

From Masyumi to PKS: The Transformation of Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia

Aghitsna Ahmad Al Qusyairi, Marsudi, Muhammad Adiburidho, M. Affan As-shidiqi, M. Qomarul Huda

Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia

aghits.qusyairi3@gmail.com
marsudigani9@gmail.com
adiburridho@gmail.com
affandiki00@gmail.com
emqohu@uinkediri.ac.id

Abstract: *Islamic political parties in Indonesia have shifted markedly in form and strategy since independence, yet their electoral weight has not kept pace with the size of the Muslim electorate. This study traces that transformation through a qualitative library research design, combining historical-biographical and political analysis of party documents, archival records, and secondary literature from the independence period through the post-Reform era. The findings identify three distinct phases: a rigid, formally Islamic orientation under the Old Order (Masyumi, Nahdlatul Ulama); forced institutional fusion into the United Development Party under the New Order; and a fragmented but adaptively pragmatic landscape after Reform, populated by PKS, PKB, PPP, PAN, and PBB. Across these phases, Islamic parties have secured real legislative gains, including the Pesantren Law, sharia-economy regulation, and labor protections, but remain constrained by ideological pragmatism, traditionalist-modernist fragmentation, competition from nationalist parties with Islamic wings, and a persistent tilt toward symbolic moral politics over concrete socio-economic policy. The study concludes that Islamic party survival in Indonesia's democracy depends less on doctrinal purity than on the capacity to translate religious identity into substantively responsive policy.*

Keywords: *Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia, Post-Islamism, Adaptive Pragmatism, Party System Fragmentation, Sharia Economy Policy*

INTRODUCTION

From the pre-independence period to the modern era, Islamic political parties have consistently played an important role in national politics. These parties are driven by Muslims' desire to apply religious values as the foundation of national life. In the early independence period, parties such as Masyumi and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) played a key role in advancing Muslim political interests while also shaping the direction of national policy (Mukminin, 2015). Even so, the track record of Islamic political parties in Indonesia has not always reflected strong dominance. Across various periods of history, especially during the Old Order and New Order, Islamic parties tended to be under the control of political power. As a result, their presence appeared more as a moral and cultural force than a dominant political one. Entering the Reform era, political openness opened the way for a revival of Islamic political parties. However, this institutional revival did not immediately translate into increased voter support. This phenomenon indicates sharp internal divisions and a shift in the political preferences of Muslim voters (Romli, 2020, p. 207).

This shift reflects a move toward post-Islamism, in which voters weigh their political choices more carefully and show less interest in closed ideological rhetoric (Hasibuan, 2025). In addition, the stagnation of support for Islamic parties has also been influenced by the growing strength of Islamic mass organizations choosing a nonpartisan path, along with nationalist parties' efforts to court Muslim voters (Saputra et al., 2024). This dynamic shows that Muslim voters now place more weight on open, socio-economically responsive programs than on mere religious symbolism (Indriani, 2025), (Iqbal, 2014, p. 97).

In line with this shift, the return of Islam to the political arena is often caught between conveying a genuine vision and using symbols to win votes (Zuhri, 2020, p. 55). Elite efforts to gather support through identity politics often fail to convert religious sentiment into solid support at the ballot box (Pribadi, 2019, p. 258; Ummatin, 2020, p. 22). This condition is compounded by voters' skepticism toward theocratic

agendas seen as increasingly irrelevant to the needs of a more pluralistic and inclusive society.

As a result, the vote share of Islamic mass-based parties tends to decline sharply, which some observers see as a signal of fading sectarian polarization in the national political landscape (Romli, 2013, p. 45). This trend further underscores that Islamic political parties now face a crucial challenge in redefining their vision so it can move beyond mere religious rhetoric, to address the needs of an increasingly diverse society (Nurjaman, 2023, p. 197). In addition, the growing number of Islam-based parties has actually fragmented the vote at the grassroots level, making it increasingly difficult to consolidate support (Edyar & Hayati, 2023).

In the Reform era, Islamic political parties have also shown changes in ideology and strategy. Islamic parties tend to adopt a more moderate and adaptive approach to the modern democratic system in order to survive. Parties able to adapt to a pluralistic socio-political context tend to gain more stable support than parties that maintain a rigid ideological approach. This shows that transformation is a key factor in the survival of the Islamic political movement in Indonesia (Fitriyah et al., 2025, p. 6). From the early independence period to the present, Islamic political parties have consistently been a crucial force in Indonesia's political constellation. Their presence not only voices the aspirations of Muslims as the majority group but also reflects complex social and political change. In this landscape, the track record of Islamic political parties in Indonesia shows a highly dynamic evolution—spanning an early formative phase, a phase of internal fragmentation, and an adaptive institutional transformation phase responsive to shifts in the national political climate (Anwar, 2023).

However, behind these adaptation efforts, challenges related to identity crisis and failure to formulate an ideological platform aligned with public aspirations remain the main obstacle to their electoral gains (Nurhuda et al., 2025; Rofiq, 2025). This challenge requires Islamic parties to quickly translate their ideology into a more visionary and inclusive work program to ensure relevance amid a pluralistic society

(Kadewandana, 2016, p. 67). Therefore, this electoral setback is not the end of Islamic politics, but an opportunity for parties to reconsider their role as one form of struggle within a broader landscape of power (Ahnaf, 2016, p. 128).

Even so, the continuing decline in votes since the 1955 election shows that having a large Muslim population no longer makes these parties easier to elect at the ballot box (Zulifan, 2016, p. 194). This gap is compounded by a growing public perception that Islamic parties no longer offer any fundamental difference from other pragmatic parties (Yumitro, 2018, p. 65). This condition shows that failure to win voter support does not necessarily mean their ideology has collapsed. It also signals the need for a more pragmatic, context-appropriate struggle (Refra et al., 2025).

Despite this substantial body of work on electoral decline and internal fragmentation, existing accounts rarely trace how these pressures have reshaped party ideology, symbolism, and policy substance continuously across all three political eras within a single frame. This study addresses that gap by tracing the transformation from the Old Order through the post-Reform period using a unified historical-biographical and political lens.

Islamic political parties can be identified through several key markers: first, Islam as the party's official basis. Second, easily recognizable Islamic symbols, such as the crescent moon and star, the Ka'bah, or Arabic calligraphy. Third, a voter base rooted in a particular Muslim community. In terms of these structural characteristics, Islamic parties are generally identified by elite leadership with a strong religious background and policies that consistently prioritize the interests of Muslims (Mubarak, 2019, p. 22; Undang & Thamrin, 2017, p. 186).

Accordingly, this study's objective is to explain how and why Islamic political parties in Indonesia have transformed since independence. It analyzes these changes and identifies the main factors shaping their development within Indonesia's continually evolving political system. Specifically, it traces the historical transformation across the Old

Order, New Order, and Reform regimes, evaluates the legislative role and contributions of Islamic parties, and accounts for the electoral paradox by which a Muslim-majority electorate has not translated into commensurate electoral dominance.

1. METHOD

a. Philosophical and Methodological Foundations

This study uses a descriptive-analytical approach through library research to examine Islamic political parties using contemporary political theory and historical tracing (Surianto, 2014). This approach also uses a genealogical method, tracing the roots of the party's thinking and doctrinal change into policy that is more flexible and consistent with democratic practice. In this way, the researcher can assess whether the party's core values, platform vision, and work program are aligned in parliament and the public sphere.

In addition, this study combines document analysis and in-depth interviews to observe changes in doctrine and political symbols that reflect the development of party strategy (Aminuddin & Masykuri, 2016; Noor & Warjio, 2025). This approach will highlight how Islamic parties have shifted from a form-emphasizing approach to a substance-emphasizing approach in response to an increasingly diverse and changing electorate (Saifuddin, 2013). Thus, this study connects the study of Islamic thought, which is often separated from practical politics, with analysis of governance, which often overlooks the influence of religious values (Yusdani, 2016).

Furthermore, this analysis will also examine the tension between applying religious values in the public sphere and the demands of constitutionalism within the framework of modern democracy (Mukrimin, 2023, p. 39). In this context, the contest between textual-normative and substantive-contextual approaches becomes a crucial point in formulating a model of political *da'wah* that is responsive to national pluralism (Hermawan & Murjoko, 2025). This interpretive process will later be deepened through an integrated historical, sociological, and theological approach to gauge the extent to which this

political consolidation reflects the essence of a civil society (Masyarakat Madani) within a democratic space (Jufri, 2020, p. 286).

1) Philosophical Orientation

This study uses a qualitative-interpretive approach focused on text analysis, interpretation of meaning, and historical reconstruction. A qualitative approach is relevant here because this study not only describes political events but also interprets the meanings, processes, and shifts in orientation embedded in documents and discourse on Islamic politics (Arifin et al., 2022, p. 553; Muthoifin et al., 2019, p. 782). A historical approach is used to reconstruct the development of Islamic political parties based on the context of time, actors, background, and changing relations between political ideas and state institutions (Muthoifin et al., 2019, p. 782).

This study is designed to understand how the meaning, ideology, and strategy of Islamic political parties have changed over time and across various political regimes in Indonesia. A number of studies show that this transformation occurs through changes in doctrine, symbols, and electoral strategy, as well as adjustments to the democratic system and a pluralistic society (Hasan, 2013; Noor & Warjio, 2025; Yani, 2023). Therefore, change in Islamic political parties is not a mechanical or accidental event, but an adaptation process shaped by institutional dynamics, shifting voter characteristics, electoral competition, and the demands of political pluralism (Krismono et al., 2025; Refra et al., 2025).

This philosophical orientation also allows the study to distinguish between changes in ideological identity and changes in political strategy. A shift from a formalistic approach toward a substantivistic approach, for example, does not always indicate the loss of Islamic orientation, but may instead reflect an effort to translate Islamic values into broader issues of social justice, welfare, democracy, and the public interest (Putera, 2024; Refra et al., 2025; Saifuddin, 2013). Within this framework, the transformation of Islamic political parties is understood as a process of negotiation between the continuity of

Islamic identity and the need to adapt to Indonesia's democratic and pluralistic political reality (Kelibay et al., 2025; Umam & Junaidi, 2017, p. 5).

2) Data Generation Techniques

The type of research applied in this study is library research. Library research is appropriate here because the research object consists of ideas, doctrines, history, documents, and political records that can be traced through written sources (Arifin & Saepudin, 2021, p. 358; Surianto, 2014). Data were gathered from various academic literature, historical documents, primary textbooks, regulations, draft bills, official party documents, and journal articles discussing the development of Islamic political parties in Indonesia (Abadi et al., 2023, p. 5; Arifin et al., 2022, p. 553).

The use of diverse sources is intended to obtain data that is not only descriptive but also allows comparison between ideological ideas, political symbols, party platforms, institutional decisions, and political practice. Analysis of party documents and academic works can be used to trace changes in political orientation, including changes in doctrine, symbols, and the party's relationship with society (Abadi et al., 2023, p. 5; Noor & Warjio, 2025). Thus, the data collected not only record the party's normative statements but also reveal the process of change in its thinking and political strategy.

To deepen the analysis, we collected texts recording two main dimensions. First, the historical dimension, which covers origins, organizational development, leadership changes, and the track record of key figures in the formation and transformation of Islamic political parties (Islam and Politics in Indonesia, n.d., p. 72; Muthoifin et al., 2019, p. 782). Second, the political dimension, which covers policy dynamics, shifts in ideological orientation, electoral strategy, coalition patterns, the party's relationship with constituents, and the party's response to changes in the political system (Hamayotsu, 2011; Nurjaman, 2023, p. 193).

The collected data were then classified based on political period, party type, actors, issues raised, form of change, and ideological orientation. This classification is necessary so the study can systematically compare continuity and change across periods (Abdurrohim et al., 2023, p. 115). This grouping also helps the researcher identify whether the changes that occurred were limited to the level of symbols and communication strategy or also extended to doctrine, platform, organizational structure, and party policy (Kelibay et al., 2025; Noor & Warjio, 2025).

3) Data Analysis

We analyzed the data qualitatively, descriptively, and interpretively. Qualitative analysis was used to organize the data, identify themes, group meanings, and interpret relationships among documents, actors, and political context (Abdurrohim et al., 2023, p. 115). Descriptive analysis was used to lay out the chronology and characteristics of party change, while interpretive analysis was used to explain the causes, forms, and implications of that change (Abadi et al., 2023, p. 5; Arifin et al., 2022, p. 553).

The data analysis stages included data reduction, categorization, interpretation, comparison, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by selecting information directly related to the history, ideology, structure, strategy, and policy of Islamic political parties. Next, the data were categorized by political period, figure, party, doctrine, symbol, constituent base, and policy orientation (Abdurrohim et al., 2023, p. 115; Arifin & Saepudin, 2021, p. 358). The categorization results were then compared historically to identify patterns of transformation and the factors influencing them (Muthoifin et al., 2019, p. 782).

This study uses two main approaches to analyze the data: a biographical approach and a political approach, combined through comparative-historical analysis.

The Biographical Approach is used to trace the evolution, metamorphosis, chronology, and track record of key figures and Islamic political party entities across generations. This approach is

important because shifts in party orientation cannot be separated from the roles of leadership, political experience, intellectual background, and organizational networks of the actors involved (Islam and Politics in Indonesia, n.d., p. 72; Munhanif & Ihsan, 2023). Through the biographical approach, the study can explain the relationship between figures' ideas, political decisions, and shifts in organizational direction.

The Political Approach is used to analyze changes in organizational form, electoral strategy, ideology, policy orientation, voter behavior, and coalition patterns of Islamic political parties within Indonesia's constitutional system. This approach is also used to examine the party's ability to adjust its Islamic message to the demands of democracy, pluralism, and voter rationality (Nurjaman, 2023, p. 193; Umam & Junaidi, 2017, p. 5). In addition, the political approach allows the study to assess whether a party's strategic change is a form of pragmatization, moderation, or institutional adjustment to electoral competition (Hasan, 2013; Refra et al., 2025).

The two approaches are combined through comparative-historical analysis. This analysis is used to compare the development of Islamic political parties across different periods and to identify shifts from a formalistic orientation toward one that is more substantivistic, adaptive, and contextual (Putera, 2024; Saifuddin, 2013). Thus, a party's strategic change is not immediately understood as ideological inconsistency, but is examined in light of the political context, institutional structure, social change, and electoral demands underlying it (Hamayotsu, 2011; Kelibay et al., 2025).

2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

This study applies Political Transformation Theory as its main analytical framework to dissect changes in the form, strategy, ideology, and orientation of political parties over time (Yani, 2023). This theory is used to explain political change as a process that unfolds through the interaction of ideas, actors, institutions, and socio-political context (Munhanif & Ihsan, 2023). In the party context, political transformation refers not only to formal structural change, but also encompasses substantive shifts in how a party understands its identity,

formulates its agenda, and builds relationships with society (Fuad, 2024; Noor & Warjio, 2025).

This theory is used to analyze how Islamic political parties adapt to democratic openness, electoral competition, regulatory change, social pluralism, and shifting voter characteristics (Krismono et al., 2025; Nurjaman, 2023, p. 193). Within this framework, transformation can occur through doctrinal adjustment, symbolic moderation, changes in the support base, renewal of organizational strategy, and the reformulation of policy to better suit the needs of a heterogeneous society (Hasan, 2013; Kelibay et al., 2025). A shift from a rigid, purely ideology-based movement toward a form that is more adaptive, moderate, and inclusive does not always indicate the loss of Islamic identity, but may instead reflect a strategy to preserve political relevance and electoral viability (Refra et al., 2025; Umam & Junaidi, 2017, p. 5).

This study's conceptual model links four main indicators of Islamic political parties: formal basis, visual and symbolic articulation, sociological constituent base, and elite character and religious policy. The use of these indicators aligns with the understanding that Islamic political parties can be identified not only through their formal basis, but also through symbols, social base, leadership orientation, and political agenda (Mubarak, 2019, p. 22; Undang & Thamrin, 2017, p. 186).

The formal basis indicates the position of Islam or Pancasila in the party's identity and foundational struggle (Undang & Thamrin, 2017, p. 186). Visual and symbolic articulation refers to the use of emblems, terminology, narratives, and Islamic symbols in political communication (Mubarak, 2019, p. 22). The sociological constituent base refers to the societal group that serves as the party's main source of support, while elite character and religious policy relate to leadership background, cadre-formation patterns, and the translation of Islamic values into political programs (Fitriyah et al., 2025, p. 6; Hamayotsu, 2011).

These four indicators are analyzed in relation to national political practice. The relationships among the indicators are used to assess the direction and depth of an Islamic political party's transformation (Refra et al., 2025). If the change occurs only in symbols and communication strategy, that transformation can be categorized as an electoral adjustment. However, if the change also encompasses the party's basis, doctrine, platform, recruitment pattern, organizational structure, and policy orientation, the transformation reflects a deeper institutional and ideological shift (Kelibay et al., 2025; Noor & Warjio, 2025).

This conceptual model is ultimately used to test whether Islamic political parties can maintain their Islamic identity while developing a political agenda that is inclusive, democratic, and responsive to the needs of Indonesia's pluralistic society (Krismono et al., 2025; Saifuddin, 2013). Thus, the study measures not only the presence of Islamic symbols, but also the consistency among values, platform, political behavior, and the party's work program in parliament and the public sphere (Aminuddin & Masykuri, 2016).

3. RESULTS AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

a. The Historical Transformation of Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia

Across the historical and thematic analysis below, three main patterns emerge. First, Islamic parties' formal relationship to the state shifted from the rigid, state-Islam fusion sought by Masyumi and early Nahdlatul Ulama, through forced merger into the United Development Party under the New Order, to the more fragmented but ideologically flexible landscape of PKS, PKB, PAN, and PBB after Reform. Second, this flexibility produced real legislative output, including the Pesantren Law, sharia-banking and sharia-economy regulation, and labor-policy reform, delivered mainly through parliamentary representation, oversight, and coalition-building rather than through renewed demands for a formal Islamic state. Third, that same pragmatism carries a cost:

internal fragmentation between traditionalist and modernist bases, the proliferation of Islamic wings inside nominally nationalist parties, and a persistent pull toward symbolic moral politics at the expense of substantive socio-economic policy. These patterns are consistent with, but also sharpen, prior accounts of Indonesian Islamic-party adaptation: where Barton et al. (2021) and Fossati et al. (2019) describe a general shift from rigid to adaptive-pragmatic orientations, the present findings specify where that adaptation has translated into policy gains (education, sharia finance, labor) and where it has stalled at the level of symbolism alone.

The Historical Transformation of the Islamic Political Party Movement

After Indonesia proclaimed its independence on August 17, 1945, Dutch colonial rule came to an end. A new chapter of political freedom began. Drawing on their fighting spirit and major role in winning independence, Muslims used this moment to hold the Congress of Muslims in Yogyakarta (Noer, 1987). At that meeting, they agreed to unite their political strength by founding an Islamic party. These parties continued to change through the post-Reform era (Maksum et al., 2019, p. 276; Riyanto, 2020, p. 204).

This change reflects the party's effort to incorporate Islamic values into a diverse democracy, while also addressing the challenge of acceptance amid an increasingly diverse society (Madhur, 2025). The presence of major parties such as Masyumi and NU in the early independence period became a key milestone in advancing the aspirations of Muslims while also asserting an Islamic identity on the national political stage (Iman, 2023). Even so, there was a dichotomy of thought among Muslims regarding the relationship between religion and the state, in which Masyumi viewed Islam as a comprehensive ideology governing every aspect of political life (ARISANDI, 2004; Nim., 2008).

In contrast, other groups tended to be more accommodating toward a more inclusive nationalist principle as a middle path within a pluralistic constitutional system (Fadli, 2020, p. 34). This ideological tension reached its culmination during the Constituent Assembly era (1956-1959), when efforts to formalize Islam as the basis of the state clashed sharply with the interests of nationalist and secular groups (Adan et al., 2023, p. 378). This historical experience shaped a reflective understanding among Islamic political elites of the Reform era, who tended to avoid repeating similar formalistic demands in order to preserve democratic stability (Wahyuni, 2021, p. 92). Rather than imposing a formalistic agenda, Islamic parties now emphasize Islam as a source of ethical values in public policy in order to bridge ideological differences within society (Anwar, 2025). This change shows that each chapter of the Islamic movement has its own logic. Its history is not a straight continuation of the colonial period, but a sequence that has continually adapted to the times (Soetomo, 2020, p. 129). In the 1940s, Islamic organizations were at one point split by rivalry between traditionalist groups and modernist intellectuals. This rivalry influenced party policy direction, but has now turned into pragmatic cooperation within the multiparty system (Mubarak, 2018, p. 131; Nursyamsu, 2017, p. 173). This transformation reflects the success of Muslim elites' political *ijtihad* in balancing the essence of religious teaching with the reality of the theistic democratic system in place in Indonesia (Prihatin, 2016, p. 1). However, this dynamic pattern of relations is not free from the challenge of accepting pluralism, as some circles still view diversity as a reality demanding an accommodating stance rather than mere symbolic formalization (Yumna & Abidin, 2019).

The re-emergence of religiously symbolic parties in the 1999 election is an indicator of the return of sectarian politics, influenced by the transition from an authoritarian regime to a climate of open democracy (Ishaq, 2012). This phenomenon continues an old pattern: national leaders since the Constituent Assembly era have sought to incorporate Islamic values into the constitution and the public sphere (Mahanani et al., 2022, p. 63). Furthermore, this dynamic shows that Islamic identity in national political contestation functions not only as an expression of

religious ideals, but also as a bargaining tool for engaging with a diverse democracy (Kelibay et al., 2025), (Ronaldo & Darmaiza, 2021, p. 44).

Islamic Political Parties of the Old Order and New Order Eras

The Masyumi Party

The Masyumi Party was founded to promote the advancement and revival of Muslims in national politics. The party also revived Muslims' longing for the past. The Masyumi Party was established on November 7-8, 1945. The Masyumi Party had a strong support base, including among farmers. Masyumi ran economic programs supporting cooperatives and modernizing production tools to improve people's welfare, although it did not specifically pursue a land-redistribution agenda (Emalia, 2018, p. 414).

The Japanese occupation government formed the Masyumi organization in 1943 as a federation of Islamic organizations. The Masyumi Party, as a new political organization, was established after the declaration of independence, specifically in November 1945 (Islam and Politics in Indonesia, n.d., p. 72). Even so, they still held a meeting in Yogyakarta attended by 500 people from several Islamic organizations. Masyumi was established to uphold the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia, carry out Islamic ideals in matters of state, and unite the struggle of Muslims to defend independence (Partai Masjumi : Antara Godaan Demokrasi & Islam Integral, n.d.; Prihatin, 2016, p. 13).

Masyumi reached the peak of its success in the 1955 election, when the party secured the second-largest vote share and won a significant number of seats in parliament and the Constituent Assembly. During that period, an important agenda was to formulate a permanent basis for the state—in line with the PPKI session of August 18, 1945, which stipulated that the basis of the state was provisional and would be reviewed once the national situation stabilized. However, political tensions flared when the upheaval of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) erupted in early 1958 in Sumatra.

The Sukarno government accused several key Masyumi elites, including Mohammad Natsir, of being actively involved in that regional rebellion. This political escalation prompted changes within the party. Mohammad Natsir was subsequently replaced by Prawoto Mangkusasmito as leader. Although government troops eventually suppressed the PRRI uprising led by several regional officers, the impact was fatal for the party's existence. Under Presidential Regulation No. 7 of 1959 on party simplification, President Sukarno dissolved the Masyumi Party through Presidential Decree No. 200 of 1960, on the grounds that its figures were involved in a rebellion against the government (Madinier, 2013; Perkembangan Politik Partai Masyumi Pasca Pemilu 1955, n.d.)

The Nahdlatul Ulama Party

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was born as a vehicle for the struggle against Dutch and Japanese colonialism and for winning Indonesian independence. NU also became one of the forces safeguarding the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Choirul Anam cites three reasons for the founding of Nahdlatul Ulama: first, religious reasons; second, defending the teachings of Ahlu al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah; and third, upholding nationalism. This nationalist spirit grew because NU was founded with the determination to unite ulama and religious leaders against the colonizers. The name Nahdlatul Ulama means “the Awakening of the Ulama.” To strengthen nationalism, NU founded a youth organization called *syubbānul waṭḥān*, now known as GP Ansor (Anam & Latief, 1985).

In 1937, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari took the initiative to form a coalition of political organizations aimed at pushing Indonesia toward a parliamentary system. On November 7, 1945, NU joined the Masyumi Party, agreeing that Masyumi would serve as the vehicle for Muslims' struggle. However, on April 5, 1952, NU separated from Masyumi and founded the Nahdlatul Ulama Party. In its first election, the NU Party placed third with 6.9 million votes (18.4 percent). In 1960, the NU Party survived President Sukarno's party-simplification policy. In the early New Order, NU ranked second after Golkar. However, in January

1973, the New Order merged NU with other Islamic parties into the United Development Party (PPP). At its 27th Congress (Muktamar), NU ceased to be a political party and returned to its role as a religious organization in line with the 1926 khittah (Rosyid, 2016).

b. Party-Level Adaptation Strategies in the New Order and Reform Era

From Forced Fusion to Post-Reform Multiplicity

The United Development Party

After the fall of the Old Order, Muslims hoped that Islamic strength would return to the national stage through the New Order. Modernist Islamic circles wanted to revive Masyumi, which had been dissolved under Sukarno. On December 16, 1965, the government formed the Muslim Coordinating Body, consisting of several Islamic organizations in Indonesia. These organizations asked the government to reinstate Masyumi (Islamising Indonesia: The Rise of Jemaah Tarbiyah and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), n.d.). However, this was rejected by the New Order government, and members of these organizations formed the Indonesian Muslims Party (Parmusi) to accommodate modernist Islamic organizations. On January 5, 1973, the government formed an Islamic party merging traditionalist and modernist groups, namely the United Development Party (Ariffin, 2019).

One of PPP's ideas, aligned with the teachings of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, is to build a comprehensive social order and a harmonious life encompassing politics, governance, social affairs, economics, and culture. PPP is present in Indonesian politics to voice the aspirations of Muslims. This idea emphasizes ethics in the use of power to realize Islamic ideals: justice, freedom, and a civilized humanity grounded in the oneness of God (tauhid) (Rahman et al., 2022).

Islamic Political Parties after the Reform Era

The Prosperous Justice Party

As one of the Islamic political forces to emerge after the New Order, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) was officially founded on July 20, 1998. At its founding, the party used the name Justice Party (PK) as a form of resistance against the New Order regime, before eventually changing its name to PKS on April 20, 2002. PKS makes Islam the basis of a movement carried out through da'wah. In its activities, the party carries a vision of pioneering the achievement of the national ideals enshrined in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. To realize this, PKS focuses on preparing leadership cadres who are of high integrity and responsive, implementing accountable party governance, and strengthening the party's role in defending the public interest (PKS, 2025).

PKS's foundation is the tarbiyah movement, similar to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimun). The main figure of that movement was Hassan al-Banna. This movement carries out Islamization in stages: from the individual, family, and society to politics. PKS focuses on da'wah activities and organizational development. Both are carried out through gradual cadre formation and political involvement to achieve da'wah goals (Surahman, 2018).

The National Mandate Party

PAN was born after the Reform era, on August 23, 1998, through a declaration by 50 national figures, including Amien Rais, Goenawan Mohammad, Rizal Ramli, and Faisal Basri. As an open party, PAN embraces various elements of society, although its strongest affiliation comes from Muslims, particularly members of Muhammadiyah. This closeness is rooted in structural and historical ties: Amien Rais led both organizations, which fueled the view that PAN and Muhammadiyah are two inseparable entities (Prihandini, 2014).

On the other hand, PAN's development was influenced by PPP's experience under the New Order, which was marked by ideological tension between Islamic and nationalist groups. PAN became a vehicle seeking to unite these two principles (EKSISTENSI PARTAI POLITIK DI INDONESIA PERSPEKTIF FIQH SIYASAH, n.d.).

With this strategy, PAN sought to improve the previously less harmonious relationship between Islam and nationalism in Indonesia, while also avoiding group polarization for the sake of the broader national interest (Latief & Pa, 2016).

The National Awakening Party

PKB is one of the parties that represents the Nahdliyin community. PKB was founded on July 23, 1998; the formation of the National Awakening Party was led by KH. Ma'ruf Amin. He formulated NU members' aspirations to form a political party. He then formed a team of five kiai as declarators of the National Awakening Party: KH. Munasir Ali, KH. Ilyas Ruhiat, KH. Muchid Muzadi, KH. Musthofa Bisri, and KH. Abdurrahman Wahid as PBNU Chairman. Since then, PKB has existed as a political party closely tied to the Nahdlatul Ulama organization and the Nahdliyin community (Hidayaturrehman & Sudarman, 2019, p. 375).

The National Awakening Party holds Pancasila as its ideological basis, yet PKB was born out of the largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama. The compromise between a nationalist party identity and this historical background serves as the main point of reference for PKB. PKB's values closely mirror those of Nahdlatul Ulama as set out in the party's founding declaration and its mabda' al-siyasi (political principles), namely realizing the ideals of Indonesia's proclamation of independence, rather than the values or political ideals of an Islamic state (Supawi, 2023).

The Crescent Star Party

The Crescent Star Party (PBB) is an Islamic political force that struggles based on teachings bringing mercy to all. This principle emphasizes upholding justice, honesty, and truth, advocating for oppressed groups, and respecting human rights across faiths. PBB was declared on July 17, 1998, by Yusril Ihza Mahendra at the start of the Reform era, positioning itself as the successor to the ideological line of the Masyumi Party from the Old Order era (Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB) Di

Indonesia Ideologi Dan Perjuangan Politik Pasca Orde Baru 1998-2004, n.d.). Through these symbols, PBB has sought to revive Muslim voters' memory of Masyumi's past glory as the face of modernist Islamic politics (Hidayat, 2018, p. 88).

PBB focuses on national development that is open to all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion, or group, guided by the pillar of *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy for all creation) (Pramono, 2022). This party pursues a legislative and constitutional path to incorporate Islamic law into national law. For PBB, Islamic sharia acts as the substance or spirit of national law, so its application does not mean Indonesia must become an Islamic state. In this regard, PBB's founders believe the party is the sole heir to Masyumi's political legacy, which had been dissolved by the Sukarno regime in the 1960s (Arifin & Saepudin, 2021, p. 354).

c. Representation, Legislative Role, and Reception of Islamic Political Parties

Functions and Contributions of Islamic Political Parties

The Role of Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia

As the primary link between society and the state, political parties play an important role in modern democracy. In Indonesia itself, Islamic political parties have a strategic function in constitutionally advancing the interests and aspirations of Muslims, particularly through involvement in drafting legislation in the House of Representatives (DPR RI). The presence of these parties is concrete evidence of the dynamic integration between Islamic politics and the Pancasila democratic system based on the 1945 Constitution. Some important roles of Islamic political parties in Indonesia are as follows:

Political Representation

In political theory, political parties function as a representation of society's interests and as bearers of the people's mandate. They are tasked with speaking and acting on behalf of large groups or the public (Budiarjo, 2007). Islamic political parties play an important role in channeling Muslims' aspirations into public policy, including issues of

Islamic education, the sharia economy, and the Hajj and Umrah. Thus, Islamic parties serve as a primary bulwark for Muslims in democratically pursuing their interests (Madhur, 2025; Romli, 2020, p. 192).

The Application of Islamic Law in National Policy

Islamic political parties play an active role in promoting the application of Islamic sharia across various aspects of social and legal life. At the central level, political parties seek to embed sharia principles in legislation, such as sharia economics, sharia banking, and sharia insurance. In provinces and regencies with Muslim majorities, political parties also seek to introduce local Islamic sharia bylaws (Renhoard, 2019, p. 126).

Integration of Islamic Values into National Law

Islamic political parties more often advance Islamic values through the substance of policy rather than through the textual formalization of sharia. This can be seen in regulations related to the sharia economy, zakat, and waqf. This view aligns with Bahtiar Effendy, who asserts that Islamic politics in Indonesia is adaptive and inclusive toward the democratic system (Lubis, 2020).

Oversight Function (Control)

In addition to drafting legislation, Islamic political parties also oversee the government through parliament, for example through the right of interpellation and inquiry. This oversight helps ensure the government remains open and accountable (Huda, 2013). Jimly Asshiddiqie states that Islamic parties exercise oversight over policy formulation, policy implementation, government performance, and the state budget (Asshiddiqie, 2006).

Coalition and Political Dynamics

In a multiparty system, Islamic parties often build coalitions to strengthen their influence in decision-making. In a democracy, these

coalitions require compromise and negotiation among parties (Huda, 2013).

Contributions of Islamic Political Parties in Indonesia

The contribution of Islamic political parties can be seen in their efforts to advance moral values, social justice, and broad support for the interests of Muslims and the public. In a democracy, these parties bridge Islamic teachings and Indonesia's pluralistic society. Because of this, Islamic parties help enrich national politics and contribute to building an inclusive and civilized system. Several Islamic political parties have helped shape policy in Indonesia (Rasyid, 2017, p. 312). For example, PKS initiated bills to strengthen the people's economy, family resilience, and control of staple-goods prices. PPP has championed aspirations related to the sharia economy, Islamic education, and Islamic law (Rasyid, 2017, p. 312). PAN has promoted the protection of women's rights, education, and community empowerment. In addition, their active involvement in legislative and executive coalitions has helped drive policies moderately inspired by Islamic values, at both the regional and national levels (Farchan & Kusumoningtyas, 2023, p. 106), (Sholehah et al., 2024).

Beyond matters concerning Muslim interests, Islamic political parties have proposed national-level public policies. For example, PKS pushed to separate the Job Creation Law from the employment cluster following Constitutional Court (MK) Decision No. 168, in order to protect workers and businesses. PKS has pushed for labor policy reform targeting various strategic issues proportionally and fairly. This reform focus includes strengthening the wage system and the Decent Living Needs (KHL) standard, and improving the quality of industrial relations, as well as refining the layoff (PHK) mechanism to be more oriented toward humanitarian values and better able to provide optimal protection for workers (Christi & Effendy, 2026; Farroza et al., 2024). On the other hand, most other Islamic political parties have chosen to integrate into governing coalitions in order to pragmatically maximize policy influence, rather than simply maintaining ideological opposition (Matin et al., 2025).

Islamic political parties such as PKB played a role in pushing the Pesantren Bill through to become the Pesantren Law. Cucun Sjamsurizal stated that the Madrasah and Religious Education Bill, on its way to becoming a DPR-initiated bill, is an important first step in advancing justice for pesantren and madrasah. Even so, this effort is not yet complete, as it still needs to be followed through until enacted into law. This bill is expected to address the disparities long felt by religious education institutions, while also giving fairer recognition and support to the major role of pesantren and madrasah in building the nation's education and character (Effects of the Pesantren Law on Indonesia's Education System – A Projection, n.d., p. 14; Khairani et al., 2021, p. 86).

The National Mandate Party has proposed various bills focused on improving the quality and competitiveness of human resources, equitable development across regions, and strengthening an innovation- and technology-based economy. For example, PAN has pushed for stronger vocational-education regulation, incentives for startups and MSMEs, and legal protection for informal-sector workers. In coalition contexts, PAN is known as a pragmatic party that remains consistent with its reformist values. PAN also serves as a bridge between Islamic and nationalist parties in formulating joint policy, particularly in human development and the people's economy. PAN has also built cross-faction cooperation outside the formal governing coalition in deliberating strategic bills such as personal-data protection, social workers, and new and renewable energy. In addition, the dynamics of religiously based interest groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama remain an important factor supporting the strengthening of pesantren education as a pillar of the national education system (Mahendra & Sirozi, 2024).

4. Discussion: Implications and Recommendations

The research findings on the transformation of Islamic political parties from the early independence period to the post-Reform era show that these parties have continuously adjusted their ideology. In

the early period (Masyumi and NU), Islamic political parties held a rigid ideology because they sought to formally enshrine Islamic identity in the basis of the state (Barton et al., 2021). However, structural political pressure during the New Order, through the forced-fusion policy into PPP, permanently altered the trajectory of Islamic politics (Islamising Indonesia: The Rise of Jemaah Tarbiyah and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), n.d., p. 55). Islamic political parties then loosened their formal religious boundaries in order to survive amid secular-nationalist political pressure. This condition gave rise to what is known as adaptive pragmatism in the Reform era. The emergence of parties such as PKS, PKB, PAN, and PBB demonstrates that Islamic parties are no longer uniform in how they translate the relationship between religion and the state (Fossati et al., 2019, p. 102123). PKB and PAN, for example, chose to adopt Pancasila as their basis while still maintaining their sociological religious support bases (Nahdliyin and Muhammadiyah) (Mass–Elite Representation Gap in Old and New Democracies, n.d., p. 191). This phenomenon supports political transformation theory: a party survives when it can adapt to an increasingly fluid electorate no longer bound to narrow sectarian politics (Fossati et al., 2019, p. 102123).

Controversies and Challenges of Islamic Political Parties

The Tug-of-War Between Ideology and Political Reality

Islamic political parties carry values they seek to advance, including sharia rules and values. But most Islamic political parties prioritize quick strategies in order to win elections and gain power. Many Islamic political parties pay little attention to their ideological values, focusing instead on winning elections by joining forces with other parties of differing ideology and adopting more flexible political strategies (Chalik, 2021; Herdiansah, 2017).

Fragmented Islamic Political Parties

Islamic political parties in Indonesia tend to be fragmented, both organizationally and in their mass base. Organizationally, these parties differ because they carry diverse ideologies. Their mass base is also divided into several groups. Two groups within Islam are traditionalist Islam, affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama as in PKB, and modernist Islam, affiliated with Muhammadiyah as in PAN. This difference makes it difficult for the two to consolidate and build cooperation (Electoral Rules Effect, n.d., p. 118; Undang & Thamrin, 2017, p. 215).

The Establishment of Autonomous Islamic Bodies within Nationalist Parties

A challenge for Islamic political parties has emerged because many nationalist parties have established Islamic wings, such as PDIP's Baitul Muslimin, Golkar's al-Hidayah study group, Satkar Ulama, and MDI (the Council for Islamic Da'wah). The Democratic Party established the SBY Dzikir Assembly, and Gerindra established GEMIRA (the Greater Indonesia Muslim Movement) (Fitriyah et al., 2025, pp. 4–5; Qodir & Hefner, 2024, p. 193). This is a serious challenge. Islamic figures and former activists of Islamic organizations are increasingly joining nationalist parties. Nearly every party in Indonesia now seeks to accommodate and champion the aspirations of Muslims (Fanani, 2011).

Polarity Between Moderation and Radicalism

The increasingly sharp divide between moderate and radical groups within Islamic political parties affects political and social stability in Indonesia. Major organizations in Indonesia such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah emphasize principles of tolerance, moderation, and interfaith dialogue. Both of these mass organizations advocate for an Islam aligned with Pancasila, one that is inclusive and accepting of all differences. However, there are also radical groups such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) that campaign for fundamentalist religious and anti-pluralist narratives via

social media to reach their da'wah targets (Khoiri et al., 2021). This divide poses a challenge for Islamic political parties in maintaining social and political stability in Indonesia. Beyond this mainstream, a political Islamist group has also emerged that tends to distance itself from mainstream organizations and formal political parties, viewing existing entities as too accommodating of national political realities (Maksum et al., 2019, p. 276).

Symbolic Moral Politics and Policy

Islamic political parties in Indonesia focus too heavily on moral symbolism in public policy. These parties emphasize policy agendas centered on public morality issues such as gambling, extramarital sex, LGBT, deviant sects, and alcoholic beverages. They also push for regulations governing dress codes and individual piety related to proficiency in reciting the Qur'an and personal religious observance. However, they offer little in the way of solutions to everyday problems such as unemployment, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and access to healthcare (Hadiz, 2017; Iqbal, 2014, p. 97; Umam & Junaidi, 2017, p. 8; Yunanto & Hamid, 2013). This is a genuine challenge for Islamic political parties in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This study set out to trace how Islamic political parties in Indonesia have transformed across regimes, what legislative role they have played, and why their electoral weight has not matched the size of the Muslim electorate. The findings show that their development has followed a long and complex trajectory from the independence period to the Reform era. Muslims, who played a major role in the struggle for independence, subsequently built political power through various Islamic parties, such as Masyumi and Nahdlatul Ulama, through to the United Development Party under the New Order, as well as new parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party, the National Mandate

Party, the National Awakening Party, and the Crescent Star Party in the Reform era. In practice, Islamic political parties play an important role as a vehicle for representing Muslims within the democratic system, particularly in advancing religious, social, and economic aspirations through constitutional means.

Their contribution can be seen in public policy, such as the sharia economy and Islamic education, as well as regulations incorporating Islamic values into national law. In addition, Islamic parties also carry out an oversight function over the government and are active in building political coalitions. However, Islamic political parties also face various serious challenges, such as conflict between ideological idealism and political pragmatism, internal division among Islamic groups, and competition with nationalist parties that likewise accommodate Muslim aspirations. Some parties have also been criticized for focusing on moral symbolism without offering concrete solutions to socio-economic problems.

A less expected pattern is that the parties most willing to loosen their formal Islamic identity (PKB and PAN, both formally Pancasila-based) have proven more durable than parties that retained an explicit Islamic *asas*, suggesting that institutional survival in Indonesia's post-Reform democracy rewards flexibility on formal identity more than it rewards ideological consistency. This nuances the standard account of Islamic-party moderation by showing that moderation and doctrinal continuity can coexist rather than trade off, as PKB's retention of its *Nahdliyin* base alongside a nationalist *asas* illustrates.

This study is limited by its reliance on documentary and secondary sources rather than elite interviews or voter survey data, which constrains its ability to explain why specific pragmatic choices were made rather than only that they occurred. Future research should pair this historical-biographical approach with elite interviews or panel survey data to test whether the adaptive-pragmatism pattern identified here holds at the level of individual voter decision-making. For policymakers and party strategists, the findings suggest that Islamic

parties seeking electoral durability should prioritize translating religious values into verifiable socio-economic policy outcomes over symbolic moral legislation.

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