

FROM DA'WA TO POLITICS? PROSPECTS OF INDONESIAN SALAFI MOVEMENTS BECOMING POLITICAL PARTIES WITHIN LUCARDIE'S FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This paper investigates the prospects of Indonesian Salafi movements transforming into formal political parties by applying Lucardie's (2000) framework of political project, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structures. While Salafi political participation in contexts such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Malaysia has been widely studied, the systematic application of this framework to Indonesia remains limited. This study addresses that gap by employing a qualitative design based on seven elite interviews conducted in 2018 and extensive secondary literature. The analysis identifies two main factions: Traditional Salafis and Salafi Reformers. Findings show that Traditional Salafis articulate a clearer political project, primarily defensive and oriented toward protecting da'wa spaces yet lack the institutional resources and cultural legitimacy required for effective party formation. By contrast, Reformist-oriented groups such as Muhammadiyah, Persis, and Al-Irsyad possess robust organizational infrastructures and nationwide networks but consistently reject transformation into political parties, preferring to channel influence indirectly through education, civic engagement, and individual cadres. A paradox therefore emerges: factions with stronger political ambitions lack the capacity to mobilize, while those with resources deliberately avoid party politics. Although digital platforms and hijrah youth networks have expanded Salafi symbolic capital, these remain insufficient to overcome

entrenched barriers in Indonesia's political culture, which is dominated by moderate Islam and stigmatizes Salafi labels. Theoretically, this study contributes by extending Lucardie's framework through the inclusion of digital mobilization and cultural legitimacy as decisive factors. Practically, it suggests that inclusive democratic spaces for non-violent Islamist actors may mitigate radicalization risks while strengthening pluralism.

Keywords: *Lucardie Framework, Political Islam, Salafi Movement, Social Movements*

INTRODUCTION

The Salafi movement has become an increasingly visible and influential force within contemporary Islamic landscapes. While traditionally associated with doctrinal conservatism and liturgical purism, Salafism in recent years has exhibited adaptive transformations—especially through digital media and social mobilization—which make it significant even in democratic Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia. In Indonesia's major cities, the phenomenon of *urban Salafism* has emerged, leveraging social media, popular culture, and youth networks to propagate religious identity and discipline (Aidulsyah, 2023). This digital turn has not only expanded Salafi reach but also allowed Salafi discourses to merge with the *hijrah* movement, popularizing new forms of Islamic consumption and lifestyles among middle-class youth (Rijal, 2025).

Moreover, Salafi actors in Indonesia have engaged in processes of Arabization through Instagram and YouTube preaching, connecting global Salafi discourses with local audiences (Nursyabani, 2024). These dynamics reveal how transnational Salafi messages are localized into Indonesian idioms of piety, creating a hybrid form of religiosity. At the same time, particular Salafi groups, such as the Madkhāliyah orientation, illustrate complex interactions with the state negotiating loyalty to political authority while operating within Indonesia's democratic institutions (Sunarwoto, 2020). This demonstrates the spectrum of Salafi orientations: from quietist *da'wa* groups committed to obedience to rulers, to more activist orientations willing to challenge mainstream Islamic discourses.

Globally, many Salafi movements have maintained a distance from formal politics, focusing instead on *da'wa*, education, and moral reform. Yet the post Arab Spring era demonstrated that Salafi actors are not monolithic. In Egypt, the Hizb al-Nour party became a surprising electoral contender, showing that Salafis could enter formal politics when authoritarian constraints collapsed (Lacroix, 2016). In Tunisia, Salafi groups also experimented with party formation, though their impact was limited by weak resources and public suspicion (Wolf, 2017; Uysal, 2013). These cases suggest that while Salafism is often framed as apolitical, under certain conditions it can rapidly politicize. This raises a pressing theoretical question: under what conditions might Salafi actors transition from social-religious movements into formal political competitors, particularly in consolidated democracies like Indonesia?

In the Indonesian context, the Salafi movement has grown steadily since the 1980s through pesantren, study circles, and transnational connections with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Hasan, 2007). In the democratic era, its presence has expanded through media platforms, bookstores, and online preachers. However, despite this social influence, there has been no systematic move toward party formation. Existing Salafi factions display stark contrasts: Traditional Salafis articulate defensive political projects but lack nationwide organizational resources, while Reformist Salafis (often aligned with Muhammadiyah, Persis, or Al-Irsyad) control significant institutional resources yet reject party politics on ideological grounds (Tabroni & Idham, 2023). This divergence creates what may be termed a “resource paradox” within Indonesian Salafism.

The scholarly gap is evident. While literature on Indonesian Islam has richly examined radicalism, moderation, and the role of mainstream organizations, studies explicitly analyzing Salafi potential for party formation remain scarce. Previous research often focuses on Salafi *da'wa* strategies, intra-Islamic polemics, or transnational flows (Wahid, 2014; Rijal, 2025). Few works systematically apply party formation theories—such as Lucardie’s (2000) framework of political

projects, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structures—to Salafi actors in Indonesia. Without such an analysis, the paradox of Salafi influence without politicization remains underexplored.

This study addresses that gap by adopting Lucardie’s triadic framework to assess the feasibility of Salafi transformations into political parties. Specifically, the research seeks to answer three core questions:

1. To what degree do Indonesian Salafi movements have the capacity to form political parties?
2. Which faction—Traditional Salafi or Reformist Salafi—is more likely to initiate or tolerate such a transition?
3. What structural and cultural obstacles would they confront in attempting this shift?

To answer these questions, the study employs a qualitative case study design based on elite interviews and thematic analysis. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with Salafi leaders, policy experts, and Islamic intellectuals in 2018, complemented by secondary literature. This methodological approach allows an in-depth exploration of Salafi actors’ own perceptions of political projects, resources, and opportunities. The choice of interviews reflects recognition that Salafi political orientations are not always explicit in public documents but must be inferred from insider discourse. As Clarke and Braun (2017) argue, thematic analysis of qualitative data is well-suited to uncovering complex ideological positions and organizational logics.

The findings reveal a recurring paradox: factions with clear political ambitions often lack institutional heft, while those with stronger organizational capacity resist party politics on ideological grounds. Traditional Salafis articulate defensive political projects but cannot mobilize sufficient resources. Reformist Salafis, with vast institutional networks, choose instead to exert indirect influence through cadres and cultural authority. At the same time, Indonesia’s political opportunity structures, characterized by stringent party laws, entrenched mainstream Islamic organizations, and public stigma against Salafism, further inhibit party formation.

This Indonesian trajectory stands in contrast with international experiences. In Egypt and Tunisia, Salafi parties emerged only during moments of political rupture; in Kuwait, Salafi blocs adapted to a rentier-state parliamentary system; and in Malaysia, Salafi elements integrated into PAS rather than forming independent parties. Indonesia represents a unique case of democratic containment, where Salafis thrive in civil society but are structurally and culturally prevented from becoming formal political actors (Blanc & Roy, 2024; Rijal, 2025).

This research contributes on two levels. Empirically, it maps how Salafi actors in Indonesia negotiate identity, networks, and media resources in ways that sustain influence without formal politics. Theoretically, it expands Lucardie's framework by showing how digital media (Aidulsyah, 2023; Nursyabani, 2024) and cultural stigma (Tabroni & Idham, 2023) must be incorporated into analyses of party formation. The Indonesian case thus demonstrates that political opportunities are not only institutional but also cultural, shaped by legitimacy struggles within Islam.

The study has limitations worth noting. The primary data derive from seven interviews conducted in 2018, a relatively small sample, and prior to more recent political cycles. While secondary sources help triangulate findings, the study cannot capture the full diversity of Salafi orientations across Indonesia. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital da'wa suggests that Salafi engagement may shift in the future, requiring continuous research (Rijal, 2025).

Despite these limitations, the study remains relevant for multiple audiences. For scholars, it offers a case study integrating Indonesian Salafism into comparative debates on political Islam. For policymakers, it highlights the conditions under which Salafi actors may be constructively engaged rather than excluded. For Muslim communities, it provides a nuanced picture of Salafi identity beyond monolithic stereotypes of radicalism. In all, this research seeks to

illuminate not only the constraints of Salafi party formation but also the broader implications for understanding Islam and democracy in contemporary Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the prospects of Indonesian Salafi movements evolving into political parties. A qualitative approach was chosen because Salafi orientations toward politics are shaped by ideological reasoning, theological interpretation, and cultural negotiation rather than quantifiable indicators. Case studies are particularly well-suited to analyzing complex phenomena that are context-dependent and require in-depth exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study's focus on Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, provides a unique lens to explore how Salafism adapts in pluralistic and competitive political settings.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through seven semi-structured elite interviews conducted between June and July 2018 in Jakarta and Tangerang. It remains relevant because elite perspectives provide structural and strategic insights that are relatively stable over time and continue to shape current institutional practices. Moreover, the interviews capture foundational logics and decision-making patterns that still inform contemporary policies and organizational behavior. The respondents included three leaders of Salafi pesantren and *da'wa* institutions, two policy analysts specializing in Islamic movements, one lecturer of Islamic studies, and one representative of a Muslim civil society organization. All participants were male, ranging in age from 25 to 60, which reflects the gender norms of Salafi networks in Indonesia, where men dominate leadership and public representation. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility while ensuring thematic comparability. Interview protocols covered themes such as views on political

participation and party politics, perceptions of mainstream Islamist parties (PKS, PAN), positions on sharia-related legislation, experiences with digital *da'wa* and resource mobilization, and assessments of the broader political opportunity structure in Indonesia. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. To capture the rapid development of digital Salafism, the interviews were supplemented by secondary data: journal articles, organizational publications, YouTube sermons, Instagram *da'wa* accounts, and online fatwas. These additional materials provided important context, given that much of contemporary Salafi discourse in Indonesia circulates digitally (Aidulsyah, 2023; Nursyabani, 2024)

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the six-step model by Braun and Clarke (2017). First, transcripts and documents were read multiple times to familiarize the researcher with the data. Second, initial codes were generated inductively, capturing recurring themes such as “purity of *da'wa*,” “political pragmatism,” “digital mobilization,” and “stigma.” Third, codes were grouped into broader categories aligned with Lucardie’s (2000) framework: *political project*, *resource mobilization*, and *political opportunity structures*. Fourth, themes were reviewed and refined against the data. Fifth, thematic maps were generated to visualize relationships. Finally, findings were written up with illustrative quotes and references to secondary literature. This analytical strategy was chosen because thematic analysis offers flexibility to combine inductive coding (emerging from the data) with deductive mapping (guided by Lucardie’s framework). It was particularly useful for linking micro-level narratives of informants with macro-level political structures and global Salafi trajectories.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Lucardie's (2000) triadic framework for analyzing the formation of new political parties, which emphasizes three interrelated dimensions: (1) political project, referring to the articulation of a distinctive ideological vision that differentiates a movement from existing parties; (2) resource mobilization, encompassing the organizational, financial, and symbolic capacities required to sustain political activity; and (3) political opportunity structures, denoting the institutional, legal, and cultural contexts that enable or constrain party viability.

While Lucardie's model was originally developed in Western democratic settings, its adaptation to religious movements in Muslim-majority societies requires further conceptual refinement. Recent scholarship highlights how digital mobilization (Aidulsyah, 2023) has become a crucial mechanism for ideological dissemination and community building, particularly among *hijrah* youth who consume religious narratives through online platforms. Similarly, transnational legitimacy networks—linkages with Middle Eastern scholars and funding bodies—shape the symbolic capital of Salafi groups and their ability to claim religious authority beyond national boundaries (Blanc & Roy, 2024). At the same time, stigmatization dynamics within Indonesia's plural Islamic landscape create cultural boundaries that limit Salafi inclusion in mainstream politics (Tabroni & Idham, 2023).

Accordingly, this study extends Lucardie's framework by treating digital media, youth religiosity, and cultural legitimacy as critical sub-dimensions that mediate the interaction between ideology, organization, and structure. This modified analytical lens allows a more nuanced understanding of how Salafi movements negotiate between *da'wa* purity and political pragmatism, revealing the hybrid nature of contemporary Islamic activism in Indonesia's democratic context.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Given the sensitivity of political discussions in religious communities, care was taken to frame questions in neutral language and to respect participants' theological convictions. Interviews were conducted in familiar community spaces (mosques, pesantren offices) to maximize comfort and trust.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and analyzes the empirical findings of the study, applying Lucardie's (2000) three-dimensional framework—political project, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structures—to the Indonesian Salafi movement. The analysis draws upon seven elite interviews and extensive secondary materials, including digital *da'wa* content on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, organizational publications, and recent journal studies (2020–2025).

Findings reveal how digital platforms have become both a resource and a constraint for Salafi activism: they expand symbolic influence among urban *hijrah* youth yet fail to translate into formal political power. Within this context, the study uncovers a persistent paradox—factions with strong online visibility often lack organizational coherence, while those with institutional depth resist politicization on theological grounds.

Political Project of Indonesian Salafis

The political project of Indonesian Salafi movements reveals a profound ambivalence. While the movement as a whole shares an orientation toward religious purification and *da'wa*, its factions diverge significantly in their views on political engagement. Traditional Salafis demonstrate a defensive political agenda. In interviews, leaders emphasized their role in “guarding the ummah” against perceived threats such as pluralist interpretations of Islam, the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights, and the possibility of non-Muslims assuming leadership

positions in Indonesia. These views resonate with global Salafi concerns about *bid'a* (innovation) and religious deviance, but they acquire a distinctly political character in Indonesia's democratic context. For example, informants cited specific laws and constitutional debates (e.g., debates around sharia bylaws in Aceh and West Java) as areas where Salafi voices should be present. Such positions reveal that Traditional Salafis perceive political participation less as a proactive project for social transformation and more as a protective shield against liberal and secular policies. This defensive orientation aligns with broader global patterns. Studies show that in many contexts, Salafi political engagement arises when *da'wa* spaces are threatened (Tabroni & Idham, 2023). In this sense, the "political project" of Traditional Salafis in Indonesia is conditional, reactive, and framed in terms of survival rather than ambition.

Reformist Salafis, by contrast, express consistent rejection of partisan politics. Organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Persis, and Al-Irsyad view politics as divisive and corruptive, undermining the purity of *da'wa*. For them, the political project lies in strengthening education, social services, and cultural capital. Leaders emphasized that transforming into a political party would compromise their credibility as religious and social organizations. Instead, they prefer indirect influence by placing individual cadres within broader political institutions, or by shaping public discourse on morality and governance. This mirrors findings in recent studies of Reformist Salafism that emphasize institution-building and social outreach over electoral politics (Nursyabani, 2024).

A generational shift adds complexity to these orientations. The *hijrah movement*—urban youth seeking personal religious transformation—has increasingly intersected with Salafi teachings (Rijal, 2025). Many *hijrah* youth consume Salafi content online, adopt Salafi dress and practices, and view Salafi preachers as moral guides. While not formally politicized, this demographic creates a potential base for future mobilization. Yet both Traditionalists and

Reformists remain reluctant to translate this momentum into a formal party project.

Globally, similar divergences exist. In Egypt, Hizb al-Nour justified political entry by framing it as a defense of *da'wa* against secularism after the fall of Mubarak (Lacroix, 2016). In Tunisia, Salafi groups only adopted a political project after the Arab Spring created new opportunities (Uysal, 2013). By contrast, in Indonesia, Reformists with the strongest resources resist politicization, while Traditionalists articulate a defensive project without the organizational means to pursue it. This creates a structural paradox at the heart of Salafi politics in Indonesia.

Resource Mobilization

Lucardie's second dimension emphasizes the role of organizational, financial, and symbolic resources in enabling party formation. In Indonesia, resources are unequally distributed across factions, with significant consequences. Traditional Salafis rely on *pesantren* networks, mosques, and informal study groups (*majelis taklim*). These institutions provide moral legitimacy and grassroots connections but lack the formal organizational structure required for national political mobilization. Many *pesantren* are small, fragmented, and locally focused, operating without coordination or centralized leadership. Funding often comes from foreign donors (particularly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) and local contributions. However, respondents admitted that dependence on foreign funding creates vulnerabilities and limits autonomy.

Digital media is increasingly used as a resource. Traditional Salafi radio stations and YouTube channels reach large audiences, while Instagram and TikTok are used to attract younger demographics. Recent studies highlight how Salafis strategically adopt social media aesthetics to appear modern and relatable (Aidulsyah, 2023). Yet while digital platforms amplify influence, they do not automatically translate into electoral capacity. Mobilization requires institutional

coherence, membership databases, and financial capital—resources that Traditionalists lack.

Reformist Salafis command far greater resources. Muhammadiyah operates more than 170 universities, 400 hospitals, and nationwide women's organizations. Persis and Al-Irsyad add further educational institutions and social networks. These resources provide unparalleled organizational depth. Reformist Salafis also benefit from strong legitimacy in middle-class and urban Muslim communities. Importantly, their female organizations provide a potential solution to Indonesia's 30% female representation requirement for political parties.

However, Reformists consciously separate these resources from political ambitions. Leaders argue that universities and hospitals should remain politically neutral to preserve credibility. Their choice reflects a strategic calculation: while they possess the resources to become a formidable political force, they prefer to influence politics indirectly through cultural hegemony and individual cadres. This dynamic creates what scholars describe as a “resource paradox”: those with political ambitions lack resources, and those with resources lack political ambition. Lucardie's framework assumes that political projects and resources converge, but in Indonesia's Salafi case, they diverge. This divergence explains why no Salafi party has yet emerged despite substantial religious infrastructure.

Political Opportunity Structures

The third dimension concerns the external environment: legal rules, cultural legitimacy, and political competition. Legal barriers in Indonesia are formidable. To register a political party, groups must establish branches in all 34 provinces and ensure that 30% of candidates are women. Traditional Salafis lack the organizational spread, while Reformists reject female political participation on theological grounds. Informants described these requirements as “structural deterrents,” effectively blocking new Salafi parties at the institutional level.

Cultural barriers are equally significant. Salafis in Indonesia are often stigmatized as “radical” or “foreign.” Mainstream organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah frequently portray Salafi interpretations as un-Indonesian, fostering suspicion among the public (Rijal, 2025). This stigma reduces the likelihood that a Salafi party would gain broad legitimacy.

Political competition also limits opportunities. Islamist parties such as PKS already occupy the niche of religiously oriented politics. For Salafis, aligning with PKS or PAN is often a more pragmatic strategy than attempting to create a new party. Informants noted that “duplication” of Islamist parties would fragment the vote and reduce effectiveness. This reflects broader findings that niche religious movements struggle in consolidated multiparty systems (Blanc & Roy, 2024).

Recent electoral cycles illustrate these dynamics. The 2019 elections witnessed increased mobilization around religious identity, with large mobilizations such as the 212 Movement. Yet Salafis remained ambivalent, preferring to support candidates indirectly rather than establish their own party. In 2024, similar dynamics persisted: Salafis participated in online campaigns, but no faction attempted to register a Salafi party. This demonstrates how opportunity structures in Indonesia remain hostile to formal Salafi politics, even in periods of heightened identity mobilization.

International Comparisons

Comparisons with other contexts highlight the uniqueness of the Indonesian case and underscore why Salafi movements in Indonesia have remained reluctant or unable to institutionalize as political parties. In Egypt, the emergence of Hizb al-Nour after the 2011 revolution exemplified how Salafis can rapidly enter politics when authoritarian structures collapse. As one of the first Salafi parties globally, Hizb al-Nour initially gained significant electoral support and positioned itself as a guardian of sharia in the new democratic order. However, internal fragmentation between pragmatists and purists soon undermined party cohesion,

and subsequent repression under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi revealed the fragility of Salafi political projects in authoritarian resurgence (Lacroix, 2016; Brown, 2013). This case demonstrates that sudden openings can push Salafis into politics, but sustainability is not guaranteed.

In Tunisia, Salafi groups experienced new freedoms after the Arab Spring. The Al-Rahma Party was legalized and participated in elections, but it remained marginal due to weak organizational structures and persistent public suspicion of Salafi ideology (Wolf, 2017; Uysal, 2013). The Tunisian case highlights how democratization can create openings for Salafi actors, yet without robust resource mobilization and cultural legitimacy, their political relevance remains limited. In Yemen, the Islah Party—a coalition of Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi factions—has long been an important political player. However, the escalation of conflict, the rise of Houthi forces, and foreign interventions severely constrained its effectiveness. Recent scholarship shows that civil conflict environments distort Salafi participation, transforming it into survivalist strategies rather than ideological political projects (Bonney, 2011).

In Kuwait, Salafi blocs operate openly within parliamentary politics. Yet their role remains largely issue-based, focusing on moral legislation and education rather than ideological transformation of the state (Brown & Hamzawy, 2010). The rentier-state environment allows such blocs to thrive, as oil revenues cushion social demands and the monarchy tolerates limited opposition. Salafi politics here adapts to clientelistic structures, illustrating how political economy shapes Islamist strategies.

In Malaysia, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) demonstrates how Salafi influences can blend with local Islamist traditions. Scholars note that PAS incorporates Salafi discourses on *aqida* and sharia, while maintaining compatibility with local Malay nationalism and Sufi elements (Noor, 2019). Importantly, Salafi actors in Malaysia tend to integrate into PAS or broader Islamist parties rather than form distinct Salafi entities. This shows how

hybridization with existing institutions can sustain Salafi influence without necessitating separate party formation. Taken together, these cases emphasize three patterns: (1) Salafi parties often emerge in moments of rupture or authoritarian collapse (Egypt, Tunisia); (2) their success depends heavily on resource mobilization and legitimacy (Tunisia, Yemen); and (3) in rentier or hybrid systems, Salafis prefer to integrate into broader Islamist coalitions (Kuwait, Malaysia).

Indonesia diverges sharply from all of these trajectories. Unlike Egypt or Tunisia, Indonesia has not experienced an authoritarian collapse or revolutionary rupture that could open extraordinary opportunities for Salafi politicization. Unlike Kuwait, Indonesia lacks a rentier-state system that provides financial incentives and space for Salafi blocs. Unlike Malaysia, Indonesia's mainstream Islamic organizations—Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah—remain powerful and resistant to Salafi branding, effectively crowding out Salafi parties. Consequently, Indonesia represents a case of “democratic containment”: while Salafis wield significant influence in civil society, through education, social media, and cultural authority, they are structurally and culturally prevented from transforming into formal political parties (Blanc & Roy, 2024; Tabroni & Idham, 2023; Rijal, 2025).

Theoretical Discussion

Applying Lucardie's framework to Indonesia yields three theoretical insights. First, Salafi factions demonstrate divergent political projects. Traditionalists articulate a defensive agenda consistent with “prophetic parties,” while Reformists act as “prolocutors,” influencing politics indirectly (Lucardie, 2000; Tabroni & Idham, 2023). This divergence challenges assumptions that Islamist actors will converge around formal politics once resources become available.

Second, resource mobilization in the digital age complicates Lucardie's model. Social media and online *da'wa* create new forms of symbolic capital that mobilize followers, shape identities, and sustain ideological movements (Aidulsyah, 2023; Nursyabani, 2024). Yet digital resources are insufficient for electoral viability without organizational structures. This highlights the need to update Lucardie's framework to incorporate digital mobilization as a distinct dimension.

Third, opportunity structures in Indonesia underscore the importance of cultural legitimacy. While Lucardie emphasized institutional and electoral rules, the Indonesian case shows that societal stigma and intra-Islamic contestation can be decisive. The delegitimization of Salafi identity by mainstream actors prevents translation of resources into political success (Rijal, 2025). This expands Lucardie's model by foregrounding how cultural opportunity structures intersect with institutional ones.

Taken together, these insights reveal that Indonesia exemplifies a paradox of Salafi politics: high social influence but low political potential. The very factors that sustain Salafi growth in civil society—religious purity, digital activism, and transnational legitimacy also constrain their ability to transform into a party. For scholars of political Islam, Indonesia demonstrates how Salafism can thrive without politicization, and how democratic systems can contain religious movements through cultural and institutional filters.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small sample size of seven interviews limits the generalizability of the findings. However, as a qualitative case study, the goal was not representativeness but depth and nuance. Second, data collection occurred in 2018, prior to the 2019 and 2024 elections, which witnessed intensified religious mobilization. While secondary sources help update the analysis, future fieldwork is needed to capture the post-2019 dynamics.

Third, gender perspectives are underrepresented, as female voices within Salafi movements were not included. Given that Indonesia's party law requires 30% female representation, this gap warrants future attention.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to assess whether Indonesian Salafi movements possess the capacity to form political parties, which faction is most likely to do so, and what structural and cultural barriers constrain such a transition. The findings indicate that while Salafi actors exert growing social and cultural influence, their capacity to establish a formal political party remains limited. Traditional Salafis articulate the clearest political project, primarily defensive and oriented toward safeguarding *da'wa* spaces, yet they lack the organizational infrastructure, nationwide networks, and financial resources required for party formation. Reformist-oriented Salafis, by contrast, command extensive institutional resources through education, healthcare, and civil society organizations but consistently reject partisan politics on ideological grounds, preferring indirect influence through moral authority and individual cadres. As a result, no Salafi faction currently combines both political intent and mobilizational capacity in a way that would make party formation viable. The study further shows that Indonesia's political opportunity structure strongly discourages Salafi party institutionalization. Legal requirements for party registration, gender quota regulations, and intense competition from established Islamist parties raise the costs of entry, while cultural stigma surrounding Salafi identity undermines broader electoral legitimacy. Digital media and *hijrah* youth networks have expanded Salafi symbolic capital, but these resources remain insufficient to overcome organizational fragmentation and societal distrust. Compared to cases such as Egypt or Tunisia, where Salafi parties emerged during moments of political rupture, Indonesia represents a context of democratic containment, in

which Salafi influence is tolerated and even normalized in civil society but constrained from becoming formal and partisan.

This study has several limitations. It is based on a small number of elite interviews conducted in 2018, which limits the ability to capture regional variation, gendered perspectives, and post-2019 political developments. Nevertheless, the findings illuminate enduring ideological commitments and structural constraints that continue to shape Salafi political behavior. Future research should expand empirical coverage to include provincial contexts, female Salafi actors, and more recent electoral cycles, while also comparing Indonesia with other Muslim-majority democracies in Southeast Asia. Overall, the central takeaway is clear: Indonesian Salafism's influence is real and growing, but under existing ideological orientations and opportunity structures, it is far more likely to remain indirect and cultural than formal and partisan.

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