

Foreword

The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) is the most interesting phenomenon in contemporary Indonesian politics. Not only is it growing rapidly in membership and electoral support, it is also bringing a new and markedly different approach to Islamic politics, one which has no precedent in Indonesian history.

There are several interrelated elements to this new approach which deserve mention. First, more than any other Islamic party, PKS's primary source of ideological and organisational inspiration is external and draws heavily upon the thinking of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Other parties, in particular Masyumi during the 1950s, had a high awareness of developments in the Middle East and South Asia, but their internal discourses and doctrines were largely domestic. In the case of PKS, one need only look at the number of Brotherhood texts translated and published by party members, the frequency of references to Hasan al-Banna or Sayyid Qutb in party documents or websites, and the popularity of images from the Middle East, such as Hamas badges or T-shirts depicting Palestinian youths throwing stones at Israeli soldiers during the Intifada, to find evidence of the depth of Middle Eastern consciousness. Other parties such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Masyumi, Parmusi, the United Development Party (PPP), the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the Crescent Moon Party (PBB) have been much less influenced by such external forces.

Second, PKS is the only genuine cadre party in present-day Indonesian politics. It has a strict process of induction, training and promotion of members which produces a disciplined and committed corps of cadre. Whereas most other parties have low routine involvement of grassroots members outside of campaign periods, PKS has regular branch meetings, discussion groups, community activities and religious outreach. Moreover, most PKS office holders and legislators have usually gained their positions on the basis of merit and through an internal democratic process. This stands in contrast to the vote-buying, intimidation, patronage considerations and favouritism that so often besets other parties. Indeed, with the possible exception of the former Soeharto-regime party Golkar, PKS is the only party to develop the kind of internal culture and organisational discipline which political scientists deem desirable for the proper functioning of a consolidated democracy.

Third, it is the only party with an extensive and ongoing community service program. This can take various forms from emergency relief for the victims of natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, floods and fire to the provision of regular and often free medical and dental services to poorer communities. While some parties offer occasional services, particularly in the run-up to elections, PKS has made its welfare programs an integral part of its outreach.

Thus, PKS has been able to promote itself as a 'caring' party and one which has good track record of community assistance.

Fourth, PKS has made morality in public life central to its political program. All the major parties of the post-Soeharto era declare their commitment to 'clean' and 'transparent' politics but in most cases this is for rhetorical effect rather than a statement of intent. Indeed, corruption and collusion pervade most Indonesian political parties and the prospect of quick enrichment remains an important motivation for many politicians. By contrast, PKS is relatively (but not entirely) free of 'money politics' and it enforces strict anti-corruption regulations for its leaders and legislators. In recent years, the party has imposed tough sanctions on members found to be taking money illicitly and branches have also been quick at withdrawing support for leaders who are seen to have benefited excessively from their positions. Moreover, PKS legislators have strived to expose and prevent corruption and abuse of office in the national and local parliaments, often incurring the ire of other parties. On occasions, this has even led to the kidnapping of PKS politicians.

Finally, PKS is more serious about ideology and policy than any other large political party. At a time when most parties are unashamed about their lack of internal discussion about the values and policy objectives to which they should aspire, PKS is notable for the richness of its intra-party discourse on key conceptual and doctrinal issues. The sheer number of books, magazines and web-based materials produced by PKS members far exceeds the output of any other party.

For all these reasons, PKS can be seen as broadening the choices available to Indonesian voters and as offering a fresh alternative to more 'traditional' parties such as PPP, PKB and Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Though PKS is often criticised in both the Indonesian and foreign media, there are grounds for welcoming its presence in Indonesian politics and its ability to provide a new paradigm of Islamic political behaviour.

Despite its successes in dramatically increasing its electoral support and membership, PKS is entering into a more challenging phase of its development that will test its ability to maintain its ideological focus and moral integrity. The party's victories in recent direct elections of provincial and district head (pilkada) have brought its leaders into positions of direct authority in regional administrations, with all the temptations and dilemmas which such positions involve. In the past, most parties have been heavily compromised and corrupted by the holding of executive power. It will be interesting to see if PKS can avoid a similar fate. Also, PKS leaders have made clear their plans for the party to double or triple in size over the next few elections. Such a rapid expansion risks diluting the purity of the Brotherhood-inspired ideology, which the party has until now held dear. While PKS leaders may hope to 'convert' the influx of new

members to their way of thinking and behaving, it could be that the new 'recruits' change PKS, making it more like other parties and less distinctive in Indonesian politics.

Understanding PKS and analysing its political behaviour presents challenges to scholars and observers. This is partly due to the fact that the party represents a new trend within Indonesian Islam which has few parallels with preceding movements. It is also a reflection of PKS's own success in tightly managing the party's image, particularly to emphasise its 'moderate' and 'pluralist' aspects and play down the more Islamist elements. Thus, any analysis of PKS needs to (1) consider carefully how to characterise the party, particularly whether existing typologies of Indonesian Islam are adequate to describe it, and (2) probe behind the party's self-image to examine the origins and contours of its thinking.

In this regard, Yon Machmudi has rendered us a valuable service. In this book, he provides a thoughtful and authoritative context for viewing PKS. He critiques the existing categorisations for Indonesian Islam and points to their inadequacy when describing the PKS and the campus-based Tarbiyah movement from which it sprang. He reworks the santri typology, dividing it into convergent, radical and global sub-streams. This offers new possibilities for explaining the PKS phenomenon and assists in differentiating between various types of Islamic revivalism in contemporary Indonesia. It also allows a more understanding of the accommodatory stance which PKS has towards the state and other political forces.

Yon Machmudi's account, which is based on his doctoral thesis, is also notable for his analysis of the religious and organisational background of PKS leaders. Contrary to the assertions of some scholars, who claim that the party is modernist dominated, he argues that PKS actually draws cadre from a broad cross-section of the Muslim community, including the traditionalist community.

Yon's text provides a good overview of the development of PKS from its Tarbiyah movement origins to its impressive success at the 2004 general elections. It considers the party's attitude towards the issues of sharia implementation and community welfare and closes by examining the future challenges facing PKS. It is a well written and authoritative account from a scholar who has done wide-ranging research on the party. It is a valuable contribution to the literature on PKS and I am happy to recommend it to readers.

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