

## The Islamist Mobilization in 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election

Hasbi Aswar\*

Fauzi Wahyu Zamzami

Alifya Kasih Widjayanti

Ahmad Priyansyah

International Relations Department

Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Sciences

Universitas Islam Indonesia

Corresponding author email: [hasbiaswar@uui.ac.id](mailto:hasbiaswar@uui.ac.id)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20885/iconish.vol1.art24>

**Abstract:** The 2019`s presidential election has become very tense as religious groups, figures and narratives played an important role in this political contest. Both of the candidates, Jokowi and Prabowo, were supported by Islamic groups that compete with each other to gain supporters from Muslims. The role of Islam in Indonesian politics is not new but has existed even longer than Indonesian independence. As a religion, Islam is believed to not separate religious and political life though there are disputes on the degree of integration between the two terms. This article aims to analyze the role of Islamists in the presidential election in 2019 to delegitimize the incumbent candidate, Jokowi – Ma`ruf Amin, and to win Prabowo – Sandi. This article used a qualitative method to explore the strategy of Islamist mobilization in the 2019`s election. In comparison, the data is collected through documents and online sources. This article found that Islamist groups and figures used many strategies to support Prabowo in defeating Jokowi by using campaigns, religious speeches, and statements, and publishing a song as critics of Joko Widodo`s presidential administration.

**Keywords:** GNPf Ulama, Islamist Mobilization, Indonesia, Presidential Elections 2019.

### 1. Introduction

The second term of Joko Widodo`s presidency has faced a significant role of Islamist groups in Indonesian politics. Those groups and figures frequently appeared in public with political narratives that criticized the existing regime on many issues in politics, economy, religion,



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by the Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Sciences, Universitas Islam Indonesia (FPSCS UII). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

etc. The tension increased with the coming presidential election in 2019, where Joko Widodo registered again as the incumbent candidate and put Ma`ruf Amin as his vice president. On the other hand, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiogo Uno became the challengers. Muslim opposition or the Islamist groups who were frustrated with the regime chose to support Prabowo. The active role of Islam in the Indonesian politics of Indonesia is not a novelty in Indonesian politics but even longer than Indonesia itself as a nation. There were many Islamic kingdoms (sultanates) in this region, Nusantara, where Islam became the basis of those states. In the process of Indonesian independence, Muslims played an important role, including after the independence until today under the reformasi/democracy era (Aswar, 2016).

This article will discuss the role of the Islamist groups who were against Joko Widodo and supported Prabowo in the 2019`s presidential election. This article aims to elaborate on how those groups and figures mobilized Indonesian Muslim people to go against Jokowi by delegitimizing his images to critics and showing the failures of his government or administration. On the one hand, to call people to support Prabowo Subianto as the choice of Ulama and Muslim Indonesia.

## **2. Literature Review**

The terms Islamism, radicalism, fundamentalism, Islamic revivalism, and political Islam are often used interchangeably to describe a phenomenon of an Islamic movement with a certain Islamic vision. According to Tibi (2012), the essential thing about Islamism is that this movement is not a religious movement and fights for faith. Still, Islamism is a political movement called religionized politics, which means a process of fighting for a political order believed to originate or radiate from the will of God and not from the sovereignty of the people. According to Tibi, this Islamist movement has an ideology that makes religion (din) and state (dawlah) in a political system based on sharia and has a global scope, namely a global system of power (Tibi, 2012).

Tibi (2012) noted several distinctive characteristics of fundamentalist or Islamist groups. According to Tibi (2021), the most important point is an ambition for remaking the world. The vision of a new world order that the Islamists aspire to is a world order based on the judiciary of Allah (God`s rule) instead of the concept of popular sovereignty. According to Tibi, this concept is only made up by Islamist groups, does not exist in traditional Islamic teachings (salaf), and is not inherited from Islamic teachings. The second point is understanding the global conflict between Islam and Judaism. There is an understanding among Islamists that the new world order built by Islam will threaten or be threatened by the Jews who now rule the world order. The third is the view of democracy, where although Islamists differ in their view of democracy, they have the same final vision, namely an Islamic state. Fourth and finally, understanding jihad as a means to create a world order based on Islam (Tibi, 2012).

## **3. Method**

This article used a qualitative method to analyze the issue of Islamist mobilization in the Indonesian election in 2019. Data for analysis is collected from books & online documents,

including websites and journals. All this data will help identify the political activities of the Islamist group represented by GNPF Ulama (National Movement of Defenders of Ulama`s Edict) to support the president and vice president, Prabowo, and Sandi against Joko Widodo & Ma`ruf Amin in 2019 presidential election. In terms of mobilization strategies, the Islamist group chose peaceful strategies such as making campaigns, speeches, and forums to persuade Indonesian Muslims.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The Islamist mobilization to challenge Joko Widodo`s candidacy in the 2019 general election is rooted in the 2016 Anti-Ahok Movement that created National Advocacy Movement for Ulama`s Edict (GNPF-MUI). This was a movement led by some Muslim figures, including groups such as Islamic Defender Front (FPI), Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Forum Umat Islam – (FUI) (Muslim Forum) that has succeeded in holding big protests and putting Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in Jail in 2017 for religious blasphemy issue. This movement, however, did not stop only at that issue but also continued to problematize president Joko Widodo as considered to be Ahok`s side (Rohmawati, 2021).

Many activities showed how this movement mobilized Muslim figures and people to defeat Joko Widodo in the general election of 2019, including holding an Ulama Congress (Ijtima Ulama), a forum to national gather support from the Islamist groups and figures; contributing to the political campaign of Prabowo and Sandi; and publishing song that tries to decrease another candidate popularity (Jokowi – Ma`ruf). These activities are carried out through the narrative of the anti-Islamist character of Joko Widodo`s regime and the regimes that failed to govern the Indonesian people, except only to create religious and political polarization during his administration era (Fathy, 2019).

Ijtima Ulama Held by Muslim Collision in GNPF – Ulama (previously called GNPF-MUI) was aimed to lead Indonesian Muslim political choice toward the Ijtima Ulama`s decision on presidential candidate heading the 2019`s presidential election. The first Ijtima ulama was held on 26-28 Juli 2018, attended by approximately 600 scholars and national figures from various cities in Indonesia, including some political figures. This forum decided to support Prabowo Subianto as the candidate for president and chose the vice president from Ulama`s representatives, namely Salim Segaf Al-Jufri and Abdul Somad Batubara (UAS); however, Abdul Somad refused it, and Salim Segaf was not chosen by Prabowo (Muharam et al., 2021, p. 309).

The Ijtima Ulama II was held again on 16 September 2018, and this forum agreed that the right candidate for vice president with Prabowo Subianto is Sandi Uno. Sandi is believed to be easily accepted by Indonesian people with his financial ability and social mobility (Muharam et al., 2021, p. 309). In the event, Prabowo signed 17 points of integrity pact, which included the guarantee of Rizieq Shihab`s return, respecting Muslim scholars, and preserving religious harmony in Indonesia. It is signed in front of Political and Muslim main figures such as Zulkifli Hasan, The head of Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), Mustafa Kamal (Secretary-General of Partai Keadilan Sejahtera), Fadli Zon, Vice Head of Gerindra Party, Slamet Ma`arif, Head of Brotherhood of 212 Alumni (PA 212), Muhammad Al Khathath, Secretary-General of Forum

Umat Islam, and Munarman, Secretary-General of FPI. This forum also agreed to establish A Muslim Political Coalition called as Koalisi Keumatan consisted of Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Partai Gerindra), Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) and Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB) (KumparanNEWS, 2018; Tangkas et al., 2021, p. 117).

The result of Ijtima Ulama II was followed by the support from prominent young national preachers, Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH) and Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS). Ustadz Adi Hidayat, during his visit to Prabowo's residence, conveyed several messages for Prabowo when he was elected president. Two of the messages are that the mandate is carried out as well as possible and carried out honestly and that he listens to the community's aspirations so that he can do what is best for the community. UAS conveyed the support of the people from his lecture visits to several Indonesian cities, where UAS often saw his congregation raise their hands by raising two fingers as a form of support for the Prabowo Sandi pair. (Hidayatullah.com, 2019).

On the one hand, a prominent Muslim Preacher, KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) also gave his support by saying "Bismillah saya memilih 02, Pak Prabowo dan Pak Sandi" (In the name of Allah, I choose No.2, Prabowo and Sandi). Aa Gym supports Prabowo – Sandi as he sees them as a firm and clean figure who can handle problems in Indonesia (Gunadha & Sari, 2019).

As a result of the ijtima` 1 & II, Indonesian Muslims' increased support toward Prabowo Subianto. It was shown by the LSI (Lingkar Survei Indonesia) research report that there is an increasing number of Muslim support from the alumni of 212, around 75%. In contrast, the support for Jokowi and Maruf Amin decreased to 16,7 %. Compared to the previous research in August 2018, Prabowo got the support of 61,1 percent and Joko Widodo, 27%. On the other hand, the support for Prabowo decreased in the NU sympathizers compared to Jokowi – Ma`ruf, which got increased support, 26,1 % vs. 55,5% (Warta Ekonomi, 2018).

On 2 December 2018, GNPF Ulama initiated a 212 Reunion that was claimed to be attended by 3-8 million people. It was attended by the political coalition that supported Prabowo – Sandi, such as PKS, PAN, and Gerindra. Prabowo was one of the speakers at the event. Habib Rizieq Shihab, in his recording speech from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, invited Indonesian Muslims, not from the supporter of the religious blasphemer but should be from ijtima ulama and partai koalisi keumatan (ummah coalition party). Even though this event was full of religious nuances, political observers argued that it was more for political motives than religious ones. Looking at the figures and parties were invited, and the calls to support Prabowo Sandi (CNN Indonesia, 2018).

The Islamist figures of GNPF-Ulama were also actively involved in the political campaign of Prabowo – Sandi held in Stadium Gelora Bung Karno on 07 April 2019. It was also attended by some muslim figures (Ulama) such as Habib Syekh Bin Abdulqodir Assegaf, K.H Syuqron Makmun, Habib Hanif, Bahtiar Nasir, and Habib Rizieq Shihab joined online from Saudi Arabia. In this grand campaign, the Islamic rituals such as reciting praise to the prophet Muhammad (Shalawat) and reciting Islamic phrases (zikr) (Amalia, 2019; Kalumata, 2019). In this campaign, Habib Rizieq emphasized that looking at the enthusiasm of Indonesian people toward Prabowo-Sandi both in rural and urban areas indicated a victory for them and cannot be defeated unless it is rigged (Amalia, 2019).

Another strategy to compete with the incumbent, Jokowi – Ma`ruf Amin, is to publish a song to downgrade the popularity of Joko Widodo. The title is 2019Ganti Presiden, sung by various national figures, including prominent Muslim figures, such as Amien Rais (senior Muslim figures), Mardani Ali Sera, and Fadli Dzon, preachers such as Neno Warisman (a Muslim preacher), Derry Sulaiman (Muslim preacher), and Haikal Hassan Baras (Muslim Preacher), Ahmad Dhani and John Sang Alang. This song contains criticisms of Jokowi, such as not keeping his promise to open 10 million jobs and making it easier for foreign workers to enter. Jokowi also is said to give misery to people's lives, starting from the increase in the basic electricity tariff (TDL), the price of food, and rampant corruption. The President also is described through his depiction as a propagator of hatred and lies to the people and imprisoning Indonesian clerics (Ulama) and people (Amelia R, 2018).

The *ijtima ulama* and other involvement of Ulama and Muslim figures, in fact, do not contribute so much to the win of Prabowo Subianto. The April 17, 2019 election showed that Jokowi won with 55.5 percent of the vote or over 85 million votes, whereas Prabowo Subianto received over 68 million votes or 44.5 percent of the vote (Jakarta Post, 2019).

Responding to that, GNPF-Ulama rejected this result and again held *Ijtima ulama III* on 1 May 2019, attending around 1000 Muslim figures, including Prabowo Subianto. This forum agreed that there was structured, systematic, and massive fraud in the 2019 election process that delegitimizes the legal result of the election. It also supported the Prabowo – Sandi team in proposing the case to the court and demanding KPU (General Election Commission) annul the election result and disqualify Joko Widodo – Maruf Amin (KumparanNews, 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

The presidential election in 2019 showed the high contribution of Muslim groups and figures as well as Islamic narratives. It happened between the two candidates, Prabowo - Sandi and Joko Widodo - Ma`ruf Amin. This article focused on discussing the political mobilization strategy of the Islamists on the Prabowo side represented by GNPF Ulama or National Defender of Ulama`s edicts. This article found that GNPF Ulama and Muslim figures used several strategies to win Prabowo Sandi, such as holding *ijtima ulama*, inviting people in religious speech, and creating songs to delegitimize the opponent (Jokowi – Ma`ruf), and involving in political campaigns. The main issue played by pro-Prabowo groups is that the Jokowi regime does not respect Ulama and fails to lead the Indonesian people to a better life. The 2019 general election in Indonesia became a historical event where religion played a more important role in the election process.

## References

- Amalia, Y. (2019). Kampanye Akbar Prabowo-Sandi Ditutup dengan 10 Pesan Habib Rizieq. <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/kampanye-akbar-prabowo-sandi-ditutup-dengan-10-pesan-habib-rizieq.html>

- Amelia R, M. (2018). Lagu #2019GantiPresiden Dirilis, Begini Liriknnya. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4029541/lagu-2019gantipresiden-dirilis-begini-liriknnya>
- Aswar, H. (2016). Respon Nahdlatul Ulama Terhadap Gagasan Islam Radikal di Indonesia. *Thaqafiyat*, 17(1), 2–17.
- CNN Indonesia. (2018). Reuni Aksi 212 Dinilai untuk Kepentingan Politik. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20181121204654-32-348254/reuni-aksi-212-dinilai-untuk-kepentingan-politik>
- Fathy, R. (2019). Gnpf Mui: Strategi Pembimbingan Dan Keberhasilan Gerakan Populis Islam Di Indonesia. *Asketik*, 3(1), 29–45. <https://doi.org/10.30762/ask.v3i1.1180>
- Gunadha, R., & Sari, R. R. N. (2019). H - 4 Pilpres, Aa Gym Resmi Dukung Prabowo - Sandiaga Uno. <https://www.suara.com/news/2019/04/13/154538/h-4-pilpres-aa-gym-resmi-dukung-prabowo-sandiaga-uno>
- Hidayatullah.com. (2019). UAS Dukung Prabowo: Umat dan Ulama Berharap Besar kepada Bapak. <https://hidayatullah.com/berita/nasional/read/2019/04/11/163123/uas-dukung-prabowo-umat-dan-ulama-berharap-besar-kepada-bapak.html>
- Jakarta Post. (2019). It's Over: Jokowi Wins. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/05/21/its-over-jokowi-wins.html>
- Kalumata, R. (2019). Kampanye Akbar Prabowo-Sandi di GBK, Zikir Hingga Selawat Badar Bergema. <https://www.suara.com/news/2019/04/07/091353/kampanye-akbar-prabowo-sandi-di-gbk-zikir-hingga-selawat-badar-bergema>
- KumparanNews. (2019). Hasil Ijtima Ulama III: Laporkan Kecurangan hingga Diskualifikasi 01. <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/hasil-ijtima-ulama-iii-laporkan-kecurangan-hingga-diskualifikasi-01-1qzkDtNT3EG/3>
- KumparanNEWS. (2018). 17 Poin Pakta Integritas Prabowo dan Ijtima Ulama II. <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/17-poin-pakta-integritas-prabowo-dan-ijtima-ulama-ii-1537087117943864211/full>
- Muharam, M. M., Marijan, K., & Kusman, A. P. (2021). Power relation of the 212 Islamic Group and the government in the 2019 presidential election. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 34(3), 305. <https://doi.org/10.20473/MKPV34I32021.305-316>
- Rohmawati, H. (2021). Alumni 212” and Ijtima Ulama: A Critical Study Of The Relationship Between Religion And Politics. *ISTAWA: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam (IJPI)*, 6(2), 176–198. <http://journal.umpo.ac.id/index.php/istawa/article/view/4374/pdf#>
- Tangkas, S. A., Ngenget, I., & Musthofa. (2021). Gerakan Politik GNPF-Ulama dalam Pemilihan Umum Presiden 2019. *Jurnal Indonesia Sosial Sains*. <https://doi.org/10.36418/jiss.v2i1.113>
- Tibi, B. (2012). Islamism and Islam. In *Islamism and Islam*. Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.50-2316>
- Warta Ekonomi. (2018). Hasil Ijtima Ulama II Pendukung Prabowo Naik 75%, NU Masih Jokowi. <https://www.wartaekonomi.co.id/read196848/hasil-ijtima-ulama-ii-pendukung-prabowo-naik-75-nu-masih-jokowi>