

## The Decline of Islamic Parties and the Dynamics of Party System in Post-Suharto Indonesia

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the decline of Islamic parties in post-Suharto Indonesia and its correlation with changes in the electoral system. Using a mixed method, data on the post-Suharto election was analyzed quantitatively using the Pedersen formula, supplemented with a qualitative review of scholarly sources, such as journals, books, and proceedings. The results showed that the changing electoral system triggered dynamics in the party system, leading to a decline in the number of votes for incumbent parties, particularly Islamic parties. This decline led to electoral volatility, where voters were more willing to switch their support from one party to another. Moreover, the decline of Islamic parties' electoral performance prevailed, as they could not reclaim their positions. This study offers insight into the workings of political party systems in developing democracies, showing how modifications to the electoral process can influence the political environment. These results add to the growing body of knowledge on party systems and electoral politics, not only in Indonesia but also in comparable contexts around the globe.

### Keywords:

Islamic party; electoral system; party system; electoral volatility; Indonesia

### Introduction

Several studies have reported that compared to other countries in South Asia, such as Thailand or the Philippines, the Indonesian party system is not only more stable (Ufen, 2008a) but also features better-performing political parties (Fionna & Tomsa, 2017). However, after four elections (1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014), the vote shares of most parties declined, especially the incumbent ones. Islamic parties, on the other hand, remained stagnant in their poor performance (Kikue, 2011). This was followed by the establishment of new parties and a slight increase in electoral volatility (Tan, 2005). The importance of a party system is widely recognized, as indicated by research in this field (Aminuddin, 2017; Gyene, 2019; Mamonto, 2019; Hidjaz et al., 2020).

The literature offers contradictory findings regarding the Islamic cleavage and its contribution to the Indonesian party system after the fall of Suharto. Saeful Mujani and Willian Liddle (2004) demonstrated that leadership was a significant factor in influencing voter behavior, refuting the dominance of religious orientation in vote acquisition among Islamic parties in post-Suharto Indonesia. According to King (2003), the number of party votes in several regions in the 1999 election was similar to that of 1955, characterized by sectarian politics (*politik aliran*). Baswedan (2004b), in comparing the 1999 and 2004 elections, found a pattern of voter support for Islamic parties in cities with a Muslim majority. Meanwhile, the Democrat and Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) parties received strong support from Nationalists and Christians.

The idea of *politik aliran* has advanced fundamentally, breaking down Indonesia's distinctive 'streams' of political thinking. King (2003) and Baswedan (2004) saw similarities in casting ballot designs between the 1955 and 1999 races, but there were contrasts. Parties remained socially established (Ufen, 2008a: 17), and a new characteristic of *politik aliran* was driven by pop-charismatic leaders like Megawati and Gus Dur. There was a 'de-alignment' of contrasts, as influence was more about initiative styles and positions, rendering the party's platform immaterial. Voters were attracted to the main figures, and gathering programs practically had no meaning in casting ballot conduct. Moreover, Fiona cited Liddle and Mujani (2007) stated that "voters who voted for PDIP, PAN and PKB did so primarily because of their leaders, thereby setting the tone for future voting patterns that would indeed often be guided by the appeal of charismatic leaders" (Fiona, 2016).

Moreover, it is likely that winners in plurality in the first election after the fall of Suharto did not represent the actual performance of the parties. They won votes due to the political euphoria as the grassroots were freed from the restrictions imposed by Suharto's regime. In reality, most parties lacked political platforms, had poor programs, and were oligarchic. This poor performance eroded votes in subsequent elections (2004, 2009, and 2014), resulting in electoral volatility and fragmentation in the party system. The erosion also encouraged the establishment of new parties, which then received a substantial overflow of votes.

The absence of internal leadership and coherence within Islamic parties is another significant factor contributing to their demise. These parties have been plagued

by factionalism, with various factions often working against each other. This internal strife has led to incoherent policy positions and a negative party reputation (Mujani & Liddle, 2004). Historians also stated that the downfall was due to the focus on religious affairs rather than broader socioeconomic concerns. The parties struggled to articulate a coherent vision for the country's future beyond their religious agenda, making it unappealing to voters who did not prioritize religious issues (Fiona & Tomsa, 2017). The decline in the political performance of Islamic parties contributed to the electoral volatility in the Indonesian party system (Nurjaman et al., 2018; Ufen, 2006, 2008a). Although these parties led during the pre-reformation period, they struggled to sustain influence in the post-Suharto.

Islamic parties had difficulty adapting to the new situation so they tried to leave their normal base as conservative Muslims. This is due to changes in the political environment, where society has become more secular and democratic (Barton et al., 2021; Prajuli, 2018). The inability of Islamic parties to adapt to the new political situation is an explanation for the decline of Islamic parties post-Suharto. This has become the subject of academic debate supported by various explanations from various points of view (Mujani, 2019). These phenomena are part of the dynamics of the party system in Indonesia which is very interesting to researchers.

The importance of a party system is widely recognized (Aminuddin, 2017; Gyene, 2019; Mamonto, 2019), with many scholars conducting research in this field. For example, some argue that the number of political parties is significant (Hicken, 2008), while others emphasize the importance of ideological distance between large parties (Bértoa, 2011).

Some stress the importance of designing an institutional framework for party competition (Mietzner, 2015). Of course, all perspectives have received scholarly attention, but the institutionalized party system has drawn the most (Hicken & Kuhonta, 2014).

The current study aims to investigate the decline of Islamic Parties and the impact of changes in the electoral system in post-Suharto Indonesia. To achieve this, the study utilizes strength variables derived from the electoral volatility index and the effective number of parties. These variables are measured based on incumbent and new political parties' electoral results, including Islamic and nationalist block parties. Electoral volatility can explain party system stability, which is calculated using the Pedersen volatility index. The formula included calculating the total percentage of votes that changed for all parties in the year (i) divided by two (Pedersen, 1990). Meanwhile, the effective number of parties (ENP) is used to assess whether party votes are more concentrated or dispersed than in a multiparty system. Blocking of parties is used to show the origin of shifting votes, with new parties' wins explaining the declining votes of incumbent parties. Incumbents refer to parties that passed the election threshold and participated in subsequent elections, whereas new parties are those competing for the first time.

### **The Dynamic of the Party System in Indonesia**

The transition to a liberal democratic political system in 1998 was a critical period for democratic life in Indonesia (Wang, 2018), which was then followed by the initial phase of the post-reform democracy. This should lead to a stable party system in the future of Indonesian democracy (Bland, 2019). However, volatile voting patterns emerged due to a decline in the

performance of political parties, particularly among the Islamic ones. This high electoral volatility has led to an increased number of parties in the parliament.

Electoral volatility refers to the degree of changes or fluctuations in the voting behavior of a specific electorate over time (Casal Bértoa, 2014). There is significant unpredictability in how voters cast their ballots in each election when electoral volatility is high. The most common indicator for assessing party system stabilization is the Pedersen electoral volatility index (Casal Bértoa, 2014), which shows aggregate changes in party support levels from one election to the next.

In recent years, studies on parties and party systems in Indonesia indicate the existence of cartelism after the fall of Suharto (Chiaromonte & Emanuele, 2017; Slater, 2013). Ufen (2007) argued that the party system was stable, as proven by the strong relationship between parties and their constituencies. Meanwhile, Mietzner (2015), in the study of political party finance, found no evidence of an institutionalized party finance system. Parties and party systems in post-Suharto still played a significant role in decision-making, voter and party associations, and relationships with other groups (Fionna, 2016).

Koichi Kawamura (2013) stated that the presidential in Indonesia did not always follow a linear path, as constitutional change may prevent political parties from participating in forming a government. The increase in the presidential nomination threshold since 2004 has led to a principal-agent relationship, with a political party, voters, and party coalition being the principal and the president being the agent. Medium and minor parties usually maximize their votes in legislative elections and only contribute votes in the presidential election,

as exemplified by the Functional Groups Party (Golkar). On the other hand, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the People Conscience Party (Hanura), the Democrat Party (Democrats), and the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) are personalized parties, with the leader serving as the principal.

According to Andreas Ufen (2015), elections in Indonesia strengthen the personal aspect in presidential and regional elections, with the rise in popularity often boosted by political campaign consultants. Ironically, there seems to be a dealignment between political parties and the presidential candidate as they do not always serve the party's interests. For instance, the relationship between Jokowi and PDIP lasted until the second year of administration, indicating Jokowi's outsider status within the party.

The results of the post-Suharto election show a decline in votes for Islamic parties (Harahap, 2019; Noor, 2012). Under a closed proportional election system in the 1999 election, voters selected parties based on their image, with political choices determined by the party's position (Hanan, 2019; Sebastian & Arifianto, 2020). However, strengthening the position open depends on the strength of political elites within the formal structure, encouraging the emergence of an oligarchy (Al-Hamdi, 2021). Such an oligarchy creates a barrier for quality cadres because the recruitment is based on political and personal proximity to party elites (Novianto & Wulansari, 2023). This prompted a change in the electoral system from a closed to an open list, which was a transition from party to individual candidate domination in the elections (Barceló & Muraoka, 2018; Moeis et al., 2020). As power shifted from parties to individual candidates, many parties recruited well-known cadre figures in the subsequent

election. This shift in the electoral system shifted the competition from party-based to individual candidate-based, both from outside and within the parties.

Intense competition among candidates and the pressure of increasing the threshold encourages candidates to adopt Machiavellian politics, justifying any means to gain votes, such as money politics and vote buying (Khairi, 2020). These conditions have caused political costs to rise, made parties and cadres more pragmatic, and increased money's influence over party ideology. Therefore, many Islamic parties that prioritized Islamic agendas saw significant declines in votes, such as the National Awakening Party (PKB), United Development Party (PPP), National Mandate Party (PAN), and Crescent Star Party (PBB). These conditions encouraged parties to explore various sources of party finance, including sourcing finance from cadres in the government, which has resulted in numerous cadres being involved in corruption cases (Donovan & Karp, 2017; Schleiter & Voznaya, 2014). These cases caused the disillusionment of Islamic party constituents, leading to abstains and vote swings. Moreover, the internal party divisions stemming from elite conflicts weakened the Islamic parties, resulting in even fewer votes (Romli, 2020).

Indonesia's democratic transition, as described above, is relevant to a discussion of political parties and party systems in a larger context of a post-authoritarian environment, making it an important case study. The country's multifaceted multiparty system is an example of the intricacies of party fragmentation and coalition politics, which can be relatable to other countries with multiparty system worldwide. Other countries prone to issues rooted in interfaith and politics can find

common ground in post-Suharto Indonesia, learning a lesson from the loss of appeal of Islamic parties and the contributing factors. These insights are relevant to the context of identity-based parties, religious politics, and the intersection of secularism and religion in politics. In other words, academics and decision-makers worldwide can learn from and gain insight into Indonesia's political environment.

In the context of the party system in Indonesia, Islamic political parties experienced significant growth after the Parliamentary Democracy period, such as in the 1999 election, where they played an important role in the electoral competition. However, the number of Islamic parties has decreased recently as they do not meet the threshold and lack support from voters. This raises questions about the future of Islamic parties in the Muslim-majority country, Indonesia. Islamic political parties become structural feature in many Muslim-majority countries. The fact that this is not the case in Indonesia piques curiosity about the role and impact of these parties on the political landscape, especially because, elections around the world have seen parties aligning with political agendas rooted in an Islamic worldview since 2000.

There are several reasons for the decline in the strength of Islamic parties after Suharto. The first is the declining voter support. Islamic parties experienced a consistent decline in voter support during the Suharto era and after the reforms under Gusdur and Amin Rais, as indicated by the historical trends and election results. The second is the dominant voter behavior trend. Despite the technical problems in the survey, a dominant trend in the form of changes in voter behavior emerged, impacting political participation

patterns in favor of non-Islamic parties. The third is internal conflicts. The emergence of new parties after Suharto's presidency caused internal conflicts within Islamic parties, which contributed to the complexity of the multiparty system in Indonesia as a whole.

## Methods

A mixed study methodology was utilized to investigate the factors contributing to the decline of Islamic parties in the post-Suharto era and their consequences on the Indonesian party system. This study starts with an extensive literature review of scholarly articles, books, and reports on Indonesian politics, Islamic parties, and post-Suharto political developments to establish a strong foundation.

The data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively. Election data from the Indonesian Electoral Commission (KPU) were analyzed quantitatively, comprising vote results and party seat allocations. The electoral volatility index was calculated from the percentage formula based on the election results using the Pedersen index formulae (Pedersen, 1990). The Volatility Index was calculated based on the Pedersen index, with the formula of the total percentage of votes for all parties that changed in year (i) divided by two.

$$V = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |\Delta p_i|}{2}$$

Where: V – volatility index; n – number of parties participating in the election;  $\Delta p_i$  – the number of votes that changes from election to election for the i-th party.

The Effective Number of Parties (ENP) was calculated by summing the squares of the percentage of votes or seats and dividing by



the squared number of votes or seats.

The total percentage of votes for all parties that changed in year (i), is divided by two. In addition, the Effective Number of Parties (ENP) assesses the number of relevant parties, calculated by summing the squares of the percentage of votes or seats, divided by the squared number of votes or seats. The qualitative data was collected from an in-depth literature review of journal articles, books, and proceedings related to the study topic.

## Results

### The Decline of Islamic Parties in Post-Suharto

Islamic parties striving to promote Islamic ideals and governance experience have seen varying degrees of success worldwide. While some have gained significant political influence and even founded governments, others have struggled to attract mass support and attain political power. In the context of Indonesia, despite the country's Islamic culture and history and its status as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Islamic parties have struggled to establish political traction (Barton, 2020; Weiss, 2010). Some Islamist parties were successful in being part of coalition governments but were often marginalized and lacked influence in political decisions. Moreover, Indonesian voters often view corruption cases, economic progress, and social justice more than religious identity (Donovan & Karp, 2017).

Social divisions based on religious behavior, as conceptualized by Clifford Geertz and translated into political choices, are known as religious cleavages (*politik aliran*) (Fossati, 2019). This perspective has been consistently used in studying political behavior in Indonesia (Nurjaman et al., 2018; Ufen, 2006, 2008a). The 1955 election provides an

example of the operation of *politik aliran*, where the *santri* (devout Muslims) voted for Islamic parties, and the *abangan* (minimalist Muslims) voted for the nationalist party. However, this political stream consistently faced criticism over time due to anomalies in political life, especially in the post-Suharto era (Mujani, 2019). Nevertheless, mainstream politics as an approach to understanding politics in Indonesia is still widely used by academics.

The 1999 election was considered a miniature of the 1955 election, which was dominated by *politik aliran*. However, in subsequent elections (2004, 2009, and 2014), new political behavior emerged, including the influence of celebrities, politicians, and academics (Mujani & Liddle, 2004). On the other hand, King and Baswedan emphasized that sectarian politics remained predominant (Baswedan, 2004a). Islamic parties in Indonesia struggled to articulate a clear and appealing vision for a government that extended beyond upholding religious principles. Many Indonesian voters, particularly Muslims, were skeptical about theocratic ruling and preferred to see politics and society take a more diverse and inclusive stance (Dastagir & Ramzy, 2019; Prajuli, 2018).

After the third democratic election in 2009, the prospects for Islamic parties in electoral politics were even more bleak. A common perception was that political Islam declined in the parliamentary and electoral spheres. This political stance involves the aspirations and collective activities of Muslims to achieve religious goals and principles in the public sphere, such as the implementation of sharia law. Religious parties are political organizations rooted in Islamic ideology that use religious symbols and resources for mobilization or are affiliated with religious

**Table 1.**  
**The Seats of Nationalist and Islamic for Both Individual and Block Parties**

Blok Party	1999			2004			2009			2014		
	Party	Seats		Party	Seats		Party	Seats		Party	Seats	
		N	%		N	%		N	%		N	%
I S L A M I C	PPP	58	12.47	PPP	58	10.55	PKS	57	10.12	P AN	49	8.75
	PKB	51	10.97	PAN	52	9.45	PAN	43	7.78	PKB	47	8.40
	PAN	35	7.53	PKB	52	9.45	PPP	37	6.61	PKS	40	7.14
	PBB	13	2.80	PKS	45	8.18	PKB	27	4.82	PPP	39	6.96
	PK	6	1.29	PBR	13	2.36						
	PNU	5	1.08	PBB	11	2						
	Others	3	0,65									
	<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>36.77</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>29,29</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>31,25</b>
N A S I O N A L I S	PDI P	154	33.12	Party Golkar	128	23.27	Demokrat	150	26.79	PDIP	109	19.46
	Golkar	120	25.81	PDIP	109	19.82	Golkar	107	19.12	Golkar	91	16.25
	PKP	6	1.29	Demokrat	57	10.36	PDI P	95	16.96	Gerindra	73	13.04
	PDKB	5	1.08	PDS	12	2.18	Gerindra	26	4.64	Demok.	61	10.89
	PDI	2	0.43	PDK	5	0.91	Hanura	18	3.21	Nasdem	35	6.25
	Others	7	1,51	Party Pelopor	2	0.36				Hanura	16	2.86
				PKPB	2	0.36						
	<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>63.23</b>		<b>319</b>	<b>58</b>		<b>396</b>	<b>70.71</b>		<b>385</b>	<b>68.75</b>

Source: Indonesian Electoral Commission

Note: "The members of the First Chamber, the House of Representatives (DPR), were elected using a proportional system in multi-member constituencies. The Second Chamber, the People's Congress (MPR), comprised the DPR members and 132 representatives from the provinces, constituting the relatively weak House of Regional Representatives (DPD) established in 2004. They were elected using a majority system in multi-member constituencies and were not allowed to be members of political parties. Moreover, direct presidential elections have been in place since 2004, as well as direct elections of mayors, district chiefs, and governors since 2005. The allocation of seats was adjusted based on a ruling by the Constitutional Court.

mass organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah. This includes orthodox Islamic parties like the PBB and PPP; Puritan Islamic parties inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, like the Justice and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS); modernist Islamic parties associated with Muhammadiyah, such as PAN; and nationalist-religious parties founded by NU leaders, particularly PKB.

Table 1 shows the decline in the popularity of religious parties over the past ten years. In 1999, religious parties secured 34% of votes, winning 171 parliamentary seats in the People Representative Council. There was a decrease in votes to 26% in 2009, and a subsequent

increase to 36.77%, with 219 legislative seats secured in 2004, mainly due to the substantial expansion of PKS. PKS was founded by leaders of the *dakwah* (missionary) *Tarbiyah* as a political wing of the group at the onset of the democratic transition in 1998, drawing inspiration from the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. The party elites initially pursued their mission to establish an Islamic society based on Syariah through democratic means" (Kikue, 2011). However, PKS' poor performance in the 1999 election prompted internal party reform for its survival. The party ran under the name "PK" in the election and later adopted a more moderate platform, improving its electoral performance in 2004. Fionna and Tomsa (2017) emphasized

that while pragmatists dominated PKS between 2004 and 2014, recent stagnant election results led to a resurgence of the idealist faction.

Meanwhile, PAN and PKB were established in 1999 and linked with Muhammadiyah and NU (the Islamic mass organizations), established in 1912 and 1926, respectively. During the initial election of 1999, PKB won a promising 12.61% of votes. However, in subsequent elections (2004, 2009, and 2014), the vote share decreased due to internal conflict. The decline in the votes of PKB resulted from the prevalence of clientelist and ascriptive relations and organizational fragility stemming from a lack of party institutionalization. Consequently, the party exhibited "patrimonial" and "clientelistic" characteristics (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2020; Syarif, 2019). This organizational fragmentation made the party vulnerable to exogenous intrusions, such as access to state patronage, corruption, and electoral changes (Kikue, 2011). On the other hand, nationalist parties, such as PDIP and Golkar, consistently garnered substantial votes and seats. The remaining core Islamic party, PPP, represented a fusion of various strands that drew support from both modernist and traditionalist Muslims in different regions. "PPP attempted to harness the strengths of NU and modernist organizations, making it particularly influential in areas with a high percentage of orthodox Muslims, such as Aceh and West Sumatra" (Ufen, 2008b).

Regarding seat distribution, the Islamic parties were less stable than the nationalist party. Using Geertz's concept of political streams (aliran), Indonesian parties can be categorized into Nationalist and Islamic Parties. In the post-Suharto era, most nationalist parties were institutionalized better than Islamic parties (Brumberg, 2015). Data from

post-Suharto elections in 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014 revealed that Islamic parties secured 36.77%, 42%, 29.29%, and 31.29% of the seats, respectively, while Nationalist parties accounted for 63.23%, 58%, 70.71%, and 68.75% of the seats, respectively. According to Weis, "parties explicitly advocating for sharia law (the Jakarta Charter) garnered less than 20% of votes for that year, and subsequently increased their share only to around 21% in 2004, before declining to approximately 16.5% in 2009. The combined vote share of parties merely linked to Islamist mass organizations dropped from 37.5% in 2004 to 29% in 2009. Most Islamist parties in all three elections campaigned more on general issues like corruption and the economy rather than Islam per se" (Weiss, 2010).

The comparison of the post-transition election results with the first democratic election in 1955 demonstrated a long-term decline in the popularity of Islamic parties. During the first democratic election, two major Islamic parties, Masyumi and NU, collectively held a 39% vote share (Madinier, 2020; Warjio et al., 2020). Moreover, some experts argued that the political influence of religious and mass organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah declined in electoral politics, indicating the decline of political Islam (Al-barbasy, 2017; Damm, 2018; Iqbal, 2019). The decline in the political influence of NU and Muhammadiyah is because these two largest mass organizations in Indonesia are no longer directly involved in politics.

Some scholars concluded that the significance of religion differed from what was initially expected, and the meaning of political Islam in electoral politics remained minimal. According to Mujani and Liddle (2010), the decreasing influence of religious parties indicated that the public disapproved



of the enforcement of Sharia or other forms of Islamism in Indonesian politics. The survey on voting behavior also found that voters were less concerned about ideology and more interested in other factors, such as personality and leadership. Voters no longer consider ideology as a basis for determining political choices, but are pragmatic. The pragmatic behavior creates a fertile climate for the development of Machiavellian politics, such as swaying votes by any means possible.

Opposing the idea of the decline of Political Islam, some studies suggested that religion had become increasingly valuable as a symbol or tool for mobilizing pious Muslim voters due to the prevalence of electoral competition. Furthermore, secular politicians and nationalist parties, such as the former ruling Golkar party, had become more accommodating to Islam and even more forceful in promoting religious-based policies and agendas to gain greater popular support (Baswedan, 2004a; Buehler, 2009; Subianto, 2020).

Parties that formally proclaim themselves as Islamic parties do not seem to have the confidence to promote Islamic values in their various issues and agendas. The challenges they face, especially related to corruption issues, may have caused such a dwindling confidence. Islamic values no longer become their core principles, even though their mass base is Muslim voters. At the same time, non-religious parties increased their efforts to gain the sympathy of Muslim voters, either by recruiting Islamic figures or leaders of Islamic organizations as their legislative candidates. In this case, PDIP show more accommodating to legislative candidates with a traditional Islamic (NU) background.

### **The Dynamics of the Party System from 1999-2014 Election**

This section describes (1) the election volatility index and the Effective Number of Parties (ENP) from the 1999-2014 elections and (2) the implication of changes in the electoral system and thresholds on parties, specifically Islamic ones. Table 2 shows that the electoral volatility index the percentage of voters who changed their vote from one election to another was relatively high across all four elections, with an average of 29.03%. This suggested that many Indonesian voters changed their political allegiances.

The average ENP was 8.05, indicating a relatively low number. This implied that the Indonesian political system was relatively stable, with a minority of political parties receiving the majority of votes. The data also revealed that electoral systems had evolved, with criteria for entry of political parties into parliament changing from one election to another. The electoral thresholds in 1999 and 2004 were relatively low at 2.5% and 3.5%, respectively. Meanwhile, the parliamentary threshold in the 2009 and 2014 elections were 2.5% and 3.5%, respectively. These changing election thresholds could contribute to the differences in election results.

The data indicates that the Indonesian political system remained consistent, with a small number of parties obtaining the majority of votes. The low ENP indicates that the Indonesian political system remained moderately consolidated. However, the relatively high electoral volatility shows that voters are willing to swing, which changes the dynamic of the party system in post-Suharto Indonesia. Islamic parties were impacted the most by these changes, particularly in 2009. The vote garnered in the 1999 election

**Table 2.**  
**Variables in Party System from 1999-2014 Election**

Variables	Elections Years									
	1999		2004		2009		2014		Average	
	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats
Electoral Volatility			28.55	25.78	30.25	26.46	28.29	21.54	29.03	24.59
ENP	5.06	4.74	8.55	7.07	9.59	6.13	9.00	8.36	8.05	6.56
Electoral System	P.C.L.		OP.L. (30%)		OP.L.		OP.L.			
Threshold	E.T. 2.5%		E.T. 3.5%		P.T. 2.5%		P.T. 3.5%			

Source: Author's calculations

Note: P.C.L. (Proportional Close list); OP.L. (30%) (Open List with a minimum vote 30%), P.O.L. (Proportional Open List);

E.T. (Electoral Threshold), P.T. (Parliamentary Threshold); E.T. (Electoral Threshold); P.R. (Parliamentary Threshold)

was 39% under the proportional closed list system, subsequently rising to 42% in 2004. However, in the 2009 and 2014 elections (under the proportional open list system), the vote decreased to 29.29% and 31.25%, with the 2009 election marking the lowest vote acquisition for Islamic parties in the history of Indonesian politics.

The change from a closed to an open-list proportional electoral system impacted the relationship between parties and voters. The closed list system of relations was relatively stable because voters voted for the party image, and the seats were allocated by a sequential list. On the other hand, the open list system allocated seats by the largest number of votes obtained, leading to tight competition among candidates within a party. This condition encouraged parties to use new and more pragmatic strategies, such as recruiting popular legislative candidates with high electability from a social, political, and economic perspective. The fierce competition also prompted legislative candidates to win votes using any means, including vote buying and money politics (Khairi, 2020). This practice severed the relationship between parties and voters, as they cast their vote for money and not ideology.

Islamic parties feel this disruption in relations between parties and voters. Although Islamic parties emphasize the holistic role of Islam in various aspects of life, including politics, which shapes the political landscape (Qodarsasi & Ghofur, 2020), the votes of Islamic parties continue to decline. Fionna and Tomsa (2014) argued that the factors contributing to the decline of Islamic parties include the electoral system, the democratization process, and the influence of the media. The decline in votes for Islamic parties is a wake-up call for the elites, so they try to find solutions to increase the electoral votes, such as by form coalitions, especially during presidential elections. The dynamics of Islamic party coalitions, especially those forming an opposition, contribute to the political climate and other realities in the Indonesian political landscape.

The decline of Islamic parties is not just a coincidence because, according to Hefner (2008), during Suharto's rule, Islam's influence on politics was limited as regime tried to depoliticize Islam. Nonetheless, Islamic parties continue to fight for survival. This depoliticization continued, even after the end of the New Order authoritarian regime. Islamic party did not gain momentum in the democratization after Suharto to reclaim their

power like in the 1955 election. Furthermore, the identification of political parties with Islam as an ideology faced challenges, contributing to a decline in voters' ties with Islamic parties. The results show that the votes for Islamic parties in the 1999-2014 elections were unstable. Their number started to decrease as they transformed into catch-all parties.

Briefly, after the end of Suharto's government, the dynamics of the Indonesian party system change due to the decline in the number of Islamic parties. Nevertheless, Islam continues to play an important role in Indonesian politics. According to Mietzner (2008), the relationship between Islam and democracy is central, with perpetual relevance and influence in modern Islamic politics. Evidence shows that the political coalition of Islamic parties in 1999-2014 added to the complexity of Indonesian politics. In short, an understanding of Islamic politics and the various activities of Muslim activists can indicate the dynamics of the post-Suharto party system.

## **Discussion**

The study shows that change in the electoral system creates party system dynamics. Interestingly, the dynamics have resulted in electoral volatility and a decrease in the vote share of incumbent parties, especially Islamic parties. The decline resulted in electoral volatility, indicating the likelihood of vote swings. Furthermore, the analysis shows that when the electoral system was changed, the share of Islamic parties' electoral votes decreased. This result does not make the party system simpler when the number of political parties decreases. In other words, this report shows how efforts to simplify the party system through changes to the electoral system only led

to a decrease in vote share and highlighted how complex the relationship between the electoral process and political party performance in post-Suharto Indonesia is.

The changes in the electoral system and the increase in thresholds in post-Suharto Indonesia are different from those in other countries, which simplifies the party system. Lundell (2012) found that party systems in European countries are linear with electoral systems. District systems will generate fewer parties in parliament, whereas proportional systems will generate more. Moreover, Döring & Manow (2017) tested three mechanisms of the impact of electoral rules on the party-political makeup of governments: voting behavior, political geography, and party fragmentation. They found the first two mechanisms at work in the democratic chain of delegation, from voting to the formation of governments. Their findings confirmed that majoritarian systems have a substantially conservative bias, but proportional systems result in a more nuanced picture. In the case of post-Suharto Indonesia, although changing the electoral system into a majoritarian system (proportional open list), reduces the number of parties entering parliament, it does not simplify the party system. By contrast, a proportional closed list system results in a simpler party system, but the number of political parties included in parliament is large. The 1999 election resulted in 22 political parties in the parliament, but ENP was around 5.06 (based on votes). Meanwhile, the 2004, 2009, and 2014 elections resulted in a significantly lower number of parties entering parliament, but the number of influential parties was higher.

Moreover, the change in the electoral system (from a proportional closed list to an open list) and threshold weakened the

influence of political streams (*politik aliran*) that manifested religious behavior into political choices (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016). The changes in the electoral system resulted in political fragmentation and changes in political preferences based on social influence and religiosity. The weakening *politik aliran* affected Islamic parties, as Muslim voters no longer voted for them unilaterally. However, the decline in the number of votes for Islamic parties did not simplify the party system because votes were distributed to many parties, especially the ruling parties with popular figures (Raharjo Jati, 2022).

These new improvements affirm the idea that post-Suharto parties were not established yet in the public arena and that their party identification was low. This phenomenon in Indonesia was similar to that of the Philippines, where wealthy people used parties as their vehicles for electoral victory (Ufen, 2006). These patterns were increased by direct presidential election in 2004, making electability essential for any presidential candidate. Discretionary has made alliances between parties neglecting vote accumulations to guarantee a triumph. It is evident that, in these alliances, contrasts in belief systems are pushed aside to clear a path for intrigue.

The rising Islamization in Indonesia, accompanied by modernization and urbanization, has encouraged the formation of Islamic political parties in the country. However, these parties failed to gain significant support from the electorate due to their focus on religious ideology rather than pragmatic policies (Istadiyantha, 2019; Laila et al., 2021; Sakai & Fauzia, 2014). Another study contends that the failure of Indonesia's Islamic parties can be traced to the country's democratic process. As Indonesia moved toward democracy,

Islamic parties competed in a more open and democratic context, exposing their limited appeal beyond their traditional support base. Furthermore, the report claims that the growth of more moderate Islamic parties, which have attracted a broader audience and formed partnerships with secular parties, contributed to the decline of fundamentalist Islamic groups (Menchik, 2019; Prasojo et al., 2019).

Moreover, Indonesia's party system in post-Suharto has given rise to a political process that prioritizes political democratization in the form of elections (Al-Hamdi, 2021). Dalton (2021) confirms the electoral system has an impact on the polarization of the party system and the changes in political preferences based on social and religiosity. Moreover, the decline of *politik aliran* negatively contributes to Islamic parties. Muslim voters no longer vote automatically for Islamic parties. Islamic parties have failed in the post-Suharto elections. Their decline has added to the dynamics of the interaction patterns between parties (party system) in Indonesia.

For several reasons, Indonesia is an important case study in the broader discussion of political parties and party systems. First, as the largest democratic country with a Muslim majority and one of the countries with the largest population in the world, Indonesia's political developments have an important meaning. Second, the country's democratic transition following the fall of Suharto's authoritarian government in 1998 highlighted the difficulties and procedures of democratization in a post-authoritarian environment. This particular situation, which is a common problem in comparative politics, allows researchers to investigate how political parties change and adapt in transitioning democracies.

Indonesia's diverse and fragmented party system is another aspect that contributes to the broader debate. The multiparty system provides insight into the challenges of political fragmentation, the challenges of coalition, and the complex dynamics that arise from parties competing for power. This political reality is relevant for Southeast Asian countries and countries with multiparty systems in the world.

Furthermore, the decline in the performance of Islamic parties after the fall of Suharto and its contributing factors can explain the role of identity-based political parties, religious politics, and the relationship between secularism and religion in politics. These themes are relevant in many countries facing issues of religion, identity politics, and the role of religious-based parties in the democratic context.

## **Conclusion**

This study illustrates the complex relationship between the decline in the performance of Islamic parties and the dynamics of the party system after the fall of Suharto. The change in the electoral system from a proportional closed list to an open list contributed to a decline in the votes of incumbent parties, especially the Islamic Party, which had implications for the political environment. Furthermore, this research found that the decline of Islamic parties resulted in changes to the party system.

The transformative nature of the multiparty electoral system in post-Suharto Indonesia had rendered the party structure more dynamic and fluid. This consequently impacted the religious parties, reducing their previously considerable influence in Indonesian politics. While party votes were more evenly distributed, election volatility

remained high due to the large number of parties exceeding the electoral threshold.

Achieving a balance between the dynamic and flexibility of the party system and the need for a stable government posed a significant challenge for a developing country. Striking this balance necessitated thoughtful deliberation, such as weighing the ongoing shifts in party allegiances against the need for fair and transparent elections and encouraging all citizens to participate in the political process. In addition, the success of the Indonesian multiparty system hinges on the collaborative efforts of political leaders and the populace to address challenges and cultivate a more inclusive democracy.

This study offers insights into the workings of political party systems in developing democracies, where change in the electoral process may influence the political environment. These results add to the growing body of knowledge on party systems and electoral politics, not only in Indonesia but in comparable contexts around the globe. However, this study has some limitations. First, the research data is secondary data; second, this study primarily focuses on Islamic parties in Indonesia. Field research employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) for data collection is required for future research. Comparative research between Indonesian and Islamic parties in other nations is also needed.

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