

The Failure of Islamic Parties in Indonesia

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Introduction

Indonesia is predominantly Muslim country, from its independence until now the majority of Indonesian citizen is Muslim, although the number of Muslim in Indonesia decreases from around 99% to just 88%⁹⁸, but because the sizable number of its citizen, Muslim in Indonesia could be the largest Muslim community within a state. This phenomenon makes us difficult to escape Islam as a major religion in Indonesia with every theme of discussion including politics.

Talking about Islam and politics might be a boring theme for several people, however religion has a significant position we can not deny in discussing political themes. As Anthony Gill argues that the world events give more clear evidences that religion is, and will continue to be, a major player in politics⁹⁹. In my opinion this is correct since almost all – if not saying all – people in the world hold religions as part of life and it is related to everyone life, including politics.

If we seen Islam as a major point in political arena, unfortunately many people argue that Islam failed to play a good role in terms of politics. One of them is Oliver Roy. He states that re-islamization did not change political rule nor economic¹⁰⁰. In relation to that, this paper will examine the thesis that Islam has neither significant role nor effects to the political system. However this study is limited to the Indonesian state and in particular studying the failure of Islamic parties in Indonesia.

⁹⁸Kenneth M. George, *Design on Indonesia's Muslim Community*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Aug., 1998), p. 696

⁹⁹Anthony Gill, *Religion and Comparative Politics*, *Annual Reviews* 2001, p. 135

¹⁰⁰Oliver Roy, *Gagalnya Islam Politik*, Jakarta, Serambi, p. 28

Party and Islamic Parties in Indonesia

Roy C. Macridis states that there is no a political system can runs without political party.¹⁰¹ This is because political party has a significant function in the modern political system. Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond clearly mention that political party has seven function, namely: (1) Candidate nomination, (2) Electoral mobilization, (3) Issue structuring, (4) Societal representation, (5) Interest aggregation, (6) Forming and sustaining governments, and (7) Social integration.¹⁰²

In Indonesian political system political parties has been changing over the time. Indonesian political system experienced multi-parties system, single party system, limited multi-party system, and now Indonesian people are experiencing the multi-parties system.¹⁰³

As a majority, Islam has affected the political system in Indonesia. The evidence of this phenomenon is emerging of Islamic Political Parties. Yes, parties with plural form, since there are many Islamic political parties in Indonesia. Yet, Allan A. Samson, when seeing the enthusiasms of Islamic political parties to participate in 1999 Indonesian General Election, states that Islam is the most religion point that has a most strong connection to politics.¹⁰⁴

While Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond mention four typology of party types, namely: Elite Parties, Mas-Based Parties, Ethnicity-Based Parties; and Movement Parties.¹⁰⁵ Theoretically the Islamic parties included in the Mass-based party. The mass is the follower and believers of the religion.

Islam and the state have a strong and long relationship. The relationship between Islam and politics in Indonesia even has been stated since the beginning of the

¹⁰¹Roy C. Macridis, *Pengantar Sejarah, Fungsi, dan Tipologi Partai-Partai*, in *Teori-Teori Mutakhir Partai Politik*, edited by Dr. Ichlasul Amal, (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana Yogya), 1998, p. 18

¹⁰²Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond, *Types and Functions of Parties*, in *Political Parties and Democracy*, (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press), 2001, p. 7-8

¹⁰³Merriam Budiardjo, *Mencari Sistem Kepartaian yang Cocok*, in *Partisipasi dan Partai Politik; Sebuah Bunga rampai*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia), 1998, p. 257

¹⁰⁴As quoted by Khamami Zada, *Problem Empiris Politik Islam*, in *Mengapa Partai Islam Kalah?*, p. 95

¹⁰⁵For more details please see Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond, *Types and Functions of Parties*, in *Political Parties and Democracy*, Maryland, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p.9

independence. As we can find in the Indonesian history log, in the first general election in 1955 there were Masyumi and NU party.

In contrast, a sizable number of Muslim population in Indonesia and the emerge of many Islamic political parties do not guarantee that Islamic political party get a victory in Indonesian political system.

Why Islamic Parties Loses? The fail of Islamic Parties in 1999 and 2005 left a big question mark. The majority of Indonesian citizen is Muslim, the number of Islamic Parties is much, not only one party, so the voter have many option to decide whom would he support. But then the result was fail. In the 1999 Indonesian General Election the wining party was PDI and in 2005 Indonesian General Election was Golkar. Here are some analytical answers.

Islamic political parties in the reality face many empirical problems, some of them are:

(1) The complexity of Islamic Parties. There are too many Islamic parties in Indonesia that has similarities in basis and principle, for example in PKB, PAN, PBB, etc. This problem has an easy way out but seems impossible to implement. That is building one unity strong Islamic party, so the voter sound would be united and stronger. This phenomenon seems that reflection of the compound of Indonesian Muslim and the political interest of some Muslim organizations.

(2) Conflict potention. Since the complexity of Islamic parties, it is vulnerable to lead to conflict. The evidences of this conflict can easily be seen when the time of political campaign. Both psychological conflicts and physicals conflicts can be easily occur, for example insulting words or physicals conflict. In this time we can not see the *ukhuwah islamiyah* they should keep. Even the recent case is PKB divided into two polars. Both of them claims as the truth and in linear have a right to use political party's attributes. This problem still become polemic and makes the supporters frustration.

(3) The Islamic politic in Indonesia have not gain what so called political activity,

since there is no united leader

(4) The over expectations. The reality is that the large number of Muslim voters in Indonesia does not guarantee that Islamic political party will have much loyal follower, many Muslim voter now have many consideration to vote, not only about religious matter. As can be seen, historically the Islamic parties never are the majority in general election, not in the old era, new order era, nor the reformation era. On the other hand many leaders of Islamic political parties are having a big expectation.

To answer this problem the keyword is *ukhuwah islamiyah*.¹⁰⁶

Another way to investigate the failure of Islamic political parties is understanding what is Muslim voter consideration to vote a political party. According to Abdul Munir Mulkan is client relationship. Many Muslims tend to make client relationship more as a reason to vote a political parties rather than religious reason. The majority of Muslims are physical worker (labor) and farmer that consider more client relationship, because the main point in their life is real life that hard, not only about the religious matter¹⁰⁷

In respond to the lose of Islamic political party in Indonesia, Sugiono said that it is because Muslim in Indonesia is variety, at least he mention three variety of Muslim in Indonesian, namely: modern Islam, traditional Islam and abangan Islam. In addition, the abangan Islam is the majority, compared to the two others. The abangan Muslims are not so religious in their daily life, therefore in terms of politics they highly consider to give the political aspiration to the nationalist party like PDI-P. Therefore the Islamic parties seems does not make them attracted to vote. The second variant is traditional Islam, although the number of modernist Muslim is quite big, but their vote is divided to many Islamic parties, in similar to that condition, the modernist Muslim vote also divided into many Islamic party. This result in small presentage of muslim vote and the way out is to unity the Islamic

¹⁰⁶Khamami Zada, *Problem Empiris Politik Islam*, in *Mengapa Partai Islam Kalah?* p.95-97

¹⁰⁷Abdul Munir Mulkan, *Memahami Perilaku Pemilih Muslim*, in *Mengapa Partai Islam Kalah?* p. 124-125

party so the vote can be significant. .¹⁰⁸

Another opinion why Islamic party loses in Indonesian General Election is stated by Saiful Mujani.¹⁰⁹ According to Mujani, (1) Socialization among Muslim voters. The PPP an old party, they have more experience and time to socialize their party. Many Muslim also recognize them well. This condition makes them have what so called *party ID*. While relatively new parties do not have that much time to socialize their party and install the image of theory party in the mind of Muslim voters. So, the party ID is important to attract Muslim voters.

In conclusion, the Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia are facing many huge problems. One of the crucial problem is the compound of the number of the Islamic political parties. This particular problem actually has a simple solution, which is uniting all Islamic political party in one organization (political party), then shows all the citizen that Islamic political party can act in an Islamic ways. however the solution seems extremely difficult to be implement. Many people—particular;y whom has budget and political interest—more and more tries to build political party.

This phenomenon is like evidence that Islam still be a nice political tool to attract people, and dreams that they would be a political leader.

¹⁰⁸Sugiono, *Islam dan Politik di Indonesia*, in *Mengapa Partai Islam Kalah?* p.183-185

¹⁰⁹Saiful Mujani, *Kekalahan Partai Islam*, in *Mengapa Partai Islam Kalah?* 196-197

