

## **CHALLENGING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE MAKING OF DEMOCRACY AS THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN**

**Dicky Sofjan**

Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies, Graduate School of  
Universitas Gadjah Mada.

**A**fter more than 15 years of reform, the Indonesian state has embarked on a journey to consolidate its democracy by 2025. However, much of the assessment on the ground suggests that Indonesia is undergoing the “conservative turn” (Van Bruinessen 2013 and Hamayotsu 2014), which clearly and directly challenges the argument on the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Such negative development invariably undermines Indonesia’s efforts to make democracy ‘the only game in town’. This paper thus attempts to problematize Indonesia’s efforts in democratic consolidation in the face of legal and policy challenges as well as the increasing pressure by Muslim religious conservative forces in society, which have cumulatively destabilized one of the most fundamental principles in democracy, which is religious freedom. The main thrust of the paper argues that Indonesian society remains ambivalent to democracy due largely to its predisposition to uphold Islam based on the *primus inter pares* (first among equals) principle.