

## PDI Perjuangan Evaluation: Between Party Identity *vis à vis* Mass Base Expansion

Maurit Putera Pradita<sup>1</sup>, Nurul Nurhandjati<sup>2</sup>

Ilmu Politik Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This journal article reflects on the results of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) legislative elections, which left several important notes, particularly regarding the party's weaknesses in the religious sphere. Negative sentiment about religion still clings to the party despite its three consecutive victories in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 legislative elections. In an ideological context, PDI-P has consistently maintained and upheld its ideology, even in unfavorable situations. However, on the other hand, PDI-P is faced with a party image that is not as good as its vote acquisition, as well as political attitudes, party policies, and political communication that still need improvement. Using qualitative research methods, the findings and results of the study indicate that PDI-P can maintain its ideology by limiting its reach to a segment of conservative Muslim voters or try to move towards the center and expand its mass base to all sectors, at the risk of sacrificing the ideology they have long adhered to.*

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### Corresponding Author:

Maurit Putera Pradita

Universitas Indonesia

Email: [mauritpradita@gmail.com](mailto:mauritpradita@gmail.com)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has indeed been the winning party in the legislative elections three times in a row (2014, 2019, 2024). In the world of football, this term is called *hat trick* which means scoring three goals in the same match. However, one acute problem that continues to plague the PDI-P is religious sentiment. The PDI-P's religious problems did not arise suddenly. In the author's opinion, several factors contributed to this problem. First, from its inception, the PDI was a merger of a nationalist party and a religious minority party, namely Parkindo and the Catholic Party. No Islamic party united with the PDI during the New Order era party fusion. The existing Islamic parties merged into one Islamic party, the United Development Party (PPP). Similarly, the Functional Groups (Golkar) formed the Indonesian Ulema Working Unit, the Indonesian Islamic Youth Force (AMII), the Islamic Da'wah Council (MDI), Islamic Education, Al-Hidayah Institute of Islamic Studies, and the Islamic Education Improvement Association (GUPPI) (Ahmad Asroni, 2013:28). Conversely, the PDI was formed by nationalist elements and minority groups within it. Second, the narratives promoted by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) are arguably the most Pancasilaist compared to other political parties. PDI-P wants all the values of Pancasila, embodied in its five principles, the points of Pancasila, and the ideology of Sukarnoism, to be applied holistically and comprehensively to Indonesian politics. Third, PDI-P policies are often considered unrepresentative of the interests of Muslims, a topic that will be discussed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

The aforementioned religious issues inherent in the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) contributed to the decline in votes for the party in the 2024 legislative

elections. The presidential and vice-presidential candidates nominated by PDI-P received the lowest number of votes among the contestants. Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD only secured 27,050,878 million votes (16.47%). Ganjar-Mahfud's vote tally was even less than one-third of the 96,214,691 votes won by the 2024 presidential election winners Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who secured 58.81%. Furthermore, Ganjar-Mahfud did not win a single province out of Indonesia's 38 provinces, including Central Java and Bali, which are considered "strongholds."

The decline in the PDI Perjuangan vote occurred in various provinces, even provinces that were initially controlled by the PDI Perjuangan had to be seized by other parties. Several provinces with high voter lists, including DKI Jakarta, fell to the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), then East Java fell to the National Awakening Party (PKB), and in West Java, the PDI Perjuangan fell out of the top three behind the Golkar Party, the Great Indonesia Movement Party, and the Prosperous Justice Party. More in-depth, the pattern shown in the table above is merely stagnant or declining. Not a single province saw an increase in the PDI Perjuangan vote. In other words, provinces that were initially not won by the PDI Perjuangan continued to be unable to be won by the PDI Perjuangan. The PDI Perjuangan dropped out of the top three in the provinces of West Java, Banten, South Sumatra, the Riau Islands, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, and Gorontalo. The PDI Perjuangan also remained powerless in the provinces of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, West Sumatra, and West Nusa Tenggara.

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) may be proud of having won three consecutive legislative elections since the 2014 legislative elections. PDI-P elites refer to it as a hat trick. A hat trick is a football term meaning scoring three goals in a single match. In reality, no party has been able to match PDI-P's record during the reform era, not even the Democratic Party during its heyday. However, in the author's opinion, three consecutive victories in the last three legislative elections cannot be used as an indicator of a party's success. PDI-P has not improved its political communication; in fact, PDI-P has broken with President Jokowi, even though he is still a registered PDI-P member. Furthermore, PDI-P still seems to be struggling to gain additional electoral support from Islamic religious groups. The formation of the Bamusi Party of Struggle (OSP Bamusi) has, in fact, failed to improve PDI-P's negative image. The granting of vice presidential or deputy regional head positions to Islamic groups, including Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD, Jokowi-K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, Jokowi-JK; Megawati-K.H. Hasyim Muzadi; Ganjar-Taj Yasin Maimoen, Gus Ipul-Puti Guntur Soekarno, and others, has in fact been ineffective in increasing the electability of the PDI-P or its cadres in recent elections. In various surveys, the PDI-P is considered the party least likely to demonstrate its religious aspects.

This journal article argues that the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) needs corrections, despite its success in winning three consecutive legislative elections (2014, 2019, and 2024). These election results should not be used as a basis for complacency. Rather, there are serious religious issues that have not been adequately resolved during the PDI-P's 51-year political history. These serious religious issues include the PDI-P's negative image, perceived as godless, irreligious, secular, liberal, indifferent to the aspirations of Islamic groups, half-hearted in its advocacy of Muslim interests, and so on. This situation is further exacerbated by highly controversial and hurtful statements and political stances by PDI-P elites. On the other hand, PDI-P appears to prioritize its non-Muslim cadre and does not hesitate to advocate for the interests of minority groups. If left unchecked, the impact will continue to be felt by the presidential, vice-presidential, regional head, and legislative candidates nominated by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), and even the coalition parties. Therefore, this serious problem must be addressed

and addressed if PDI-P wants to remain successful and remain a major party. Relying solely on its mass base and traditional voters is not enough. PDI-P still needs an electoral overflow from swing voters, voters who value figures over parties, as well as additional electoral support from religious groups. Once again, the results of the 2024 presidential and legislative elections demonstrate this, serving as a warning sign for PDI-P. Therefore, minimizing negative sentiment related to religious issues is essential for PDI-P.

In this regard, research has been conducted on the dissertation of Dr. Idris Thaha as a permanent lecturer at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University entitled "Islam and PDI Perjuangan: Accommodation of the Political Aspirations of the People". The dissertation, which was examined by the professor of political science at the University of Indonesia, Prof. Dr. Maswadi Rauf, M.A., very comprehensively discusses the political journey of PDI-P from its inception until 2018 and the religious issues that befell it. In the 8 existing chapters, Thaha discusses many aspects ranging from the relationship between Islam and the state; the politics of streams from the 1955 election, the politics of streams in the New Order and reform eras; data on PDI Perjuangan votes in the 1999, 2004, 2009 elections, and so on. Thaha also discusses the formation of Bamusi as a forum to fight for Islamic values within the PDI Perjuangan. However, the theoretical and conceptual framework used by Thaha is not visible. The available explanations are only descriptive, without contextualizing them with the theoretical foundations that should be used at the dissertation level. There is also no explanation regarding the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, the 2019 presidential election, and most recently, the 2024 presidential election, where the PDI-P was vulnerable to attacks on religious issues.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This journal uses a qualitative research method. According to Garry Stoker and David Marsh, a qualitative research method is a research method used to capture meaning, context, and process. In other words, a qualitative research method is a research method in which the author explores political phenomena and the real events that underlie them, combined with writing rules and relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This research method allows the author to conduct participant observation and in-depth interviews with relevant informants. The interviews are based on an interview guide, critical and analytical questions, and further investigation to verify the truth or validity of the findings in the field. Furthermore, the epistemological foundation of qualitative research methods is closely related to interpretive epistemology, which emphasizes the dynamic nature of social science. Therefore, Stoker and Marsh assume that there is no definitive truth in social science, unlike the natural sciences (exact). In explaining this interpretive epistemology, the most important thing that must always be guided by researchers is ensuring that existing claims are valid and accountable through the existence of information and data found during the research process. The timeframe is not specified in the title, as religious issues within the PDI-P have been present since its inception. However, this journal article will focus on the period 2014-2024, as the national political narrative, rife with religious politics, identity politics, and Islamic populist revivalism, has contributed to the negative image of the PDI-P's religious aspects.

This journal will utilize two data sources: primary and secondary. Primary data sources come from field studies and interviews with relevant parties, while secondary data sources are obtained from literature studies in the form of books, theses, dissertations, scientific journal articles, and other scientific writings. In conducting interviews with existing sources, the selection of sources is carried out using the purposive informant technique. This technique requires researchers to collect information carefully, elegantly,

and not rashly, and pay attention to the SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) elements in the data collection process because the data to be found may be confidential or sensitive data that informants may not necessarily want to disclose. The selection of informants using this purposive technique is adjusted to the research objectives. This way, the data collected is in accordance with the research needs, and the selected informants truly master the field, knowing the depth of information required in a study.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), one of Indonesia's largest political parties, has always been under public scrutiny regarding the issue of religious representation within the party. Amidst its campaigns that consistently promote the values of nationalism, Sukarnoism, and Marhaenism, the party with the white snout symbol appears indifferent to the various religious issues associated with it. Labeling it as a communist party/PKI, a Christian party, or a foreign stooge seems to be ignored by the party elite. In fact, when the phenomenon of right-wing populism strengthened in Indonesia during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, the 2019 presidential election, and its residue in the 2024 presidential election, PDI-P remained unconcerned about this reality. PDI-P consistently upholds its ideology and refuses to mix religious matters into politics. PDI-P unhesitatingly supported Ahok in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and Jokowi in the 2019 presidential election. Ahok was even appointed as the Central Executive Board (DPP) Chair for the Economic Affairs. This treatment seems to create favoritism for minority groups but not for Islamic groups. How could it not be? The Chairperson of the DPP for Religious Affairs has been left vacant since Prof. Hamka Haq passed away on December 7, 2023. Hamka Haq himself has a Muhammadiyah background and has been trusted to lead the religious sector of the PDI Perjuangan since 2019. Hamka Haq is also a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives from the East Java II electoral district (Pasuruan-Probolinggo city and district) for two terms (2014-2019, 2019-2024). In addition, he also leads Baitul Muslimin Indonesia as the PDI Perjuangan's religious wing organization (OSP). Bamusi was founded on March 29, 2007, which terminologically means a home for Muslims. The initial formation of Bamusi, according to Taufik Kiemas, was an effort by the PDI Perjuangan to become a catch-all party. With the formation of Bamusi, it is hoped that the PDI Perjuangan can become a cross-border party that embraces all groups and increase the PDI Perjuangan's electoral potential, which has not previously attracted the attention of Islamic groups.

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) institutionally has a special division specifically dealing with religious matters, namely the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in the One Almighty God. This division has undergone two changes in nomenclature. At the beginning of the PDI-P's formation during the Reformation era, this division was called the Central Leadership Council for Belief in the One Almighty God without including the term "Religious." Then, in the PDI-P's Articles of Association (AD/ART) for 2010-2015, 2015-2020, and 2020-2024, the nomenclature changed to the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in the One Almighty God. The word "religious," which was initially absent, has been officially included in the latest PDI-P's AD/ART.

The PDI Perjuangan Central Leadership Council's religious affairs and belief in God Almighty division has a very clear purpose and function, namely to protect the PDI Perjuangan from attacks based on religious narratives. As a nationalist party, the PDI Perjuangan is often associated with a party that does not care about religion, the Christian party, the communist party, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and so on. More

comprehensively, the duties and functions of the Central Leadership Council's religious affairs and belief in God Almighty division are stated in Article 19, paragraph 7, which reads:

Chapter	Sound
Pasal 19 ayat 7a	Formulating strategic party policies in efforts to build a religious life based on a cultured God
Pasal 19 ayat 7b	Cooperating with government agencies, the community, and religious organizations in preventing intolerance and building a harmonious life between religious communities and belief systems; and
Pasal 19 ayat 7c	Carrying out organizing, mobilizing, mentoring, and actions that are of a direct nature to defend the people to realize a religious life without religious egoism, practicing and carrying out religion and beliefs in a civilized and cultured manner.

What is stated in Article 19 paragraph 7a, 7b, 7c above is certainly the responsibility of the PDI Perjuangan and more specifically the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in Almighty God to be able to implement it in party life so that the PDI Perjuangan is no longer associated with a left-wing party, a communist party, a Christian party and so on. However, in reality, the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in Almighty God is unable to fulfill the expectations in Article 19 paragraph 7a, 7b, 7c of the AD/ART above. The author at least analyzes three factors causing this, namely (1) the vacant position of chairman of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in Almighty God, (2) the lack of attention from the elite and party structures to the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in Almighty God, and (3) the lack of concrete work programs and activities of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in Almighty God.

The first factor is the vacancy in the position of Chairman of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in One Almighty God, which has been ongoing since the death of Prof. Hamka Haq on December 7, 2023. This position has been left vacant without any acting official (Plt) who could essentially serve as an interim chairman. This vacancy was only filled when Megawati Soekarno Putri announced Zuhairi Misrawi, who was also the Indonesian ambassador to Tunisia, as Chairman of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in One Almighty God for the 2025-2030 term. This means that there has been a period of almost two years during which this position has been left vacant. In fact, according to informant Mindo Sianipar, the vacant position of chairman of the division can be immediately filled through a direct appointment mechanism by the General Chair or the nomination of a candidate for chairman from the Secretary General after selecting the top three candidates through a fit and proper test. However, this was not done by the PDI Perjuangan as an institution.

The second factor is the lack of attention from the party's elite and structural staff to the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in One Almighty God. This factor is closely related to the first factor, namely the vacancy of the position of Chairman of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in One Almighty God. The absence of a replacement for the late Prof. Hamka Haq shows that the PDI Perjuangan does not care about the existence of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in One Almighty God. If this happens to strategic positions such as the Central Leadership Council for Politics, the Central Leadership Council for Ideology and Organization, or the Treasurer and Secretary General, the appointment process for Acting will certainly take place in the shortest possible time. Mindo Sianipar, in his interview with the author, stated that he had served as Acting Chairman of the

Central Leadership Council for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries when his colleague Prof. Rokhmin Dahuri was arrested by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) for corruption of non-budgetary funds of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries in 2007. Mindo revealed that the process of appointing him as Acting Chairman did not take more than a month. Pramono Anung, the Secretary General of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), conducted a selection process with the names of Mindo Sianipar, I Made Urip, and Togap Hot Manahan Silitonga as potential candidates. This vacancy also affected the party's wing organization, Baitul Muslimin Indonesia, which is hierarchically under the Religious Affairs and Belief in God Almighty division. After the death of Prof. Hamka Haq, the position of chairman of Bamusi was left vacant until mid-2025, when Ustadz Helmi Hidayat, who was also a special staff member of Ahmad Basarah, became the definitive chairman of Bamusi.

The third factor is the lack of concrete work programs and activities of the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in the One Almighty God. The work programs and activities implemented by the Central Leadership Council for Religious Affairs and Belief in the One Almighty God are practically only ceremonial activities such as breaking the fast together, Friday prayers together, community service, charity to orphans and the poor, Nuzulul Qur'an commemorations, and so on. This program is not extended to the lowest level, accompanied by education and outreach to constituents that the PDI Perjuangan also cares about, religious matters, not only those of a nationalist nature. The hurtful remarks of PDI Perjuangan elites, coupled with the party's stance on Islamic-tinged policies, actually exacerbate the reality that PDI Perjuangan pays great attention to nationalist matters but not to religious matters.

In the election, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) failed to secure the most votes in its home turf. Although PDI-P secured a solid legislative victory, its presidential candidate, Ganjar Pranowo, lost to Prabowo Subianto in the province (Detik, 2024). A similar phenomenon also occurred in regions long considered "strongholds," such as Central Java. There, PDI-P was unable to maintain its dominance, with Megawati herself even admitting that her party was "battered" in its traditional base (Tempo, 2024; Liputan6, 2024). This case demonstrates that the party's identity and traditional mass base, reified as an eternal stronghold, are fragile. A similar situation occurred in Bali Province. Voters in Bali still chose PDI-P for the legislature, but simultaneously elected presidential candidates from other parties. This means that party loyalty does not automatically transfer to its executive candidates. This phenomenon also indicates that the coattail effect does not always work. Voters are increasingly able to discern political choices.

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has often assumed that strength within its traditional base will automatically boost a presidential candidate's electability. However, in reality, the presidential candidate's personality carries its own weight. Ganjar's failure in Bali demonstrates the gap between the party's symbolic power and the candidate's personal capacity. Young voters in Bali and Central Java appear more attracted to alternative figures such as Gibran Rakabuming, seen as representing a new generation, and the Prabowo-Gibran ticket, perceived as bringing continuity to Jokowi's leadership (BBC, 2024). This means that when parties rely too heavily on old personifications, in this case Megawati, political regeneration is hampered, while other parties successfully articulate new figures more in line with social developments.

This analysis also provides important insights into strategies for expanding their base. Parties can no longer view their traditional strongholds as safe zones. The cases of Bali and Central Java demonstrate that these bases can shift if other issues or figures become more relevant to voters. Therefore, expanding their base is not sufficient by increasing

campaigning in their base areas; they must also target new regions with strategies more aligned with regional developments and needs. Furthermore, campaigns should be able to integrate the party's image with the candidate's image, preventing vote-rigging, as in Bali and other PDI-P areas. Thus, the 2024 election confirms that ideological identities reified as permanent forces are insufficient (Fossati & Aspinall, 2020). Old figures reified as eternal symbols no longer guarantee electoral support (Mujani & Liddle, 2010; Ridwan & Fatkhuri, 2023). Even traditional mass bases, reified as "bull pens," can in reality collapse as voters become more rational and flexible (Afriandi, 2021). In other words, this phenomenon demonstrates that reification is not just a theory but also a political reality that determines the fate of parties.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Although the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) achieved significant electoral success and won the election, cultural acceptance of the party remains limited. This can be explained by two dimensions of party institutionalization: value infusion and reification (Noor, 2017). First, the PDI-P failed to instill religious values consistent with the Muslim majority. The party's identity was largely built on secular nationalism and pluralism, which, while important, did not always resonate with a society still deeply religious. Second, the absence of religious-based value infusion hampered the PDI-P's reification process. The old stigma as a "Christian, Chinese, and communist" party persisted and was reinforced by the issue of Megawati's Islam. Furthermore, the PDI-P's character as a post-democracy party further weakened reification. The party emphasized one-way communication through Megawati's speeches, emphasizing Pancasila and nationalism rather than fostering cultural dialogue with the Muslim community.

On various occasions, the perception has emerged that the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) tends to favoritism toward minority groups, particularly those of Batak, Chinese, and Christian-Catholic ethnicity. This tendency is evident in the dominance of non-Muslim figures in structural party positions and in the list of legislative candidates, who occupy high ticket positions, which are electorally more advantageous. This situation has given rise to criticism that the PDI-P, as a nationalist party, has failed to reflect the spirit of inclusivity by encompassing all groups, but instead has become trapped in exclusive and pragmatic cadre selection practices. As noted by Fossati and Aspinall (2020), in countries with clientelist political practices, ideological identity is no longer a primary factor in voter behavior. Identity more often functions as a symbolic label than a substantive basis for building loyalty (Fossati & Aspinall, 2020).

Thus, the 2024 election event confirmed that ideological identities reified as permanent forces are insufficient (Fossati & Aspinall, 2020). Old figures reified as eternal symbols no longer guarantee electoral support (Mujani & Liddle, 2010; Ridwan & Fatkhuri, 2023). Traditional mass bases reified as "bull pens" can, in fact, collapse as voters become more rational and flexible (Afriandi, 2021). In other words, this phenomenon has demonstrated that reification is not merely a theory but also a political reality that determines the fate of parties.

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