

## **Between Faith and Freedom: Muslim Attitudes and Democratic Decline in Indonesia**

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Despite longstanding claims by cultural essentialists like Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and Elie Kedourie that Islam and democracy are inherently incompatible, Indonesia—the world’s largest Muslim-majority country—has challenged that assumption. For over two decades since the fall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime, Indonesia has managed to blend democratic governance with Islamic values. While most Indonesian Muslims continue to express strong normative support for democracy, this endorsement does not consistently translate into support for liberal democratic principles. Drawing on a nationally representative survey conducted in July 2025, this study uncovers a troubling gap: although a majority of Muslims view democracy as the best system for Indonesia, many simultaneously harbor intolerant attitudes. These include objections to non-Muslim religious practices and places of worship, resistance to non-Muslims holding political office, and strong support for majoritarian privileges in state-religion relations. The survey also finds substantial backing for Islamist policies such as compulsory hijab, the criminalization of LGBTQ individuals, and a ban on bank interest. These patterns point to a growing tide of intolerance and religious majoritarianism, which correlates with Indonesia’s ongoing democratic backsliding. As liberal values weaken, illiberal political actors increasingly exploit these sentiments to advance their electoral agendas—raising urgent questions about the future of inclusive democracy in Indonesia.