



CHALLENGES FOR ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTIES IN
INDONESIA: A CASE STUDY OF
PARTAI PERSATUAN PEMBANGUNAN (PPP)

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the challenges facing Islamic political parties in Indonesia focusing on United Development Party (PPP) as the case study. The thesis examines the various factors that contribute to weakening electoral support for Islamic political parties in Indonesia. Research indicates that the misconception of the priority of the Muslim voters, shifts in political orientations towards more pragmatic political attitudes, the politicization of religion and increased factionalism in Indonesian Islamic Parties are among the key factors shaping electoral trends and voters' behaviour towards Indonesian Islamic political parties. In response to declining public support, PPP has attempted to adjust its campaign platform towards more pragmatic positions with mixed outcomes.

ملخص البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة التحديات التي تواجه الأحزاب السياسية الإسلامية في إندونيسيا مع التركيز على حزب الوحدة والتنمية (PPP) كدراسة الحالة، وتبحث هذه الدراسة العوامل المتنوعة التي تساهم في إضعاف الدعم الانتخابي للأحزاب السياسية الإسلامية في إندونيسيا. ويشير البحث إلى أن الفهم الخاطئ لأولوية الناخبين المسلمين، والتحويلات في التوجهات السياسية نحو المواقف السياسية العملية، وتسييس الدين، وزيادة الفصائل في الأحزاب الإسلامية الإندونيسية هي من بين العوامل الرئيسية التي تشكل الاتجاهات الانتخابية وسلوك الناخبين تجاه الأحزاب السياسية الإسلامية الإندونيسية. وفي استجابة لتراجع الدعم الشعبي، حاول حزب الوحدة والتنمية تعديل منصة حملتها نحو مواقف عملية مع ذات نتائج متباينة.

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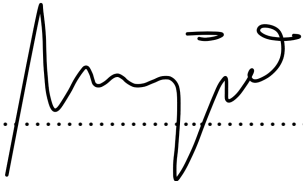
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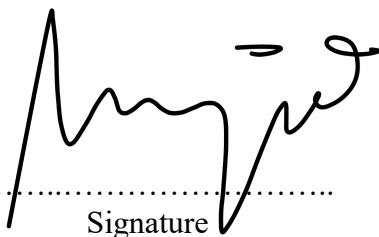
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This work is dedicated to my father, mother, sister and brothers

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

DPD	Regional People's Representative
DPR	People's Representative Council
DPRD	Regional People's Representative Council
Gerindra	Great Indonesia Movement Party
Golkar	Party of the Functional Groups
	Hanura People's Conscience Party
HMI	Muslim Student's Association
KPU	General Election Commission
Masyumi	Council of Indonesian Muslim Association
MPR	People's Consultative Assembly
NASAKOM	Nationalism, Religion and Communism
NasDem	National Democrat Party
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama
PAN	National Mandate Party
Parkindo	Indonesian Christian Party
Parmusi	Indonesian Muslim Party
PBB	Crescent Star Party
PDI	Indonesian Democratic Party
PDI-P	Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle
	Pemilu General Elections
Perindo	Indonesian Unity Party
Perti	Islamic Educational Movement
PD	Democrat Party
	Pilkada Regional Elections
Pilpres	Presidential Elections
PKB	Nation Awakening Party
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party
PKS	Prosperous Justice Party
PNU	Nahdlatul Ulama Party
PPP	United Development Party
PPTI	Persatuan Pengamal Tarekat Islam
PRRI	Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia
PSII	Indonesian Muslim Union Party
PUDI	Indonesian United Democracy Party
RIS	United Indonesian Republic
SBY	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono
SI	Muslim Union
TAPMPR	Provision of People's Consultative Assembly

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As a democratic state, Indonesia uses general elections as a means to elect its political leaders. People are given rights to run for political posts and to establish political parties without limitation by the government. This freedom of expression has led to a competitive party system without the domination of any particular party. The political parties of Indonesia carry different ideologies based on nationalism and religion. Although the number of political parties increased from one election to another, only some parties were able to participate in the general elections due to the political threshold rule which requires 2.5 per cent of national votes in order to qualify to participate in the general election.

Among the political parties that exist in Indonesia, many parties hold some form of religion as their core ideology. Islam for instance, is one of the important ideologies shaping party politics in Indonesia. Many of the Islamic parties emerged from Muslim organizations which existed before the nation's independence. Islamic political parties such as Nahdlatul Ulama Party (PNU), Council of Indonesian Muslim Associations (Masyumi), Islamic Association Party of Indonesia (PSII), and Islamic Educational Movement (Perti) are among the first Islamic political parties to participate in the first Indonesian general elections in 1955.

However, under Suharto's regime, the number of political parties permitted to participate in elections was restricted to three parties. This happened between the 1977 and 1997 elections where the parties are fused. The three parties were: (1) The

Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) which was the fusion of *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (PNI), *Partai Musyawarah Rakyat Banyak* (Partai Murba), *Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (IPKI), *Partai Kristen Indonesia* (Parkindo) and *Partai Katolik* represented the nationalists and the Christians, (2) United Development Party (PPP) which was the fusion of *Partai Nahdlatul Ulama* (PNU), *Partai Muslimin Indonesia* (Parmusi), *Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia* (PSII), and *Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah* (Perti) represented the Islamic parties, and (3) Functional Groups Party (Golkar, *Golongan Karya*) which was Suharto's party. PPP was the only Islamic political party at the time. During this period, Golkar dominated in every election.

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, during the *Reformasi* era, B.J. Habibie took over Suharto as Indonesian President and to some extent restored the freedom of political participation. This contributed to the emergence of new formed political parties. Among the new emerging Islamic parties which participated in the 1999 elections were Nation Awakening Party (PKB), National Mandate Party (PAN), Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and Crescent Star Party (PBB), etc. The emergence of these new Islamic parties has challenged PPP to obtain vast support from Islamic party voters. The supporters of the Islamic parties which were represented in PPP for the past five elections spread to other newly formed parties with policies claiming to fulfil people's aspirations. Moreover, these new political parties were led by actors who were victims of repressive pressure during the "New Order" who then began to gain positive standing among the people. Political actors such as Amien Rais (PAN), Megawati (PDI-P), Abdurrahman Wahid (PKB), Sri Bintang Pamungkas (PUDI, *Partai Uni Demokrasi Indonesia*), and other political actors, pushed people to enter the newly formed political parties as alternative political choice (Wenas, 2002).

PPP was even more challenged with the secular-nationalist parties that tend to favour Muslims through creating policies that are Islamic in their agendas. Although these parties are secular, Islamic issues and influence have never been neglected as they are a part of Indonesian culture. Therefore choosing a secular party does not seem to be a “sin” for Indonesian Muslims as it does not violate Islamic values. Thus, having major Muslim population does not always determine the success of Islamic parties in general elections.

In terms of its electoral performance, PPP’s votes fluctuate in every election despite being the oldest Islamic political party to exist. Since the 1999 elections, PPP has been increasingly challenged by the emergence of new Islamic parties. In the legislative election in 1999, PPP gained only 10,71% of the votes which fell dramatically from 22,43% in the 1997 election. In 2004, PPP’s votes fell to 8,16% and worsened to 5,33% in 2009 elections (“Hasil Pemilu,” n.d). In the recent general election in 2014, PPP’s votes increased slightly to 6,53% (Malik, 2016). This study on PPP’s electoral performances is therefore an attempt to discover the factors contributing to the decline of its performances in the post-Suharto era.

A lot of research has been conducted to uncover the reasons contributing to the decline of Islamic parties’ performance in elections. However, studies focusing on PPP are still rarely found in the literature. The present study thus extends upon the previous research on PPP’s performance in elections by conducting a direct survey. This research is expected to discover the factors that contribute to the challenges for the PPP through the perspectives of the voters themselves. It is hoped that the field research would add value and insight to the existing literature on the role of Islamic Political parties in Indonesian democracy.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Indonesia has gone through eleven general elections since its independence. During these elections the participation of Islamic parties has increased and decreased from one election to another. During Sukarno era, Islamic parties were popular among Indonesian voters. Masyumi, PNU, PSII and Perti for instance, has always succeeded to be among the top ten most voted parties.

Under Suharto era, when the party system was simplified, the Islamic parties were fused to one party called the United Development Party (PPP). This party started to participate in elections from 1977 and constantly gained the position of second most voted party from 1977-1997 in elections. However, its performance has fluctuated from time to time with decreasing support in recent elections. After the fall of Suharto many political parties were formed without exception to Islamic parties. Many people shifted their votes to secular-nationalist parties and voters of Islamic parties spread their support among other newer Islamic parties. This study will focus on the reasons for the decline in support for PPP and other Islamic parties in Indonesia in the post New Order era.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

This study can be justified based on four main reasons. First, although Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world, it does not adopt Islam as the state's ideology which led to the possibility of Islamic parties not winning in general elections.

Secondly, the increasing number of Islamic political parties in Indonesia has not led to victory for Islamic parties in any elections. Analysis of voting behaviour

among Indonesian Muslim voters is needed in order to understand the reasons for this unwillingness by Muslim voters to vote for Islamic parties.

Thirdly, despite being the oldest Islamic party in Indonesia, PPP's electoral support has been decreasing. This study seeks to examine the strategies and agendas of PPP to revive its support in the Indonesian electorate. Given the similar conditions and challenges affecting the various Islamic parties in Indonesia, this study could help provide a general understanding of the present and future role of Islamic parties in Indonesian politics.

Fourth, since most studies mainly utilise secondary data to analyse Indonesian politics, the use in this study of primary data through direct analysis of a survey of Indonesian voters would help to provide a better understanding and perspective on the perception of Muslim voters with regard to PPP at the present time.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the role of Islamic political parties in Indonesian democracy.
2. To analyse the performance of Islamic Political Parties in the Indonesian general elections.
3. To investigate factors that contributed to the decline in PPP's support, and the strategies used by the party to regain support from the Muslim constituency in Indonesia.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What roles have Islamic political parties played in Indonesian democracy?

2. How have Islamic political parties in Indonesia performed in general elections?
3. How has the PPP tried to overcome its decline in electoral support in recent general elections?

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been numerous studies conducted on the topic of elections and Islamic political parties in Indonesia. Most of the previous literature has studied the Islamic political parties in a general manner, but electoral studies focusing on PPP are still rare. This study discusses particularly on the challenges of Islamic political parties in Indonesian elections. The case study of PPP is taken as an example of a losing party that survives. The literature review is divided into three parts: Indonesian general elections, Islamic political parties and PPP.

1.6.1 Indonesian General Elections

Saiful Mujani and William Liddle (2007) made a comparison of Indonesian general election results. In their article, “Leadership, Party, and Religion: Explaining Voting Behaviour in Indonesia”. They compared the 1955 and 1999 elections and found out that the supporters of *Shari’ah* law implementation fell dramatically from 40% to 14%. The 17 Islamic parties that participated in the 1999 elections collectively obtained only 36.6% of the votes of Indonesian Muslims. They concluded that an increased number of Islamic parties does not determine the success of Islamic parties in general.

Higashikata and Kawamura (2015) in their article “Voting Behaviour in Indonesia from 1999 to 2014: Religious Cleavage or Economic Performance?”

compared Indonesian election results from 1999 to 2014. They found out that religious cleavage still exists in Indonesia. By measuring the Muslim share and the mosque ratio, their findings show that the regions which have Islamic social influence tend to vote for Islamic political parties. Islamic social influence here means the society are religious people and the culture of the region is influenced from their religiosity. Thus this also affect to their political choices.

Leo Suryadinata (2002) claimed that there are characteristics in Indonesian elections. In the 1999 elections, he emphasised that ethnicity, regionalism and religion played a significant role in which Islam has played an important role in creating secular Muslims (*abangan*) and purist Muslims (*santri*). These categories then shaped the different types of political parties and a person's voting behaviour.

1.6.2 Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia

Since Indonesia gained back its political freedom after the fall of Suharto in 1998, many political parties were formed. PPP which became the representative of all Islamic parties during the New Order era had to face challenges in the 1999 election onwards as there were more Islamic parties that emerged as competitors. There were 17 Islamic parties that participated in the 1999 election including PPP (Romli, 2004). The emergence of these Islamic parties seems to show that there were different views among the Muslim community itself.

Lili Romli (2004) argues that there are four factors which contributed to the phenomena of Islamic political parties post Suharto era. These factors are the theological, historical, sociological and *Reformasi* factors. First, theologically religion is something that is integrated into Indonesian politics or said as *din wa daulah*. Therefore, societal problems and politics are inseparable with religious issues. As a

manifestation from this view, there is the need for political power (in the form of political parties) in order to apply Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) in the state. Second, in terms of sociology, with the Muslim majority, it is appropriate to channel political aspirations in line with Islamic values and struggle. Political parties thus became the vehicles to fulfil the aspirations of Muslims in politics. Third, historically Islam was the driving force in fighting the colonials during the struggle for independence. *Sarekat Islam* (SI) was formed as a movement with the most members compared to other movements operating at the time. Fourth, the *Reformasi* era also was a factor in the formation of Islamic political parties. The struggle of students in overthrowing the New Order resulted in the political freedom of all citizens. Every group and organization was given the opportunity to form political parties according to their political views. This freedom was then used by political elites including the Muslim political elites to form political parties.

Greg Fealy (2003), argued that Islam has failed in the Indonesian constitution and elections. This is due to the major diversity of views within the Islamic community. He stated that the different categories among Indonesian Muslims (*abangan* Muslims and *santri* Muslims) creates different political interests among them. This also has caused a sense of mistrust among the Muslim groups regarding the presentation of their political and religious interests. Rather than achieving brotherhood, Muslims made an intra-*umma* competition. Furthermore, the divergence of ideology, political and religious interests, vision, and other divisions among Islamic parties shows the weakness of Muslims in giving trust to each other, and finally it becomes another source of conflict within the Muslim community.

On the other hand, secular-nationalist parties showed their attention towards Islamic issues to gain votes from the Muslim community. This approach affected

Islamic parties and in some way gave an advantage to the secular-nationalist parties. When Islamic parties raise Islamic issues on their agenda, it does not become special as it is the interest of the party. Rather, it may create an assumption of using religion as a tool to gain power and votes from the people. As for secular-nationalist parties, raising Islamic issues opened the possibility for an advantage to gain Muslim voters as the secular-nationalists were considered not only focused on gaining power for themselves, but also paying attention to religious issues. Moreover, by taking care of the interests of various different religious groups, these parties add to their potential of gaining votes as a party that has concern about religious tolerance, in contrast to Islamic parties that only have concerns about one particular religion, Islam.

Ahmad Fuad Fanani (2013), elaborated on the factors contributing to the failure of Islamic political parties in elections. He argued that it is difficult for Islamic parties to find the strategic issues to fight for in elections. The issue of implementing *Shari'ah* law at the state level is still considered to be a “sensitive” matter and has not become a major concern among Muslims in Indonesia. Furthermore, the formation of an Islamic forum within the internal body of the parties which was strong enough in its regeneration had also weakened the position of Islamic political parties. In Golkar, Islamic Students Association (HMI) has a very important influence in its cadres as it is an organisation that trains youth leadership and many of its members then became politicians through Golkar. In the Democrat Party, *Majelis Zikir SBY* was made, also the *Baitul Muslimin* of PDI-P and Indonesia Raya Muslim Movement (GEMIRA, *Gerakan Muslim Indonesia Raya*) in Gerindra Party. He further argues that the people are more interested in the political issues that relate directly to their needs and improving the future of the nation more so than Islamic issues.

Furthermore, the article by Syamsuddin Haris (2004) analysed the failure of Islamic political parties in the 1999 elections. He shared four main arguments on this matter. These include what he calls the internal factors, external factors, politicisation of religion and polarisation of politics and leadership. Internally, the Muslim leaders during that time formed a misconception on the so called 'normative position' of Indonesia. There are three issues regarding this which are (1) Historically, Muslim leaders believed that Muslims had contributed to the Independence of Indonesia, (2) Theologically, there is a need for Islam to govern all aspects of human life including the state and politics, and (3) Sociologically, most Indonesian citizens are Muslims. Through the misconception of the Muslim leaders that these issues could bring a great advantage for Islamic parties in winning elections, Islamic political parties failed to gain votes. This failure was caused partly by external factors such as the shift of the political orientation of Muslims in which there was no need for an Islamic state or Islamic political parties. Islamization of secular parties by the establishment of *Lembaga Dakwah* (Islamic missionary institutions) within the secular parties was an addition to the factors of failure for Islamic parties to gain votes from the Muslim community.

In terms of Politicization of religion by the Islamic parties, Haris (2004) explained that religion was used to justify political actions such as the making of laws obligating Muslims to choose Islamic parties. Such types of legislation also contributed to the failure of Islamic parties in elections. Meanwhile the polarization of politics and leadership, according to him, indicates the fragile cohesiveness among the Islamic leaders which caused the emergence of new Islamic parties to compete in capturing the same mass base (Antlöv & Cederroth, 2004).