional debates—is not amenable to empirical measurement or quantitative analysis. The primary goal is interpretive reconstruction: to understand the meanings, motivations, and reasoning behind K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim's political actions and statements within their specific historical context. The methodological orientation is rooted in the presupposition that political ideas, particularly those produced in high-stakes foundational settings, are best understood through rigorous textual interpretation and contextual analysis.

The research relies primarily on textual data, systematically classified into two main categories:

1. **Primary Documents:** These are the most crucial sources for understanding the historical moment and KWH's direct input. They include the official minutes and records of the BPUPK and PPKI deliberations, the original text of the Jakarta Charter, the final version of the 1945 Constitution, and any available written statements, speeches, or later interviews of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim himself, such as his recollections published in *Menjelang Indonesia Merdeka* and his interviews with K.H. Saefuddin Zuhri.
2. **Secondary Sources:** These sources provide scholarly context, analysis, and interpretation. They encompass monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and historical analyses relevant to Indonesian Islamic political thought, the history of the Indonesian constitution, and biographies of key figures from the era. Works by scholars like Bahtiar Effendy, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, B.J. Boland, and Andrée Feillard are indispensable for triangulating and contextualizing the findings from the primary sources.

Documentary data were assembled through purposive literature mapping and inductive scanning of historical archives. The collected texts are subjected to a multi-layered analytical process. First, an **interpretive reading** is performed to grasp the core arguments and nuances within each document. Second, **extraction of categories** is used to identify recurring themes, key concepts (e.g., "unity," "masalah," "freedom"), and argumentative structures in KWH's statements. Third, **thematic classification** organizes these findings into coherent patterns that trace the development of his thought during the debates.

Data are processed through two complementary analytical techniques:

1. **Content Analysis:** This technique is used to delineate Wachid Hasjim's explicit and implicit argumentative structures. It involves a systematic coding of his statements to identify his core principles, his justification for specific proposals, and his responses to counterarguments.
2. **Historical Contextualization:** This technique is essential to avoid anachronism. It relates KWH's arguments to the specific intellectual, political, and sociological conditions of mid-

20th-century Indonesia, including the pressure from the Japanese occupiers, the looming threat of Dutch colonial return, and the diverse socio-religious landscape of the archipelago. To ensure analytical rigor, the study employs **source triangulation**, cross-examining convergent and divergent textual evidence across primary and secondary sources. Additionally, **documentary criticism** is used to assess the authenticity, contextual integrity, and potential normative bias within historical materials. Interpretive outcomes are further calibrated against the dominant academic consensus in the historiography of Indonesian Islamic political thought.

The Paradigm of Islam-State Relations and KWH's Intellectual Roots To situate K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim's political thought, it is essential to first map the broader theoretical landscape of Islam-state relations. At least three distinct paradigms can be identified within Islamic political thought.¹³ First, the **integrative paradigm** posits that religion (Islam) and the state are a unified, inseparable whole (*din wa dawlah*). In this view, the state is an instrument for implementing divine law, and sovereignty belongs solely to God. The head of state is both a political and a religious leader, and the constitution must be identical to Islamic law (*sharī'a*). This paradigm inherently rejects the modern nation-state, which is seen as an artificial construct that divides the universal Islamic community (*ummah*).¹⁴ A state organized under this model is highly prone to authoritarianism, as political opposition can be framed as religious dissent or even apostasy.

Second, the **symbiotic paradigm** envisions a relationship of mutualism between religion and the state. Religion needs the state to provide an environment where it can flourish and its laws can be protected, while the state needs religion to provide an ethical foundation for governance and to foster social morality.¹⁵ In this model, religious law can influence positive law and may even be adopted in part, but it is not the sole source of legislation. The focus is on the state upholding the universal ethical principles found in the Qur'an—such as justice (*al-'adālah*), equality (*al-musāwāh*), and freedom (*al-hurriyah*)—rather than on the formal implementation of a specific legal code. Consequently, the establishment of a formal "Islamic state" is not a primary objective; what matters most is the substance of governance.¹⁶

This symbiotic paradigm resonates deeply with several classical Islamic concepts. For instance, the principle of *siyasa shar'iyah* (governance according to Sharia) in Islamic jurisprudence allows the ruler considerable discretion to enact policies that serve the public interest (*maslahah*), even if they are not explicitly stipulated in the divine texts. Furthermore, the historical reality of pluralistic Islamic empires, such as the Ottoman and Mughal, which governed non-Muslim populations through legal pluralism (*millet system*), provides a historical precedent for this symbiotic model. It prioritizes the welfare of the community (*jama'ah*) over rigid legal formalism.

Third, the **secularist paradigm** proposes a clear separation between religion and the state. In this view, the state must be neutral in matters of faith, and religion is confined to the private sphere. Islam is not the foundation of the state, nor should it determine its form. Islamic law cannot be unilaterally imposed as positive law without going through the formal legislative process. All religions are treated equally, and none receives special privilege from the state.¹⁷

Drawing on this framework, post-independence Indonesia can be classified as a state that adheres to the symbiotic paradigm. The political thought of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim fits squarely within this model. However, to fully understand his intellectual disposition, one must look beyond these broad paradigms and consider his specific roots within the Indonesian Islamic tradition.

KWH's thought was profoundly shaped by his identity as a leading figure of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization. NU is rooted in the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (Aswaja) tradition, which emphasizes moderation (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and balance (*i'tidal*). Theologically, Aswaja adopts the Ash'arite school of creed (*aqidah*) and the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*). This jurisprudential pluralism inherently fosters a more flexible and contextual approach to Islamic law, in stark contrast to the literalist and scripturalist approach favored by groups like Persis or later, the Salafi movement. This intellectual ecosystem made the "symbiotic paradigm" a natural and coherent expression of his deeply held religious beliefs, rather than a purely political concession. His thought can also be situated within M. Syafi'i Anwar's typology of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals, where he exemplifies a blend of the **substantivist type**—prioritizing the realization of Islamic values over formal symbols—and the **realistic type**—seeking to manifest Islam in a way that is adapted to the local cultural and socio-political reality of a plural Indonesia.¹⁸

The Political Wisdom of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim in the BPUPK and PPKI The crucible in which KWH's political wisdom was forged was the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Independence (BPUPK), established by the Japanese on 9 April 1945. The Committee's task was monumental: to formulate the philosophical foundation, form of the state, and territory of the future independent Indonesia.¹⁹ The 68-member body was immediately fractured by a fundamental ideological debate. The Islamic camp, representing roughly 20 percent of the members, advocated for Islam to be the basis of the state. The nationalist camp, the remaining 80 percent, while largely composed of Muslims themselves, vehemently opposed the formal entanglement of religion and the state.²⁰

The first session, held from 29 May to 1 June 1945, was marked by intense debate. The question of the state's foundation was first raised by the chairman, Dr. Radjiman Widyadiningrat. Ki Bagoes Hadikoesoema, a prominent figure from Muhammadiyah, was the first to respond, proposing Islam as the sole foundation.²¹ This was met with the antithesis from the nationalist camp, represented by Mohammad Yamin and, most famously, Soekarno, who proposed the "Five Principles" (*Panca Sila*) as the state's foundation.²² The clash was irreconcilable: one side demanded a formal Islamic identity, while the other offered a philosophical, pluralistic alternative.

To break the deadlock, a **Committee of Nine (Panitia Sembilan)** was formed, comprising four representatives from the Islamic faction (Abikusno Tjokrosujoso, K.H. Kahar Muzakkir, Agus Salim, and K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim) and five from the nationalist faction (Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta, A.A. Maramis, Achmad Subardjo, and Mohammad Yamin).²³ After approximately 21 days of intense deliberation, the committee reached a historic compromise on 22 June 1945. This agreement, later known as the **Jakarta Charter (Piagam Jakarta)**, accepted Pancasila as the state's foundational principles but with a crucial addition to the first principle: "with the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out Islamic law."²⁴ It was a masterful synthesis, attempting to accommodate the nationalist desire for a unifying philosophy with the Islamic demand for formal recognition.

The debates continued into the second BPUPK session (10-16 July 1945), where KWH played an even more proactive role. He proposed two significant amendments to the draft constitution. First, he argued that the President of Indonesia must be a Muslim and a native-born Indonesian.²⁵ His reasoning was that for a government to be considered legitimate in the eyes of the Muslim majority, its head of state should share their faith, which would have significant implications for state-

religion relations. Second, he proposed a revision of Article 29 to read: "The official religion of the state is Islam, with guarantees of freedom for every citizen to practice any religion and to carry out religious worship according to their faith."²⁶ After a long and exhausting debate, the nationalist camp, following Soekarno's urging, surprisingly agreed to accept these proposals.²⁷ The Islamic faction seemed to have won a significant victory.

However, this victory was short-lived. Following the dissolution of the BPUPK on 7 August 1945 and its replacement by the Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (PPKI), the political landscape shifted dramatically. On 18 August 1945, just one day after the proclamation of independence, the PPKI session agreed to remove the Jakarta Charter and all provisions explicitly referencing Islam from both the Preamble and the main body of the 1945 Constitution.²⁸ The rationale was the preservation of national unity and cohesion. This decision was primarily driven by strong objections from political leaders and representatives from Eastern Indonesia (predominantly Christian and Hindu), who viewed the Jakarta Charter as a form of discrimination that would marginalize religious minorities.²⁹ They feared that while its immediate implementation might not be oppressive, it would create a constitutional basis for future discriminatory measures.³⁰ The specific changes made were:

1. The phrase "with the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out Islamic law" in the Preamble's first principle was replaced with "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" (Belief in the One Almighty God).
2. Article 6, paragraph (1), which originally read "The President shall be an Indonesian and a Muslim," was amended to read simply, "The President shall be an Indonesian."
3. Article 29 was changed from KWH's proposal to a more neutral formulation guaranteeing religious freedom for all citizens.³¹

This reversal was a profound moment of crisis for the Islamic faction. Yet, it was K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim's response to this reversal that truly defined his political legacy. While other Islamic figures expressed disappointment or frustration, KWH accepted the decision with remarkable equanimity.³² His acceptance was not a sign of weakness or defeat; it was an expression of a higher form of political wisdom, deeply rooted in his Islamic worldview.

KWH's acceptance of the decision, far from being a mere political concession, can be understood as a profound application of the Islamic legal principle of *maslahah 'ammah* (public interest). Although he was one of the figures who had vigorously advocated for Islam as the basis of the state, in his view, the unity of the Indonesian nation was far more important than formal recognition of Islam.³³ **This reflects a deep understanding of the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shariah*), where preserving the unity and welfare of the community (*jama'ah*) is a paramount religious duty, sometimes taking precedence over formal legalistic demands.** In fact, even before the BPUPK session, KWH had emphasized this priority. He stated:

"Our past history has shown that we have not yet achieved unity. For the sake of this unity, which is urgently needed in our efforts to build our Indonesian state, the most important question in our minds is not 'Where, in the end, will Islam be positioned within the state?' but rather 'By what means can we guarantee the place of our religion in an independent Indonesia?' Therefore, I repeat, what we need at this moment is an unbroken national unity."³⁴

The Theology of Compromise: "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" Perhaps the most brilliant and underappreciated contribution of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim was his own proposal to replace the contentious "seven words" of the Jakarta Charter with the formulation **"Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" (Belief in the One Almighty God)**. This was not a reluctant compromise but a proactive, theologically sophisticated move.

This was a masterstroke of political theology. By replacing the legalistic 'seven words' with the theological concept of 'Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa', he shifted the debate from the domain of positive law to the realm of shared monotheistic values. The phrase "dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya" was inherently legalistic and exclusive, creating a distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. In contrast, "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" was a philosophical and theological statement. **This move effectively 'Islamized' the first principle of Pancasila from within, embedding the core of Islamic faith (*tawhid*)—the belief in the absolute oneness of God—in a way that was inclusive rather than exclusive.** The addition of the word "Esa" (One) was particularly significant. While all monotheistic religions believe in God, the emphasis on absolute oneness is the central tenet of Islam. As noted by Bahtiar Effendy, this could be seen as a symbolic victory, embedding the monotheistic element of Islam within the state ideology³⁵ Furthermore, historical accounts note that KWH actively worked to persuade a initially resistant Ki Bagoes Hadikoesoemo to accept this change, demonstrating his role as a bridge-builder³⁶

KWH's own rationale for accepting the removal of the Jakarta Charter, as recounted to K.H. Saefuddin Zuhri, further reveals his pragmatic yet principled stance:

"First: the political and security situation at the beginning of the Revolution indeed required national unity and cohesion. Second: as a minority group, they [Eastern Indonesians] could engage in offensive politics, even accompanied by political pressure (chantage), seemingly as if oppressed by the majority. As the group most invested in ensuring unity and cohesion in facing the Dutch, who still had operatives everywhere, Islamic and nationalist leaders met their demands. This was understood to mean that the obligation to implement Islamic law (sharia) for its adherents could still be accommodated through the honest application of Article 29, paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, which reads: 'The state guarantees the freedom of each of its citizens to practice their religion and to carry out worship according to that religion and belief.'"³⁷

This statement is crucial. It shows that KWH's acceptance was conditional on his optimistic belief that the revised constitution still provided sufficient space for Muslims to practice their faith. For him, the state's role was to guarantee freedom of religion, not to enforce a specific one. The inclusion of "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" and the guarantee of religious freedom in Pancasila signified that the Indonesian nation was founded on a belief in God, which in turn ensured the independence of its citizens to adhere to and practice their respective religions.³⁸

The Symbiotic Vision Realized in Pancasila KWH's acceptance of Pancasila was not a reluctant surrender but a genuine belief that it could serve as a robust framework for a symbiotic relationship between Islam and the state. He, along with other Islamic leaders like K.H. Masykur and K.H. Kahar Muzakkir, played a significant role in defining Pancasila as a profoundly religious (Islamic) ideology, ensuring that its principles were infused with ethical values that resonated with Islamic teachings.³⁹

His son, K.H. Salahuddin Wahid (Gus Sholah), later noted that the religious values of Islam are strongly reflected in Pancasila, a fact that is not surprising given that its proponents were Islamic figures.⁴⁰ The acceptance of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution by KWH and other leaders of the Islamic faction was therefore a testament to their willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of the nation. It is for this reason that Pancasila has been called "the greatest gift from the Muslim community to the Republic of Indonesia."⁴¹

A more insightful articulation of this legacy was provided by KWH's eldest son, former President K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). He argued that Pancasila represents the *maximal effort* of Indonesian Muslims to preserve the state amidst the tug-of-war between factions advocating for a secular or an Islamic state foundation.⁴² **Gus Dur's interpretation of his father's legacy provides a crucial key to understanding KWH's thought: for him, the state's role is to guarantee the freedom to practice religion, not to formalize one religion. This distinction is central to the symbiotic paradigm.** Pancasila governs the organization of national life, providing an ethical framework for all citizens, while Islam governs the conduct of religious life for its adherents. The two do not conflict and need not be made to conflict. In line with his father's thinking, Islam does not need to be the official state religion or formalized into law. What matters most is that the state guarantees Muslims the freedom to practice their religion fully and with dignity⁴³

This vision stands in stark contrast to the **integrative paradigm**, which seeks to merge the two domains, and the **secularist paradigm**, which seeks to exclude religion from the public sphere altogether. KWH, through his political wisdom, articulated and helped institutionalize a "third way": a symbiotic model where the state is religiously neutral but not hostile, and where religion is a source of public ethics but not the direct source of positive law.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the political thought of K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim on Islam-state relations cannot be reduced to mere political compromise or a sign of defeat. Instead, it represents a coherent and courageous articulation of the '**symbiotic paradigm**,' a model that views the state and religion as mutually reinforcing entities serving the common good. His acceptance of the removal of the Jakarta Charter was not a retreat from his Islamic principles, but a strategic and theologically grounded decision rooted in the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shariah*), particularly the principles of *maslahah* (public interest) and the preservation of national unity (*hifdz an-nafs* and *hifdz al-'aql*).

By analyzing his thought through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence (*siyasa shar'iyah*) and the sociology of knowledge (his NU intellectual tradition), this article has offered a more nuanced understanding of the Islamic foundations of the Indonesian state. KWH's wisdom provides a critical alternative to both the integrative aspirations of contemporary Islamist groups and the secularist tendencies that sometimes surface in Indonesian public life. He offered a 'third way' that remains profoundly relevant for navigating the complex socio-religious landscape of contemporary Indonesia.

The relevance of KWH's political wisdom is perhaps more urgent today than ever before. In an era marked by rising religious intolerance, identity politics, and the pragmatic egoism of elites, his example shines as a beacon of principled leadership. He demonstrated that true religious commitment does not require the domination of one group over others, but rather the creation of a just and harmonious society where all can flourish. His legacy challenges contemporary

Indonesian Muslims to move beyond a preoccupation with formal symbols and legal formalism and instead focus on the substantive implementation of Islamic values—justice, compassion, and public welfare—in the public sphere.

The limitations of this study include its focus on a single figure, which, while allowing for depth, may not capture the full complexity of the debates within the Islamic faction itself. Future research could build upon this by exploring the influence of KWH's symbiotic paradigm on subsequent Islamic political movements in Indonesia, particularly within the Nahdlatul Ulama tradition, and by comparing his thought more systematically with his contemporaries, such as Mohammad Natsir, who advocated for a more formalistic approach.

Ultimately, the nation deeply longs for leaders with K.H. A. Wachid Hasjim's character: leaders who are firm in their principles yet flexible in their strategy, who are deeply religious yet profoundly inclusive, and who understand that the greatest service to their faith and their nation is to forge unity amidst diversity. His political wisdom is not a relic of the past; it is a vital resource for Indonesia's future.

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