



From social majority to political minority: the stagnation of Islamic Parties in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of Islamic political parties in Indonesia during the Reformasi era, which was marked by significant political system changes and evolving electoral landscapes. Despite Indonesia's status as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, this research focuses on understanding the factors behind the lack of voter interest in Islamic political parties, especially after the 1998 reform. By utilizing a literature review method, this research aims to identify why these parties have struggled to gain significant votes in post-reform elections and what steps they could take to improve their relevance and image among voters. The findings indicate that although Indonesia holds the largest Muslim population globally, Islamic-based parties have faced consistent challenges in securing electoral success. After the reform, while many new Islamic parties emerged, none regained the dominance once held by the United Development Party (PPP) during the New Order era, when the PPP was the sole political platform for Muslims following party simplification by Soeharto's regime. The study also reveals that the lack of voter interest can be attributed to Islamic parties' failure to present concrete, appealing programs and voter dissatisfaction with their performance. Ultimately, this research aims to provide insights into how Islamic political parties can enhance their role in Indonesia's democratic system by improving voter engagement and political participation.

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INTRODUCTION

Political parties are vital components within a democratic political system, including Indonesia. As primary channels for expressing public aspirations and shaping public policy through legislative institutions, their existence is inseparable from the broader dynamics of national governance and civic life. Political parties in Indonesia hold a significant place in the country's political history, including Islamic political parties (Sartori, 2005; Navis et al., 2020). According to Salim (as cited in Saifuddin, 2013), Islamic political parties in Indonesia can be categorized into three types: (1) parties that explicitly adopt an Islamic label, (2) parties that advocate for Muslim interests without formally identifying as Islamic; and (3) parties whose platforms are intended for the general public but are rooted in a predominantly Muslim constituency. The presence of Islamic parties represents an

attempt to articulate the political aspirations of the Muslim community, reflecting ongoing efforts to integrate Islamic values into Indonesia's pluralistic democratic framework.

Historically, Islamic parties have played a significant role in Indonesia's political development. During the era of Parliamentary Democracy (1950–1959), parties such as Masyumi and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) emerged as dominant actors in the legislature, reflecting the strong ideological affiliation of the Muslim community with religion-based political representation (Mage, 2018). However, the transition to Guided Democracy (1959–1965) introduced a new political dynamic; Masyumi was disbanded due to its opposition to President Sukarno's regime, while NU opted to align itself with the ruling power to preserve its political relevance (Fadli, 2020). Under the New Order regime, Islamic political articulation underwent depoliticization and institutional reduction through party streamlining policies, although it persisted under the United Development Party's (PPP) banner. The post-Reformasi period following 1998 provided greater space for Islamic political fragmentation and institutional resurgence, marked by the emergence of various parties grounded in Islamic values. Nonetheless, the electoral performance of Islamic parties has shown signs of stagnation and decline, resulting in a notable anomaly within Indonesia's democratic politics: the demographic majority of Muslims has not translated into political dominance by Islamic parties (Wilandra, 2024).

This phenomenon indicates a substantial theoretical and empirical gap in the study of contemporary Islamic politics in Indonesia. Much of the existing literature focuses on historical, theological, and ideological dimensions. In contrast, studies examining Muslim constituents' electoral preferences, particularly in the context of post-Reformasi socio-political transformations, remain limited. The changing characteristics of Muslim voters, especially among the urban youth, who tend to be more rational and issue-oriented, prioritizing matters such as the economy, corruption, and social welfare, call for a new approach in assessing the relevance of Islamic politics (Triana, 2017; Tolkah, 2018). Moreover, the rise of digitalization and populism has created a more fluid political landscape, challenging the persistence of traditional ideological identities. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this research gap by critically and contextually analyzing the causes behind the stagnation of Islamic parties in Indonesia's political arena. It further explores how the reconstruction of ideological and electoral strategies can be undertaken to more adaptively and effectively respond to the evolving dynamics of contemporary Muslim political society.

During the New Order, Islamic political parties faced restrictions and strict control, with only a few allowed to operate in a political system dominated by Golkar as the main party. However, after the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 and the beginning of the Reformasi era, Indonesia's political system underwent significant changes. The Reformasi era brought a breath of fresh air for political freedom, including for the Islamic parties that were previously suppressed. The Reformasi era (1999-present) saw the resurgence of Islamic parties, categorized into three types: parties advocating for Islamic principles, parties based on Pancasila but incorporating elements of Islam, and parties with ties to Muslims but not solely Islamic (Effendi, 2003). During this period, Islamic parties remained an integral part of Indonesian politics, even though none of them won directly in elections (Mage, 2018).

Since the beginning of Indonesia's independence, Islamic-based parties have played an important role in national politics. However, these parties have faced several challenges in this era. They have had to adapt to a society that is becoming more rational and pragmatic, and they must compete with non-religious parties that are stronger politically and economically. In addition, Islamic parties have also experienced a shift from an ideological base to a more pragmatic approach, which at times has led them to lose their original identity and mass base. PPP, one of the main Islamic parties, showed a symbiotic accommodative stance in advocating for Muslim aspirations through constitutional channels, especially during the changes to the 1945 Constitution. Meanwhile, other parties such as PKS emerged as a new force focused on community empowerment and the application of Islamic values in the modern context.

This study critically examines the stagnation of Islamic political parties in Indonesia during the Reformasi era, a period characterized by political liberalization, multiparty competition, and increasing voter autonomy. Despite being the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Islamic political parties in Indonesia have failed to convert the Muslim social majority into electoral

dominance. This paradox raises fundamental questions regarding the disconnection between religious identity and political preference in contemporary Indonesian democracy. Drawing on political behavior theory and rational choice models, this research aims to identify the sociopolitical, ideological, and strategic factors contributing to the declining electoral appeal of Islamic parties. Employing a qualitative, literature-based approach, the study not only addresses the empirical gap concerning the electoral performance of Islamic parties but also offers a new conceptual framework for rethinking their political strategies amid shifting voter demographics and the rise of issue-based politics. The findings contribute to broader scholarly discussions on Islamic politics, party system transformation, and democratic consolidation in Southeast Asia, rendering the study relevant to academics, political actors, and policymakers interested in religion-based political representation within democratic societies.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this article is a literature review or literature study. This approach is chosen because it allows the author to explore various relevant literature, including books, journals, articles, reports, and other documents that can provide insights into the dynamics of Islamic political parties in Indonesia during the Reformasi era. This literature study will focus on identifying the reasons why Islamic political parties have failed to secure significant votes in the elections held after the 1998 reform. This approach is selected because it provides a deeper understanding of the history, development, and factors influencing Islamic political parties within the context of Indonesian politics.

The research employed a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review (SLR) method to explore the dynamics of Islamic political parties in post-Reform Indonesia. The data sources consisted of peer-reviewed academic journals, scholarly books, and reputable scientific articles, which were accessed primarily through academic databases such as Sinta, Scopus, and DOAJ. The literature selection process followed predefined inclusion criteria: (1) publications in English or Indonesian; (2) published between 2000 and 2025; (3) relevance to themes of Islamic political parties, voter behavior, political Islam, and democratic transformation; and (4) methodological rigor and theoretical contribution. Exclusion criteria were also applied to filter out non-scholarly sources, opinion-based writing, or outdated references lacking empirical foundation.

The procedure was conducted in four systematic stages: (1) identification of key concepts and search terms, such as “Islamic political parties,” “voter preferences,” “post-Reformasi politics,” and “Islam and democracy in Indonesia”; (2) screening and selection of literature through abstract and full-text review; (3) data extraction, in which relevant findings, theoretical frameworks, and methodological insights were synthesized into a structured matrix; and (4) analysis and interpretation using qualitative content analysis. This final stage involved categorizing themes, identifying research gaps, and generating a conceptual synthesis based on recurring patterns and contradictions within the literature. As noted by [Nurjanah and Mukarromah \(2021\)](#), content analysis allows researchers to engage deeply with textual data to produce a nuanced understanding of the studied phenomenon through careful reading, coding, and interpretation. This method ensures that the literature review is not merely descriptive, but analytical and integrative, offering a critical map of current scholarly discourse and guiding the formulation of this study’s conceptual framework. By employing this systematic and transparent procedure, the study adheres to high standards of methodological rigor and scholarly reliability.

The data analysis technique used is content analysis, where the researcher conducts an in-depth discussion of the information obtained from the data sources. The following are the stages of the literature study in this research: 1) searching and collecting relevant references; 2) identifying and selecting sources of literature to be analyzed; 3) reviewing and writing important information from the selected sources; 4) analyzing the collected data; and 5) compiling the results of the analysis in a structured description and summarizing the research findings ([Parinata & Puspaningtyas, 2022](#)).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Political Parties during the Old Order Era

During the presidency of Indonesia's first president, two different systems of government were introduced. The first was the parliamentary system, often known as the Liberal Democracy Era, and the second was the presidential system, referred to as the Guided Democracy Era or commonly called the Old Order period. In the Liberal Democracy Era (1950-1959), Indonesia adopted a parliamentary system, and during this time, the number of political parties was quite large. A total of 29 political parties existed, three of which were Islamic political parties: Masyumi, the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII), the Islamic Movement Party (Pergerakan Tarbiyah Islamiah - Perti), and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

The 1955 Indonesian general election marked a significant milestone in the country's democratic history, displaying intense competition between Islamic political parties. The Islamic political parties in the 1955 elections included Masyumi, NU, PSII, Perti, the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (AKUI), and the Tharikat Islam Party (PPTI). Masyumi emerged as the leading Islamic party, gaining wide support before internal conflicts led to the formation of rival parties such as NU (Gemilang et al., 2022). Both Masyumi and NU employed campaign strategies that emphasized Islamic identity to attract Muslim voters, a practice known as "political piety" (Widariyanti, 2020). The election witnessed fierce competition among major parties, including PNI, Masyumi, NU, and the PKI, each utilizing different ideologies and methods to secure votes (Nur'Aini, 2024). The division between NU and Masyumi prior to the election had a significant impact on Masyumi's ability to secure Muslim votes, with both parties occasionally attacking one another, despite sharing the same Islamic foundation (Anwar, 2020).

The results of the 1955 election showed that PNI, Masyumi, NU, and PKI were the top four parties. PNI received 22.32% of the vote, securing 57 seats, Masyumi obtained 20.92% with 57 seats, NU garnered 18.41% with 45 seats, and PKI secured 16.36% with 39 seats. Similarly, in the Constituent Assembly election, PNI obtained 23.97% with 119 seats, Masyumi received 20.59% with 112 seats, NU gained 18.47% with 91 seats, and PKI earned 16.47% with 80 seats (Nur'Aini, 2024).

From these results, it is evident that although PNI won the most seats, Islamic parties such as Masyumi and NU still played a crucial role in Indonesian politics, reflecting the strong influence of Islamic groups in policy-making during the Old Order period. The internal divisions within Masyumi leading up to the 1955 elections negatively affected the party's ability to secure Muslim votes. Based on the 1955 election results, Masyumi could have achieved a significant victory had the parties that previously united with it remained united. Meanwhile, NU, which participated in the 1955 elections, achieved substantial support and secured third place in the vote count in the People's Representative Council and the Constituent Assembly.

NU's success as one of the major winners in the 1955 election was influenced by several key factors. One of them was NU's ability to foster solidarity among the santri (Muslim students) and ulama (religious scholars), emphasizing their struggle to defend Islamic ideology and showing an anti-communist stance. Regular study groups strengthened the bond between the kiai (religious leaders) and santri, facilitating effective consolidation during the campaign period. NU's campaign themes were always rooted in religious traditions, focusing on faith and moral education, making it easy for the public to accept. NU's campaigns often included jokes and jibes, reminiscent of traditional Javanese theater, as well as songs in Javanese that made the public feel closer to NU (Anwar, 2020; Suwarno, 2021; Sulistiyo, 2025).

Another campaign strategy was through the publication of books containing Arabic and Javanese poetry (written in Pegon script). These poems included religious guidance, teachings on faith and ethics, and practical instructions for voting, such as how to mark the NU symbol on the ballot. In the 1955 election, three main pillars became NU's strength: ulama, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), and politicians. These three pillars worked well together, creating a strong synergy and gaining widespread support from the people. Within a short period, just about three years before the elections, NU successfully consolidated its strength and proved its influence, securing a significant number of votes (Simorangkir, 2015; Saifuddin, 2013).

Islamic Political Parties during the New Order Era

The New Order era did not provide favorable opportunities for democracy, despite its claims of being a democratic political system through Pancasila Democracy. In reality, the New Order imposed simplification on political parties. From the numerous parties that participated in the 1955 election, the New Order reduced them to just three: Golkar, PPP, and PDI. Political dynamics in Indonesia underwent significant changes concerning Islamic political parties since the New Order period. In the early years of the New Order, the government initiated the merger of political parties, including Islamic parties. This led to the formation of the United Development Party (PPP) in 1973, which became the sole political vehicle for the aspirations of the Muslim community. PPP was formed by the merger of four Islamic parties: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII), the Indonesian Muslim Party (PARMUSI), and the Islamic Party of Indonesia (PERTI) (Mas'ad, 2019). PPP became the sole representative of Islamic political aspirations during the New Order. Although PPP succeeded in winning several regions with strong Islamic bases, it had to operate under the government's strict control. Despite being the majority religion, the political position of Islam remained relatively weak during this period (Ikrrar, 2016).

The New Order regime claimed that the political situation was stable, but political parties were marginalized in reality. The political order of the New Order was not fundamentally different from the Old Order, in that it involved a process of stifling the progress of political parties—especially those with a clear mass base. The Old Order used decrees to suppress Islamic political parties, which had real mass support. Similarly, the New Order merged political parties into just two political entities. The New Order government also conducted depoliticization and imposed strict control over political parties, including Islamic ones. This made it difficult for Islamic parties to articulate their political aspirations freely. As a result, not all of the aspirations and political participation of Islamic parties during the Old Order could be further developed in the New Order. This can be seen from the results of the elections between 1971 and 1997.

During the New Order, Islamic political parties were confined within the framework set by the government, which limited their ability to engage in broader political participation. PPP's success in securing several regions did not reflect genuine democratic competition but rather the controlled nature of the political system that restricted the role of opposition and alternative political expression, especially for political parties based on Islam. Thus, while the New Order claimed stability and security in the political sphere, it effectively weakened the political influence of Islamic parties, marginalizing their role in the political landscape of Indonesia.

Table 1. Election Results from 1971 to 1997
(Source: General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia)

Political parties	Year					
	1971	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997
Golkar	62,8 %	62,1 %	64,2 %	73,2 %	68,1 %	74,5 %
PPP	27,1 %	29,3 %	28 %	16 %	17 %	22,4 %
PDI	10,1 %	8,6 %	7,9 %	10,9 %	14,9 %	3,1 %

The Dynamics of Islamic Political Parties During the Reform Era

After the fall of Suharto's regime in 1998, Indonesia entered the Reform Era, emphasizing democratization and decentralization. This transition enabled political parties, including Islamic parties, to participate more freely in the political process, bringing significant changes to the political landscape of Indonesia, particularly for Islamic political parties. The transitional government under President Habibie allowed the formation of new political parties beyond the three that had existed since the New Order era (Romli, 2016; Supawi, 2023).

Reform brought significant transformation to Indonesia's political system, offering greater space for Islamic political parties to play a role. The post-New Order political landscape introduced several key changes, including the restructuring of state institutions and the national political system. Political sectors outside of state control were allowed to flourish. Citizens from diverse backgrounds were granted the freedom to establish political parties, including Islamic-based parties. Prior to the 1999 general election, a total of 181 political parties had been established by various components of

society. Of these, 42 were Islamic parties. After undergoing a selection process conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs' Team Eleven, only 48 parties met the requirements and were officially registered as participants in the 1999 general election, 20 of which were Islamic parties (Rofi'i et al., 2022; Yani, 2023).

Observing the dynamic development of political parties described above, a fundamental fact emerges: there has been a significant shift in Indonesia from a state-centered to a society-centered political landscape, from bureaucrats to politicians. The state is no longer the sole and dominant actor in determining the formulation of Indonesia's political future. Non-state forces, particularly Civil Society and Political Society, have gained recognition and trust to drive fundamental changes toward the realization of an open and democratic society (Rais, 1998; Riyanto, 2020). An equally dramatic change is the emergence of Islamic preaching movements (*dakwah*) and political Islam as major forces attracting public attention after long existed on state power's periphery. Political Islam, which had previously been marginalized, has now found a legal and legitimate space to act as a key player in both preaching and political activism.

This development led to the fragmentation of Islamic political parties, with the United Development Party (PPP) giving rise to several new Islamic parties such as the National Awakening Party (PKB), the Crescent Star Party (PBB), and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) (Mas'ad, 2019). According to Rahardjo (2010), Islamic parties that emerged after the New Order can be categorized into three types: parties that adopt Islam as their ideological foundation, parties based on Pancasila but that cater to traditional Muslim constituents, and parties that maintain ties with Muslims but are not limited to Islamic interests alone.

Factors Influencing the Lack of Public Interest in Voting for Islamic Political Parties

Indonesia holds the position as the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world. Nevertheless, Islamic-based political parties have consistently fallen short in political contests within Indonesia, even though the vast majority of its population adheres to Islam. Historically, in Indonesia's democratic elections, Islamic parties have never emerged as the dominant political force, even though nearly 90% of the electorate identifies as Muslim. This phenomenon is evident in the results of the 1955 general election, where Islamic parties such as Masyumi, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), PERTI, and PSII collectively garnered only around 43% of the votes. Furthermore, in the 1999 and 2004 elections, the combined strength of Islamic political parties remained around 38%. The defeat of Islamic-based parties in the June 7, 1999 general election marked a significant moment, as the United Development Party (PPP) only managed to place within the top five, with disappointing vote totals.

Meanwhile, the Crescent Star Party (PBB), despite forming its faction in the parliament with 13 members, performed well below expectations (Aprilliyani et al., 2022). In addition, the Justice Party (PK) secured only seven seats in the House of Representatives and failed to meet the minimum threshold of 2% of the national vote required for the 2004 general election. Graph of Islamic Political Party Vote Shares in the 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, and 2024 Elections.

Table 2. Results of the Islamic Political Party Election
(Source: Kompas.com, 2024)

Vote Results	Year					
	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
	38%	38.35%	28.77%	31.40%	30.05%	30,87

Table 2 illustrates the decline in the dominance of Islamic political parties, with no single party achieving the prominence once held by the United Development Party (PPP) during the New Order era. During that period, PPP was the only official Muslim political platform after Soeharto's regime simplified the political party landscape. Currently, the Islamic political map in Indonesia is far more fragmented, with parties such as PKS, PPP, and PAN competing for the Muslim vote. None of them hold hegemonic power.

The political landscape of Islamic parties in Indonesia has undergone significant changes since the pre-reform era. During the New Order, Islamic politics was repressed mainly, with only three major

parties allowed, including one Islamic party (Qodir et al., 2023). After the reform era, many Islamic parties emerged, but their electoral performance has generally declined. This decline is attributed to party fragmentation, shifting voter preferences, and competition from nationalist parties that accommodate Muslim aspirations (Romli, 2020). The ideological approach of Islamic parties has also shifted, with some, such as PKB, adopting Pancasila rather than Islam as their political foundation, a departure from earlier parties like Masyumi, which sought to establish Islamic law as the state ideology (Purba et al., 2024).

The results of the elections in Indonesia also serve as a clear signal that the Muslim majority no longer considers Islamic symbols in politics as important, focusing instead on the substance. This indicates a potential shift in political culture and political participation within the Muslim community. The image of political parties from this data shows that while the public holds a positive view of political parties, in legislative elections, there is a lack of interest among other communities in voting for Islamic political parties (Aprilliyani et al., 2022; Pramestuti et al., 2022). This can be observed from the declining number of voters in the 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, and 2024 elections. In conclusion, this data reveals that the reasons why the public does not vote for Islamic political parties include:

Lack of Program Proposals

Islamic political parties are often perceived as failing to offer clear and relevant programs that address the needs of society. This has resulted in a worsening image of these parties in the eyes of voters, especially among urban communities who seek change and concrete solutions to various social and economic problems. Many voters feel that Islamic political parties focus too much on religious issues without seriously addressing programs that could improve public welfare, such as education, healthcare, and the economy. When the proposed programs do not directly impact or are irrelevant to people's everyday lives, Islamic political parties struggle to gain broader trust and support.

To address this, Islamic political parties must be more active in formulating and presenting clear and applicable programs for society. These programs must address real issues faced by the community, whether in the fields of education, employment, or infrastructure development. Furthermore, Islamic political parties must ensure that their programs do not merely discuss religious values in theory. Still, they can also be translated into concrete policies that bring tangible benefits to the public. By taking a more practical and solution-oriented approach, Islamic political parties can regain the public's trust and demonstrate that they genuinely care about the community's welfare, rather than just focusing on religious issues alone.

Voter Disappointment with Islamic Political Parties

Urban Muslim voters who were disappointed with the performance of politicians during the 1999-2004 period, particularly from Islamic political parties, were seen as less responsive to the aspirations of Muslims (Mikail, 2015; Nurish, 2021). During this period, many voters hoped that Islamic political parties would offer concrete solutions to the social and economic problems faced by the Muslim community, especially in urban areas. However, in reality, many politicians from these parties were perceived as not being sensitive enough to the aspirations of Muslims, both in terms of public policy and in maintaining religious principles in politics. Disappointed by unfulfilled promises, many Muslim voters began to feel that Islamic political parties could no longer be relied upon to fight for the values they upheld.

For instance, in the 2004 elections, many urban Muslim voters who initially supported Islamic political parties felt that their struggle to promote the welfare of Muslims and address social justice issues was being ignored. A concrete example was the inability of some Islamic parties to respond to the need for better education for Muslim children in urban areas, as well as the worsening economic situation that negatively impacted the welfare of the community. Moreover, the lack of decisiveness on religious and social issues made many Muslim voters feel that Islamic political parties prioritized short-term political interests over the broader and more sustainable pursuit of the Muslim community's aspirations. Disappointed with this inability, many voters shifted their support to other parties they perceived as more serious in advocating for their interests.

The public shifted its support to the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). This party was considered to have a clearer vision and mission in introducing a cleaner and more modern image of Islam

(Nurjaman, 2025). During this period, many people, particularly urban Muslim voters, began to shift their support to PKS because the party had a clearer vision and mission, capable of offering a cleaner and more modern image of Islam. PKS attracted attention by emphasizing strong moral principles, integrity, and a commitment to eradicating corruption, which was previously seen as a major issue in other Islamic political parties. Furthermore, PKS presented itself as a more progressive alternative in implementing political Islam, creating the impression that it could accommodate the needs of modern society, which increasingly demanded changes in the political system and government toward greater transparency, cleanliness, and social justice.

A concrete example of this shift in support can be seen in the 2004 elections, where PKS achieved significant results and garnered a lot of attention from urban communities. PKS offered a platform closer to the aspirations of Muslim voters, who were seeking a party that not only talked about religious values but could also provide real solutions to social and economic issues. With a more modern image, the party attracted younger voters who were eager for change, as well as those who were disappointed with traditional Islamic parties perceived as less progressive and unable to adapt to the demands of the times. Through a clean, transparent, and integrity-filled campaign, PKS succeeded in winning the hearts of many voters who had previously been skeptical of other Islamic political parties.

Muslim voters tend to prefer national parties over Islamic parties, with only 48% expressing a positive stance toward Islamic parties (Navis et al., 2020; Aprilliyani et al., 2022). The fragmentation of Islamic parties and the changing ideological orientation of Muslim voters have also contributed to their declining electoral performance (Romli, 2016; Nasuhaidi & Subekti, 2024). Some voters perceive Islamic parties as merely using religion as a slogan without any real implementation (Gustari, 2020; Hudha et al., 2025). The decline in support for Islamic political parties in Indonesia cannot be separated from the complex interplay of internal fragmentation, the failure of programmatic articulation, and the shifting ideological preferences of Muslim voters. Mas'ad (2019) notes that in the post-New Order era, the fragmentation of Islamic parties weakened the consolidation of political power among Muslim constituencies. Mikail (2015) highlights their inability to build public trust, particularly due to unfulfilled political promises. As Nur'Aini (2024) demonstrates, Muslim voter preferences have tended to be more pragmatic than ideological since the 1955 general elections, a pattern that has persisted into the Reformasi era. This trend is further emphasized by Yani (2023), who argues that Islamic parties have stagnated largely because they relied on religious symbolism rather than substantive policy agendas. Nastain et al., (2023) reinforce this view by asserting that Islamic parties have failed to achieve significant electoral victories over the past two decades due to a lack of politically innovative responses to public welfare issues. By synthesizing these five studies, this research presents a critical analysis suggesting that the crisis of representation among Islamic parties is not merely an electoral issue, but rather a reflection of the dissonance between their projected political identity and the real needs of an increasingly rational, urban, and solution-oriented Muslim electorate.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia holds the position as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. However, in the context of Indonesia itself, Islamic political parties have always lost in the political contest, even though the majority of the population is Muslim. Throughout the history of democratic elections in Indonesia, Islamic political parties have never become a majority force, even though most of Indonesia's citizens are Muslim. The political landscape of Islamic parties in Indonesia has evolved significantly since the pre-reform era. During the New Order period, Islamic politics were largely suppressed, with only three main parties allowed, including one Islamic party. After the reform era, many Islamic parties emerged, but based on the election results after the reform, none of these Islamic parties became dominant like the United Development Party (PPP) during the New Order period. At that time, PPP became the only official political platform for Muslims after the party simplification by the Soeharto regime.

The political parties that emerged after the reform era have generally experienced a decline in electoral performance over time. This decline is linked to factors such as the lack of programmatic

offers from Islamic political parties and voter disappointment with these parties. Many Islamic political parties are perceived as failing to provide clear and relevant programs that address the concrete needs of society, leading to a decrease in voter trust and support. Additionally, voter dissatisfaction stems from the inability of these parties to effectively represent the aspirations of the Muslim community, particularly in addressing social and economic issues.

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