

# *Identity Politics Within Indonesian Islamic Parties: Study of PKB and PKS*

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**Abstract**—This paper will focus on the issue of political behavior of the National Awakening party (PKB) and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) which are the two major Islamic parties in Indonesia. In the practice of managing relations with voters, it appears that the two Islamic parties often use religious attributes as a tool to influence voters to vote for those parties. The use of identity politics is allegedly a practical way to obtain maximum votes and legislative or executive positions. In this study the authors used the method of Explanatory cases with a Qualitative approach. Explanatory case study methods is used to explain more deeply the research questions that focus on PKB and PKS. The author's hypothesis is Political Islam represented by these two parties turns out to have to encourage compromise and pragmatic steps. Discourse on identity politics often used as a shield to advocate for their short-term political achievements. In turn, the struggle for Politic of Islamic identity may lead to all significant changes in internal party mechanisms and reinterpretation of party values in a more moderate direction and accommodating to their political environment.

**Keywords:** *Political Islam, Islamic Party, Political of Identity, Indonesian Politics, Election*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses how the fragmentation of Islamic political parties is an affirmation of the identity politics. After the collapse of the New Order, according to Pamungkas[1] the emergence of new political parties is interesting to be observed. One of them is the phenomenon of religious groups or organizations –especially Islam– that has encouraged the establishment of political parties. The Islamic religious organizations are Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which are trying to take a political role. However, it did not then convert its organization into a political party, but rather both organizations facilitated the establishment of political parties as part of the organization's politics. However, the two organizations said that they had no organizational relationship with the parties they formed. Existing relationships are only initiator and aspirator. In the end, NU facilitated the establishment of the National Awakening Party (PKB), and Muhammadiyah facilitated the establishment of the National Mandate Party (PAN). In addition, there is also a religious movement commonly referred to as the tarbiyah movement, which in 1999 founded the Justice Party. The Tarbiyah movement is an initiation of young Muslim activists who initially focused their movements on campus or universities.

In plain view, it is clear that Islamic political parties rely on Islamic symbolization in mobilizing voters based on the emotional relationship. The symbolization of Islam

according to Azyumardi Azra [2] and Rusli Karim [3] is expected to be the "glue" between parties and voters. In connection with that, it turns out the key of the strength of the party, according to O'Donnell and Scmitter [4] lies in its ability to articulate the symbols of party identity such as through names, ideologies, programs, and symbols that unite the party with the voters. Therefore, the ability to articulate becomes a determining factor in gaining support from voters.

Eickelman and Piscatori [5] argue that Islam has become a force in the construction of power relations, so it is often used in building political legitimacy. In addition, Islamic symbolization is considered effective as an instrument of mobilizing support.

The argument that religion is important is certainly not surprising, for example the people of the United States known as the liberal state almost always have a feeling of closeness with certain religious groups and they have a much broader level of religious involvement compared to involvement in politics. And this large participation is expected to have significant influence. Nevertheless, Leege and Kellstendt (2006, p. 423-424) estimates that there are roles played by churches, religious organizations who acts as a medium to politics, an interconnected relations between citizens or individuals with government institutions. [6] stated that "Religion remains one of the best indicators of political behavior. Religion has a lot to do with politics. Because religion shapes and reinforces moral visions."

In this paper, the writers want to understand and dig deeper into the capabilities of Islamic political parties such as PKB and PKS that utilize religious identity sentiments and as an affirmation of the identity politics of each in competing through the electoral arena. The hardening of the Islamic identity since 1999 and increasing further in 2017 however is crucial momentum to be observed. The issue of Islamic sharia and its contradiction with modern democracy is a debate that is always hot. Thus, this research will look at the Political Islam Platform that is tested based on political experience that tends to be very dynamic.

## II. THEORETICAL

### *A. Political of Identity*

In this section, we try to present how concept of political identity and religious symbols as political commodities to win the sympathy of voters. According to Agnes Heller, as quoted in Abdillah [7] defines identity politics as a political concept and movement whose focus is "difference" as being unique. Religious identity is interpreted as political power or

a legitimate tool based on transcendent doctrinal normativity. In addition, religious identity is a symbol of political practices and also its implementation to embrace the sympathy of followers. This is consistent with what has been written by Abdilllah [7] who stated that: *“the power of religion in binding individuals in a bond of togetherness is very strong, religion becomes a strong political commodity for several groups of individuals. Parties that base their principles on religion, are evidence that religious involvement is strong enough.”* So that the Muslim voter ties to Islamic political parties are likely to be able to sustain a party's vote gain. So the bond of Muslim voters against Islamic parties are likely to be able to support the acquisition of the party vote. Therefore, the ability to articulate becomes a determining factor in gaining support from voters

This sociological context seems to be used by Islamic political elites to establish and subsequently maintain the existence of Islamic parties. With the majority of Muslims, naturally they will get support from Muslims. Therefore, the existence of Islamic political parties will automatically be supported by Muslims. Moreover, coupled with a theological perspective, where the need for tools to struggle to realize the aspirations of Islam. With this context, the sociological and theological factors meet, complement and support one another [8].

#### B. Fragmentation of Islamic Political Parties

Before explaining about fragmentation, we will describe the conception of the Islamic party. According to Azra (in Thaha [9] is characterized by the use of Islamic principle, using formal symbol of Islam, and having large constituent from moeslems. So, PKB and PKS can be categorized as Islamic political party.

In the context of the discussion of the fragmentation of Islamic political parties, fragmentation is defined as the breakup of Islamic political power into various forces as in the form of several Islamic parties. Every Islamic party is not a single representation of other Islamic parties. But, in every Islamic party, Islam indeed is part of the party itself, and each has a different form and political appearance (Mashad, 2008, p. 26).

Regarding the roots of the fragmentation of Indonesian society, we can see from Robert Jay's in Effendy [10] research that has made conclusions about the dichotomy between santri and abangan. His main concern was the issue of religious schism which led to political schism that developed between the Santri subculture (devout Muslims) and the Abangan subculture (Muslim Javanese).

On the basis of such a study, Robert Jay tried to explain the course of Islamic politics in the context of Indonesia in the 1950s. The confrontational pattern that developed in the 1955 election was very clear, namely the battle between the two large groups of Masjumi and NU (santri group) with PNI and PKI (abangan group).

In almost the same way, the cultural dimension in Geertz's [11] analysis of flow is important. According to him the flow is a society that has a modern organizational foundation, and emerges from an older socio-cultural framework. The concept of Geertz flow enriches our analytical tools, because the concept is a valuable tool for

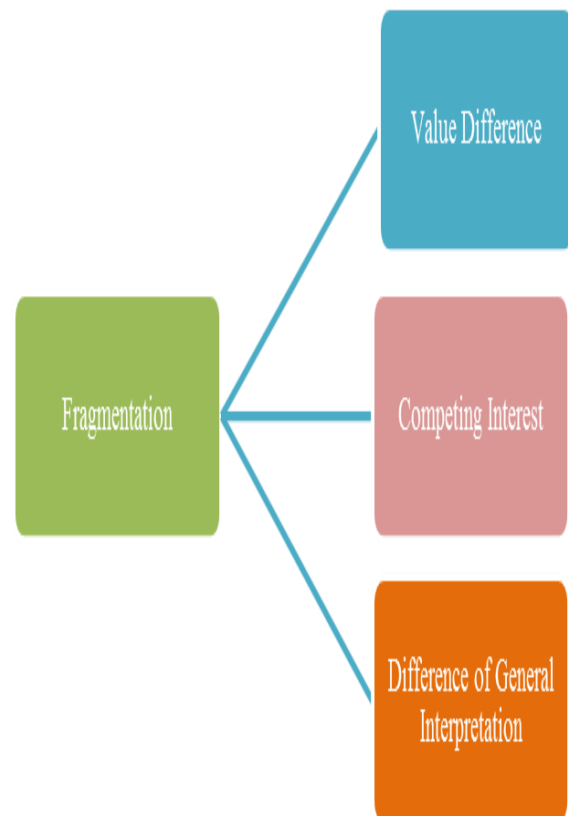
understanding the link between national party ideas and cultural patterns at the most basic level in Indonesia.

In contrast to Robert Jay, Geertz [10] divides three socio-cultural variants known as Abangan, Santri, and Priyayi. Later he explained the general differences between the three variants in his work *The Religion of Java*, he wrote:

"Abangan represents an emphasis on the animistic aspects of all Javanese syncretism and is broadly related to the element of farmers among the population; santri represent an emphasis on the Islamic aspects of syncretism above and is generally related to trade elements (also certain elements in agriculture); and priyayi emphasize Hinduistic aspects and relate to elements of bureaucracy."

Geertz's [12] categorization may be anthropologically inseparable from the difference in the flow of Islamic thought and political attitudes themselves. The condition of Islamic political forces then gave rise to the fragmentation of Islamic political parties. The following figure is three main factors that cause the fragmentation.

FIGURE 1. CAUSES OF FRAGMENTATION ON ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTY



Source : Illustrated according to Mashad Scheme, 2008

Thus, it is clear that political fragmentation occurs at least due to three main factors: Differences in interpretation of values, competing interests, and differences in the interpretation of public interests. As the fragmentation shifts from being just a difference in the meaning of general policy, to competing interests, or even on differences in values, there

will usually be a shift from cooperation to competition, which eventually becomes a conflict. The thicker the level of fragmentation, the stronger the tendency of conflict intensity (Mashad, 2008, p. 41-42 and 123).

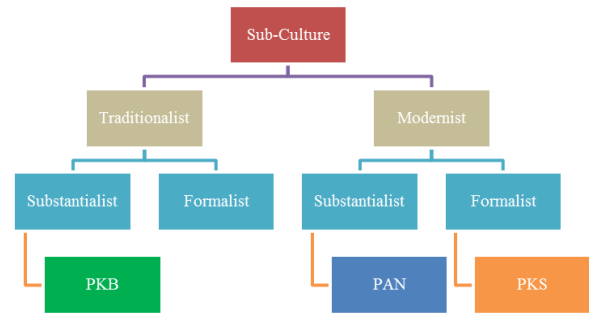
*First*, the difference in interpretation of values. Post-New Order political constellation, there are indeed interesting phenomena in Islamic political discourse in Indonesia. This is marked by the division of Islamic political culture, substantialism and formalism (although it still remains in line with traditional and modernist sub-cultures), of course with all its levels. The polarization, however, was reflected in the process of fragmentation of party formation, which was clearly listened to from the establishment of PAN and PKB (Mashad, 2008, p. 163). The presence of the two parties with a large and broad mass of supporters from among these Muslims, has a platform of pluralism and nationality in addition to religious commitments with their interpretation of Islamic values. The existence of two such parties shows a more substantive transformation and political reorientation [13].

*Second*, competition and differences in interests. The difference in vision, orientation and interests of the political elite is a reflection of the causes of Islamic political fragmentation [13]. Such as the reasons why NU residents want to have their own political party. This is inseparable with reasons that are loaded with interests. The factor of importance can also be seen from the reasons put forward by K.H. Cholil Bisri that NU needs to have its own party, so that it does not become a driver for other people's carriages (meaning other parties). Which indirectly means "good for other people, not good for us". This argument certainly cannot be separated from historical factors, where NU got a disproportionate ration when joining Masyumi and then PPP. The statement from the elderly kiai indicated that the factors of interest became the source and foundation of Islamic political fragmentation (Mashad, 2008, p. 177-178).

*Third*, differences in the meaning of general policy. In the context of party, the difference in values adopted by a party ultimately determines the party's meaning of "general policy". Very subtle differences can be clearly seen at the low level of policy meaning, as reflected in party programs that show a variety of objectives, so that it becomes evidence of differences in trends in policy meaning. The difference came from PKB and PAN with PKS. If PKB and PAN claim to prioritize the values of inclusiveness, then PKS identifies itself as Islamic parties that fight for universal Islamic values by implementing formal Islamic law (formalization) in Indonesia (Mashad, 2008, p. 170-172).

The phenomenon of the establishment of Islamic political parties after the fall of the New Order regime is so diverse and tends to be fragmented. At this point, it appears that the political elites are trying to turn on the sentiments of their respective religious identities as an affirmation of their inherent identity politics. Thus, in the implementation of the above thought, among the Islamist parties there is fragmentation between one party and another, including cultural (modernist versus traditionalist) and ideological (formalist versus substantialist) dimensions. The following is the illustration.

FIGURE 2. POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION OF PAN, PKB, AND PKS



Source : Illustrated by authors

In line with the illustration above, Islamic political parties can be classified into two major dimensions, namely the cultural and ideological dimensions. First, the cultural dimension, in which there is a disparity between traditionalist and modernist groups. The traditionalist group, based on the values contained in it, tried to domesticate the teachings of Islam (acculturation carried out by wali songo and continued by the Ulama / *Kiai*). Parties included in this category are PKB. While the modernist group, refers to the renewal of Islam which is influenced in a global context based on the political thinking of 'modern' or precisely contemporary figures. PKS fall into this category. Second, the ideological dimension, which is divided into formalist groups and substantialist. PKS falls into the category of formalist Islamic party. Therefore, the party formalizes "Islam" into its party both in principle / ideology and the value of its struggle. While PAN and PKB are Islamic parties that are categorized as a substantialist group, because they do not formalize "Islam" in their principles or ideology and prioritize cultural movements rather than formalization (Mashad, 2008, p. 123-124).

### C. Literature Review

In this section, we try to present a summary of Literature Review. *First*, Research by Burhanuddin Muhtadi, in his book entitled "*Dilema PKS: Suara dan Syariah.*" In that study Muhtadi sought to raise the natural aspect of PKS as one of the usual political parties. Muhtadi mostly reviewed the history and political methods of PKS from the time of its birth to the contemporary era. PKS is a political party that was born through the womb of an Islamic social movement called Tarbiyah (Muhtadi, 2014: 34). In his book, Muhtadi uses the perspective of social movements in reading the dynamics of PKS both from the aspect of da'wah and collective actions. PKS itself is a phenomenal party not only in Indonesia but also in the world. In this context it is not uncommon for PKS to be compared to "AKP" in Turkey. However, PKS is also to some degree trapped in a dilemma. PKS as a propaganda party fighting for Islamic values must clash with the concrete reality of politics namely pragmatism and compromise.

*Second*, Research Anthony Bubalo, Greg Fealy, Whit Mason. Published in a book titled "*PKS dan Kembarannya: Bergiat Jadi Demokrat di Indonesia, Mesir dan Turki.*" In their research, they offer an analysis of the dialectical



relationship between practices and concepts of democracy with political Islam in Indonesia, Egypt and Turkey. Democracy, however, has serious implications for the ideas and activism of Al Ikhwanul Muslimin, AKP and PKS. This book is a comparative effort to find the influence of the political context in the process of normalization of political Islam groups which then leads to openness and a more transparent basis (Bubalo et al, 2012: 28). They further believe that internal evolution, shifting, and change are realities that cannot be avoided by the three political parties. The crossing of political Islam with liberal democracy can be said as a compromise in the name of the struggle to uphold Islamic values.

The comparative study provided by the two studies above focuses more on the internal dynamics of the "AKP" and PKS along with the challenges they face, especially the compromises and dilemmas that occur. While in this research, we are trying to analyze the political struggle of the identity of Islamic parties in winning mass sympathy in the electoral arena of Indonesia by PKB and PKS.

### III. METHODS

From a variety of methods, this research uses a qualitative method using an explanatory case study approach. The qualitative method is used because it is very suitable for analyzing and understanding phenomena about an actor's events and actions holistically (Harrison, 2004: 6). The case study approach is a research strategy in which researchers carefully investigate an event, activity, process, or group of individuals. Cases are limited by time and activity, and researchers gather complete information using various data collection procedures based on a predetermined time (Cresswell, 2012: 12).

Furthermore, the use of the explanatory case study method (Yin, 2008: 6-11) is because this approach is able to answer the deep questions that we want to know about the question "How is the use of identity politics implemented by Islamic parties in electoral politics? What is the strategy of Islamic political parties to win votes optimally?."

### IV. DISCUSSION

#### A. Historical roots of the establishment of PKB and PKS

The phenomenon of the establishment of Islamic political parties after the fall of the New Order regime is so diverse and tends to be fragmented. At this point, it appears that the political elites are trying to turn on the sentiments of their respective religious identities as an affirmation of their inherent identity politics. Following below is a note about the historical roots of the birth of three Islamic political parties prior to the 1999 election, namely PKB and PKS (in the 1999 election, the PK / Justice Party).

##### 1) PKB

The National Awakening Party (PKB) was declared on July 23, 1998 in Jakarta. It is common knowledge that PKB was born from the womb of "Nahdlatul Ulama" (NU) with the main initiator, Abdul Rahman Wahid. The establishment of PKB by NU as an effort to overcome the two major trends that emerged in NU after the New Order. One other group is wanting NU to remain a religious organization. The way out

is for NU to establish a party, in this case the PKB, for facilities and articulation of the interests of NU residents without making NU a political party.

Thus, the relationship between NU and PKB is historical, cultural, and aspirational. Historical means the formation of the PKB is closely related to NU. Cultural means that the party make struggle to pay attention the unique cultural environment adopted by NU, namely the cultural environment formed by the Islamic values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*. While aspirational means that PKB is obliged to fight for political ideals possessed by NU followers.

According to Marijan (1999, p. 263), NU politics must be placed in a subordinate position, not in an ordination position. Such a placement would make NU *jam'iyah* have two movements at once. A number of his pilgrims carried out political movements through the formation of political parties, other worshipers and the NU *jam'iyah* itself remained consistent with the 1926 *khitthah* (returns to the original). The organization, founded by traditional scholars and is able to survive until now, is also due to cultural ties. Strong attachments, the relationship of the *Kiai* (religious teacher) with his students, religious doctrines based on the teachings of *ahlusunnah wal jamaah*, and socio-cultural symbols that continue to develop in the NU community have proven to make this mass organization resilient from various shocks. Although since its establishment it has metamorphosed several times into a political movement in different regimes, NU has been able to survive as the largest Islamic religious organization.

##### 2) PKS

Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), standing before the 1999 elections, with the name of the Justice Party (PK). This party became phenomenal because it was born from the *Tarbiyah* movement (campus Muslim activist). *Tarbiyah* literally means education, but according to Liddle and Mujani [14], the word has a more specific meaning for PKS, which is to raise awareness about Islam or Islamic awareness raising. The *tarbiyah* movement is a prototype of the campus missionary movement that emphasizes the educational aspects or guidance of pilgrims with reference to the proselytizing process taken by the Prophet; seeks to apply Islam as a whole (*kaffah*), comprehensive (*syamil*), and human. This movement was originally conceived by Hasan Al-Banna. In its development, this movement was able to fight the political and cultural trends that were quite strong in Egypt in the mid-20th century, to become a movement that was taken into account in the Middle East to Indonesia, and now it became a global movement [15].

The *Tarbiyah* movement is considered successful in articulating itself in Indonesia in a real way and also in the succession of political power raising from the PK initially to turn into the PKS in the 2004 elections [15] The establishment of the party as a form of struggle formally and legally in order to achieve the desire to formally implement Islamic ideology in Indonesia. According to Mashad (p. 102 and 169), the party is one representation of Islamic parties who crave the application of Islamic sharia to Muslims in Indonesia.

**B. Tussle of Identity Politic of Islamic Parties**

In this section, the authors try to present how the constellation of the struggle of Islamic political parties such as PKB and PKS by utilizing political identity and/or religious symbols as political commodities to win the sympathy of voters. The following is the data for votes obtained by PKB and PKS from the 1999 elections to the 2019 elections.

TABLE 1. VOTE GAIN OF PKB DAN PKS FROM 1999 TO 2019

Year of Election	PKB		PKS	
	Total Vote	%	Total Vote	%
1999	13.336.982	12,61	1.436.565	1,36
2004	11.989.564	10,57	8.325.020	7,34
2009	5.146.122	4,94	8.206.955	7,88
2014	11.298.957	9,04	8.480.204	6,79
2019	13.570.097	9,69	11.493.663	8,21

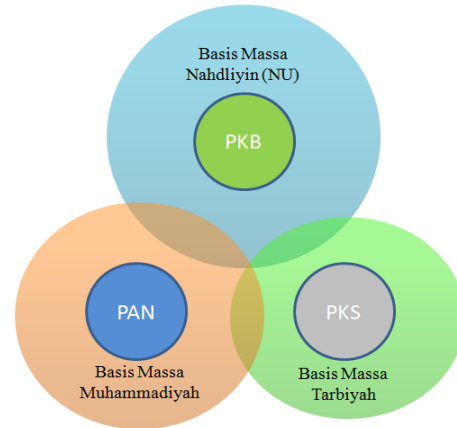
Source : Compiled by author from various sources

PKB in the 1999 elections won third place in the national vote acquisition. However, the basis of mass support from the party was limited in Java. Because almost 90% of the votes come from Java [16] And what's interesting and unique is that this party is strongly supported by rural voters. A character that is suitable as a party of nahdhiyin citizens, mostly in rural areas. In the 2014 election, PKB experienced a fantastic increase in votes of around 6 million votes. From 5,146,122 votes increased to 11,298,957 votes. Even in this election, PKB enough to get a large vote in East Java which is its main base. As we know, that area is an area with a number of elderly kiai and nahdhiyinyang residents who are the main supporters of PKB. The party's glory continues to be seen with the vote acquisition which increased by 2 million in the 2019 elections.

Meanwhile, PKS (in 1999, named PK) obtained 1,436,565 voices. However, this party managed to rise significantly in the 2004 elections by gaining 8,325,020 votes. In the 2009 election, the party gained 7,89% or 8,206,955 votes. However, in the 2014 election, based on the percentage having decreased to 6,79%. But in fact, the party experienced an increase in the number of votes of approximately 280,000 votes. What needs to be understood is that, since the 2004-2014 elections, PKS votes have tended to be fixed at 8 million. This stagnation is trying to assume that it turns out that regeneration according to some internal and external figures from PKS is going very well, but in reality it is not so. The imprecise of the party's vote is proof that the internal regeneration system is facing obstacles like the other parties. However, in the 2019 election, the Tarbiyah party experienced an increase in votes by 3 million votes. The following is a picture that the writers present to describe how the struggle of Islamic parties (PKB, and PKS) tries to

push their identity politics towards their respective main support bases by campaigning for religious issues or problems and at the same time they are targeting mass base outside each core base.

FIGURE 3. BUBLE OF ISLAMIC PARTIES AND CONSTITUEN



Source : Illustrated by authors

The optimization of identity politics is often practiced by PKB and PKS (also PAN) and is a must in achieving electoral targets. Let's look at the phenomenon of national politics especially in 2017 that the theme of Political Islam is very interesting to observe. The strengthening of Islamic identity when the DKI Jakarta elections in 2017 and towards the 2019 elections, through the National Movement to Guard the MUI Fatwa or the GNPF-MUI which is drawing public attention. Political mobilization against the blasphemy case by the Governor of Jakarta at that time opened two crucial political spaces. *First*, Islamic parties such as PKB and PKS try to capitalize or exploit it by further enlarging the political discourse of identity that they have long voiced. A characteristic inherent in a group in this case is the Islamic-style party is the growth of feelings in a community labeled religious identity among its members or cadres. These feelings raise awareness of strong relationships. In addition, according to Abdillah [7] there is also a feeling of "unity and sameness" on each member.

*Secondly*, these efforts require alliances or unity with other elements outside the mass base of the Islamic Party both the Social Organization (Ormas), individuals, and with other nationalist-style parties and a number of changes in internal party policies. The development of Islamic parties in Indonesia to some degree shows irony and paradox. Thus, the struggle for identity politics in Indonesia has become more dynamic and not static. Adaptive actions and changes in the actions of Islamic political parties in response to concrete political realities and developments. Political Islam will be placed in the context of not only identity and ideological elements but also its crossing with efforts to achieve the targets of political power and success in general elections both short and long term.

PKB and PKS have so far expanded the support segmentation beyond its core base. In fact, they are interconnected and wrestling to embrace communities outside their core base. How not, PAN no longer only

consolidates support from Muhammadiyah and urban bases but also targets Nahdlatul Ulama and rural bases. PKB also continues to expand the target is to base Muhammadiyah, urban society and millennial generation. Likewise with the PKS, although on the one hand the party or its elites still maintain and maintain the core base of conservative supporters, but the other side is expanding or developing its electoral base progressively such as targeting the NU and Muhammadiyah bases, so that the party is able to raise significant votes by 3 million vote in 2019.

Such electoral basis strengthening strategy is in line with Kirchheimer's [17].

view of the nature of the catch-all party, which is an open party that targets the broadening of segmentation support across groups indiscriminately or targets anyone or any group that is willing to support and elect Islamic parties during elections.

Islamic parties such as PKB and PKS look so rational in the face of electoral political contestation. This can be seen from the behavior of the patterns he practiced in the last few elections. They tend to be so eager to get their votes as much as possible. Therefore, both PKB and PKS conducted a variety of ways or strategies to pass that, one of which was by expanding the segmentation of the support base to the middle or the mainstream mass base so that there was a struggle between the three Islamic parties. Nevertheless, they still maintain good relations with their traditional militant mass base in order to continue to support the party's votes.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In this study the author's team underlined that Political Islam represented by Islamic parties such as PKB and PKS must in fact encourage compromise and pragmatic steps. Identity politics discourse is often used as a shield to advocate for short-term political achievements. In turn, the struggle for political Islam identity may lead to significant changes in internal party mechanisms and the reinterpretation of party values in a more moderate and accommodating direction to their political environment in order to gain significant vote control especially in the electoral sphere.

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