

Nationalist Vs Islamic: The Dynamic of *Politik Aliran* in Post-Suharto Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Democracy in post-Suharto Indonesia is dynamic, especially in terms of electoral politics. Some scholars assume that *politik aliran* (political streams) is still continued, but others believe it has ended. In this article, we examine the dynamic of *politik aliran* in the 1999, 2004 and 2009 general elections. It is widely recognised that the votes of both Nationalist and Islam political parties declined from election to election. This study aims to analyse the continuity and change both of Nationalist and Islamic parties in Indonesia. The results of the study suggest that electoral politics based on *politik aliran* in post-Suharto Indonesia continues, but the number of votes for neither Islamic nor for Nationalist parties have changed. The balance of power between Islamic parties and Nationalists parties is expected to change.

Keywords: Indonesia, Islam, nationalist, party, *politik aliran*, volatility

INTRODUCTION

Politik aliran (political streams) in Indonesia refers to political cleavages. Its implicit meaning carries a note of socio-religiosity or *santri-abangan-priyayi*, a form of political institution such as Islamic and Nationalist political parties. From the first democratic elections held in 1955 until the elections of 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997 under a repressive New Order regime, scientists considered that *politik aliran* was the

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determinant factor that affected political behaviour (Aminuddin, 2016; Naharuddin, 2016; Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016). *Politik aliran* also continued in post-Suharto Indonesia (Baswedan, 2004a, King, 2003, 2004b, Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016).

According to King (2003), in some regions, the number of votes for parties in the 1999 election was similar to that in 1955 when the election was marked by *politik aliran*. Using King's method, Baswedan compared the 1999 and 2004 elections in terms of the pattern of voter support and found a significant number of votes for Islamic parties in every town and district, with a majority of Moslem, Nationalist and Christian parties getting strong support from PDI -P *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle supporters (Baswedan, 2004b). In the 2009 election, however, voter loyalty to these parties dwindled (Nurjaman, 2017).

Saiful Mujani (2007); William Liddle; Wawan Sobari (2016) argued against this, stating that the influence of religious orientation on the vote for Islamic parties in the post-Suharto election was not significant. Wawan Sobari stated, "The Javanese phrase '*anut grubyuk*' was mentioned by voters as one of the reasons for voting the way they did" (Wawan Sobari, 2016, p. 249). On their part, Liddle and Mujani found that leadership was a significant factor in political behaviour as a consequence of the development of the mass media, especially television, in rural areas (Mujani & Liddle, 2010). Another study also found that "Information and Communication

Technology (ICT) has the highest impact as the best option during the campaign and more effective and improve monitoring of the progress of the party" (Yaacob, Ambong, Endut, & Amin, 2014, p. 1). Nevertheless, we assume that *politik aliran* still exists, although there have been changes from one election to the next.

In this article, I seek to examine the votes for both Nationalist and Islamic block parties at the national level. A study of block parties in the electoral arena is very important for several reasons: first, the dynamic of electoral politics will affect the issues of the electoral campaign; second, a change in the number of votes within block parties will affect policy outcomes in parliament; third, such a change will affect the party coalition and the party in power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Democracy and Political Party

Political parties play an important role in a modern democracy (representative democracy). Scholars have repeatedly stressed the importance of political parties and see it as the main criterion for measuring democracy, especially in transition because "during the transition and over subsequent electoral periods, political parties have emerged in these democracies to select candidates, mobilize constituents, contest elections, and form governing coalitions" (Lupu, 2013, p. 1340). However, nations with a long tradition of democracy will remain stable, as, according to Wittenberg (2013), "these countries and the voters

living there accumulate experience with democracy and a democratic party system, however, levels of volatility are expected to decrease” (Wittenberg, 2013, p. 22).

Political parties also provide issues and a choice of leadership for the public, which they promise will be implemented when they come to power. Schattsneider stated that it is clear that political parties create democracy, and modern democracy is unthinkable without the existence of political parties (Saglie & Heidar, 2004, p.1). However, Veenendaal (2016) has challenged this argument, stating:

. . . the Schattschneider thesis may hence be empirically incorrect, from a more normative perspective the idea that parties fulfill a crucial role in a representative democracy seems to be at least partially confirmed by the present analysis of Palau. In the case of Palau, the absence of parties is strongly related to the significance of clan relations and personalistic politics, and as several respondents indicated these alternatives to political parties have a largely negative impact on Palauan politics. (Veenendaal, 2016, p. 8)

Regarding the transition from oligarchic to democratic societies, Acemoglu (2004) offered a different argument i.e.

. . . in a certain moment in time an oligarchic regime may have a comparative advantage over a democratic one in terms of the preservation of property rights, thanks

to its greater capacity and incentives to set lower tax rates on the elite’s wealth. (Mejía & Posada, 2007, p. 7)

This argues that the previous regime prepares for a further step of democracy, particularly democratic transition into the second phase of consolidation of democracy. Briefly, when a democratic regime and the effective functioning of democratic institutions have been established and have legitimacy, then the format and function of the party system become very important.

. . . almost 30 years ago, ‘the stability of the party system [rather than the parties] was the really decisive factor for the stability of the whole system in all democratic systems. . . its findings have important implications in terms of how democracy should be promoted. . . should be approached with a preferential eye on party systems rather than merely on parties, as has usually been the . . . focusing on party systems must remain a basic if not the central theme for examining the survival of liberal democracy. (Casal Bértoa, 2016, p. 20)

This means that the stabilisation of the party and the party system is very important for the government. The stabilisation of the party and party system is correlated with the stabilisation of political cleavage; the cleavage determines political behaviour or ‘the frozen cleavages’. Similar to the last pint is “the basic cleavages that undergird party support over the medium or long

term: the national revolution that produced a cleavage between the central state and peripheral communities and between the central state and a supranational church; and the industrial revolution that produced an urban/rural cleavage, and later a worker/employer cleavage” (Hooghe & Marks, 2017, p. 3).

Regarding “the frozen cleavages”, many researchers have to accept the fact that the cleavage not frozen anymore due to decreasing alignment and increasing individual emancipation. A general process of de-alignment occurs across time, indicated by the decreasing association between political preferences on the one hand and class, religion and regime preferences on the other. Regarding how religious cleavage works in shaping political behaviour, Bargsted wrote:

The level of religiosity – as indicated by the intensity of religious feelings, beliefs, or behaviors – can also shape political preferences. . . . found that after extensive statistical controls more frequent worship is associated with right ideological self-placement and that the effect was stronger than that of class. Church attendance, the most commonly used indicator of religiosity, is often seen as a strong determinant of rightist positions (Bargsted, 2012, p. 6)

In addition, the impact of the emancipation of individual voters over time has meant that people no longer vote for the party of their social group. In order

to respond to these circumstances, political parties began to look for other social groups and tried not to focus solely on their social affiliations. Some Islamic parties used the issue of poverty or low income to politicise Islam (Choi, 2017). Political issues became a more determinant effect as a base of their choice in the election, as various scholars pointed out that the decline in voting structure went hand in hand with the growing issue of voting. Furthermore, “Strengthening of ethnic tolerance among the youth involves educating them on the cultural differences and issues of interethnic relations through the mainstream news media” (Tamam et al., 2008, p. 1).

Political Cleavage in Indonesia

Many scholars have shown that religious cleavage is the most significant factor in studying electoral politics. Trihartono and Patriadi (2016) pointed out the importance of religious cleavage, especially Indonesians’ electoral politics. “Social cleavages are widely assumed to have a close link with the party system. In a plural society like Indonesia, in which primordial sentiments frequently emerge, the cleavages do not only draw upon different social groups, .., its election and party system have been frequently analyzed through cleavages framework” (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016, p. 26). Conventional wisdom regarding the effect of social cleavages maintains that greater social cleavage diversity leads to greater party system fragmentation (Raymond, Huelshoff, & Rosenblum, 2016, p. 2).

Cleavage theory, originated by Lipset and Rokkan, conceives a national party system as the expression of underlying social conflicts (Hooghe & Marks, 2017, p. 3). Cleavages can be derived from economic class, religion, ethnicity, language, culture and geography, among others. But the determinant cleavage comes from religion, as Knutsen (2012) pointed out: “Some important political value orientations can be derived from the structural cleavages incorporated in the well-known model of Lipset and Rokkan (1967). The religious cleavage is related to religious versus more secular values” (Knutsen, 2012, p. 4). However, religious leaders in diverse societies competing along a dominant versus minority religious cleavage often seek to incorporate overlapping ethnic and/or class issues into their struggles (Raymond, 2016, p. 6).

Just as other countries have frozen cleavage based on religion, Indonesia too has a basic cleavage based on religious behaviour, namely political streaming or *politik aliran* in Indonesian. *Politik aliran* is a generic term used to refer to the term political cleavages, even though it may be somewhat less precise. In the absence of an equivalent term, *politik aliran* is used to give meaning to the term political cleavages. It was suggested as a political concept by Clifford Geertz (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016, p. 3) and despite garnering some amount of criticism, it continues to be a major tool in the study of Indonesian politics.

The pattern of *politik aliran* gives implicit meaning to the socio-religious term, *santri-abangan-priyayi*, a type of political institution such as Islamic or Nationalist parties. “Those distinctions have been carefully elaborated in Indonesia, most famously with Clifford Geertz’s differentiation of *abangan* (traditional, less orthodox) and *santri* (modernist and more pious, generally divided into urban and rural variants) sociopolitical *aliran* (streams)” (Weis, 2010, p. 84). “*The Religion of Java*”, the seminal book by Geertz (1959) continues to be cited up to today in social discourse, politics and culture in Indonesia, providing the main reference for scientists for understanding Java.

Briefly, *santri* is a devout Moslem group that seeks to ensure that Islam is the basis or foundation for political groupings, such as political parties and the state. Therefore, Islamic political parties were formed, and in the 1950s it was attempted to govern Indonesia based on Islam. On the other hand, *abangan* is a nominal Moslem group who believe that Islam is not important in socio-political life. Thus, it should come as no surprise if *abangan* eventually become more open to other dominant political ideology such as communism. The third group, *priyayi*, is a Moslem group who are culturally close to *abangan*; what sets them apart is the way they behave, which is more refined. In addition, many of them are government officials.

METHODS

The aim of this study was to gain greater insight into the nature of *politik aliran* (political streams) by exploring a secondary set of electoral data. To examine the viability of the arguments that have been derived from the theory, this study conducted a qualitative analysis of party votes for both Islamic and Nationalist parties in Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in 1998 and its effects on the dynamic of *politik aliran* (political streams) in the following period.

To fulfil data collection requirements, the research used secondary data. The main databank was obtained from the Indonesian National Electoral Commission (KPU) and others sources such as books, documents and journals. Data that needed to be calculated were the Nationalist block party votes, Islamic block party votes and the volatility of the party block votes. Data on the secondary electoral results of the national election were collected from the Internet website, www.kpu.go.id. A qualitative method of analysis was used to assess whether political cleavage factors (Islamic vs Nationalist) related to the election result can explain differences in the volatility of block votes for the parties in each Indonesian election.

Although this study will not provide a conclusive answer to the question of whether the strength of cleavage inhibited or aggravated electoral volatility, the analysis will hopefully provide useful insights into how different features of party ideology affect the dynamics of *politik aliran* (political streams). The in-depth

studies will be written about the Islamic block party (Modernist and Traditionalist), analyzing the volatility of votes that induced a change in *politik aliran* (political streams) and traditionalist parties, which continue *politik aliran* (political streams) today despite the decrease in their votes. Electoral results of both modernist and traditionalist Islamic parties have been relatively well-documented.

RESULTS

Politik aliran in post-Suharto Indonesia persists even though some of its dynamics correlate with the volatility of the votes for the parties from one election to the next. The results of the 1999 election were congruent with that of the 1955 election due to the fact that many of the parties in the 1950s were both Nationalist and Islamic parties. In 1999, there were more votes for the Nationalist block than for the Islamic block, but in 2004, there was a slight change, and the votes for the Nationalist block decreased somewhat. In 2009, the votes for the Islamic block decreased significantly (10.83%) (Table 1).

Continuity of *Politik Aliran*: Total Vote of Nationalist Parties and Islamic Parties Persist

The first national election in 1955 resulted in a party system structured by *aliran* (Ufen, 2006, p. 28) and this trend continued in the post-Suharto Indonesia elections. The National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional*, PAN) and the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, PKB)

for example, had strong affinity with two parties from the 1950s, the *Masyumi* and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU). PPP (*Persatuan Pembangunan*, United Development Party), and Golkar are state-sponsored products of the New Order regime, while the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) is “the prominent new political trend in the mid-2000s in urban Indonesia” (Okamoto, 2014, p. 9), emerging out of a campus-based religious movement.

Most of the parties in post-Suharto Indonesia, in both the Nationalist and Islamic block, were a continuation of the 1955 election. However, in the 1999 election, most of the voters chose Nationalist parties such as *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDIP, Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle) and *Golongan Karya* (Golkar, The Functional Group of Parties). PDIP was the majority winner with 35,689,073 votes (33.74%), while, Golkar as a party ruler in the time of the New Order government, was the second plurality winner after PDI, with 22.44%. The hegemonic party, Golkar, lived on after the fall of the Suharto regime although the numbers were volatile, at 22.4% in 1999, 21.58% in 2004 and 14.45% in 2009. However, during the New Order period, Golkar always gained the average vote of more than 60%.

On the other hand, the number of votes for the Islamic block parties in post-Suharto Indonesia was relatively the same, although the share of the votes among the Islamic parties in the block changed from one election to the next. Moreover, although Indonesia has a majority Moslem (80%) population (Baswedan, 2004a p. 1; Buehler, 2009, p. 1), the share of the votes for the Islamic block parties was not significant. In 1999, the vote shares for the Islam block parties was 38.10%, and this increased to 2.22% in 2004. Nevertheless, the increasing votes for the Islamic block parties, from 38.10% (1999) to 40.32% (2004) was short-lived as in the next election, the number of votes for the Islam block parties dropped dramatically from 40.32 % to 29.49%. With that, the Islamic block parties lost about 10.83% of the vote in 2009 (Table 1). In comparison, in the 1955 election, Masjumi and NU as the Islamic parties of the era, obtained approximately 43.70% of the votes (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016, p. 30).

Although the votes for the Islamic parties fluctuated, most the parties, such as *Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP, United Development Party), *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (PKB, National Awakening Party), *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS, Prosperity and Justice Party) and *Partai Amanat*

Table 1
Comparison of the number of votes obtained by the Nationalist vs the Islamic blocks of parties

	Votes (%)					
	1955	1999	2004	Change	2009	Change
Islamic	43.70	38.10	40.32	+ 2.22	29.49	- 10.83
Nationalist	56.3	61.90	59.68	- 2.22	70.51	+ 10.83

Source: Research Findings

Nasional (PAN, National Mandate Party) endured the shifting political climate.

In 1999, PPP had listed the principles of Islam as its party ideology. This party survived from the New Order era party, which was originally a consolidation of some of the parties based on religion. Since the PPP was the result of this merger, the elite of PPP were a combination of modernist and traditionalist leaders. Meanwhile, *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS, Prosperity and Justice Party) had attracted much attention due to its spectacular increase in the number of votes in 2004. The former name of the party was Justice Party (PK, 1999), but the name had to be changed due to a low electoral threshold of 2.5%. At the time, the party received only 1.7% of the votes, but this number increased four-fold to 7.3% in the next election in 2004, and then increased again slightly in 2009 to stand at 7.9%. The party was led by a cadre of passionate and highly educated leaders of Islamic student organisations. PKS successfully utilised organisation and campaign techniques introduced by Western democracies. This encouraged other Islamic parties to undertake similar efforts to revamp to more modern campaign strategies.

Another Islamic party, *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (PKB, National Awakening Party), was a revamp of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the biggest Islamic mass organisation in Indonesia, and was proposed by Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur). It was one of the Islamic parties that drew strength and support from the constituencies; however, this party lacked organisation and

succumbed to many internal conflict among its elites. In the 1999, 2004 and 2009 general elections, PKB's number of votes was, respectively 7.12%, 6.47% and 6.01%. It would be no exaggeration to assert that PKB and NU were the same party as Gus Dur, the founder of PKB, was also a central figure in NU.

Changes to *Politik Aliran*: The Volatility of Islamic Block Party Votes

Parties such as PBB, PKS and PAN were classified as modernist Islamic parties. On the other hand, PKB, PNU, PNUI and PKNU were classified as traditionalist Islamic parties. Islamic parties in post-Suharto Indonesia had no stable electoral performance due to reforms to the electoral system and the emergence of new parties. Núñez, Simón and Pilet pointed out that "volatility does indeed increase the likelihood of reforming the electoral system but only when volatility due to new parties is considered" (Núñez, Simón, & Pilet, 2017, p. 15).

Moreover, in the post-Suharto election, modernist Islamic parties showed an increasing trend in their electoral performance compared to the traditionalist parties. However, the total number of Islamic parties, whether modernist or traditionalist, from one election to the next was slightly equal. The number of votes for the traditional Islamic parties (minus PPP) in the 1999, 2004 and 2009 general elections, respectively, were 14.35%, 14.59% and 7.95% (Table 2). The number of votes for PPP itself, respectively was 10.71%, 8.16%

and 5.32%. In this article, PPP is classified as a traditionalist Islamic party, since many modernist Islamic voters swung their vote to the modernist party, PAN.

Table 2
Comparison vote of modernist Vs traditionalist Islam parties in 1999, 2004 and 2009 general elections

Islamic Parties	1999 Election Year			2004 Election Year			2009 Election Year		
	Party Name	Vote (%)	Total Vote (%)	Party Name	Vote (%)	Total Vote (%)	Party Name	Vote (%)	Total Vote (%)
Modernist Islamic Parties	PBB	1.94	12.42	PBB	2.56	17.57	PBB	1.79	16.22
	PK	1.36		PKS	7.20		PKS	7.88	
	PAN	7.12		PAN	6.47		PAN	6.01	
	PDR	0.40		P. Merdeka	0.74				
	Others	1.60		Other	0.60			Other	
Traditionalist Islamic Parties	PKB	12.61	14.35	PKB	11.98	14.59	PKB	4.94	7.95
	PNU	0.64		PNUI	0.79		PKNU	1.47	
	Other	1.10		Other	3.19		Other	1.54	
	PPP	10.71		PPP*	8.16		PPP	5.32	
	Others	0.62		Other			Other		
Total Islam			38.10			40.32			29.49

Source: Research Findings

DISCUSSION

In countries that have advanced in the process of democracy, inter-party rivalry originates from the split between left and right ideology. However, inter-party rivalry in Indonesia is not rooted in socio-economics as is true for Western Europe and other developed countries. Block parties in Indonesia are anchored in political streams (*politik aliran*), that is, they are categorized along two poles, *santri* and *abangan* (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016). *Santri* parties lean towards Islam in their politics, while *abangan* parties tend to be Nationalist parties.

In the context of the 1999 election, which was clearly different in trend, according to Weis (2010) *politik aliran* “could not really manifest itself in the more urban, mobile, educated society of 1999, patterns of mobilisation still tended to emphasize loyalties either to modernist Islam or to a traditionalist-nationalist alliance” (Weis, 2010, p. 89). The first election in post-Suharto Indonesia, in 1999, voted in the nationalist block parties, with 61.90% of the votes going to them, while the Islamic block parties garnered only 38.10% of the total votes. Some of the Islamic parties, such as PPP and PKS

tried to respond to the electoral condition by promoting stronger Islamic ideology and succeeded in improving their electoral performance in the 2004 election, increasing the number of votes they received by 2.22%. It is clear that *politik aliran* works for the Indonesian electoral system as a frozen cleavage (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016). In order to determine whether or not there is a correlation between the increase in the votes received by the Islam block parties and the ideology they promoted still needs to be proven.

However, in 2004, the Islamic block parties decreased significantly from 40.32% to 29.49% as voters were extremely disappointed in them. According to Naharuddin (2016), Ufen mentioned that its significance began to diminish and referred to the de-alignment trend indicated by the rise of 'presidentialised' parties and growing intra-party authoritarianism. In addition, in the internal party, especially Islamic Traditionalist parties, there was often conflict among the elite in addition to political patronage and corruption: "the party was fragmented organizationally and susceptible to exogenous intrusions such as access to state patronage, corruption and electoral changes" (Kikue, 2011, p. 141). The decrease in the number of votes for the Islamic block parties was one of the explanations from some scholars given in claiming the end of *politik aliran* (Liddle & Saiful Mujani, 2007; Wawan Sobari, 2016). However, it should be remembered that although the number of votes for the Islamic block parties decreased, some

Islamic parties such as PKB, PAN, PPP and PKS have survived to this day.

The weakening of *politik aliran* (political streams) has led to changes in the power among political parties, and this needs further explanation due to cause-and-effect dynamic of the party system. The decline in voter alignment in post-Suharto Indonesia also needs further explanation, whether it is describing the symptom of the electoral market in the election or not. Changes in the electoral market can be seen from things such as changes in social structure, structural de-alignment and any decline in party identification, change in value orientation, competition issues and party crises. Furthermore, since electoral volatility is mostly due to higher voter distrust in the party, it appears as pragmatic behaviour in society and is welcomed by the party as pragmatism in the form of vote-buying. High-cost politics was used as a bridge to reach voters outside the traditional base as a characteristic of the *catch-all* party. The *catch-all* party indulging in high-cost politics eventually took on *cartel-party* characteristics, and had an impact on the number of corruption cases involving members of the Representative Board.

CONCLUSION

Politik aliran (political streams) in post-Suharto Indonesia was continued, but with some changes. The changes in *politik aliran* correlated with the volatility of individual parties, and this in turn contributed to the volatility of the block of parties. Some parties, neither Nationalist nor Islamic, lost

votes in subsequent elections. Volatility mostly came from the major parties such as PDIP, *Golkar*, *Demokrat* (Nationalist), PPP, PKB, PAN and PKS. Among the Islamic block of parties, both Modernist parties and Traditionalist parties experienced volatility, but the Traditionalists saw higher volatility than the Modernists, especially in 2009. Parties that have survived from 1999 to the present time can be categorised as institutionalised parties, meaning that they have roots in the community.

The changes to *politik aliran* correlate with the fluctuation in the party votes from one election to the next, and this consequently changed the balance of block parties between the Islamic and Nationalist blocks. Even though the electoral performance of Islamic block parties is going to decline *politik aliran* has not ended. Some Islamic parties still exist, although the number of votes they receive is not significant. Nevertheless, they can survive. However, the strength of *politik aliran* in structuring political behaviour in post-Suharto Indonesia has tended to decline.

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