

The Influence of Public Opinion on the Existence of Islamic Organizations and Political Parties in Political Communication in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the role of public opinion in shaping the existence and influence of Islamic organizations and political parties in Indonesia. In a democratic society, public opinion functions as an invisible force that can elevate or diminish political actors. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this research utilizes literature review and media observation to analyze the relationship between public opinion, political communication, and the performance of Islamic-based organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Islamic Student Association (HMI), as well as Islamic political parties like PKS, PPP, and PAN. Guided by theories of political communication and public opinion such as the spiral of silence and agenda-setting the findings reveal that public perception plays a vital role in either supporting or rejecting Islamic political actors. The phenomenon of mass mobilization and religious-based movements driven by public opinion demonstrates that public perception can shift rapidly and have significant impacts on national political dynamics. Therefore, managing political image and media narratives is crucial for the sustainability of Islamic political organizations in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Public opinion; Political communication; Islamic organizations; Islamic political parties; Media; Democracy

INTRODUCTION

In a modern democratic system, public opinion plays a crucial role as an invisible yet highly influential force in the political dynamics of a country. In Indonesia, a country with a Muslim-majority population, Islamic mass organizations (ormas) and Islamic political

parties have significant influence in social and political life. However, the sustainability and influence of organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Islamic Students Association (HMI), as well as political parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the United Development Party (PPP), and the National Mandate Party (PAN), depend not only on their internal strength but are also strongly influenced by public opinion developing within society.

Public opinion represents the attitudes, views, and expectations of society, which may support or reject the existence of a political group. In the context of Islamic mass organizations and political parties, such opinion is particularly important because their existence often occupies a vulnerable position within complex and plural political competition. When public opinion is positive, their legitimacy and influence tend to strengthen; conversely, negative opinion may trigger marginalization, social exclusion, and even declining political support, resulting in a weakened position within the democratic system.

In facing these challenges, political communication serves as a strategic tool used by Islamic organizations and political parties to shape and manage their public image. Mass media, as a primary channel for disseminating information and forming opinion, plays a vital role in conveying narratives that can influence public perceptions. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms through which public opinion is formed through media and political communication is an important aspect to study. Theories such as the spiral of silence, which explains how individuals tend to conceal their opinions when they feel they differ from the majority, and agenda-setting, which highlights how the media influences issue priorities in society, provide relevant conceptual frameworks for examining this phenomenon.

This study aims to examine in depth how public opinion is formed and develops within the context of political communication, as well as how such opinion affects the existence and performance of Islamic mass organizations and political parties in Indonesia. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach through literature review and media observation, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the reciprocal relationship between

public opinion, media, and the political dynamics of Islamic organizations. Thus, the findings are expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by Islamic mass organizations and political parties in maintaining their relevance and influence amid the continuing development of democracy.

Theoretical Framework

Political Communication Theory

Political communication can be defined as a type of communication intended to create certain effects within a political system. In this regard, political communication is conducted by emphasizing the examination of issues that can unite all members of society through sanctions agreed upon collectively through political institutions. According to Lasswell (1948), political communication can be analyzed using the formula who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect, which highlights the importance of the communicator, message, media, audience, and resulting effects. McQuail (2010) states that political communication also encompasses the relationship among political actors, the media, and society in creating political discourse.

Meanwhile, theories of public opinion are closely related to political communication because public opinion is the result of interactions among political messages received by society. One important theory in the study of public opinion is the spiral of silence introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1974). This theory explains that individuals tend to remain silent when they feel that their personal opinions differ from the majority view in order to avoid social isolation. The spiral of silence phenomenon is highly relevant in the context of political communication because it reveals how social pressure can influence an individual's willingness to express political opinions. Therefore, political communication theory and public opinion theory have a very close relationship, in which political communication not only conveys information but also plays a role in shaping public opinion through media and social interactions taking place within society (Habermas, 1989).

Spiral of Silence and Agenda-Setting Theory

In this context, the Spiral of Silence theory developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) is an important theory for explaining why certain opinions dominate public discourse while others disappear. Noelle-Neumann argues that individuals tend to remain silent when they realize that their views differ from the majority opinion because of fear of social isolation. This mechanism creates a spiral effect: as more individuals remain silent, the dominant opinion appears increasingly stronger, while minority opinions become increasingly marginalized. In her book *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin* (1993), she states that “public opinion is a form of social control... those who fail to express the dominant opinion may be isolated.” This theory is highly relevant in contexts such as authoritarian politics, moral debates, or social media, where divergent opinions are often silenced symbolically or in practice.

Complementing this perspective, Agenda-Setting theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw through their classic study of the 1968 United States presidential election, argues that the media not only conveys information but also directs public attention toward particular issues. In their article entitled *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*, they state that “the media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Within this framework, the media is considered capable of arranging a hierarchy of social priorities, and through the frequency, duration, and placement of issues in news coverage, the media regulates the priorities of public attention. Subsequent research by McCombs (2004) further developed this theory through the concept of second-level agenda setting, which concerns the specific attributes of issues that are also shaped by the media.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research methodology is the scientific process or approach used to obtain data to support a study. It encompasses various scientific methods, implementation steps, types of approaches, and limitations associated with their application. Research, on the other hand,

is defined as a systematic effort to acquire knowledge through the collection of factual evidence conducted critically and in a controlled manner using specific scientific procedures (Alfandi, 2001).

This study uses a qualitative approach, which places greater emphasis on observing phenomena and understanding their meanings. The study relies heavily on the use of language, both in the form of words and sentences, for analysis. This method is used as a means of understanding particular events, behaviors, or phenomena. A descriptive approach is also used to describe independent variables without comparing them or seeking relationships with other variables. This method applies to research involving one or more independent variables. The method used in this study, namely Library Research, is a type of research involving the collection of data and information through various written sources available in libraries, including books, documents, magazines, historical records, and others (Mardalis, 1999).

The study uses Content Analysis techniques, which focus on the consistency of communication content, understanding the meanings contained within it, and interpreting symbols and symbolic interactions that occur during the communication process (Bungin, 2011). Benard Berelson (1959) explains that content analysis is a research method used to objectively describe communication content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the modern era, which is filled with information, the public voice is no longer merely something expressed behind the scenes; it has become a social force capable of building or destroying companies and individuals. Public opinion is now an active actor in determining social, political, and religious dynamics within contemporary democracy. The public is not merely a passive object waiting for direction. Its influence may be invisible, but it has the ability to mobilize many people, shape general perceptions, and influence the fate of social institutions such as religious organizations. This makes it important to examine how Islamic mass organizations (ormas), such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU),

Muhammadiyah, and student organizations, all depend on substantial public support or rejection. Therefore, understanding how public opinion influences Islamic mass organizations is essential for understanding how religious social movements continue to develop within a changing society.

The Role of Public Opinion in the Existence of Islamic Mass Organizations

For some time, public opinion has been regarded as an invisible force capable of determining the continuation or collapse of social and political organizations, including Islamic mass organizations. According to Bogardus in Abdurrachman (1993: 56), public opinion functions as a form of social moral support and is very important for strengthening the legitimacy of laws and the existence of social institutions. Public support within Islamic mass organizations is therefore very important in determining the sustainability of an organization.

Sastropetro (1987: 119–123) even states that public opinion can function as a “social sanction,” placing psychological pressure on individuals or groups against whom it is directed and potentially destroying the credibility of an institution. History records that prominent figures of Sarekat Islam, such as Agus Salim and Abikusno, were expelled from the organization, a process that was influenced by public opinion at the time. Important figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid, who came from Nahdlatul Ulama, also faced public pressure that made his position in the political arena unstable. This phenomenon demonstrates that the existence of Islamic mass organizations is highly dependent on effective management of public communication. According to Yulianita (2003), the collapse of the Masyumi Party in 1960 also shows that Islamic institutions can collapse when they lack consistent public support. Therefore, modern Islamic mass organizations must recognize that their existence depends on ideological vision and public communication methods capable of maintaining, sustaining, and expanding their social support base.

Given the decisive role of public opinion in determining the existence and strength of Islamic mass organizations, we can see how public support and perceptions shape the position of these organizations in the social sphere. This leads to more specific political

phenomena, such as the 212 Movement. This action became a clear example of how Islamic mass organizations and Muslim groups could mobilize mass support with substantial public opinion behind them, thereby exerting a significant impact on national political dynamics.

Political Phenomenon Involving Islamic Mass Organizations: The 212 Movement

The 212 Defending Islam Movement, held on December 2, 2016, was one of the important events in the history of Islamic movements in Indonesia. Although the movement began with allegations of religious blasphemy by the then Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the action developed into something broader than merely a legal or religious issue. The demonstration showed how Indonesian Muslims could gather in large numbers to express their aspirations, not only concerning religion but also social and political matters. In this context, the term Islamic politics emerged, reflecting how Muslims utilize religious values to influence political policies and government decisions. Islamic politics does not necessarily have to operate through political parties or seek to establish an Islamic state; it can also emerge through mass movements, public opinion, or peaceful social pressure. The 212 Movement provides a concrete example of how Muslim political power can emerge suddenly and on a large scale, producing tangible effects on the direction of Indonesian politics, particularly ahead of the Jakarta gubernatorial election and subsequent national developments.

Demands

The 212 Defending Islam Movement was concerned not only with religion but also with politics. In this context, Islamic politics refers to how Muslims work together to influence regulations, laws, and state leaders. The 212 Movement became a concrete example of Muslims uniting to express their interests openly in public.

Muslim Mobilization and Political Symbols

The 212 Movement succeeded in bringing together millions of people from various regions. This demonstrated that Muslims possess considerable strength when united. In politics, a mass gathering of this scale can become a symbol of power capable of

influencing government decisions or election outcomes. The 212 Movement signaled to political elites that the voice of the Muslim community could not be ignored.

Participation of Islamic Figures and Organizations

A number of Islamic figures and organizations participated in the 212 Movement, including GNPF-MUI, FPI, and various other mass organizations. They addressed not only legal aspects but also focused on justice, leadership, and the future of Muslims in the country. Their presence demonstrated that Islamic politics was experiencing a revival within society by bringing moral and religious issues into the political arena.

Political Impact after the 212 Movement

After the action, many of the figures involved became increasingly active in practical politics. For example, some supported particular candidates in gubernatorial elections or presidential elections. The 212 Movement also had a major influence on the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, which ultimately resulted in Ahok's defeat. This demonstrated that the movement possessed real political power and was not merely a religious movement.

Identity Politics in the 212 Movement

The 212 Movement is often associated with the use of identity politics, namely the utilization of religious identity (Islam) for political interests. This can have positive effects when used to pursue justice and the interests of society. On the other hand, if not managed properly, it can create divisions within society by creating a distinction between “us” and “them,” or between the majority and minority.

Overall, the 212 Defending Islam Movement provides an example of how Muslims can express their voices and engage in politics peacefully while remaining firm. Islamic politics in the context of this movement was not an attempt to establish a religious state, but rather to pursue justice and Islamic values within the context of national and state life. The movement demonstrates that religion and politics in Indonesia cannot be separated, and that the two will always interact in social life.

Examples of Public Support for or Rejection of Islamic Mass Organizations

Public Support for Islamic Mass Organizations and Political Parties Sarekat Islam (1911–1912)

Sarekat Islam (SI), initially established as Sarekat Dagang Islam in 1911 and transformed into SI in 1912, became one of the first Islamic organizations capable of attracting massive public support in the Dutch East Indies. Its ability to reach various segments of society, from small traders to educated elites, stemmed from the strong sense of religious solidarity that bound its members. Public support for Sarekat Islam (SI) during the 1911–1912 period was an important foundation for the organization's transformation from a traders' association into a national political movement (Iskandar & Firdaus, 2020). Founded by Haji Samanhudi in Surakarta in 1911 as Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI), the organization initially aimed to protect the economic interests of indigenous Muslim batik traders from the dominance of Chinese traders. However, religious solidarity and collective Muslim awareness of social injustice encouraged SDI to develop into SI in 1912, with a broader scope and clearer political orientation. Thus, SI's success in reaching the wider public occurred because strong public opinion favored it. The strength of the Muslim masses supporting SI represented a concrete form of positive public sentiment that developed through social interaction, religious study gatherings, sermons, and the print media of the time. Consequently, various forms of tangible support directly affected the strength and sustainability of the organization. Public support for SI was reflected in the rapid growth of its membership. In 1913, SI claimed to have 150,000 members, and this number increased to approximately 350,000 in 1916, eventually reaching 2 million in 1919 (Setiawati & Samsudin, 2020). This growth demonstrated that SI succeeded in attracting the sympathy and active participation of people from various social backgrounds, including small traders, farmers, and santri. A major factor attracting public support was SI's Islamic identity, which provided a sense of unity and hope for Muslims to struggle for their rights in the context of Dutch colonialism. In addition, SI utilized print media such as newspapers to disseminate its ideas and strengthen public support. For example, in 1913 or 1914, SI acquired the newspaper Sinar Djawa, which was later renamed Sinar Hindia in 1917. This media outlet became an important instrument for disseminating SI's messages and building public opinion in support of its movement. In the development of Muhammadiyah (1912),

Muhammadiyah's modern approach, founded by Kiai Haji Ahmad Dahlan on November 18, 1912, in Yogyakarta, constituted an Islamic reform movement that emphasized a modern and rational approach. The movement aimed to improve the condition of Indonesian Muslims by integrating Islamic values with modernity while responding to the social and cultural challenges of the time. Muhammadiyah emerged as an Islamic mass organization with a modern and rational approach. The journal notes that this communication strategy successfully attracted public sympathy, particularly among educated groups, because it was able to respond to contemporary challenges such as education, health, and hygiene, which had previously been regarded as weaknesses among Muslims (Hasanah et al., 2024).

One of the main strategies used by Muhammadiyah was an informative, educational, and persuasive communication approach. Through this communication technique, Muhammadiyah successfully disseminated moderate and rational Islamic teachings to the wider public. The use of various media, such as tabligh, newspaper articles, magazines, books, and brochures, became an effective means of introducing modern Islamic perspectives. In addition, Muhammadiyah utilized mass media as a tool to provide information and education to the public. Suara Muhammadiyah magazine, as one of the mass media outlets owned by the organization, played an important role in building good relationships with relevant readers and communities. The public relations strategy implemented by the magazine included providing useful and engaging content, promoting the magazine, and maintaining its reputation by consistently adhering to journalistic ethics and professionalism. Public support for Muhammadiyah was expressed not only through membership but also through moral and social recognition. This demonstrates how appropriate communication can shape public opinion favorably toward Islamic mass organizations (Moewashi, 2023).

MIAI and the Consolidation of Islamic Politics

MIAI was even able to submit political demands to Gabungan Politik Indonesia (GAPI), such as requiring the head of state to be Muslim, two-thirds of the cabinet to come from Muslim circles, and the establishment of a Ministry of Religious Affairs. This was

possible because public opinion among Muslims at the time strongly supported the position of Islamic politics as part of the aspirations for national independence. Majelis Islam A'la Indonesia (MIAI) was established in 1935 in response to the need for a forum of unity among Islamic organizations in the Dutch East Indies. From its emergence, MIAI was positioned as a significant forum for Muslim consolidation, particularly in confronting colonialism and the political marginalization of Muslims at the national level. Public support for MIAI was reflected in the high participation of other Islamic organizations that joined under its umbrella. This phenomenon reflected a consensus among Muslims regarding the importance of uniting political visions and struggle strategies in confronting colonial power and pursuing independence. As a consequence of its strategic position, MIAI was able to articulate Muslim political aspirations openly and firmly. This was manifested through the submission of political demands to Gabungan Politik Indonesia (GAPI). These demands included, among others, that the future head of state should be Muslim, two-thirds of cabinet members should come from Muslim circles, and a Ministry of Religious Affairs should be established. These demands did not emerge in a vacuum but were driven by strong public opinion among Muslims, who at the time strongly supported an increased position for Islam within the political structure of post-colonial Indonesia.

Participation in the 1999 Election

In the contemporary context, public support was also visible in the participation of Islamic parties in the 1999 Election. Islamic parties that passed verification demonstrated that they had sufficiently large mass bases. This means that public opinion provided concrete and measurable political legitimacy. The participation of Islamic parties in the 1999 Election was tangible evidence of strong public support for religiously based political existence after the Reform era. Parties wishing to participate in the election were required to have organizational structures in at least 10 first-level regions and 10 second-level regions. This requirement was not merely administrative but reflected the extent to which a party possessed a real network and sufficiently broad grassroots support. Islamic parties that passed verification demonstrated that they had significant mass bases, formed through a combination of cultural, historical, and religious public support (Nasuhaidi & Subekti,

2024).

Public support for Islamic parties can be observed in the emergence and success of several parties such as the National Awakening Party (PKB), the United Development Party (PPP), and the Crescent Star Party (PBB). PKB, for example, received substantial support from members of Nahdlatul Ulama who previously lacked an official political vehicle during the New Order. After the Reform era, the political aspirations of NU members crystallized into electoral votes for PKB as their representation in parliament. Similarly, PPP, which maintained its existence as the only Islamic party accommodated during the New Order, was able to retain the loyalty of its constituents in the 1999 Election. PBB, carrying the legacy of the old Masyumi spirit, also demonstrated that public nostalgia for ideological Islamic parties remained alive and found a place, particularly in regions with a long history of Islamic political struggle such as West Sumatra and Aceh. This form of public support was not limited to the number of votes in elections but was also visible in high public participation in political campaigns, religious outreach activities, and the strengthening of religious identity in public spaces. Islamic study groups, pesantren, and Islamic mass organizations became active channels for disseminating the programs of Islamic parties. On the ground, the public demonstrated support by displaying party attributes at homes and on private vehicles, attending mass rallies, and disseminating information through traditional social networks such as social gatherings and religious study sessions. This is consistent with Neni's argument that public opinion toward Islamic parties forms a concrete social force capable of influencing policy direction and the political bargaining position of these parties within a developing democratic system. Thus, the participation of Islamic parties in the 1999 Election was not merely a product of political freedom following the collapse of the New Order, but also the result of a long process of forming positive public opinion toward Islamic politics. This support was active, structured, and reflected society's expectations regarding the representation of Islamic values in a democratic system of government (Assyaukanie, 2004).

The Election of Abdurrahman Wahid as President

One of the peaks of public opinion support for Islamic mass organization figures was

seen when Abdurrahman Wahid, or Gus Dur, from Nahdlatul Ulama, was elected President of the Republic of Indonesia. Gus Dur received legitimacy from NU, which was supported by a broad social and cultural base, demonstrating how the power of public opinion can elevate a leader to the highest position. Gus Dur was not merely a charismatic figure but someone deeply rooted in the social and cultural networks of traditional Muslim communities, particularly in Java. The legitimacy he obtained came from a militant and loyal NU mass base that had long been involved in political dynamics through socio-religious channels such as pesantren, religious study gatherings, and rural preaching activities.

Gus Dur's victory cannot be separated from the public support built through political communication conducted by NU over a long period. His influence was not built instantly, but through his role as a Muslim intellectual, advocate of tolerance, and moderate spiritual leader. NU, which initially constituted a socio-religious force, succeeded in consolidating its strength in practical politics through the National Awakening Party (PKB), making the community's voice heard not only in the moral sphere but also in national political decisions.

Public opinion support for Gus Dur appeared in various forms, ranging from mass mobilization during campaigns and dissemination of religious messages supporting a fair and experienced leader, to waves of sympathy from civil society seeking change after the New Order. This strength of opinion subsequently transformed into real political power through support in the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), which ultimately elected Gus Dur as president to replace B.J. Habibie (Basid et al., 2024).

The Division of Sarekat Islam by Communist Groups

Sarekat Islam experienced internal division when figures such as Alimin attempted to change the organization's orientation toward communism and changed its name to "Sarekat Idjo." This demonstrated the existence of groups within society that rejected Islam as the ideological basis of the organization. This rejection stemmed from ideological and political differences, which subsequently encouraged communist groups to establish Sarekat Rakyat and later the PKI. The emergence of communist groups within Sarekat Islam (SI) triggered

negative reactions from various segments of society. The public began to question SI's consistency as an organization promoting Islamic values because of the sharp ideological conflict between the moderate Islamic faction and the Communist faction.

This division caused society, particularly SI members and sympathizers, to become confused and lose trust in the organization. Some members of the public viewed the involvement of communist groups within SI as obscuring the organization's original objectives, which had focused on defending Muslim interests and fighting Dutch colonialism. The internal conflict and sharply contrasting political objectives led to declining public support for SI.

Some even considered the organization no longer capable of serving as a representative vehicle for Muslims and began seeking alternative Islamic organizations that were perceived as more committed to upholding religious values. This situation eventually encouraged the PKI to separate from SI and establish its own organization in 1923, although the effects of the division continued to damage SI's reputation and generate skepticism among Muslims. Thus, internal public opinion within SI became divided, demonstrating how negative opinion can damage the cohesion of an Islamic organization (Fanani & Maimunah, 2021).

Rejection by Secular Nationalists

Western-educated secular nationalists often accused Islam of being “backward.” They criticized Islamic teachings, including polygamy, education, and public health. This demonstrated the existence of negative views of Islam among influential intellectual groups involved in formulating colonial and national policies. Secular nationalists educated in the Western tradition tended to view Islam as less modern or even backward. They frequently criticized several aspects of Islamic teachings, such as the practice of polygamy, the education system, and public health. This attitude reflected negative views among intellectuals who played important roles in formulating policies during both the colonial period and the early independence era. The rejection and skepticism emerging from this elite group also contributed to hindering the recognition of Islam as the official ideology of the state. The opinions formed among secular nationalists limited the political space

available to Islamic politics in determining national policy. Such rejection by elite public opinion became one of the factors hindering political recognition of Islam as the official ideology of the state (Anjar Nugroho, 2013).

The Removal of the Jakarta Charter (1945)

Disappointment among Islamic groups deepened when the seven crucial words in the Jakarta Charter, namely the phrase “with the obligation to implement Islamic Sharia for its adherents,” were removed from the country's foundational document. The removal was not merely a matter of wording but represented a clear rejection of the desire among Muslims for Sharia to become part of the legal foundation of the state. At the time, Muslims constituted a very large majority of Indonesia's population. This event illustrated the tension between Muslim expectations for official recognition within the governmental system and concerns among other groups that Islamic symbols might become too dominant amid the nation's diversity. In addition, the proposal to replace the word “God” with “Allah” in the foundational state text was also rejected, particularly at the request of Balinese Hindu figure I Gusti Ketut Pudja. These decisions demonstrate that, at the time, the national situation was not yet ready to accept dominant Islamic symbolism in the state constitution, given the existing religious and cultural diversity (Tujuh et al., 2021).

The Dissolution of Masyumi (1960)

The Masyumi Party faced significant rejection from political elites who supported the Soekarno government and the Nasakom ideology. Many nationalist figures and Nasakom supporters viewed Masyumi as an obstacle to national unity because it was considered to place excessive emphasis on exclusive Islamic interests. In addition, Masyumi's relations with conservative groups and opponents of the government further strengthened negative perceptions of the party. Among the wider public, support for Masyumi also began to decline as government influence and propaganda increased, portraying the party as anti-government and a threat to national stability. This situation caused the party to lose a strong mass base and made it vulnerable to government repression. This rejection was not only political but also social, because some members of society began to regard Masyumi as less relevant in the context of an Indonesia seeking to unite various elements of the nation under

a single ideological umbrella. This is a clear example of how state power, shaped by elite opinion and the mass opinion supporting Nasakom, could reject a previously influential Islamic party. Without strong public support, Masyumi was unable to withstand political repression (Lim, 2017).

The Fall of Gus Dur as President

Although Gus Dur was elected president and initially received broad support, some groups began to express dissatisfaction with his leadership. He subsequently had to step down before completing his term after losing political support and amid public opinion that turned against him, even though he had hired a Public Relations consultant. Many members of the public and political elites felt that his policies were inconsistent and tended to be controversial, creating doubts about his ability to lead the country. This negative opinion was further strengthened by the media and opposition groups that actively criticized Gus Dur's actions and decisions.

Gus Dur's efforts to improve his image through a Public Relations consultant also failed to reverse public opinion, which had already become largely skeptical. Much of the public felt that the changes he had promised had not been realized, while various internal political conflicts further weakened his position. Ultimately, rejection from the public and political elites resulted in the loss of support that forced him to end his presidency prematurely (Kuswanto, 2022).

Public Opinion in Political Campaigns and the Media

According to Herimanto (2007), the term public opinion derives from two Latin words, namely *opinari* and *publicus*. *Opinari* means to think or assume, while *publicus* refers to something belonging to or associated with the wider public. When combined, these terms convey the idea that public opinion reflects the thoughts, expectations, and assumptions arising among many individuals within a community. Although, in general, “public” refers to a large group of people, the term also contains a collective dimension of views. A shared view or public opinion can only be recognized as valid public opinion when it is formed on the basis of real and relevant facts and is used to assess a social issue

according to objective standards of good and bad. Such opinion must be constructed logically and rationally, rather than being based solely on emotion or assumptions. Certain value and competency criteria also serve as benchmarks for determining whether an opinion qualifies as public opinion.

In other words, public opinion is not merely a collection of spontaneous views, but must undergo a rational process of thought and contain socially accountable values. Based on the various views and ideas outlined above, it can be concluded that public opinion is a form of perception or view held by a large group of people regarding an issue that is receiving attention or being discussed. This collective opinion emerges as a result of four main components, namely:

1. The Emergence of a Sensitive or Debated Issue or Problem
There is a situation or problem that generates differences of opinion and becomes a controversial topic.
2. Public Involvement and Attention
3. A group of people or members of society demonstrate interest in and concern about the issue.
4. A Process of Interaction and Communication through Discussion
5. There is an exchange of ideas among members of society concerning the issue, either through direct conversation or through other media.

The Formation of Agreement or a Shared View

After a process of dialogue, a collective opinion or shared conclusion emerges among society regarding the issue under discussion (Soemirat, 2005). Meanwhile, Leonard W. Doob states that public opinion considered credible or meeting certain criteria has the following characteristics:

Based on Relevant Facts

The opinion formed is influenced by facts used as references in shaping the opinion, particularly regarding moral or ethical aspects such as what society considers good and bad.

The Presence of an Attitude or Decision Based on a Reasoning Process

Rather Than Mere Raw Facts. Although facts serve as references, opinion does not rely solely on data but also involves attitudes, decisions, and social agreement in determining how to resolve a problem.

Fulfillment of Substantive Public Opinion Criteria

An opinion considered valid must contain factual elements and values reflected in society's ability to assess and respond to social problems rationally (Ruslan, 2010). An opinion is not always expressed verbally through words but can also be expressed through actions, attitudes, facial expressions, and body movements (known as body language). In addition, non-verbal symbols can be used to convey opinions, such as clothing choices or particular colors such as green, yellow, and red that carry specific meanings in social contexts. According to D.W. Rajecki, the process of forming an individual's opinion involves three main elements: emotion (affect), behavior, and cognition or thought. These three components influence one another in shaping a personal opinion. Over time and through social interaction, individual opinions can develop and merge into collective opinion or public opinion (Ruslan, 2010). Based on the preceding understanding, Leonard W. Dube states that public opinion is closely related to individual attitudes, both as individuals and as members of social groups. In other words, public opinion is the result of a combination of the attitudes of people who belong to their communities. These attitudes are shaped directly and indirectly by accumulated human experiences in interaction with the social environment. This means that experiences gained through participation in groups are important factors influencing people's thoughts and behavior. Therefore, public opinion actually reflects a process of internalized experience within a particular social context.

Furthermore, according to Marian D. Irish and Proto, public opinion is a form of statement or expression of individual or group arrangements concerning topics related to public interests. In this regard, public opinion is not limited merely to expressed views but also includes reactions to the development of social issues. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that public opinion consists of three main elements. First, there is a declaration of attitude openly conveyed through verbal, written, or other symbols. Second,

there are issues and problems that create advantages and disadvantages within society. Third, the subject matter of the opinion is directly related to social aspects and public interests. These three aspects are interconnected and form the basis for the formation of public opinion within the context of social life.

Types of Public Opinion

An individual's behavior is closely related to the attitude they possess. Attitude is an internal tendency that influences how an individual responds to a particular object, event, or situation, while behavior is the concrete manifestation of that response in everyday life. This means that behavior does not emerge suddenly but is influenced by life experiences, values, social habits, and interactions with the surrounding environment. What is displayed through actions, body language, speaking style, and choices in responding to an issue reflects attitudes that have developed gradually. Attitudes themselves are influenced by family, education, media, and culture, which shape an individual's way of thinking from an early age. Therefore, the expression of attitudes through everyday behavior is a complex reflection of the ongoing process of social learning in human life.

According to Emory S. Bogardus (in Ruslan, 2010:70), opinions in society can be classified into several forms based on their source and scope: a. Personal Opinion is a form of opinion arising from an individual's ideas or perceptions regarding a particular topic. Personal views vary considerably because each person comes from different backgrounds of experience, education, and values. Such opinions reflect the results of personal thought and usually arise spontaneously in response to a particular situation. Private Opinion refers to a more closed form of opinion within the sphere of internal beliefs. Private opinion emerges from an individual's reflective process and therefore forms the primary basis for the development of personal opinion. Although not always expressed directly, individual opinions have a significant impact on how people act and make decisions in social contexts.

Group Opinion is formed through interactions among groups of people who share similar views or objectives. In fact, group opinion can become a majority voice (general view) or a minority opinion that may not be dominant but can still affect social dynamics. Group opinion serves as a bridge connecting individual opinions with broader public

opinion.

Coalition Opinion is a form of collective opinion arising from the combination of several minority opinions that share similar attitudes or interests. Through strategic cooperation, these smaller opinions unite and form a broader view that can become a majority. Coalition views often manifest themselves in political, social, or community movements aimed at promoting change.

Consensus Opinion is a type of statement that emerges from dialogue, negotiation, or consultation processes in which various parties participate in reaching a common agreement. Consensus opinion is based not only on majority votes but also on compromises accepted by all parties involved. Because it is formed through mutual understanding, this opinion has strong legitimacy and is often used as the basis for collective decisions. General Opinion is a form of common opinion based on values rooted in a particular community or group, according to relevant social customs, habits, culture, and norms.

There are various methods that can be used to measure public opinion systematically. Common approaches include the use of surveys and scale measurements. In this case, respondents are asked to agree or disagree with particular issues. In addition, open-ended interview techniques are often used, providing space for respondents to express their opinions freely and in detail. By using these methods, researchers can obtain a broader picture of public attitudes toward a developing topic.

The most frequently used form of measurement is an assessment of opinion orientation, namely the trend or orientation of opinions developing within society. The direction of opinion can be seen from positive, negative, or neutral attitudes toward something and from the emotional feelings associated with them, such as sympathy, dislike, or indifference. This type of measurement identifies the direction in which society is moving. Therefore, it is very useful for preparing decision-making, communication strategies, and public guidelines (Ruslan, 2005). According to Effendy (2003:10), the direction of an opinion can be categorized into three main forms: Positive Opinion, a form of response indicating support for or agreement with a person, policy, or institution. This opinion is usually accompanied by feelings of sympathy, trust, or appreciation for actions

or ideas considered beneficial to many parties. Neutral Opinion arises when an individual has no clear opinion or has not yet determined a position on a particular issue. This may occur because of insufficient information, lack of interest, or because the issue is considered to have no direct impact on the individual. Negative Opinion indicates rejection, disagreement, or dislike toward a person, policy, or institution. Negative opinion often arises from bad experiences, dissatisfaction, or negative perceptions developing within society. Thus, the benchmarks of public opinion depend on several factors, namely:

Level of Public Knowledge and Educational Background

An individual's ability to understand and assess social issues depends greatly on the extent of their knowledge and level of education. A society with a good level of understanding tends to form rational and argumentative opinions.

Public Ability to Analyze and Assess Facts

Public opinion is formed not only from available information but also through the processes of selecting, analyzing, and interpreting facts carried out by individuals or groups. The public actively compares various sources of information before taking a position on an issue.

Complexity of the Social Problems Faced

An issue involving common interests usually encompasses many aspects and perspectives, making it difficult to produce a single opinion. In this context, public opinion consists of diverse voices reflecting the diversity of views within society.

The Absence of Universal Standards for Responding to Social Issues

Every society has different values, norms, and cultures. Therefore, perspectives on a particular problem will also vary. There is no single benchmark for determining right and wrong or good and bad in a social context; everything depends on the experiences, cultural backgrounds, and value systems held by the relevant public.

The Rise and Decline of Islamic Parties (PKS, PPP, PAN) from the Perspective of Public Opinion

The rise and decline of the political influence of Islamic groups in Indonesia, such as PKS, PPP, and PAN, are strongly influenced by changes in public perceptions. This is affected by how society views the integrity, ideological consistency, and political communication methods used by each party. Public perception is a key element in determining the extent to which a party is accepted, because people tend to provide political support or criticism based on their views of party performance in the public sphere (Mujani and Liddle, 2009). The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) experienced increased popularity in the early 2000s because society viewed it as an Islamic party with a good reputation, firmness, and consistency on moral issues (Ufen, 2010). However, this support suddenly declined when several of its members became involved in corruption cases, such as the beef import case in 2013 involving former party president Luthfi Hasan Ishaaq. The incident generated negative public perceptions, with people considering PKS no better than other parties in terms of honesty. This demonstrates that the compatibility between an Islamic image and political actions strongly influences public reactions (Fealy and White, 2008).

The rise and decline of the political strength of Islamic parties such as PKS, PPP, and PAN in Indonesia are strongly influenced by public opinion dynamics, which are shaped by public perceptions of the integrity, ideological consistency, and political communication strategies of each party. Public opinion is a central factor in determining party electability, because the public tends to provide support or political punishment based on its perceptions of party performance in the public sphere (Mujani & Liddle, 2009).

The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), for example, experienced an increase in electability in the early 2000s because the public viewed it as a clean, militant Islamic party that was consistent on moral issues (Ufen, 2010). However, this support declined sharply when several of its cadres became involved in corruption cases, such as the 2013 beef import case involving former party president Luthfi Hasan Ishaaq. This incident generated negative public opinion, with the public viewing PKS as no better than other parties in terms of integrity. This demonstrates that the consistency between an Islamic image and political practice strongly determines public responses (Fealy & White, 2008).

The United Development Party (PPP), as the oldest Islamic party, has instead

experienced declining political stability and public support because of internal fragmentation and an unclear political direction. Public opinion toward PPP is reflected in the continued decline of its electoral vote share over time, for example receiving only 4.52% of the vote in the 2019 Election, down from 6.53% in 2009 (KPU, 2019). Public perceptions have also been shaped by PPP's inability to undertake political transformation consistent with contemporary demands and the expectations of younger and urban voters (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010).

The National Mandate Party (PAN) has adopted a more moderate and inclusive position, but this has instead produced ambivalence in public perceptions. On the one hand, PAN has been able to attract votes from moderate Muslim voters; on the other hand, its pragmatic political maneuvers, including coalitions with various politically and ideologically opposing blocs, have been regarded by some members of the public as signs of ideological inconsistency (Fealy & White, 2008). As a result, PAN has experienced fluctuations in its vote share; for example, its vote share of 6.84% in 2009 declined to 6.84% in 2019, indicating stagnation due to the loss of a loyal ideological support base (KPU, 2019).

In general, public opinion toward Islamic parties is formed through the media, public discourse, and actual performance in the field. Parties that are unable to establish consistency between Islamic ideology and clean and responsive political practice tend to experience declining public trust. Amid the growing strength of conservative Islamic groups and Islamic populism, society is becoming increasingly selective in providing support to Islamic political parties (Mujani & Liddle, 2009; Ufen, 2010).

Analysis of the Effects of Public Opinion on the Existence of Islamic Parties

In Indonesia's post-Reform 1998 political system, the configuration of political power has undergone extraordinary diversification with the emergence of various political parties carrying diverse ideological orientations and forms of pragmatism. Among them, Islamic parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the United Development Party (PPP), and the National Mandate Party (PAN) have continued to play important roles even though they have never achieved electoral dominance. This dynamic indicates that Islamic parties

function more as moral and ideological forces that balance public discourse than as the primary actors competing for political power. The rise and decline of these parties' vote shares tend to fluctuate and depend heavily on particular socio-political constellations and public perceptions of the relevance of Islam as a guide in state practice. This is consistent with the findings of Mietzner (2008) and Mujani & Liddle (2004), which emphasize that Islamic politics in Indonesia is more symbolic than substantive.

Public Opinion toward the “Islamic” Label

Although the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim, this does not automatically translate into electoral support for parties carrying an Islamic label. This phenomenon shows that Indonesian voters are becoming increasingly rational and selective in determining their political choices. A party's Islamic label is no longer the primary attraction because voters now consider the party's managerial capacity, legislative performance, work programs, and the personal integrity of party leaders. Surveys by LSI and SMRC consistently show that the public values actual performance and concrete solutions to national problems more than religious identity rhetoric. Burhanuddin (2013) emphasizes that Indonesian Muslim voters are more pragmatic in their political orientation, and this presents a major challenge for Islamic parties to revitalize their relevance within an increasingly plural and critical society.

PKS: From a Cadre Party to a Party of Public Opinion

PKS was initially established as a cadre-based party with a strong ideological foundation and a well-organized cadre development system. This identity gave PKS militant loyalists and a disciplined organizational structure. However, since 2014, the image of PKS has faced major challenges when several of its cadres became involved in corruption cases, undermining the moral image that had long been the foundation of the party's strength. The public began to view PKS's religious narrative skeptically because it was not always consistent with the political practices of its cadres. Nevertheless, PKS demonstrated adaptability by changing its political communication approach to become more open and responsive to public issues through social media. The image of PKS as an urban, intellectual, and critical opposition party succeeded in attracting educated young

Muslim voters. This strategy indicates that PKS now combines cadre development with active public opinion formation, adapting to digital political dynamics and the expectations of contemporary voters (Fealy, 2008; Mujani & Liddle, 2007).

PPP: A Traditional Islamic Legacy Eroded by the Times

As one of the oldest parties and the direct heir to the merger of Islamic parties during the New Order, PPP once held a strategic position in representing Muslims. However, this position weakened dramatically after NU, its largest traditional base, established PKB and left PPP. Since then, PPP has experienced a political identity crisis and difficulty maintaining electoral support, particularly among younger voters and voters outside traditional Muslim communities. Internal disputes, elite-level corruption, and the inability to present a relevant new narrative have caused PPP to fall increasingly behind in national political competition. Surveys by CSIS and Indikator Politik Indonesia show that PPP is now more commonly associated with an old party lacking innovative appeal. The lack of modernization in PPP's structure and political communication has become one of the main factors making the party increasingly unattractive within the public opinion landscape (Buehler, 2016).

PAN: A Moderate Islamic Party with Limited Appeal

PAN emerged from the Reform era as a modernist Islamic party open to pluralism and cross-ideological cooperation. Although it has a historical affiliation with Muhammadiyah, PAN chose not to present itself exclusively as an Islamic party. This position makes PAN appear moderate, but it also means that it lacks strong ideological differentiation in the eyes of the public. Dependence on central figures such as Amien Rais and Zulkifli Hasan adds to the perception that PAN tends to be personalistic rather than collectively institutional. Public opinion often views PAN as opportunistic because of its tendency to move between coalitions without adequate ideological explanation. Urban and academic groups supporting rational Islam were once loyal supporters of PAN, but without ideological revitalization and a clear communication strategy, PAN also risks losing this segment (Ufen, 2008).

Media, Social Issues, and Religious Sentiment

Over the past two decades, social media has become a primary arena for the formation of public opinion, especially among young voters. PKS is among the parties that have been relatively successful in utilizing digital channels to amplify community-related issues such as LGBT, religious blasphemy, and solidarity with Palestine. Through narratives packaged in visual content and emotional slogans, PKS has been able to present itself as a defender of contemporary Islamic morality. However, this digital resonance does not always correspond directly with electoral performance because it remains largely confined to supporters' echo chambers. Meanwhile, PPP and PAN continue to lag behind in social media penetration, both technologically and in terms of narrative strategy. This lag has caused them to lose momentum in shaping public opinion and prevented them from reaching digital-native voters who now dominate elections (Lim, 2017).

The rise and decline of Islamic parties in Indonesia cannot be understood solely in terms of ideological strength or Islamic identity; they must also be viewed from the perspective of public opinion, which is becoming increasingly rational, critical, and informed. The public is no longer captivated merely by religious symbols or rhetoric but demands integrity, capacity, and responsiveness from political parties. In this context, Islamic parties face a major challenge: whether they can transform themselves into political forces relevant to the needs of the times or instead become trapped in identity nostalgia that has lost electoral meaning. Internal reform, stronger organizational structures, and renewed public communication strategies are strategic steps that must be pursued if these parties are to remain present and competitive in the future.

CONCLUSION

This article comprehensively discusses how public opinion functions as a social force that determines the existence and legitimacy of Islamic mass organizations and political parties in Indonesia. Through qualitative-descriptive analysis and literature review, the article demonstrates that public opinion serves not only as moral support but also as a

determinant of political existence, as illustrated by examples such as the 212 Movement and the histories of organizations such as Sarekat Islam, Muhammadiyah, and MIAI. The article also emphasizes that public opinion is dynamic and responsive to integrity, ideological consistency, and political image in contemporary democracy. The internal strength of an Islamic mass organization or political party is not the only factor determining its success; public opinion is shaped by historical experience, political communication, and the media.

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