

STRUCTURAL BARRIER IN THE PROCESS OF REGENERATION OF THE PKB ISLAMIC POLITICAL PARTY IN DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2004-2019

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this research is to identify the structural barriers faced by the PKB political party in promoting its members as presidential and vice-presidential candidates from 2004 to 2019. Additionally, the research aims to explore the political strategies employed by the PKB that resulted in the absence of its members in the highest democratic contests. Structural policies play a crucial role in determining political steps, taking into consideration both internal and external conditions. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, combining data from interviews and documents, supported by field observations. Interview data serves as preliminary findings guiding the discovery of document data, which is further elaborated through observations. The findings indicate that the absence of PKB members in presidential and vice-presidential contests is directly attributed to a strategic decision made in 2008 to consolidate internal party divisions. The logical reasons behind PKB's political strategy include strengthening the party's financial stability and choosing to remain within the power circle. The ingenuity of PKB's elite in addressing structural obstacles and turning them into a political opportunity by consolidating internal cadre and rebuilding relationships with grassroots stakeholders.

Keywords: structural barrier; regeneration; PKB; Presidential election; Islamic Political Party

HAMBATAN STRUKTURAL DALAM PROSES REGENERASI PARTAI POLITIK ISLAM PKB PADA PEMILIHAN PRESIDEN LANGSUNG TAHUN 2004-2009

ABSTRAK. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi hambatan struktural yang dihadapi partai politik PKB dalam mengusung kadernya sebagai calon presiden dan wakil presiden periode 2004 hingga 2019. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk menggali strategi politik yang dilakukan PKB hingga menghasilkan ketidakhadiran anggotanya dalam kontestasi demokrasi tertinggi. Kebijakan struktural berperan penting dalam menentukan langkah politik, dengan mempertimbangkan kondisi internal dan eksternal. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, yaitu menggabungkan data wawancara dan dokumen yang didukung dengan observasi lapangan. Data wawancara berfungsi sebagai temuan awal yang memandu penemuan data dokumen, yang selanjutnya dijabarkan melalui observasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ketidakhadiran anggota PKB dalam pemilihan presiden dan wakil presiden secara langsung disebabkan oleh keputusan strategis yang diambil pada tahun 2008 untuk mengkonsolidasikan perpecahan internal partai. Alasan logis di balik strategi politik PKB antara lain memperkuat stabilitas keuangan partai dan memilih tetap berada dalam lingkaran kekuasaan. Kecerdasan elite PKB dalam mengatasi hambatan struktural dan mengubahnya menjadi peluang politik melalui konsolidasi kader internal dan membangun kembali hubungan dengan pemangku kepentingan di akar rumput.

Kata Kunci; Hambatan Struktural; Kaderisasi; PKB; Pemilihan Presiden; Partai Politik Islam

INTRODUCTION

The structural barriers have been crucial factors leading to the absence of PKB cadre in direct presidential and vice-presidential contests. Over the four election periods from 2004 (if we consider the health test failure of Gus Dur) to 2019, PKB has consistently engaged in public discourse by presenting candidates for president and vice-president, yet none have successfully been registered with the KPU. In each election period, PKB has actively produced discourse regarding figures offered as presidential or vice-presidential candidates. The mechanisms employed vary, ranging from recommendations resulting from deliberations, endorsement by religious leaders (*kyai*), to even holding conventions to identify

competent figures. However, all political efforts have failed to reach a climax.

Structural barriers are not a utopia but rather a factual condition. The internal turbulence within PKB in 2008 forced the party to undergo a complete reset (Herdiansah, 2021; Tiyanto et al., 2009). The division occurred not only among the party elite but also permeated to the grassroots level, as the influence of Gus Dur remained dominant. This polarization is still evident today, albeit less pronounced. The position of PKB and Muhaimin as winners was challenging, especially considering the upcoming 2009 elections. Under such circumstances, every effort was geared towards maintaining PKB's votes rather than discussing winning the presidential election. The results of the 2009 elections revealed a significant decline (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016).

In his study, Mietzner mentions that the failure of Islamic political parties in Indonesia's democratic contests is a surprising phenomenon (Mietzner, 2021). Structural barriers represent a classic problem for Islamic parties in building internal solidarity and external relations (Chambers & Ufen, 2020). The structural approach can be observed using Anthony Giddens' thinking, which emphasizes actors, agents, and structure (Bryant & Jary, 2003; Karp, 2023). Giddens' structuration theory indicates that actors position agents strategically, and the bond between agents and structure is a mutual and inseparable link in human relations practices (Garbe & Duberley, 2021).

The objective of this research is to identify the structural barriers within the internal dynamics of PKB and uncover alternative political strategies behind PKB's less obsessive approach to promoting its cadres. A serious and intensive investigation is needed to understand why the largest Islamic party chooses to be a supporting party rather than actively pushing its own members. The structural decision is made whether due to the absence of competitive cadres or if PKB has a more aggressive and comprehensive political strategy (Hamayotsu, 2011).

This research is based on the argument that the pursuit of the pinnacle of power is not always the goal of all political parties. They also calculate based on the potential and capacity of the party to achieve it. In the Islamic perspective, there is a guiding principle: "*Ma la yudroku kulluhu, la yutroku kulluhu*," meaning if something cannot be fully achieved, do not abandon it entirely. The practical implementation in politics is that if power cannot be fully attained due to resource limitations, do not abandon everything. Therefore, PKB's stance has always been to participate in direct presidential and vice-presidential contests, even if only as a supporting party. This attitude reflects the party's responsibility to channel the constituents' aspirations and seize the opportunity to contribute to the national political dynamics. This study not only aims to uncover the reasons why PKB fails to promote its cadres in direct presidential contests but also seeks to outline PKB's political strategies over the four election periods.

METHODS

This study examines the structural barriers faced by the PKB political party in promoting its members to participate in direct presidential elections. The research aims to identify the structural obstacles within the PKB political party. Additionally, it seeks to discover PKB's political strategies and analyse the reasons behind the absence of PKB cadres in direct

presidential elections. This research is also aimed at understanding how the party's structural components overcome structural obstacles and turn them into policies that benefit the party. The study adopts three main approaches: First, the suspicion regarding the absence of PKB cadres in four presidential election periods is considered a strategic choice by the party with various empirical considerations. Second, the dynamics of the PKB political party after experiencing internal turbulence in the early days of reform marked by disharmony among elites both within PKB and with the PBNU organization. Third, structural barriers represent a unique phenomenon in the dynamics of a growing organization searching for the best format in its performance. These obstacles can become opportunities for political recovery if managed well with the appropriate approach and strategic steps.

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, elaborating on data from various sources. Initial data is obtained through interviews with individuals considered to have direct and in-depth involvement in the political movements of PKB and PBNU from the years 2004 to 2019. Interviewees are also ensured not to be in a position with practical political interests, both internally and externally, to avoid concerns of falling into a conflict of interest. The first informant is MCH, originating from the PMII organization, which has strong affiliations with PKB and NU, playing a crucial role in the cadre recruitment process. The second informant is MTA, serving as a PBNU official during the 2016-2021 term and as an administrator of RMI (*Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah*), an organization responsible for NU's Islamic boarding schools. The third informant is BDW, an expert staff of several PKB elites and a Minister from PKB during the period 2014-2019. Information from the interviews is considered as initial data, to be reinforced using a triangulation method by combining findings from documentation and observation. This is necessary because political interviews often carry biases and cannot be solely relied upon as a source of singular truth.

Data is categorized into two versions, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data refers to two main findings, namely data from interviews that are elaborated with documentation. The documents are the data obtained from official PKB documents or those distributed through various media channels. On the other hand, secondary data is obtained from the results of field observations. The data analysis process is conducted in three stages: first, the interview process with a focus on structural barriers. Interviews are conducted with three different informants, in different locations and times, allowing their findings to be formulated and compared to identify larger

trends of truth. Second, complementing findings with documentary data, including a search for documents from valid sources and a process of diversifying documents from different sources. The more diverse sources that yield similar results, the more valid the obtained data becomes. Third, the presentation of interpretive descriptive data analysis is conducted using Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, elaborating on the roles of agents and structures in the interests of actors. Data analysis was conducted using the data triangulation method, combining findings from interviews elaborated with validated documents. Data were written in qualitative descriptive form to gain depth in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The structural barriers that are crucial for the absence of PKB cadres as direct presidential and vice-presidential candidates for four consecutive periods from 2004 to the last one in 2019 are attributed to three main factors:

1. Internal Cadre Consolidation

A political party is a mass organization inherently driven by the pursuit of power. As an organization formed to contribute to nation-building by participating in power contests, political parties are often tested by internal cadre consolidation. The same holds true for PKB, which experienced significant turbulence within its internal organization.

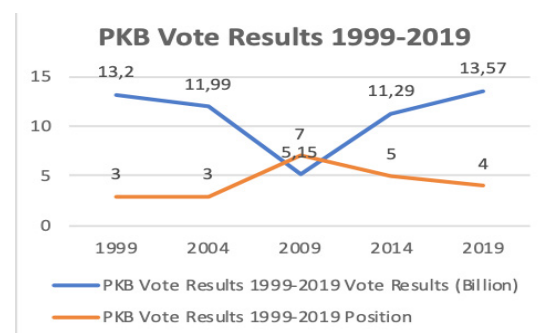
a. Power Struggle Conflict between Gus Dur and Muhaimin Iskandar

The cadreship process of PKB reached its peak in the 1999 elections. One year after reformasi, public trust, particularly from NU, strengthened, positioning PKB as the largest Islamic party in Indonesia. With a vote count of 13.2 million, PKB trailed behind PDIP and Golkar but still asserted its dominance (KPU, 1999). Public trust in Islam was intertwined with NU's ideological framework, the largest Islamic mass organization, and the charismatic figure of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), known as a reformist and a proponent of pluralism. Gus Dur's presence was extraordinary, as his charismatic persona as a Kyai and national figure, coupled with his lineage to Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of NU, reinforced his identity. The combination of cultural and national identities positioned Gus Dur as an effective electoral machine. PKB reached its peak strength on October 23, 1999, when Gus Dur became the 4th President of the Republic of Indonesia by defeating Megawati with a vote count of 373 to 313 in the MPR session (Barton, 2006).

However, the glorious era of PKB was short-lived, marked by the ousting of Gus Dur on July 23, 2001, through a special session of the MPR

that accused him of involvement in the Bulog Gate scandal (Kuswanto, 2022). Nevertheless, PKB's vote count in the 2004 elections remained consistent at 11.99 million votes, securing the third position below Golkar and PDIP. The internal constellation of PKB shifted in 2008 with the power struggle between Gus Dur (*Dewan Syuro*) and Muhaimin Iskandar (Chairman since 2005). The conflict divided PKB into two major polarizations, reaching even grassroots levels. The power struggle was marked by rival congresses between the two factions and mutual accusations between them. In the end, the government, through the decision of the Minister of Law and Human Rights, ratified the leadership under Muhaimin Iskandar with document number: M.HH-02.AH.11.01 in 2008 (Mahkamah Agung, 2008).

The impact of this internal conflict led to a drastic decline in PKB's votes in the 2009 elections, with only 5.15 million votes and a significant drop to the 7th position below other Islamic parties. A democracy system based on electoral votes makes a party's votes a "bargaining position" in lobbying and negotiations. PKB's sharply declining position made it less ideal in determining political schemes, especially in the presidential contest. Therefore, in the 2009 presidential election, PKB became a secondary player by supporting the SBY and Budiono pair. Choosing not to nominate from its own cadres was the most logical choice because PKB's votes were too small to exert influence. In that year, PKB's ideal position was to consolidate nationally and close ranks to stand united under Muhaimin's command, which was officially recognized by the government. On a national scale, PKB seemed to have to restart after experiencing a breakdown, while other parties were ready to advance in the democratic arena.



Source: Data from kpu.go.id and processed by author

Figure 1. PKB Vote Results 1999-2019

b. Muhaimin Iskandar's Narcissism

The polemic regarding Muhaimin Iskandar's political narcissism, positioning himself as the sole representation of PKB, is evident in the "one man show" politics. In every political event and national political dynamics involving PKB, almost everything revolves around Muhaimin. In contrast to other parties that often delegate the secretary-general as a

substitute, in PKB, the figure of the secretary-general is often not well-known to the public. Throughout his 18 years as the chairman, Muhaimin has had many secretaries-general, including Muhamad Lukman Edi, Imam Nahrawi, Abdul Kadir Karding, and the latest, Hasanudin Wahid. Unlike other parties that consider the position of the secretary-general vital and often visible in public, PKB instead makes the chairman the center of all activities (Cak Imin Centric).

Muhaimin Iskandar's "one man show" political strategy is suspected to be an effort to dwarf cadres so that none stand out. The presence of cadres is optimized within the party, given the opportunity to grow and develop but must not surpass the chairman. In many instances of power distribution in the government, assigned cadres are believed to have a special closeness to Muhaimin. This can be seen in the two ministerial positions during the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin era, placing Abdul Halim Iskandar, Muhaimin Iskandar's full brother, as the Minister of Village and PDT (Jannah, 2023). Even some names that had started to emerge and gained positive public reception were later withdrawn and "eliminated." Former secretary-general Lukman Edi, who also served as a minister during the SBY era, no longer holds a position in the 2019-2024 leadership (Putri, 2019).

Muhaimin Iskandar's narcissism poses a serious problem in the process of elite cadreization within PKB. This impact is strongly felt in elite cadreization where such positions have the potential to garner public attention and boost the popularity of cadres. However, this bonsai approach to cadres only applies at the national level, potentially disrupting Muhaimin's stability. Elite cadres at the regional level, who do not pose a threat to the chairman's stability, are given the opportunity to grow and develop. In an open-party system, the increasing popularity of a cadre should ideally be a positive value as it opens up many options to fill power vacuums. An open and competence-based cadreization system is employed by PDIP, providing equal opportunities for all cadres with strong potential to be presidential and vice-presidential candidates outside the circle of the chairman or even the chairman himself.

2. Political Party Pragmatism

Democracy is known as a political system that demands strong financial capital. The party's financial system, supported by state aid, cannot suffice to keep the party machinery running. One of the political party strategies to survive and achieve financial stability is by placing many of its cadres in strategic government positions. Political party pragmatism sometimes requires sacrificing potential

and opportunities to attain the pinnacle of power for the sake of the party's financial stability.

a. Focus on Party Financial Stability

PKB's failure to position its best cadres in the direct presidential and vice-presidential elections is largely influenced by internal conditions. PKB's position after Gus Dur's failure as a presidential candidate in the 2004 election due to health reasons made PKB's position challenging. Replacing Gus Dur with another figure was not a suitable step because Gus Dur's charisma remained strong and tended to be irreplaceable. Additionally, there was another trend in PKB's political strategy in responding to its position as a new party that emerged after the reform era. It seems that PKB tends to focus on the party's financial stability to have long-term resilience and be better prepared to navigate the relatively expensive democratic system.

PKB's political pragmatism is reflected in providing "Free" support to the SBY-JK pair in the 2004 presidential election. As a political party with the third-largest number of voters after PDIP and Golkar, PKB occupied a very strategic position in determining the direction of the 2004 contest. PKB's role proved significant, contributing up to 28% of the votes and securing SBY's decisive victory over Megawati-Hasyim in the second round. The compensation given by the SBY government was by providing 4 ministerial positions, which had the potential to be a source of funds for PKB. There is no more debate that ministerial positions are a way for political parties to gather financial and social capital to revitalize their networks down to the grassroots.

PKB's political strategy of redirecting its focus to power circles, even if not from its own party members, is a logical and ingenious political strategy. This assumption stems from the fact that PKB is a political party without significant support from Indonesia's "Crazy Rich" and is known to lack substantial financial strength, unlike some other parties with central figures as their main support. Gerindra has Prabowo and Hasyim Djoyokusumo, the Democratic Party has former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, PDI-P has former President Megawati, Nasdem Party has Surya Paloh, and others (Andi; Sujoko Wawan, 2021; Warburton, 2014; Winters, 2013).

The strategy focused on strengthening financial stability becomes more apparent with the PKB ministerial positions in each period. Even after the internal political constellation of power struggles between Gus Dur and Muhaimin, which impacted the party's vote count in the 2009 election, PKB still managed to place two of its cadres as ministers in the second United Indonesia cabinet. If examined, the positions given to PKB tend to be in roles that

benefit small and underprivileged communities. This is not a position given for political considerations but rather based on very clever political calculations. PKB voters come from NU, which culturally resides in coastal and rural areas with lagging economic conditions. By taking the positions of Minister of Underdeveloped Villages and Minister of Manpower and Transmigration, PKB has the opportunity to consolidate and empower cadres to the grassroots. This position is clearly advantageous in terms of strengthening cadres and the party's financial stability. Looking at each cabinet period, the Ministerial positions for PKB never excluded the roles of Minister of Villages, Underdeveloped Regions and Transmigration and Minister of Manpower. (Table 1)

Placement of Ministers from within the party is not detached from Muhaimin's interests as the party chairman. According to Anthony Giddens' Structuration theory, it is stated that humans have the ability to create structures and voluntarily determine their own structures (Giddens, 1979; Whittington, 2010). The formation of structures can be done based on the interests of the Actor by placing agents in positions that can facilitate the interests of the actor. In this case, the determination of the position of the Minister is certainly done in a structural meeting and under the dominance of Muhaimin's interests as the chairman. So, it is not surprising if the person occupying the Minister position is indicated to be

Table1. List of Ministers from PKB from 2004-2019

Cabinet	Position of Minister	Name of Minister	Period
The United Indonesia Cabinet I Susilo Bambang Yuhoyono-Jusuf Kalla (2004-2009)	Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare	Alwi Shihab	Oct 21 st , 2004-Dec 7 th , 2005
	Minister of manpower and transmigration	Erman Suparno	Dec 7 th , 2005-Oct 20 th , 2009
	Minister of Religious Affairs	M Maftuh Basyuni	Oct 21 st , 2004-Oct 20 th , 2009
	Minister of State for Development of Disadvantaged Regions	1. Saifullah Yusuf	Oct 21 st , 2004-May 9 th , 2007
		2. M Lukman Edy	May 9 th , 2004-Sept 30 th , 2009
The United Indonesia Cabinet I Susilo Bambang Yuhoyono-Boediono (2009-2014)	Minister of manpower and transmigration	Muhaimin Iskandar	Oct 22 nd , 2009-Oct 1 st , 2014
	Minister of State for Development of Disadvantaged Regions	Helmi Faishal Zaini	Oct 22 nd , 2009-Oct, 1 st , 2014
The Work Cabinet Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla (2014-2019)	Ministry of Manpower	Hanif Dhakiri	Oct 27 th , 2014-Oct 20 th , 2019
	Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration	a. Marwan Ja'far	Oct 27 th , 2014-July 27 th , 2016
		b. Eko Putro Sandjojo	July 27 th , 2016-Oct 20 th , 2019
	Ministry of Social Affairs	Khofifah Indar Parawansa	Oct 27 th , 2014-Jan 17 th , 2018
	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Imam Nahrawi	Oct 27 th , 2014-Sept 20 th , 2019
Onward Indonesia Cabinet Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin (2019-2024)	Ministry of Trade	Agus Suparmanto	Oct 23 rd , 2019-Dec 23 rd , 2020
	Ministry of Manpower	Ida Fauziyah	Oct 23 rd , 2019-present
	Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration	Abdul Halim Iskandar	Oct 23 rd , 2019-present
	Minister of Religious Affairs	Yaqut Cholil Qoumas	Dec 23 rd , 2020-present

Source: data from setkab.go.id and processed by author

part of Muhaimin Iskandar's circle. The position of the Minister of Villages in this period is held by Abdul Halim Iskandar, known as Muhaimin Iskandar's older brother.

b. Building the Existence of Political Parties

Competition among cadres at the elite level of democracy is not more important compared to the existence of the party itself. This principle is emphasized by PKB, so for almost four election and presidential election periods, they consistently follow the path of only being a supporter with Ministerial compensation. All of this is done not only because of PKB's inability to produce competent and integrity-filled cadres in the elite democracy game, but also as a strategic choice to maintain the party's existence. Being in the power circle enables PKB to always get a political stage, and all its dynamics become the center of attention for the media and the public as a whole. Its performance as a supporter of the government always receives special attention and "protection" from those in power. The strength of PKB can be seen from the proportion of the number of Ministers in each period. For example, in the Jokowi administration period with a working cabinet that contributed four of its cadres, there was only a difference of 1 cadre from the number of PDIP, the endorsing party (Asril, 2014).

It can be seen that in the four power transition periods from 2004 to 2019, PKB has never been absent as a government supporter and has always been in the coalition government, both in the two periods of the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono government and the two periods of the Jokowi era. PKB's existence as a main supporting party or main coalition member makes its position very strong and actively participates in determining the direction of political dynamics. It can be said that PKB's position is very strategic. When the government makes mistakes, it does not necessarily threaten PKB's position, but if the government performs its duties well, PKB will receive positive impacts. This is where the strategy of the political party's existence is implemented along with the immaturity of cadres who will be pushed as the party's representation in the direct presidential and vice-presidential elections.

PKB's ability to read political directions and position itself in the winning side is an advantage of political intuition. A political anomaly, if not called pragmatic politics, is PKB's ability to enter and support two opposing political poles. In the first two periods when SBY and the Democrats were in power, PKB's position was very strategic and important, especially in the period of 2004-2009, although it later declined due to internal turmoil in the second period. As if having no political burden and political closeness during the previous two periods, in 2014, PKB aligned with Jokowi, who was supported by PDIP, which politically often clashed with the Democratic Party. Staying in the government with whoever wins the election is the most realistic and logical choice to maintain the party's existence and ensure it remains a "kingmaker" in political dynamics.

Table 2. PKB's position in the 2004-2019 Elections

Period	President	Coalition	Political Party List
2004-2009	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono-Jusuf Kalla	No Name Coalition	Demokrat, PKB, PKS, PAN, PBB, PKPI
2009-2014	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono-Boediono	No Name Coalition	Demokrat, PKS, PKB, PAN, PPP
2014-2019	Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla	The Awesome Indonesia Coalition	PDIP, PKB, Nasdem, Hanura and PKPI
2019-2024	Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin	Just and Prosperous Coalition	PDIP, PKB, PPP, Nasdem, Hanura, Golkar

Source: data from kpu.go.id and processed by author

1. Ideology-based Political Habits

Muhaimin reinstated the ideological concept of PKB by extensively visiting and internally consolidating with respected Kyais (Islamic scholars).

Muhaimin's position as a young figure and the chairman of PKB provided him with the freedom to restore this fundamental concept. However, this policy is suspected to be driven by Muhaimin's personal interests to multiply the support of Kyais after the internal conflict with Gus Dur and to seize the opportunity for a clean-up, placing his agents in the new party structure.

Internal Party Strengthening

Internal party strengthening became a factor influencing PKB's failure to promote its cadres. Historically, the party has been divided into two periods of significant strength. First, the influence of Gus Dur's leadership as an ideological figure served as a bond between the party and constituents. Second, the strength of Muhaimin post the 2008 split, which proved capable of building party solidarity within the modern party system. Muhaimin's position as the party chairman faced serious challenges in the 2009 election, where polarization was felt down to the grassroots level between pro-Gus Dur and pro-Muhaimin factions. It was evident that PKB's votes were nearly at the Parliamentary Threshold with only 4.94% of the votes. This condition shifted the party's focus from seizing power to internal consolidation and party restructuring. In PKB's internal tradition, internal consolidation involves regaining the trust of Kyais, especially the senior Kyais (Kyai Khos), whose alignment will be followed by Kyais from other *pesantrens* (Islamic Boarding Schools).

For nearly a decade or two terms of leadership from 2009-2019, Muhaimin actively engaged in political visits under the guise of "sowan" (seeking blessings) to senior Kyais. This went beyond making Kyais and *pesantrens* mere formal objects of mass mobilization and electoral machinery but positioned senior Kyais as the "determiners" of PKB's political moves by seeking their guidance. Psychologically, Muhaimin's position as a young figure and a *santri* (Islamic boarding school student) would be more acceptable when visiting and seeking advice from senior Kyais. In comparison with Gus Dur, some Kyais and *pesantrens* might have lost in terms of lineage, making the communication not about giving political guidance but merely a formality of political communication.

Internal consolidation also allowed for a process of "cleaning up" the political party from elements that did not align. For almost two terms of Muhaimin's leadership, he was able to dictate and place his people in strategic and influential positions at various levels. The strength is reflected in the solidarity of PKB's votes, which has shown almost no internal friction and stands under Muhaimin's unified command. This ability can be seen from

the absence of figures surpassing Muhaimin in the cadres' process, impacting his ability to maintain his position as chairman for almost 18 years since 2005. This process has two impacts on the cadre ship system: first, the emergence of new grassroots cadres processed according to the cadre mechanism. Second, for mid-to-high-level cadres, this process is counterproductive because they do not get the opportunity to participate in democratic contests as key players or as presidential and vice-presidential candidates.



Source: data from online media timesindonesia.co.id, Kompas tv and

liputan6.com

Figure 2. Muhaimin figure strength

PKB's Failure in promoting its cadres in the highest political contest of presidential and vice-presidential elections is indicated by structural obstacles. These barriers are not solely due to internal instability resulting from conflicts among its cadres; they also stem from a shift in political strategy in response to the party's internal conditions (Bush, 2009; Y. M. Mayrudin et al., 2021). The power struggle within PKB between Gus Dur and Muhaimin led the party to its lowest point in electoral votes. It required more intensive efforts to focus on internal party issues rather than fighting for power. Muhaimin's strategic choice not to promote his cadres is a prudent and intelligent move. Muhaimin is not overly preoccupied with power struggles but can still concentrate on internal party consolidation while maintaining political influence by being a supporting party to the winning coalition.

Politics is not just about winning five-yearly democratic contests. Politics, as a means of contributing to a nation's journey, requires wisdom and the art of strategizing to maintain the existence of a political party. PKB, a political party born from PBNU, indirectly adopts Sunni theological thinking, tending towards harmonious behaviour and being in the Middle Path (Anis & Yuliarti, 2016; Bokek-Cohen et al., 2022; Mustafa, 2020). PKB's flexibility as an implementation of harmonious and moderate Sunni theology is evident in its ability to join all winning coalitions from 2004 to 2009. Despite the significant polarization among winning electoral forces each

decade, PKB and Muhaimin's flexibility managed to mitigate such differences and be accepted in two different political poles (Fealy, 2011; Hamayotsu, 2011). In the two election periods of 2004 and 2009, PKB supported SBY with the Democratic Party, and in the subsequent periods of 2014 and 2019, it supported Jokowi, endorsed by PDIP. Despite the ongoing cold war between SBY (Democrat) and PDIP (Megawati) until today.

Muhaimin's ability to build PKB's structure and utilize it according to his agenda and interests is an implementation of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (Metera, 2021). Muhaimin, as an actor with interests, strategically places agents in positions that can influence the party's decisions and policies (Metera, 2021). Hence, any emerging turmoil can be quelled with the strength and support of these agents. The two ministerial positions consistently held by PKB in the last four periods, namely the Minister of Village and Minister of Manpower, were always given to individuals close to Muhaimin, who had the potential to become agents of Muhaimin's interests. However, this condition does not apply to the Minister of Religious Affairs, occupied by Yaqut Chalil, who, despite being a PKB cadre, is allegedly positioned for the interests of the State Palace.

PKB has demonstrated its existence during two decades of Indonesia's democratic contests. Data indicates that when many Islamic political parties show electability that tends to stagnate, and some even face a decline in votes, PKB has experienced a significant increase in votes in the last two election periods (Muhtadi, 2015). The correct positioning provides access to power and engagement as a decision-maker, ensuring continuous public attention and media coverage. The ability to choose and target political party segments consistently by cultivating coastal and rural areas and the masses with the Sunni NU ideology has propelled PKB to become the largest Islamic political party in Indonesia (Widian et al., 2023). PBNU's presence, with its kyai (religious leaders) under its umbrella, positions itself as a catalyst and mediator in PKB's internal affairs. Consequently, there is almost no internal factionalism within the party, unlike other Islamic political parties in Indonesia (Hanafi et al., 2023; Herdiansah, 2021).

The existence of PKB as the largest Islamic political party in Indonesia can be considered an achievement with a very lengthy process. Coupled with the right political strategy and effective political positioning, PKB always manages to capture public attention (Y. Mayrudin & Akbar, 2019). The issue of Islamic political parties in Indonesia arises because they share the same market segment despite differing ideological genres, potentially giving rise to polarization among ideologies (Qodir et al., 2023). However, the

concepts offered by these parties also share similarities (Hamayotsu, 2011). Even the concept of a religious party has been adopted by nationalist parties with a new genre known as religious nationalism. Therefore, to endure the toughness of democratic competition, it is essential to have a strong political strategy analysis, consistent implementation, and the ability to maintain cadre solidarity.

The current political stability that PKB possesses has proven to be capable of propelling Muhaimin Iskandar, as the party's chairman, to become a vice-presidential candidate paired with Anis Baswedan (Baharuddin et al., 2022; Ramadhan & Gunawan, 2023). Although it cannot be predicted that they will win the 2024 contest. However, PKB has shown progress by boldly promoting its best cadres in the presidential contest. This courageous step is commendable because, after the last time in 2004, PKB has the courage to endorse its cadres. Now, they have once again become an Islamic political party capable of competing with nationalist parties that have dominated the Indonesian political stage for two decades. This courage is not merely symbolic but is also based on the calculation of party stability and a strong foundation of cadre recruitment patterns.

CONCLUSION

The absence of PKB cadres in four direct presidential election periods is suspected to be intentional and is part of the political strategy adopted by PKB's structural policy. Considering the internal situation of PKB that does not allow the nomination of its cadres, the party's structure prefers to shift its strategy by remaining within the circle of power as a supporting party. This policy is born out of the limitations of financial resources that support the operational aspects of political parties. The high cost of politics forces political parties to stabilize their finances before directly entering the competition as main players. Internal consolidation also serves as an answer to the above strategic choice because the polarization that occurred in 2008 significantly influenced the internal situation of the PKB party. The polarization between the Gus Dur and Muhaimin factions reached the grassroots level and created antipathy between the factions. Muhaimin, as the chairman of PKB, took time for internal consolidation and prepared financial stability before truly entering the political arena as a contestant. This condition was evident, and eventually, Muhaimin's position became a contestant for the vice-presidential candidate accompanying Anis Baswedan in the 2024 presidential election. The findings in this research will complement previous studies related to Islamic party politics in Indonesia. This research also presents important

findings to address the formulated problems, not just as textual answers but by providing analysis based on valid data. The findings will also be beneficial for the structures of other Islamic political parties in Indonesia to explore alternative political strategies in gaining power. Politics is not just about seizing power but is realistic if it involves staying in power even if only partially. Certainly, this choice is based on political reality and does not betray the ideology of the political party. PKB's political steps can also serve as a reference in managing internal party conflicts, preventing Islamic political parties from getting stuck in prolonged internal conflicts that could potentially disrupt their productivity. This research has limitations in the data collection method with internal party members. Interviews with structural members cannot be taken as a reference for truth because those involved are still bound by conflicts of interest. Therefore, interviews are only used as initial information that stimulates the exploration of data in document form. Despite these limitations, it is hoped that this research will encourage subsequent studies capable of presenting more comprehensive data and analyses from various perspectives, both internal and external.

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