

PKS after 2019 Indonesian Legislative Election: a Potential Force for Religious Democracy or a Danger Toward Islamic Fundamentalism?

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Abstract—According to the Litbang Kompas and Indobarometer’s survey, The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) remarkably became the only Islamist faction that broke into the big five in the 2019 Indonesian national legislative election, along with nationalists Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle (PDIP), Party of Functional Group (Golkar), Great Indonesian Movement Party (Gerindra), and Nationalist Democrat (Nasdem). PKS achievement came when some researchers criticized the party for its fundamentalism principles. Others were worried about the party's stance on women's public role that is regarded as a backward step towards feminism agendas. PKS's feat is academically interesting as it was achieved in the backdrops of fundamentalism discourse against the party. How the party became such a force in the Indonesian political landscape? What impact does the achievement have to the multiculturalism practices in Indonesia, given that PKS supported Sharia law enforcement in Aceh a decade ago? This study uses a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with three sources from PKS to supplement literature analysis. The study found that there is an ideological evolution in PKS in terms of pluralism and Islamic roles within the state administration. The party's practical stances are now becoming more pragmatic and inclusive. Moreover, PKS was benefited from the contemporary Islamic populism tide, in which it represents the ever-growing urban middle-class Muslims.

Keywords—*Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), fundamentalism, Islamic populism, urban middle-class*

I. INTRODUCTION

The legislative election held in 2019 seems to be a quite encouraging moment for some Islamic parties, including PKS although its position is not yet included in the top 5 (five) election winners. Among a number of other Islamic parties (even with nationalist parties), PKS achieves the highest percentage increase of vote (PKS 2% and PKB 1%). This achievement has become a turning point to see their political struggle since its transformation from justice party (PK) to Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in 1999.

In 1999 election, PKS won 1.36% of votes [1]. Then, it rose significantly to 7.3% after the intensified campaign as an anti-corruption party in 2004. Again, the achievement reached 7.88% in 2009, and it went down to 6.7% in 2014

due to corruption cases by one of the party top-officials. Next, the vote acquisition increased from around 2% to 8.21% in 2019 [1]. This data shows the evolution of gradual vote acquisition amid the exposure to the fundamentalism and corruption discourse in 2014. Even in 2019, PKS surpassed PKB and PPP as the 2 (two) largest and oldest Islamic parties in Indonesian Islamic political history. The question is, how does development in Indonesian democracy after ‘the victory’ of PKS?

Buehler said that PKS was an attractive political choice for conservative Muslims [2]. This is reinforced by the research results done by Mietzner & Muhtadi which revealed that PKS is an alternative to the political preferences of FPI Islamists although the percentage rate is only 12% after PAN and the Democratic Party (PD) [3]. Although its percentage rate is small, but Collins in his research [4] believes that PKS is the most rational political alternative for radical Islamic voters. This argument is based on a number of studies on PKS ideology, where their tendency to become more radical in Islamic thought was strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood's thinking [5]. In fact, Steele [6] defined PKS as a gradual evolutionary movement that consistently fought for Islamic fundamentalism even though, in practice, it was quite moderate in political strategy. While in the feminist, PKS’s women narratives are seen as a threat to their agenda [7].

Apart from several analysis and results stronghold above, in the context of democratic countries, the freedom principle of politics has become an opportunity for the growth and development of various social groups with various ideologies, include the existence of religious groups which later transformed into political parties such as PKS.

On the other hand, several research studies shows that the identity politics practice in Indonesia seems to find its moment along with the strengthening of the Islamic populism tide in which it hits Muslims with urban middle-class. It is the segment that has been believed and claimed as the PKS mass base in urban areas.

It is interesting to see whether the achievement of their votes is the effect of their identity politics in the midst of Islamic populism tide or not? At this point, how do they apply their ideology in the socio-cultural space of a pluralistic Indonesian society after the increasing of their votes? Will it further strengthen the assumption of Islamic

fundamentalism embedded by many researchers and observers, or will it produce religious character in democratic and political life in Indonesia.

This article was compiled based on qualitative research through literature studies and supported by in-depth interviews with PKS leaders and administrators. From the collected data, it was analysed using interactive analysis techniques and presented through a thick description approach.

II. PLURALISM PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF PKS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTY INCLUSIVE POLICY

To present a socio-cultural analysis of the Indonesian community towards PKS' votes acquisition in 2019 election, it is first important to review their ideology. Basically, PKS's political policies were strongly influenced by their philosophical views about Islam and *da'wah*. One of them is about *Syumuliyatul Islam*. For the PKS, it is a cadre basic understanding in creating a movement. For them, Islam is a religion that regulates all aspects of human life, including politics [8]. This is based on their view that what was done by Muhammad during *da'wah* phase in Medina being part of politics [9]. Muhammad exemplified how to develop the country, manage the government and expand politics to neighbouring countries outside of Arabia, which were all maintained and developed during the *Khulafaur Rasyidin* [9].

Their views are strongly influenced by Hasan al-Banna's thought stated that politics is an inseparable part of religion [10]. It is just that the PKS political concept manifested by the Muslim Brotherhood political ideology is very different from the concept of Western politics. Politics is not merely part of a tool to achieve power, but politics can be used to fight for the benefit of society [11].

At the practical level, they translated the *Syumuliyatul Islam* principle into the concept of civil society to answer the doubts of those who assumed that PKS could be a threat to the plurality of Indonesian society. Aminudin explained that civil society is not an utopia, but it could be actualized in the practice of Indonesian life, including in addressing pluralism [12]. Medina community is a real example of how Islamic values can be applied and can be very flexible to the socio-cultural situation of the Madinah community at that time.

The manifestation of the ideals of political community is to attribute PKS as an open party which implied that PKS is not owned and for Islamists only, including non-Muslims can be part of the PKS [10]. The concrete form of the inclusive principle is the acceptance of non-Muslims as PKS candidates.

Bubalo and Fealy in their writing said that PKS is one of the political preferences in Indonesia that can show that Islamists can help the democratization process [13]. Furthermore, Fealy argues that the PKS paradigm is a representation of the openness spirit, pluralism, and nationalism by which it scrapes the strong Islamic identity itself [14].

The PKS movement to become more inclusive in sociological political policy is a rational choice. The multicultural structure of Indonesian society is very well understood, which means that if the PKS maintains their Islamic ideology, their politic will not be able to survive. This rational option has actually been read since their

transformation from an Islamic movement into a political party. Having an actual choice in contrast to Muslim Brotherhood ideology that denies political parties [15], PKS tries to show the flexibility of their ideology with the socio-cultural context of Indonesia which is politically still in the stage of democratization.

It can also be seen as a form of rational choice in the context of making political strategies. The paradigm of *da'wah* is politics and politics is the *da'wah* that brings them in democratic participation is part of life strategy after reformation era. The history of Islamist interaction with Soeharto forced them to take cover under of democracy [16]. For PKS, democracy is the choice of strategies that is closest to the *syura* principle in the concept of civil society [17], so that they are relatively more tolerant. In summary, the association of the PKS paradigm with their political policy choices can be seen in the figure below:

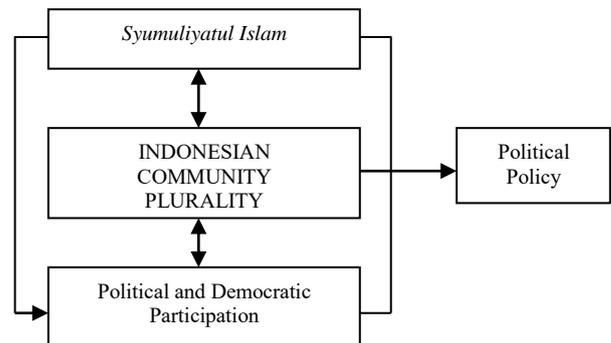


Fig. 1. Ideology Interaction and Socio-Cultural Context of Indonesia in Party Platforms and Policies

Regarding to this, Muhtadi, in his book entitled *Dilema PKS*, gives his view that this is a form of PKS confusion: between wanting to fight for the Islamic society ideology and political interests (getting votes). In my opinion, this policy is precisely the core value in which PKS wants to be conveyed regarding the integrality of Islam. The policy was born from the authenticity of Islamic teachings in which it could interact with the entire socio-cultural space of any society. Besides, in fact, when the inclusive policy was issued during the Anis Matta period, it did not succeed in becoming vote booster. PKS vote only rose to the level of 1%, which means that the policy was rationally born in order to answer the integrality of Islam in the socio-cultural context of Indonesian society.

III. PKS AND ISLAMIC POPULISM OF MIDDLE-CLASS MUSLIM

In addition to the ideological and policies factors above, the party's strong influence came from the muslim middle-class in urban area. At the practical level, the discourse on PKS has never been separated from the urban context and the muslim middle-class. As stated by Noorhaidi Hasan, PKS born from the *tarbiyah* movement on campuses through *halaqah*, and it develops into the community through *taklim* assemblies in urban areas afterwards [18]. Therefore, it can be said that most of PKS mass bases are young people and urban middle-class.

This condition is indirectly influenced by several factors. First, the Islamic narratives brought by *tarbiyah* (PKS) represent a more modern and transformative view of Islam so that it can be accepted among urban middle-class

muslims. Secondly, their presence in the city community (especially in the centre of offices, schools, campuses) becomes a magnet among the minimal rationality and individuality in the religion that characterizes the city community. This middle-class muslim, during Anis Matta's leadership, became one of PKS's political targets [19].

Historically, the development of middle-class muslim in Indonesia was begun with the disharmony of Islamist relations with the Soeharto era [20]. Previously, the marginalization of the role of *santri* (student learning Islamic knowledge) since the colonial era was the initial of the emergence of various movements led by figures from *priyayi*. This noblemen class was formed because of the program of sending Javanese students to the Netherlands. Gradually, the movement of the middle class began to penetrate into the political and religious territory of the colonial era, independence era, to the Soeharto era. They formed themselves into ICMI (Association of Indonesian Muslim Scholars). Starting from here, structurally, the middle-class muslim began to stabilize their role in the political and intellectual path [21].

In the socio-cultural sector, the characters of urban societies that are rational, individual and differential form them into an exclusive class. Alienation of economic roles and technological advancements plays a role in shaping these basic characters in which the next stages make these modern humans nervous. These psychic-social factors eventually met the Islamic populism tide in 2015-2019, initiating a new direction for Islamic societies, especially in the middle class segment through various means: the proliferation of religious study groups, development of *taklim* assemblies with diverse *habib* and *ustad* in offices, entertainment, and social media, the emergence of *hijrah* community that is oriented towards *aqidah* and *akhlak*, the development of muslim fashion businesses, halal products, and others. In other words, this era marks that muslim religious sense is getting stronger.

Islamic populism in Indonesia is leaning to a form of religious claimant that shows a transformative movement from religious conservatism to a form of social piety [22]. There are efforts to show the good deed to the public sphere, including to the context of *jihad* verses meaning drawn into the political arena as done by PKS (see PKS ideology sub-chapter). The highlight of this populism is a peaceful protest 212 by muslims against Ahok's speech which is considered to debase the Qur'an. Starting from this point, the populism of Islam which used to be a religious claimant expression experienced a shift in meaning because of its interaction with political interests.

The populism term as a proxy in democracy, it is used to measure the degree of demos through mass mobilization [23]. Therefore, the blasphemy issue here is a kind of shared agenda not only of Islamic groups but also of other political interests. In the context of Jakarta Election and Presidential Election held in 2019, it is a justification for the rationalization of identity politics within it. This was confirmed by Mietzner and Muhtadi [3], research in 2016 which stated that Yudhoyono was behind the anti Ahok issue.

The following chart shows the interrelationship of the political practices of middle-class muslim in Indonesia in the frame of Islamic populism and the accompanying identity politics:

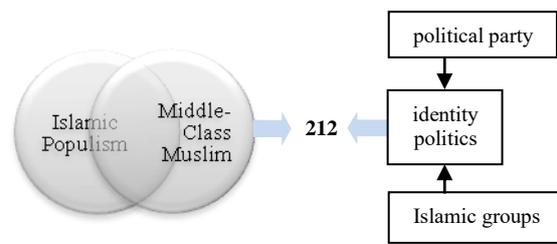


Fig. 2. Identity politics and Islamic populism of middle-class muslim

The two poles in the chart above show the phenomenon of Islamic populism which has become a symptom in the middle-class muslim segment meet with the interests of Islamic groups and political parties in the frame of identity politics. Social media technology is the driving force to ignite the social actions of middle-class muslim who are in Islamic populism movement through the issue of blasphemy. Religious Claimant, which has become a factor on social media through new issues of religious defence, has become a momentum for many interests through the practice of identity politics.

What is the position of the PKS? In the 212-action event, as institutional structural, PKS was not directly involved both symbolically and administratively, but the involvement of their cadres in the action was undeniable. If it is so, can PKS be said to take advantage indirectly from Islamic populism? Politics in my view is always speculative, meaning that we cannot conclude exactly how and where the voting will go. However, it will be more interesting if we look at the PKS policy strategy that utilizes the flow of populism in Indonesia.

Firstly, based on interview with Ardianto the Head of PKS DIY Public Relation on June 2019 and the statements in several mass-media by Mardani Ali Sera, they said that PKS used the issue of the Ulema Protection Bill to attract Muslim voters. This discourse was raised after 212 and several subsequent actions related to the rampant assumption of ulema criminalization at several places in Indonesia. On social media, this issue was quite massive and was rolled out by PKS cadres even though it was not a trending topic.

Secondly, PKS rolled out the identity politics discourse in the communities that had been their base so far, especially the *hijrah* community which was very popular among the urban middle-class muslims. They spread this issue to the other related communities such as *majelis taklim*, the women's economic empowerment community through Islamic issues, including targeting the millennial segment through muslim millennial candidates.

Their limitations in funding resources and their inability to bring national figures from PKS cadres [19], seem to require them to carefully pay attention to the trend of Islamism in Indonesia. In the next stage they use to gain vote from various segments through Islamic issues.

In another studies it was mentioned that PKS often uses identity politics as part of its way of gaining public sympathy. For example, in Bali regional elections, PKS uses the issue of Islamic unity in the middle of a Hindu Buddhist majority there. In the context of political choice, rolling out identity politics as a strategy for their political actions is rational amid political euphoria in party campaigns.

However, then, the question is whether this practice can be a justification of fundamentalism in their Islamic ideology or not? The following sub-chapter presents the writer's analysis of the unique PKS identity political view.

IV. PKS IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE PLURALITY DIMENSION

The concern about effects of identity politics usually dwells on the question: what about those who have different identities? While the democracy life in politics requires an equal distribution of justice for all society segments? Identity politics in the context of religion is also seen as causing a balance disruption in the society because it has the opportunity to grow the differences sensitivity in the midst of pluralistic societies. There are several different views from PKS related to this identity politics, which in side is a justification for the strategy that they are deed, but, on the other hand, it can also be said to be a practical manifestation of their political ideology.

"Identity politics is not something to be avoided because everyone has their own identity in which the identity is not to be removed, identity still exists. However, what must be grown is to respect the differences of identity that exist". (Sukamta)

For PKS, it means that maintaining social order in political dynamics does not have to leave their respective identities, but it is to grow a respect for all identities in society. If this function is achieved, the potential social conflict from identity politics can be avoided.

This perspective show that creating a civil society in a plurality space does not leave their respective identities or merge into other identities, but by growing appreciation for various identities is a concrete form of tolerance itself. This practice can indirectly minimize horizontal conflict in the community. PKS claims that it is their commitment as an Islamic party from the beginning to realize the ideals of civil society in Indonesia, in which their concept is built on the pluralism and democracy principles, inclusive, accountability and morality [17].

"It means that even if, in the future, there are administrators or cadres who mention the verses of the Qur'an using Islamic jargon, it should not see as identity politics. But, it has become a daily life for cadres to say such things for sure. Unless, they only used Islamic jargon during the election period. Meanwhile, they never used Islamic jargon outside the election period. Thus, in this case, they have committed politicization in religion". (Sukamta)

PKS denied what its cadres developed on social media and in various communities is as part of an identity politics. For them, that is very different from the politicization of Islam. The terms of Political Islam and Islamic Politics for PKS have conflicting meanings.

Referring to the Nasr opinion [24], political Islam is defined as an attitude that makes the main goals in politics more worldly and pragmatic, and tends to manipulate Islam for economic, politic, and social interests. Whereas, Islamic politics [25] is part of *da'wah*, which is aimed to provide services to the community and empowering them with Islamic roles. PKS Islamic political practice implies that authority is not their sole purpose in politics.

Therefore, in their assumptions, discourse the issue of Islam in the amid muslim community has basically become a culture of PKS cadres. Social services such as cheap groceries, free health checks, helping natural disasters victims, massive use of the Qur'an verses on social media are what they have often done since they transformed into political party. This action was carried out as part of their short-term target, which was to reap Muslim's vote. For the rest, in their view, what they are doing can be an entry for *da'wah* in society with their ideological assumptions which be easily accepted by the community.

I argue that when PKS is able to develop an attitude of respect for other identities, it will be a good effort in fostering an Indonesian political culture that is friendly to others. At least, it is also in line with PKS policy as an inclusive party born from the ideology and ideals of their civil society. So that this attitude should not only be a party platform or just a political statement of figures, but it also followed by efforts to civilize it within the party. It is because the party image is a cadre which is exists on social media and grassroots layers.

V. CONCLUSION

The Islamic populism tide has not only become a turning point in religious awareness in middle-class muslim in Indonesia. Referring to some of the basic assumptions of populism by some observers, the populism is not just a religious claimant. However, its accompanying political context makes populism as a proxy for certain socio-political forces to measure the degree of state power that has been considered as discrimination against certain religious groups. The climax of populism is the mass action 212, and subsequent actions that are interpreted as political *jihad* by them.

Some research literature states that there is a struggle for discourse there, including what is called identity politics. It is done not only by Islamic groups, but also political parties, including PKS, although PKS does not symbolically involve in the action. I conclude that identity politics claimed by the PKS as something that should not be avoided. It becomes their way to reap the vote of muslim society. Its form is done through the issue of Ulema Protection Bill and other Islamic issues. It becomes an illustration that socio-religious context from a society has a strong influence on the political preferences of middle-class muslim. considering that they are a group with rational characteristics so that their political preferences will be based on rationality aspects. It can be policies, platforms, track record of performance to the Islamic issues that they bring to their community.

The next critical question is, how is the future of Indonesia's democracy after the legislative elections held in 2019 coloured by strong discourse and identity politics? I assumes that the PKS identity politics perspectives that respects other identities as part of Indonesia is needed to develop. It will be more concrete to prove it in the social and political interaction of the PKS and other religious groups. Hence, it can bring a competitive political culture, but it still respects the plurality values of Indonesia.

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