

MUSLIM-BASED PARTIES AND THE STRATEGIC USE OF POLARIZATION IN INDONESIA'S MULTIPARTY POLITICS AFTER 2014

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ABSTRACT. The article explores how Indonesian Muslim-based parties are structurally responding to, and using, post-2014 polarization in coalition politics through party institutionalization. Party institutionalization is understood as the mediator that shapes how polarization results in coalition formation, internal organizational dynamics, and electoral performance. A comparative case study of PKB, PKS, PAN, and PPP is covered here, based on interviews with party elites and activists for Islamic organizations, along with secondary sources, electoral reports, and media coverage. Results indicate patterned variation across parties. PKB and PKS, with more cohesive constituencies and stronger organizational capacity, have been able to better exploit the impact of polarization to reinforce partisan identity and enhance electoral prospects: PKB with an entrenched relationship with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) milieu, while PKS uses polarization to consolidate after earlier internal frictions and expand its appeal among conservative electorates. In contrast, PAN's more heterogeneous base creates tensions between the elite when a coalition's maneuvers alienate an aspect of its supporters, whereas PPP's weak organizational solidity propels it towards government alignment despite misfit with its base of voters. Overall, depending upon party institutionalization, polarization becomes either an electoral resource or an organizational burden.

Keywords: Elections; Muslim-based party; party institutionalization; polarization.

INTRODUCTION

Religious parties in multiparty democracies suffer a familiar predicament: they have to adapt moral-religious commitments to broad coalition and electoral strategies that are good enough to compete without eroding identity-based loyalty that sustains them. This tension renders party institutionalization, or an institution's ability to reconcile grassroots particularism with the compromises of competitive politics, both challenging and consequential. The strong religious identity that underpins their support can also constrain their ability to form pragmatic coalitions, potentially exacerbating social divisions and undermining democratic principles, as observed with the BJP in India and the FIS in Algeria (Entelis, 2011; H. Kim, 2017; Yardımçı-Geyikçi & Yavuzylmaz, 2020).

This article does not approach polarization simply as an aspect of context, but rather a stress test and opportunity structure that increases the costs of inconsistency and reveals the limits of organizational cohesion. Polarization hardens political disagreement into socially anchored identities, exacerbating ideological distance and identity consciousness among voters Click or tap here to enter text.(DiMaggio et al.; Lauka et al.,

2018) 1996; Y. Kim, 2015; McCoy et al., 2018). For religious parties, this may boost mobilization prospects but reduce coalition choices, widening social cleavages, as in India and Algeria (Nikolenyi, 2020). Here we are arguing that the impacts depend on institutional capacity: political parties that enjoy stronger organizational solidity and more well-ordered connections to their constituencies can use political polarization strategically to bolster identity and bargaining power; where institutionalization is weaker, polarization turns more easily into factional conflict, restricted coalition preferences, and electoral vulnerability (Tan, 2006; Williams, 1996).

The intricacies of electoral politics often result in strategies that only sometimes align with the preferences at the grassroots level, particularly in scenarios where a party's strategic decisions fail to resonate with the broader electorate. This misalignment emphasizes the inherent tension within religious parties as they grapple with the dilemma of remaining true to their foundational principles while adapting to the changing political landscape to attract a wider voting demographic. Moreover, this highlights the critical role of their institutional capabilities in steering these competing demands while seeking to preserve their performance in elections.

To understand the institutional capacity of religious parties when faced with the dichotomy of constituent loyalty and the pragmatic play of multiparty politics, this article examines the political maneuvers of Muslim-based parties in Indonesia during the 2014-2019 elections. These parties include Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), and Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN). The period of 2014-2019 presents an exemplary case to scrutinize the adaptability of religious parties to political polarization that may affect their electoral success. Amidst an election rife with politico-religious narratives, these Muslim-based parties were confronted by a constituent base increasingly preoccupied with identity issues, which in turn alerted the parties to the potential repercussions of their presidential coalition strategies.

Indonesian Muslim-based parties represent various Muslim constituencies, each with distinct teachings and socio-cultural bases. There have been dozens of Muslim-based parties that have been founded since Suharto's fall in 1998. Still, only four parties - those mentioned above - have consistently won seats in the national parliament. The differences among the constituencies of PKB, PAN, PKS, and PPP reflect social cleavages within Indonesia's Muslim community. To understand the context of Islam in Indonesian politics—a historical underpinning is necessary.

Clifford Geertz's conception of political categorization of *santri* (Islam traditionalist), *abangan* (secularist) and *priyayi* (aristocrat) or named as *politik aliran* (stream politics) provide a starting point. This premise explicates the position of Muslims in Indonesia is not a singular entity but differentiates based on religious orientation, social class, and political imagination (Geertz, 1976). Especially in the *santri*, the group consists of several socio-political forces. Among others are the traditionalist under the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the modernist connected the Muhammadiyah and Masyumi (disbanded in 1960). After the fall of the Suharto in 1998, some Islamist groups that inspired by the globalist idea emerged among urban educated Muslims. They are the Muslim Brotherhood-influenced group, which then established a political party, PKS (Prosperous Justice Party, PKS), and a semi-clandestine political movement, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005).

Regarding political vision, the traditionalist has more flexibility in collaborating with the secularist as they share common values of inter-religious tolerance

and pluralism. On the other side, the modernists and Islamist tend to practice more purification Islam and are less compatible with secularism. Consequently, values-driven rivalry often occurs between the modernist and Islamist on one side, with the secular and the traditionalist on the other side (Bush, 2002). Recently, the Islamic parties are still formed along the socio-political cleavage inherited from the past social construction (Menchik, 2016).

The traditionalist is represented by *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (National Awakening Party, PKB), the modernist is *Partai Amanat Nasional* (National Mandate Party, PAN) and *Partai Bulan Bintang* (Moon Star Party, PBB-failed electoral threshold in the 2014 election), while the Islamist is the PKS. Another prominent Islamic party is *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (Development Union Party PPP), which was established during the Suharto regime to merge various Islamic political forces, including from NU, Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Muslim Party (Parmusi, reincarnation of Masyumi) (King, 2003). As PPP's base is mostly from traditionalists and Parmusi, the party tend to share traditionalist-conservatives characteristics.

The differences in constituency bases that reflect social cleavages within Muslim communities do not affect Muslim-based parties' coalition patterns in elections and governance. The multiparty democratic system compels them to ensure vote acquisition and governance incentives to survive the intense contestation. Since the country implemented direct presidential elections in 2004, most political parties—including Muslim-based parties—are likely to form a 'rainbow coalition' prioritizing political incentives (Azra, 2004). During Yudhoyono's presidency (led by the Democrat Party) from 2004-2014, all Islamic parties, such as PKB, PPP, PAN, PKS, and PBB, were part of the governing coalition. This coalition model continued with minor reconfigurations during Jokowi-Kalla's administration (2014-2019). While the traditionalist base, PKB and PPP, remained in Jokowi's government and the modernist base, PAN, joined the government late in 2016, PKS chose to be in the opposition alongside the Gerindra Party and Democrat Party.

In the 2019 presidential election, the configuration slightly shifted with more apparent lines where PKB and PPP were aligned with Jokowi-Amin, while PKS and PAN were part of the Prabowo-Sandi coalition. During the Jokowi-Amin administration (2019-2024), all Muslim-based parties rejoined the government, except for PKS, which remained part of the opposition force along with the Democrat Party.

Table 1. Presidential Election Coalition in 2004-2019

Candidates	2004	1 st round	2 nd round
Wiranto – Solahudin Wahid		Golkar, PKB	
Megawati – Hasyim Muzadi		PDIP	PDIP, Golkar, PPP , PDS
Amien Rais – Siswono		PAN, PKS	
Yudhoyono – Jusuf Kalla		Democrat Party, PBB, PKPI	Democrat Party, PBB, PKPI, PKB, PAN, PKS
Hamzah Haz – Agum Gumelar 2009		PPP	
Yudhoyono – Budiono		Democrat Party, PKS, PAN, PPP, PKB	
Megawati – Prabowo		PDIP, Gerindra,	
Jusuf Kalla – Wiranto 2014		Golkar, Hanura	
Jokowi – Jusuf Kalla		PDIP, Hanura, Nasdem, PKB, PPP (Romi)	
Prabowo – Hatta		Gerindra, PKS, PAN, Golkar, PPP (Djan)	
2019			
Jokowi – Ma'ruf Amin		PDIP, Hanura, PKB, PPP, Nasdem, Golkar	
Prabowo – Sandiaga		Gerindra, PKS, PAN	

The 2014 Indonesian presidential election was marked by a tight competition between Jokowi and Prabowo. The political rivalry, which expands beyond political campaign and election, has ignited an interminable polarization based on the politico-religious cleavage (Fossati, 2019). The two candidates and their supporters can be characterized as follows: Jokowi held strong support among secular-nationalist constituencies and traditionalist Islamic groups, whereas Prabowo commanded political loyalty from modernist Islamic and Islamist constituencies (Mietzner, 2018). The tensions of polarization began to increase when Jokowi and Prabowo advanced partisanship from those Muslim bases. Political contests were built through aliran-based identity narratives. For example, Jokowi's camp, which the secular PDIP nominated, was accused of being communist stooges and anti-Islam, while Prabowo's camp, which conservative Islamists supported, was considered pro-caliphate. In the post-2014 election, along with a more pluralist state management, the Jokowi-Kalla government received strong opposition from conservative Islam—among the groups are Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defender Front, FPI) and Forum Umat Islam (Islamic Umma Forum, FUI)—which later formed a political axis with Prabowo.

The conservative Islam groups gained their momentum in 2017 by supporting the opposition parties (Gerindra, PKS, and PAN) who nominated Anis-Sandiaga during Jakarta's gubernatorial election. In this event, supporter of conservative Islamic groups staged a series of street protests

demanding the trial of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Chinese descendant and an incumbent who was backed by the pro Jokowi coalition, for blasphemy. The conservatives advanced an opportunity to catch national attention of Jokowi's indifference to Islam. The gubernatorial race was won by Anis-Sandiaga, which was further glorified by the Prabowo camp including their conservative's supporter. The axis of opposition forces then conducted political mobilization nationally under the slogan #2019GantiPresiden (change the president) to replicate the Jakarta victory in the 2019 presidential election. Responding to opposition maneuvers that took account of the rise of conservatives Islam, the Jokowi administration exercised repressive measures against the politically activated conservative groups. The state apparatus arrested several of their figures, such as Al-Khathath and Bachtiar Natsir. The FPI Rizieq Shihab was also seem to be forced to stay in Saudi Arabia in exile.

Jokowi strengthened his relations with NU, the government's buffer against the development of orthodox Islamic parties, to dispel charges that he was anti-Islamic. His involvement with NU was also a calculated move toward gaining support among the *nahdhiyin*, a sizable and comparatively easily mobilized voting bloc, in order to further electoral goals. Jokowi was paired with NU supreme cleric Ma'ruf Amin in the 2019 presidential contest. Within this framework, Muslim voter bases become more aware of the social split or *aliran* preferences, with modernist-Islamists siding with Prabowo and conservative pluralists supporting Jokowi. This division sparked identity issues among Muslim voters and presented a difficult situation for Muslim-based parties in terms of how they decide on their political tactics and choices.

The political landscape for Muslim-based parties in Indonesia has been fraught with challenges amidst rising polarization. However, the impact of this polarization on the electoral strategies and objectives of these parties still needs to be clarified. It is crucial to understand the role of party institutionalization in navigating the parties through such turbulent times, mitigating adversities, or capitalizing on opportunities. The influence of a distinct voter base during polarization—whether as a bolstering force or a hindrance in pursuing electoral goals—is yet to be clearly defined. How do Muslim-based parties in Indonesia adapt their electoral strategies in response to politico-religious polarization? Specifically, this article tried to answer the implications of polarization on Muslim-based parties' ability to achieve their electoral goals. To what degree do Muslim-based

parties remain committed to democratic principles when their constituents increasingly favor identity-based political decisions during elections? And does political pragmatism ensure that Muslim-based parties maintain a moderate stance in the face of heightened identity politics? This study aims to dissect the responses of Muslim-based parties to the challenges of polarization, thereby examining the institutional capacities of religious-based parties in electoral competition—especially when identity-driven narratives influence their traditional base. Additionally, the research will explore whether these parties' allegiance to democratic values persists amidst constituent demands for identity-based political action.

This article underscores the significance of institutional strength in framing the electoral tactics of Islamic parties amid the intensified political polarization that began to sharpen post-2014. The choice of this period is pivotal for several reasons. First, the post-2014 era marked the onset of acute political polarization, where Muslim-based parties found themselves ideologically divided, with modernist factions gravitating toward Prabowo-Hatta and traditionalists aligning with Jokowi-Kalla. This polarization posed novel challenges for these parties, such as managing the ideological, religious, and mass base expectations in the wake of politically charged events like the Ahok case, which sparked widespread disappointment and fierce debate within Islamic constituencies. Furthermore, the setting is perfect for assessing the degree of party institutionalization, as Muslim-based parties were forced to confront ideological issues, religious imperatives, and mass base demands head-on.

Party institutionalization is defined in this study as the process by which political parties become deeply ingrained institutions by being integrated into society and the political system through a consistent set of behaviors, attitudes, and cultural norms. It discusses the parties' internal growth as well as their interactions with the outside world, emphasizing how important it is for parties—especially religious ones—to be able to strike a balance between coalition building and ideological purity (Brocker & Kunkler, 2013; Fjelde, 2020; Huntington, 1968; Janda, 1980; Randall & Svåsand, 2002). Within this conceptual framework, the degree of party institutionalization designates Islamic parties in navigating polarization by building resilience and strategic flexibility despite ideological and societal obstacles.

According to Randall and Svåsand (2002), party institutionalization can be assessed through indicators such as systemness, value infusion, reification,

autonomy, adaptability, and complexity. In this study, these dimensions are treated as organizational capacities that condition coalition behavior under polarization: higher systemness and autonomy generally enhance a party's ability to coordinate decisions and sustain strategic choices over time, whereas strong value infusion, especially when tightly coupled with religious commitments, can heighten constraints by raising the reputational and internal costs of coalition moves perceived as ideological deviation (Yanai, 1999). Put differently, institutionalization shapes whether coalition pragmatism is organizationally manageable or politically destabilizing.

The institutionalized religious party grants them a certain level of credibility and influence, which can be leveraged to pursue coalition strategies that might not align perfectly with their constituents' preferences. Being seen as integral to the system may afford them the flexibility to make pragmatic decisions without losing their base support. High levels of value infusion mean that their members deeply internalize the party's values, which are often closely tied to religious beliefs.

A highly reified religious party, perceived as an entity with its own identity, might find it easier to justify pragmatic coalition strategies to its constituents. If the party is seen as something greater than just a sum of its members, it can argue that certain compromises are made for the greater good of the party's long-term goals and survival, rather than for short-term ideological purity. Autonomy is crucial for religious parties in polarized settings. If a party is autonomous, it can make coalition decisions based on strategic considerations without undue influence from external religious authorities or groups. This independence is key in situations where pragmatic coalitions are necessary for political survival or influence, even if such decisions might not fully align with the immediate preferences of their base. The last aspect is adaptation and complexity, which play a significant role in navigating dilemmas between polarization and pragmatism. Adaptation allows the party to respond to changing political landscapes, which is essential in polarized environments. A complex internal structure can facilitate diverse viewpoints and strategic thinking, enabling the party to weigh the benefits of pragmatic coalitions against the potential alienation of its core supporters.

METHOD

In describing the electoral strategies of Islamic parties within political polarization, this research examines PKB, PAN, PPP, and PKS in determining

their political position in the 2019 presidential election. The four parties are Islamic parties that formed post-New Order regime and still solid to compete in the 2019 elections. In data collection, we conducted field research from early 2017 through mid-2019—then extended in post-2019. The primary data were obtained by interviewing party officials of PPP, PKB, PKS, and PAN, focusing on the party's internal dynamism regarding the 2019 election and their constituents. Interviews with Islamic organizations were also conducted, including NU, Muhammadiyah, GP Ansor, Pemuda Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah Youth), and the United Action of Indonesian Muslim Students (KAMMI). We also conducted secondary data collection through documentary studies related to each party's responses to social and political issues related to the 2019 presidential election. The statements of political actors, such as party chairmen, party administrators, and organizational administrators, are also recorded to provide information of attitudes or responses to political polarization settings. To further explore the parties' institutionalization, this research also examined various events related to the internal dynamics of parties and how they use politico-religious narratives for the 2019 election.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Cleavage of Muslim Base

The initial discussion aims to describe how Islamic parties interact with the electoral system and their social bases. Throughout the history of the Indonesian election, Islamic identity has repeatedly been politicized as a powerful force for voting mobilization (Bubalo et al., 2012). However, the bipolar electoral system in 2014 and 2019 has corroborated a political polarization between supporters that use Islamic identity as an ideological narrative. Based on the electoral survey conducted by LSI (Kompas.com, 2014), NU followers dominantly voted for Jokowi, while many Muhammadiyah followers voted for Prabowo. In 2014, Jokowi won a landslide vote in NU bases regions such as East Java and Central Java, while Prabowo led in modernist and conservative regions such as West Sumatra, West Java, Banten, and West Nusa Tenggara.

As polarization is a result of political construction and it emerged only when "political entrepreneurs" effectively played certain scenarios (McCoy et al., 2018), it is important to note that even though NU and Muhammadiyah officially deny providing political support, the behavior of the elites is saying the otherwise. Their political

support is rewarded with a position in the cabinet proportion (in the 2014 cabinet, NU has seven seats, and Muhammadiyah has only one seat) (Kustiani, 2015). The representation of Islamic organization in the cabinet is nothing new—as it had appeared in the prior cabinet. The domination of NU over Muhammadiyah in the Jokowi's era, however, indicates an increasing tone of imbalanced political support. In 2017, the NU's political position was challenged by the Islamist movements led by FPI's Rizieq Shihab, which successfully mobilized street rallies and propagated the anti-Jokowi sentiment among Muslims. Thus, to maintain conservative support while undermining the Islamist populism, Jokowi intensified his political connection with NU (Mietzner, 2018).

The NU base was also divided in supporting Jokowi-Amin candidacy regarding political support. Because NU also contains conservative currents in religious interpretation, it exhibits an internal organizational cleavage often framed as NU Struktural (structural NU) versus NU Kultural (cultural NU). The first group refers to the NU central-organizational elites, which are close to power and receive constant support from the government. While the latter are elites who are far from the central power and tend to be critical both to NU and government. Although both sides maintain the Sunni principles, they show different political perspectives. While the structural NU is willing to promote religious plurality and adopt a flexible political approach, the cultural NU prefers a Sharia-based approach to politics. In practice, as the structural NU holds a more strategic national position, it has more significant political influence than its counterparts.

The culmination of the NU-Jokowi coalition resulted in the nomination of Ma'ruf Amin as a running mate. At first, Jokowi had chosen Mahfud MD, a more neutral NU political figure, but the decision was cancelled as Ma'ruf Amin, a prominent figure in NU, played the 'NU card' (Dewi, 2018). Interesting to note that, Ma'ruf Amin and Rizieq Shihab were involved in coordinating the 2017 Jakarta Street protest (Rahadian, 2018). However, Ma'ruf Amin's candidacy was disputed by the cultural NU. They considered Amin is a man with solid political ambition, which perceived as deviant within NU's morality. This ambivalent position further divided NU in the 2019 presidential election, with structural NU backing Jokowi-Amin, while cultural NU supporting Prabowo-Sandiaga (Faisal, 2018).

In contrast to NU, Muhammadiyah tends to distance itself from giving direct political support.

However, several of their figures admitted that most of their followers had less sympathy for the Jokowi's government (Faruqi, 2014). As an illustration, in the 2014 presidential election, West Sumatra as a support base for Muhammadiyah, Prabowo won a landslide victory with 76.9 percent of the votes, while Jokowi-Kalla only got 23.1 percent. The disapproval also showed in the attitude of the elites toward Jokowi's policies which were far more critical than the NU. Herdiansah et al. (2018) depicted that Muhammadiyah tends to be critical of the government actions, while NU tends to be neutral and supportive. Nevertheless, despite being kept a safe distance from politics, Muhammadiyah elites are also divided into two camps. The first tends to be conservative, led by Amien Rais, mostly opposed the Jokowi's administration, while the more progressive one, led by Syafii Maarif, tends to support Jokowi. Since the 2014 election, Maarif actively supported Jokowi by mobilizing the Indonesian Sun Volunteers and Muhammadiyah Young Exponents. Nevertheless, the progressive faction has little influence over the majority of Muhammadiyah followers that are predominantly conservative.

Another Islamic base that played an essential role as political supporters in the presidential election was the Islamists. They can at least be identified as globalist Islam or pro-sharia based that resonate with the Islamic group that emerged in the post-New Order period (Fuller, 2011). These groups include followers of the tarbiyah congregation, sympathizers of PKS and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). Regarding the politico-religious constellation, they are at odds with groups that hold secular views and are often not in line with structural NU. On the other side, NU has long been uncomfortable as the globalist movement that had entered the sphere of traditionalist-Islam (Ridwan, 2018). In a recent development, these Islamist groups have grown closer to the modernist and cultural NU elements as in 2017 Jakarta protest. They worked in tandem in declaring the rise of Islamist populism. Except the HTI, in 2018, figures from this groups like Mardani Ali Sera (PKS), Amien Rais (PAN), and Neno Warisman (Islamic activist) formed #2019GantiPresiden movement, a political axis to support Prabowo's presidency. (Table 2)

The Coalition Politics of Muslim-based Parties

This section describes how each Islamic parties respond to polarization by further scrutinizing its organizational solidity. The discussion also explores the dynamics of political decision-making in Islamic parties during the presidential election coalition and how the identity stances of

their voter determined their role in the election amid political polarization.

Table 2. Parties' ideological spectrum on the 2019 Presidential Coalition

Presidential Candidate	Jokowi-Amin	Prabowo-Sandiaga
Left	PDIP, PSI	
Center-left	Nasdem, Perindo, Golkar, PKPI, Hanura	Gerindra, Demokrat, Berkarya
Center-right	PKB (traditionalist)	PAN (modernist)
Right	PPP (traditionalist, conservatives)	PKS (Islamist)

Source: modified from (Evans, 2019).

PKB

PKB's systemness is anchored in its dense and durable linkage to the NU milieu, which functions as a stable organizational infrastructure and a reservoir of elite cues. PKB was founded in 1998 by Abdurrahman Wahid and other central NU figures who were embedded in NU's leadership structure, with an explicit intent to reconstitute a Partai NU after its dissolution under Suharto in 1973. Over time, several PKB elites have continued to occupy strategic positions within NU, reinforcing organizational overlap. For instance, Ma'ruf Amin—an ex-PKB legislator—served as Rais Aam (NU's highest council board), while Helmy Faisal, a PKB parliamentary leader in 2014, became NU Secretary-General in 2015. This embedded relationship helps explain PKB's sustained electoral dominance in NU strongholds, where it has consistently outperformed PPP despite PPP's own historical association with NU elites. In the 2019 election, PKB won 4,198,551 votes compared to PPP's 1,192,976 votes in East Java; in Central Java, PKB also surpassed PPP with 2,726,730 votes against 971,139 votes (Farisa, 2019). These patterns suggest that PKB has been more effective in representing, and mobilizing, the NU-based electorate.

However, this organizational advantage did not translate into uninterrupted stability. The key mechanism linking internal turbulence to electoral performance is that factional conflict disrupts systemness—weakening coordination, diluting elite signals to constituents, and fragmenting clerical networks that connect the party to NU grassroots. In 2001, PKB faced a major split between Chairman Matori Abdul Jalil and Alwi Shihab (backed by Wahid), triggered by Matori's support for Wahid's impeachment. Muhaimin Iskandar's election as party chairman in 2005 did not immediately

restore cohesion; he later clashed with Wahid after the Syuro council refused to endorse Muhaimin's maneuver against President Yudhoyono. Ahead of the 2009 election, Muhaimin's faction prevailed in legal disputes and consolidated control of the party (Iswinarno, 2019). Yet the preceding conflict cycle had already imposed electoral costs: PKB's vote share declined sharply, winning only 4.9 percent in 2009, down from 10.57 percent in 2004.

The recovery mechanism, in turn, hinged on rebuilding organizational cohesion through renewed NU elite and clerical backing that reactivated grassroots ties. With support from the NU's central board, Muhaimin gradually contained internal frictions and reassembled networks of NU clerics to stabilize mobilization at the local level (Kompas.com, 2008). As internal coordination improved and the party's linkage to NU constituencies was restored, PKB gained greater strategic room to pursue tactical vote-maximizing moves beyond mere factional survival. This consolidation is reflected in the party's rebound to around 9 percent in 2014, positioning PKB as the leading Islamic party and overtaking PKS, which experienced a decline in the same election.

In the 2014 presidential election, PKB supported Jokowi-Kalla according to their calculations and survey results. In addition, PKB's support stems from the appointment of Jusuf Kalla, who was a member of NU as a representative candidate. With 58 parliamentary seats and joining the Jokowi-Kalla coalition—which is minor (5 parties) compared to the Prabowo-Hatta (6 parties)—PKB seeks to maximize its strategic position as the axis of NU's base strength. PKB-NU performed a crucial role when Jokowi-Kalla was accused of being anti-Islam and pro-communist. They mobilized thousands of rural clerics as campaigners for Jokowi-Kalla and published the book *Why Nahdliyin Choose Jokowi*. The impressive achievements have strengthened Muhaimin's position in the party. In 2019, he was re-elected as the Chairman by acclamation, which signifies the party's next political move received maximum support from the entire cadres and grassroots (Ibrahim, 2019).

PKB's deep internalization and reification is evident in its consistent representation of the NU base and adherence to its traditional values, yet it also displays a nuance that balances ideological purity with political pragmatism. This strategic flexibility is highlighted in PKB's pivotal political role heading into the 2019 election, particularly as it faced the rising popularity of the Islamist opposition to Jokowi. In the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, despite most Islamic voters leaning toward Anis-

Sandiaga, PKB, aligning with NU principles, chose to support Ahok-Djarot, actively countering Islamist narratives. PKB politician Hasbilallah's statement, "...the Islamic culture should be preserved but not the hardliner" (Defianti, 2017), during this election captures the essence of PKB's stance. The party's ability to use the *aliran* plot to mobilize NU followers in support of Jokowi's government, despite hostility from Islamists like PKS, HTI, and FPI, reflects its commitment to preserving core values while engaging in pragmatic political alliances.

PKB's political strategy exemplifies a blend of ideological fidelity and pragmatic navigation. Its autonomy is evident in making independent coalition decisions, notably in diverging from expected mostly Islamic base, while maintaining strong ties with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This autonomy is key to PKB's relevance in a dynamic political landscape. Additionally, PKB's adaptability, facilitated by a complex internal structure, enabled a strategic shift in alliances, effectively countering opposition narratives and maintaining relevance. The critical alignment with Jokowi, especially in placing Ma'ruf Amin as a representative, reflects PKB's calculated political bargaining, leveraging its coalition position for significant electoral benefits (Adriansyah, 2018). This approach not only strengthened PKB's institutional capacity but also resonated deeply with its grassroots, aligning the party's goals with its primary constituencies' interests.

PPP

PPP's paradoxical systemness and value infusion since the post-Suharto era stems from its diverse constituency base, a legacy of Suharto's 1973 unification policy. While establishing as a representative of the Islamic base with the slogan "the big house of the Muslim Ummah" in the 2014 elections (Detik.com, 2011), PPP has also experienced internal factionalisms, whether between the NU and Parmusi factions or by elite-based factions. This factionalism challenges PPP's political consolidation, as the NU faction competes with PKB's structural NU elites and the Parmusi faction contends with other Islamic parties. Despite these challenges, PPP benefits from its established party infrastructure and constituency dating back to 1974, showcasing a complex interplay of historical legacy and internal dynamics.

PPP, as a highly regulated entity, struggles with justifying its coalition strategies to its constituents amid persistent internal conflicts and factionalism. Its party identity appears fragmented, often seeming more influenced by elite interests than a unified party

ideology. This lack of a coherent identity complicates PPP's ability to align its decisions with the party's long-term goals. Compounding these challenges are the party's organizational management issues, marked by internal conflicts leading to splits and the creation of new factions (Noor, 2016). Notable instances include the formation of the Reform Star Party (FBR) in 2002/3 and the 2007 conflict between Suryadharma Ali (NU faction) and Bachtiar Chamsyah (Parmusi faction), which was more about elite power struggles than factionalism (Sepriyossa, 2014).

The 2014 election saw renewed clashes among PPP elites, with Ali supporting Prabowo and Romahurmuzy backing Jokowi, leading to a divided stance in parliament with Ali's faction joining the Red and White Coalition and Romahurmuzy's aligning with the Great Indonesia Coalition (Maharani, 2014). Despite Lukman Saifudin Hakim's appointment as Minister of Religion from the Romahurmuzy faction, internal conflicts persisted, culminating in legal disputes over the party's board status (Lampost.co, 2017; Putra, 2017). These ongoing disputes have diluted the party's decision-making capabilities, reflecting a deep-seated struggle within PPP to reconcile its internal factions with broader political objectives.

PPP's autonomy appears compromised by internal factionalism and reliance on government support, with distinct factions pursuing separate political alliances and interests, indicating a lack of independent strategic decision-making. This dependence on external support, both legal and political, has undermined the party's autonomous capacity in decision-making processes. PPP's adaptability is evident in its shifting alliances and efforts to navigate Indonesia's dynamic political landscape. However, these shifts often appear reactive rather than strategic, driven by immediate needs rather than long-term planning. The party's complex internal structure, characterized by competing factions and interests, both facilitates and hinders its ability to adapt, allowing for diverse viewpoints but also leading to strategic inconsistencies and challenges in maintaining a unified direction.

This internal complexity has been exacerbated by the ongoing polarization leading up to the 2019 general election. Each faction within PPP holds distinctive power to influence the party's performance. Romahurmuzy's faction, with structural strength and institutional support from the Jokowi administration, contrasts with Djan's faction, which represents grassroots preferences opposed to Jokowi. This division was evident in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial

election, where both factions supported the Jokowi government and the Ahok-Djarot coalition, a move seen as contradictory to the constituents' support for Anis-Sandiaga (Qodir, 2017). The run-up to the 2019 election further highlighted the tension between PPP's coalition strategy and grassroots preference, leading to frustration among legislative candidates. Attempts by the central board to portray support for Jokowi as a tactic to foster a pro-Islamic government failed to resonate with the party's conservative Islamic base, including NU, Parmusi, and Perti followers, who viewed Prabowo-Sandiaga as representing populist Islam. This mismatch between PPP's strategic alliances and grassroots preferences underlines the party's struggle to reconcile internal factions with broader political objectives.

The PPP case demonstrates how parties' organizational weaknesses prevent them from making effective political decisions. In 2017, PPP even became the first party to declare the re-election of Jokowi. This action seems to convince the winning coalition, that they are not interested in joining the opposition and should disregard their constituents.

For a troubled PPP, the opposition is not an option because they do not have sufficient resources for the consecutive elections. Being in opposition also means facing heavy pressure as the incumbent controls the political and government structures, especially when the PPP top leader was allegedly involved in a corruption case. However, Romahurmuzy's ambitious support for Jokowi is suspected as his countermeasure from lawbreaking; he was eventually arrested in 2019. Internal conflicts and elite corruption have contributed to the party votes decline. In 1999, PPP achieved 10.71 percent, and the vote results were getting lower with only 4.32 percent in 2019 (Fardiansyah, 2019). In short, amid the polarization, PPP was troubled with the asynchronism of its constituency. They should bear the consequence of being abandoned by the voters when prioritizing organizational or elite interests.

PKS

PKS exhibits high systemness through its structured membership system, grounded in the *tarbiyah* movement and the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood. This rigorous organizational hierarchy, comprising the Syura council and the executive board, underscores the party's solid consolidation. Such a system is essential for maintaining party cohesion, even in the face of internal conflicts like the split caused by the progressive faction led by Anis Matta. The emphasis on a cell system and sacred laws within its core structure and norms showcases

the strong internalization of *tarbiyah* values within the party. However, the rift between conservative members and the more lavish-living progressive faction presents challenges in maintaining value consistency across all party members (Munandar, 2011)

The manifestation of these internal conflicts became evident when, in 2008, the Anis Matta-led progressive faction, advocating more open political goals and displaying a lavish lifestyle, gained prominence, creating friction with the party's generally conservative cadres (Munandar, 2011). This friction escalated when, in 2013, party leader Luthfi Hasan Ishaq was imprisoned for bribery, intensifying the blame on the progressives. In 2015, the party's Syura council replaced Anis Matta with Sohibul Iman as leaders, further sidelining Matta's faction (Natalyn, 2018). In response, Matta established the Gerakan Arah Baru Indonesia (GARBI) in 2018 and later the Partai Gelombang Rakyat (Gelora) in 2019, accommodating his loyalists. The central board's response, requiring regional boards to sign an allegiance pact and firing Matta loyalists (Ibrahim, 2018), reflected the depth of the party's internal divisions and its impact on PKS's political behavior, especially during the polarized 2019 presidential election.

Renowned for its distinct identity and adherence to foundational principles, PKS adeptly handles internal dissent, notably through the expulsion of Anis Matta's loyalists. As PKS geared up for the 2019 election, it focused on reinforcing internal cohesion and realigning with core *tarbiyah* values, while intensifying community outreach. Capitalizing on the polarized political climate, PKS tapped into the emerging anti-Jokowi sentiment among conservative Islamic segments, leading to the significant return of former supporters disillusioned by the party's progressive factions. This strategic realignment, exemplified by the Gerakan Pulang (Garpu) movement, showcases PKS's ability to consolidate its base by maintaining a consistent stance against Jokowi's coalition, thus strengthening its electoral strategy and appeal among conservative voters (Interview with PKS's politician, September 2021).

PKS's autonomy is evident in its leadership through the Syura Council and executive board in maintaining control over strategic decisions, particularly in taking opposition stance against Jokowi. Demonstrating adaptability, PKS responded to political challenges by engaging with conservative Islamic elements. For example, they were keen to campaign for a bill to protect Ulama and religious

leaders (Cnnindonesia.com, 2019) and collaborated with groups like FPI that also oppose the government. They were in coordination in the extra-parliamentary movement, both the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial and 2019 presidential elections (Kumparan.com, 2019). However, it is important to note that the party approach to a conservative base does not mean that PKS turns to a rigid ideological party. At the 2015 PKS national meeting, there was no single direction over the party's Islam-based agenda (Khoer, 2015).

Thus, PKS's electoral strategy, which includes positioning the party as a representative of the opposition, is perceived to strengthen their electoral interests rather than the ideological maneuver. The spirit of opposing Jokowi's government and strengthened ties with anti-Jokowi Muslim voters greatly assisted PKS in consolidating during the internal conflict. This shows that PKS has rebuilt its organizational capacity to capture polarization as an opportunity to restore the party's condition and, at the same time, gain votes. Furthermore, positioning the Islamic base in opposition has also strengthened the party's solidity and expanded its reach to conservative Islam. These various strategies contributed to PKS's success in increasing the number of votes in the 2019 election, where they got 8.21 percent from 6.7 percent in 2014.

As a party born initially for Muhammadiyah followers, PAN has been moved to a more electoral party. They targeted plural segments such as urban communities and the younger generation. This shift toward a more inclusive, electoral approach marks a significant change in the party's systemness, transitioning from an ideologically driven base to a wider electoral appeal. However, this transition has sparked internal disputes. The party's openness, with less emphasis on Muhammadiyah or specific Islamic interests, led to some Muhammadiyah members leaving to form the Partai Matahari Bangsa (National Sun Party, PMB) in 2006, which adheres more closely to Islamic ideology. Despite these changes, PAN has maintained ties with its Muhammadiyah roots, evidenced by the influential role of Amien Rais, its founder and former Muhammadiyah Chairman, in shaping the party's central board and internal dynamics (Nugroho, 2015).

PAN's move toward a more pluralistic and pragmatic approach reflects a significant change in its value infusion. While maintaining its Muhammadiyah roots, PAN's openness to wider social-political segments shows a more flexible tactic. This transition, however, has challenged heavily by Amien Rais, a founding figure who strived to maintain a cohesive party identity. For example, after the 2014 elections,

Zulkifli Hasan, the party chairman desired to join the Jokowi's government (Nugroho, 2015). Despite receiving the disapproval of Amien, PAN finally entered the government in 2016, and its politician, Asman Abnur, was appointed as the Minister of State Apparatus Utilization and Bureaucratic Reform. However, in 2018, Jokowi reshuffled Abnur as the coalition's parties objected to PAN's attitude that frequently contradicts the government (Sabiila, 2021).

The 2019 presidential election coalition politics highlighted PAN's instability, stemming from differences between Amien Rais and party officials, and inseparable from political polarization. Amien harshly criticized the government and leaned close to the Islamists. Amien has been one of the most vocal opponents of the government, particularly during the 2017 Jakarta protests and the #2019GantiPresiden movement. Amien's religious expression was also seen in his adverse reaction using scriptural satire when he said that Jokowi's opposition belongs to the 'party of Allah,' whereas the opposite was the 'party of demons (Cnnindonesia.com, 2018). Amien led PAN to join PKS in the Ijtima' Ulama before the 2019 presidential nomination. These political moves imply Amien's strategy to shift the party closer to the Islamist alliance, a political move that has long been refused by the party's officials (Detik.com, 2012).

While in line with their essential voters who mostly oppose Jokowi's regime, Amien's political attitude contradicts the rest of the party board, which is inclined to be a part of the governmental coalition. Thus, before the coalition formation for the 2019 presidential election, PAN officials declare the position by supporting Jokowi-Amin. However, Amien used his veto rights to the decision and shifted PAN support to Prabowo-Sandiaga (Aditya, 2021). His counterparts were disappointed by the move and stated that they still support Jokowi-Amin (Bomantama, 2019). Internal friction in PAN indicates at least two hampering circumstances of its party's organization. First, the party is troubled by the strong influence of its founding figure that disrupts the party's decision-making mechanism. Second, PAN faces the obscurity of party identification, whether it is grassroots-based such as PKB-NU, or a catch-all. This ambiguity is transformed into a dilemmatic problem when polarization also generates contending powers within the party.

PAN has demonstrated laborious adaptability in navigating the polarized political landscape, experiencing the challenge of balancing the influence of its founder, Amien Rais, with strategic decisions made by the party board. The decision to join the Prabowo-Sandiaga coalition wasn't

unanimous within PAN, leading to further tensions between Rais and other party officials. Post-2019 election, as Zulkifli aimed to align PAN with the Jokowi administration, Rais opposed this direction, envisioning PAN as a consistent adversary of Jokowi's government. Despite Rais' resistance, Zulkifli, supported by most regional boards. This internal disagreement culminated in Rais and his son, Hanafi Rais, leaving PAN to establish the Party of Ummah, an Islamist party (Putri, 2020), marking a significant ideological stance.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Islamic parties' responses to political polarization are shaped by institutional capacity, especially in organizational solidity and voters' base tie. For parties with organizational stability and a solid voter base tie, with PKB as an example, polarization provides an opportunity as identity-driven narratives play an important role in strengthening their constituents' support. With the capacity to mobilize support from the NU, polarization has placed PKB as the primary defender of pluralism in facing the rise of conservative Islam promoted by the opposition. This action increases PKB's bargaining position in the Jokowi-Amin coalition, and eventually, brings significant electoral benefits. Another example of the politicization of polarization is shown by the PKS. Despite prior internal conflicts, PKS demonstrated its institutional capacity and took advantage of polarization by turning it into party consolidation. PKS's persistency in siding with the opposition has increased confidence among its constituency to reach wider electorates from the conservative segments.

However, for parties with low internal solidity and unstable organizational rules, polarization gives them burdens in their way. The strengthening of the identity narrative among the voter base of PAN and PPP is in contrast with their pragmatic strategy in siding with the ruling government. This situation worsens as polarization ignites the internal friction that surfaced in the parties' partisanship during the presidential election. For PAN, the party personalization by its founder has disrupted the party decision-making mechanism, made them appear inconsistent, and might confuse their constituents. In PPP, although both conflicting factions supported Jokowi, the party's solidity did not immediately recover. Not to mention that their voters tend to support Prabowo-Sandi. Those aspects have contributed to their weak electoral performance.

Finally, this study demonstrates that in the case of polarization in Indonesia, not every Muslim-based party could strengthen its ideology or identity. Parties with a more homogenous voter base are those who can politicize polarization for their electoral interests—as shown by PKB and PKS. However, parties with a more heterogeneous voter base, such as PAN, are likely to be conflicted as some of their elites tried to fulfill traditional voter preferences, while some others choose to prioritize the party's interests. As for the PPP, polarization is detrimental since the weak party management forces them to settle with the ruling government, albeit contradicting their conservative voters' preferences. The mode of electoral democracy has shaped religious parties' pragmatist behavior, in which organizational performance and traditional voter ties play a crucial role in deciding their political outcome.

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