

IDENTITY POLITICS IN TRANSITION: POLITICAL ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH KALIMANTAN

Meidi Kosandi

Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

meidi.kosandi@ui.ac.id

Abstract

This paper discusses the shift in electoral politics of political Islam in the context of democratic consolidation in Indonesia after Reformasi, particularly in South Kalimantan where 94% of the voters are Muslims and considerably religious. It examines the thesis of fading sectarian politics (politik aliran, sectarian identity-based politics) in Indonesia (Liddle and Mujani, 2004; Hamayotsu, 2012) in the midst of growing oligarchy (Hadiz and Robison, 2005; and Winters, 2011) which led to rationalism and pragmatism in electoral politics, in contrast to sectarian politics. Qualitative methodology was employed by using in-depth interviews with local elite Muslim politicians in South Kalimantan. Perceptions and motives on power, political transactional cost, coalition formation, and sharia law were elaborated and analyzed. This research argues that the political Islam adapted to the changing landscape of the electoral politics, both in elite and mass level. In disagreement with other research which concluded that the political Islam plays important role in a 'religious-democracy' in Indonesia (Tanuwidjaja, 2010), this paper argues that they adjusted their vision and strategy to make the most in the electoral politics in the changing context. Islamic norms and culture, are interpreted in harmony with nationalism and democracy, not particularly distinctive and exclusive. Islamic symbols and networks are considered advantages during election campaign and mobilization, although the Muslim politicians are pragmatic when it comes to electability, popularity, and political transaction in coalition formation and policy making.

Keywords: *democracy, electoral politics, political Islam, symbolic capital*

INTRODUCTION

Populated by mostly religious people does not make South Kalimantan a perfect medium for political Islam to grow. The region is inhabited by approximately 4 million people. 94% of them are Muslims. The rest are either Christians (2.8%), Catholicism (1.8%), Buddhism (1.7%), or Hinduism (0.9%). Not only Muslims are majority in the region, they are also known as a religious community. In the past, during the New Order (1966-1998), South Kalimantan is well known as the basis of Development Union Party (PPP, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan) voters, especially from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) followers. The party got 65% votes in South Kalimantan in the New Order, even higher than its votes in East Java, the traditional mass basis for NU supported political parties such as PPP. South Kalimantan was dominated by PPP Muslim voters then. The proportion of Muslim domination in New Order general elections from time to time was the highest nationally.

After the New Order ended in 1998, the Muslim votes in South Kalimantan dispersed to several parties, including secular parties. The results of general elections in 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014, enabled the four Islamic parties to settle their feet in the local politics by continuously getting seats in the local legislative body. The four parties, PPP, PKB, PKS and PAN, maintain important role in the

local political arena, especially in the local leaders' election, where 20% of seats in the legislative is a requirement for running for local leadership (governor, mayor, or regent).

This research examines the role of political Islam in Indonesian contemporary democracy. It questions whether or not the Islamic political parties are holding on to Islam as ideology and/or identity, and how it affects the shape of Indonesian democracy. The orientation toward Islamic norms and identity is examined through the perception and behavior of Islamic parties' activists. In doing so, in-depth interviews were conducted with local leaders, campaign managers, and party functionaries in South Kalimantan province, Banjarmasin city, Banjarbaru city, and Banjar regency, discussing perception and action during coalition formation, election campaign, and sharia policy making.

This report is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses orientation toward Islamic norms and identity in forming coalition, electoral campaign, and making sharia policy. In this first part we will discuss variations among Islamic political parties, as well as factions within each parties based on orientation towards Islamic norms and identity. The second section elaborates the impact of Islamic parties' behavior on the type of democracy being built in Indonesian local politics, in this case, South Kalimantan local politics. In this part, we will discuss how political relationship between parties, government, and public affects the type of democracy in South Kalimantan. This report will then continue to emphasize the arguments on the role of Islam in shaping Indonesian democracy based on the discussions in the two sections, in the concluding part of the report.

Ideology in Electoral Politics: Theorizing Indonesian Political Islam

The role of ideology in electoral politics has been considered seriously in analyzing electoral politics. According to Downs (1957), ideology is useful to voters to differentiate between political parties. "Ideologies help him to focus attention on differences between parties; therefore they can be used as samples of all the differentiating stands. Furthermore, if a voter discovers correlation between each parties' ideology and its policies, he can rationally vote by comparing ideologies rather than policies". Downs further argues that in a situation where information on policies and strategies of political parties are lacking, the demand for ideologies in democracy increases (1957: 142).

Downs position on political parties' behavior towards ideology is in contrast to both spatial model (Hotelling, 1929; Smithies, 1941) and ideology moderation thesis (Sartori, 1976). The spatial model argues that although parties tend to settle their ideologies in order to set distinction from each other, in a spectrum from left to right, they tend to converge in the middle. Moderation thesis argued that even a radical political groups, when they enter a political system, tend to moderate their ideologies or interpretations of the ideologies. Downs argued that spatial competition theories constructed based on two-party system but inapplicable in a multiparty system. 'Stability in competition' according to Downs, depends on the distribution of voters –normal or polarized– and party system –biparty or multiparty system. Against moderation theory, Downs argued that parties tend to maintain ideology to maintain their differences relative to others. Parties do not necessarily moderate and flock together in the middle or neutral position. In a multiparty system, the voters are most likely distributed in a multimodal curve, leading to consistency to ideology. However, Downs emphasized that despite consistency to ideology, political parties mostly tend to produce less definite, less coherent and less integrated policies. The main factors to this tendency are the tendency towards getting votes and necessity to accommodate coalition in governing.

In the context of growing oligarchy in Indonesia and the growing demand for oligarchic support to compete in the new democracy since *reformasi* and concurrent local leader elections, Islamic parties have to face a changing political relations with the oligarchy and the voters in the contest for power with more secular and non- or less-ideological parties. Some scholars argue that Islam as an ideology is declining as ideology is becoming irrelevant in the contestation (Tanuwijaya, 2010; Baswedan, 2004; and Hamayotsu, 2011). Tanuwijaya suggests that the declining votes for Islamic parties was related to the strategy of secular parties to approach the ideological position of Islamic parties. This argument confirmed Baswedan's argument (2004) of the diversification of political parties into three groups, i.e. Islamist, Islam-inclusive, and inclusive parties. Hamayotsu (2011) further adds that party

institutionalization is a contributing factor to the declining political Islam, in addition to ideological moderation.

The challenge in explaining the role of ideology among political Islam in Indonesian local politics today is the lack of attention to the role of local oligarchy (Ford and Pepinsky, 2013), local boss (Sidel, 2005) or local strongman (Shiraishi, 2000). In this paper, we will elaborate the role of the local boss to electoral politics involving political Islam and its impact to the identity politics of the political Islam.

Ideology in Coalition Formation and Election Campaign

During the local leader concurrent elections (Pilkada serentak) in 2015 in South Kalimantan, Islamic parties successfully promote their candidates to become governor, mayors and regents. In the provincial election, Syahbirin Noor and Rudy Resnawan won the election with the support from the coalition of Golkar Party, Gerindra Party, Hanura Party, PDIP, and two Islamic parties, namely PAN and PKS. Noor and Resnawan successfully defeated Muhidin and Farid Hasan Aman (independent candidate) and Zairullah Azhar and Muhammad Syafi'i who were supported by other Islamic party, namely PKB. PPP was not able to promote any candidate due to internal conflict between Djan Farid and Romahurmuzy factions. However, the head of PPP in South Kalimantan, Rudy Arifin (formerly governor), became the campaign manager for Noor and Resnawan.

The victory of Syahbirin Noor in the election was surprising to some people, noting that compared to other candidates, Muhidin and Azhar, Noor was relatively inexperienced in coping with public problems, governance issues and politics. Syahbirin Noor was an entrepreneur, a director of a coal mining company owned by Syamsudin. Syamsudin, however, is the local boss who dominated coal mining industry in South Kalimantan. Prior to working with Syamsudin, Noor served as lurah (village leader) and secretary of a kecamatan (district). The other two candidates were more popular and experienced than Noor.

Zairullah Azhar was Bupati (regent) of Tanah Bumbu regency for two periods (2005-2015). Prior to that, he was also a national parliament member from PPP, and even led the Commission 1 of the DPR RI, in charge of national policy on security and foreign affairs. He also ran for governorship in the previous two governor elections (2005 and 2010) and lost only with a little gap to Rudy Arifin, the then elected governor.

Muhidin was not less popular and experienced than Azhar. Before running for governor election in 2015, Muhidin was a popular mayor of Banjarmasin city. He was known by the people as a visionary and transformative leader who had transformed the capital city of South Kalimantan into a better place for business and tourism with better infrastructure. Muhidin's popularity was also considered as a dominant factor that made possible PKPI to gain seats in the province and city.

The result of governor election in 2015 was unexpected by the two competitors and their followers, as Noor got 41% votes, followed by Muhidin with 40% votes and Azhar with 19% votes. The margin votes between Noor and Muhidin was only 1% based on the "real count" by the general election commission (KPU, Komisi Pemilihan Umum). It is also interesting to note that based on "quick count" by independent survey institutes, Muhidin's votes was slightly higher than Noor by 2% margin, with 3% margin of error. However, Muhidin and his supporters did not file any protest to the Constitutional Court nor General Election Commission.

Another interesting outcome of the governor election was the fact that Muhidin's vote proportion as a non-party candidate was considerably high. The candidate supported by the dominant Islamic party such as PKB in coalition with Democrat Party and National Democrat Party in a region populated by mostly NU affiliated people, Zairullah Azhar, came last in the race for governor office, left behind Noor and Muhidin with a considerably large gap.

What does this picture tell us? How do we best explain the election result? If parties' constellation, coalition formation, and voters' identity and ideology cannot explain the voting result, then what does?

This research finds that contestation between the three candidates dominated by three kinds of power resource, i.e. capital (money politics), capability (leadership capacity, knowledge and vision) and popularity. Ideology and identity was present, but only with relatively low impact to even the

muslim constituent. Coalition formation and strategy also plays important contribution to the result of the election.

The victor of the governor election in South Kalimantan, Noor, appears to be supported by very strong capital power. His campaign team spent approximately two trillion rupiahs to win the election. This number is 40 times bigger than the campaign budget of the third candidate, Azhar, who spent 50 billion rupiahs, including to hire a national level political consultant and survey institution. The other candidate, Muhidin, being the richest candidate for governorship, reportedly spent only approximately 20 billion rupiahs, even lower than Azhar's expenses.

During the campaign, the elected governor did not actually demonstrate sufficient capability to compete with Muhidin and Azhar. Both Muhidin and Azhar dominated the public debate among the candidates broadcasted widely on television. The debate enabled the public to be informed about the candidates' vision, strategy, policy, and capability in understanding and solving collective problems. During the debate, Azhar was noted as the most knowledgeable candidate while Muhidin demonstrate capability to overcome problematic situations. Yet, Noor won the election. This clearly indicated that leadership capability and transformational leadership character may have contributed to the large number of votes that Muhidin got. It was sufficient to compete with Noor's capital power, but not sufficient to win the election. Muhidin, once again, spent only a limited amount of capital into his campaign compared to Noor and Azhar.

Coalition formation and strategy shows some importance in the contest between Noor and Muhidin. In the 2015 concurrent local leader election, it happens that regencies and cities in the South Kalimantan province are also conducting local leader elections, except for Barito Kuala and Hulu Sungai Utara regencies. Muhidin was very popular in Banjarmasin and other urban areas. But Noor's coalition parties make use of Noor's large campaign budget by combining provincial and regency/city candidacy campaign to compete with Muhidin's popularity. During the campaign, the voters were asked to elect the governor and mayor/regent candidates in a package, such as Syahbirin Noor for governor of South Kalimantan and Ibnu Sina for Mayor of Banjarmasin.

Relations between Party, Government, and Public: Shaping Local Democracy

Despite the tendency of the people in South Kalimantan to Islamic religious belief in daily life, their political participation in the 2015 concurrent local leader election was least affected by Islamic symbols and identity. The candidate that was known for normative leadership as an ulama, Zairullah, was not very competitive in the race with Noor and Muhidin. One important factor to the defeat is that Zairullah religious position is matched by Noor's approach to networks of pesantren, and support by the second largest Islamic party in South Kalimantan, PPP, although informally by PPP's leader's participation as Campaign Manager of Noor's candidacy. Muhidin was also later supported by one of Islamic parties, namely PAN. With the issue of Islamic affiliation matched by all candidates, it became less important to the public, and made transactional cost more important.

However, despite the fact of rational behavior of the public in participating in the local leader elections, Islamic religious believe still very important to the government and political parties in making policies. South Kalimantan remains among the regions to issue many sharia policies in Indonesia. Since 2015, there are still a few policies that endorse sharia implementation among muslims in South Kalimantan.

Most of the political Islam in the Islamic parties became more pragmatic in politics and policy making, despite minority of idealist muslim politicians. The minority idealists believe that their participation in politics matters for spreading Islamic teaching (da'wah) and materializing Islam as virtue to the society (rahmatan lil 'alamin). There are two notable religious leaders who became a mayor and a regent. Although admittedly elected by transactional cost politics, both of them are committed to implement da'wah and to realize Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin. This is reflected in their support for sharia laws and concerns for public well-being.

CLOSING REMARKS: IDENTITY POLITICS IN QUESTION

Political Islam in South Kalimantan is faced with a changing landscape of political structure and relations in both elite level and society level. In order to participate and survive in the politics and governance, however virtuous his/her motivation, the political structure and relations demanded adaptation to the character of democracy that is transactional and dependent upon popularity. Identity politics as a single strategy has become less significant for winning elections, but remains important to balance popular religious leaders. In order to win elections, the political Islam had to adapt to the transactional cost politics while compete in capability and popularity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meidi Kosandi, PhD: is a lecturer and researcher at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia (FISIP UI). His research interests include political economy, party politics, public policy, geopolitics and security studies in Indonesia, Southeast and East Asia.