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Salafis and Social Media: The Emergence of Islamic Populism in Indonesia

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Abstract

The development of the Salafism movement in Indonesia is supported by the digitalization of their preaching, even though previously this group claimed to be Puritan, rejected modernization and was known to be strict in interpreting the Koran and hadith. This article explains how Salafi preaching is increasingly spreading on social media with an Islamic populism approach based on political economy. Salafists claim that the digitalization of their preaching can be accepted by society, especially young people in the upper middle class, as evidenced by the millions of people following their social media accounts. This research data was collected through in-depth interviews with Salafi figures and managers of their digital da'wah channels, namely Rasyaad TV in Medan and Surau TV in Padang, and observing content from Salafi's social media accounts. The findings of this research show that Islamic populism is developing and is characterized by the Salafist movement adapting to developments in the digital world. They promote their ideology through Instagram, YouTube, and satellite TV channels. Even though in the early days, their da'wah tended to be more conventional and limited to the Salafi Mahjab community, now it is open to anyone and anywhere. In packaging Salafi preaching content, this movement also adapts to local (Minangkabau) culture, so the local community can accept it. Salafis are also starting to show their support for the democratic system by participating in general elections even though they previously strongly rejected the democratic political system in Indonesia.



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These findings could have implications for the new Islamic populism movement with the struggle for digital space as the spearhead of da'wah to strengthen Salafi religious ideology as well as negotiate the political system that applies to Salafi congregations in Indonesia.

Keywords: Islam Populism, Movement, Salafi, Social Media

Abstrak

Perkembangan gerakan salafisme di Indonesia kini didukung dengan digitalisasi dakwah, padahal sebelumnya kelompok ini mengklaim sebagai kelompok puritan, menolak modernisasi dan dikenal ketat dalam menafsirkan Al quran dan hadis. Artikel ini menjelaskan bagaimana dakwah Salafi kian menyebar di media sosial dengan pendekatan populisme Islam dengan basis ekonomi politik. Salafi mengklaim digitalisasi dakwah mereka dapat diterima masyarakat khususnya anak muda pada kelas menengah atas yang dibuktikan dengan pengikut akun media sosial mereka hingga jutaan orang. Data penelitian ini dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh Salafi dan pengelola saluran dakwah digitalnya yakni Rasyaad TV di Medan dan Surau TV di Padang serta mengobservasi konten-konten dari akun media sosial Salafi. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa populisme Islam berkembang ditandai dengan gerakan salafisme yang mengadaptasi perkembangan dunia digital, mereka mempromosikan ideologi mereka melalui kanal instagram, youtube, Radio dan Tv satelit. Meskipun pada masa awal dakwah mereka lebih cenderung konvensional dan terbatas pada kesamaan mahjab Salafi saja, namun saat ini terbuka kepada siapa dan dimana saja. Dalam mengemas konten dakwah Salafi, gerakan ini juga beradaptasi dengan budaya lokal (Minangkabau) agar dapat diterima oleh masyarakat lokal. Salafi juga mulai menunjukkan keberpihakannya pada sistem demokrasi dengan ikut berpartisipasi dalam pemilihan umum, padahal sebelumnya menolak keras sistem politik demokrasi di Indonesia. Temuan ini dapat berimplikasi pada gerakan populisme Islam yang baru dengan perebutan ruang digital sebagai ujung tombak dakwah mengukuhkan ideologi keagamaan Salafi sekaligus bernegosiasi terhadap sistem politik yang berlaku bagi jemaah Salafi di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Gerakan, Media Sosial, Populisme Islam, Salafi

INTRODUCTION

During the old order, the narrative of Islamic populism was confronted by the people and elites, which had been going on since colonialism, marked by the founding of the Islamic Trade Company (SDI) in 1927. This SDI emerged to match or balance the economic domination of Chinese traders the colonial government supported. Islamic populism at that time confronted Muslim traders and the Ummah with the Chinese merchant elite. Populism produces economic jealousy of the people towards a handful of Chinese. At that time, Islamic populism had a financial character and lasted until the fall of the New Order in 1998 (Kansong, 2024).

Recently, Islamic populism has re-emerged in Indonesia after the fall of the New Order. Various phenomena of Islamic populism post-New Order can be observed in the emergence of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI- Front Pembela Islam), the implementation of Sharia Bylaws, the trend of halal certification, and the Islamization of popular culture. In more extreme conditions, Islamic populism can also be observed in radical movements such as Jamaah Islamiyah, Laskar Jihad, and also in the 212 movements in the 2017 Jakarta Special Capital Region (DKI) Regional Head Election (Pilkada)(Hilmy, 2020; Kato, 2017). Islamic populism that emerged was the prohibition of Muslims from electing non-Muslim leaders (Harmakaputra, 2015). Lately, Islamic populism has developed along with information

technology, such as information flow on social media.

Various preaching content, debates on religious interpretations, and even Islamic political aspirations fill social media. For example, in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, where 212 demonstrations took place, mass mobilization and the formation of public opinion could not be separated from social media. Likewise, in the 2019 General Election, there was a sharp division due to the residue of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election conflict (Teak, 2023). There was tension between the Nationalist and Islamic groups during the 2019 Election campaign (Kato, 2017). This tension also occurs in cyberspace, where the public obtains and reproduces information through social media (Kulsum et al., 2021).

However, the conflict that occurs in the digital space is not only between the Nationalist group and the Islamic group. There are often conflicts between the Islamic groups themselves. The most frequent conflict is the social media conflict between the NU and Salafi groups. Differences of opinion about heresy are the main issues that most often trigger conflicts between these two groups. However, recently, Muhammadiyah issued an official statement regarding Salafism, which they consider to be “riding” on the charitable efforts of the Muhammadiyah congregation (AR & Riduwan, 2020). Salafism itself is known as the most strict and puritanical group of Sunni Islam (Ali, 2019). In Indonesia, Salafism is growing among the middle class, so it is not surprising that this group has quite a firm hold on preaching on social media (Muthohirin, 2015).

Although Salafism in Indonesia is increasingly aggressive in spreading its ideology through social media, politically, they claim that their movement is apolitical and obedient to the leader, even though, in reality, this movement is not in an apolitical space. Rejection of the election system and democracy and not being involved in practical politics can be considered resistance to the status quo. The negation of NU as the most prominent Islamic organization in Indonesia can also be suspected as resistance to the narrative of Islam, which is considered close to power. Therefore, although Salafism in Indonesia does not enliven the narrative of political Islam like other Islamic groups, the struggle of Salafism to return to the purity of Islam can be said to be a form of Islamic populism.

Populism itself has an ideological basis (Mudde, 2016). Populism is also said to be a “thin-centered ideology” to distinguish it from “thick-centered ideology” or “full ideology”. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) consider society wholly separated into two homogeneous but antagonistic sides, namely the ‘ordinary people’ versus the corrupt elite, arguing that politics should express the people’s will. As an ideology, populism can be defined as correct, centre, and left. Meanwhile, according to (Arguelles, 2019), populism has been defined as ideology, strategy/organization, political logic, discourse, style, and mobilization.

Salafi itself builds an ideology of purifying Islamic teachings. The discourse to return to the purity of Islam is built and spread through the mobilization of preaching on social media. The base of the congregation from the urban middle class is closely related to the use of social media as a medium of preaching. Islamization in popular culture rises along

with Islamic populism. Television shows, films, music, and lifestyles experience Islamization to respond to the needs of the new Islamic middle class (Heryanto, 2014). Islamization of popular culture shows the unification of capitalism with religious devotion. Research (Rakhmani, 2019) focuses on mainstreaming Islam in the media industry after the New Order. Currently, cyberspace is also enlivened by the study of the preaching of Salafi ustadz. A few Salafi ustadz are popular on social media like YouTube and Instagram, such as Ustad Khaled Basalamah's Instagram account, which has 3.1 million followers. Meanwhile, Ustad Syafiq Riza Basalamah has 2 million followers, and Ustad Muhammad Nuzul Dzikri has 1.4 million followers.

If previously Islamic mediatization was mostly conveyed through religious soap operas on conventional television, currently the mainstreaming of Salafi Islam focuses on social media, not only for popular Salafi ustadz but also several Salafi communities in Indonesia, such as The Stranger Al Ghurobah, which has 116 thousand Instagram followers. The most prominent mosque is the Nurul Iman Mosque in Block M Jakarta, which has 189 thousand Instagram followers. Meanwhile, the Pogung Dalangan Mosque, located very close to the UGM campus, has 54.1 thousand Instagram followers. (Irwansyah & Muary, 2024).

Therefore, this study sees the presence of Salafism on social media as a form of Islamic populism. Islamic populism in the context of this study is based on political economy, as explained by (Hadiz, 2016) Islamic populism from historical, cultural, and political-economic aspects. He sees Islamic populism from the perspective of essentialism and security, which have dominated the study of Islamic populism so far. The view that has so far seen Islam as incompatible with democratic and Western culture. According to the researcher, although Salafism claims its movement is apolitical and obedient to the ruler, it still rejects the election system and democracy.

Unfortunately, due to their weak material base, their aspirations to carry out an Islamic political system have never been achieved. Moreover, the state's repression of Islamic groups is getting stronger, making Salafism even more solidifying the power of the elite group. These characteristics are reflected in Salafis' discourse on social media. Therefore, this study looks at Islamic populism in the noisy discourse of Puritan Islam on social media driven by Salafi groups, including their negotiations in the context of local politics and culture in Indonesia.

RESEARCH SETTINGS

In particular, this article uses the perspective of Islamic populism. In this view (Hadith, 2016) sees Islamic politics after the New Order as part of the history of class resistance. Using the perspective of Islamic populism with a political-economic basis in viewing the Salafism movement and social media, according to researchers, is a rarely conducted study. Salafism in Indonesia, although claiming its teachings to obey leaders and not be involved in practical politics (apolitical), still has political aspirations. In the context of Salafis and social media, the attitude of rejection of democracy and practical politics can be seen from

the reflection of resistance to a social system that is considered corrupt and un-Islamic. The negation of other groups shown in social media content also explains the language of Islamic populism used by Salafi adherents.

Social media content containing criticism of heretics and groups considered not by pure Islamic teachings can be articulated as the language of Islamic populism. This study will address how Salafi groups develop Islamic populism through social media. This study took two research locations: Medan City and Padang City. Both cities have Salafi da'wah channels through social media, especially YouTube and cable TV. Rasyaad TV in Medan City and Surat TV in Padang City. Data collection techniques were used by conducting in-depth interviews with Salafi figures, their congregations in Jakarta and Medan, and the program managers of each satellite TV. In addition, they also conduct in-depth observations and analyze the content they produce. Both areas also have somewhat developed Salafi congregation followers, including on their respective social media, although there are differences in each content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digitalization of Da'wah and Adaptation to Local Culture

Salafi is one of the schools of thought in Sunni Islam known to be the most strict in interpreting the Quran and Hadith. Salafism is a modern phenomenon, but its followers use traditional *Manhaj* (methodology) to reveal the meaning of the Quran and Hadith (Duderija, 2011). Salafi comes from Arabic, which refers to the first generation of Islam, Salaf al Salih. (Muary & Atika, 2023) (Muthohirin, 2016). However, this does not prevent this group from adopting information technology. Compared to other Islamic groups (especially NU and Muhammadiyah), Salafi is quite active in digital da'wah, primarily through various social media channels. Salafi is also well-known for its routine study activities, usually held in mosques, prayer rooms, or congregation houses.

Routine studies are usually held weekly and have themes related to the book of interpretation or everyday life. Schedules are typically published through social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and other channels. Interestingly, these routine study activities are broadcast live or made as content.

Table 1. Instagram accounts managed by Jemaah Salafi

Number	Instagram Account Name	Category	Number of Followers
1	Jakarta Mengaji	Assembly	373 Thousand
2	Masjid Nurul Iman	Mosque	189 Thousand
3	Masjid Pogung Dalangan	Mosque	54.1 Thousand
4	Masjid Pogung Raya	Mosque	15.5 Thousand
5	Ypiaorid	Foundation	21.1 Thousand
6	The Stranger Al Ghurobah	Community	116 Thousand

7	Khalidbasalamahofficial	Ustad	3.1 Million
8	Syafiq Riza Basalamah	Ustad	2 million
9	Muhammad Nuzul Dzikri	Ustad	1.4 Million
10	Raehanul Bahraen	Ustad	629 Thousand
11	Ridwan Hamidi	Ustad	11.1 Thousand
12	jogja.mengaji	Community	39.8 Thousand
13	Jogjakajian	Community	54.3 Thousand
14	Radio rodja	Media	151 Thousand
15	Rodja TV	Media	579 Thousand
16	Infokajianmedan	Community	12.7 thousand
17	Medanmengaji	Community	37 Thousand
18	Firanda_andirja_official	Ustad	873 Thousand

Through the Instagram channel, Salafi congregations share da'wah from weekly studies. Many Salafi prayer rooms and mosques have Instagram accounts to broadcast da'wah. Likewise, the Ustadz are quite active in creating da'wah content. The da'wah that is published can be in the form of live broadcasts or clips of sermons edited into Instagram content. One of the Salafi institutions that initiated da'wah through mass media is Radio Rodja(Atabik, 2013).

Initially, Radio Rodja was established to clarify accusations against one of the mosques managed by the Salafi congregation. Over time, Radio Rodja broadcasts da'wah regularly and has many listeners. Radio Rodja has a satellite television channel, Rodja TV, and various social media channels. Jakarta Mengaji is also one of the institutions that has succeeded in managing social media. Jakarta Mengaji's offline da'wah is carried out at the Blok M Mosque in Jakarta and is continuously broadcast live via the social media channels Instagram and YouTube. Jakarta Mengaji selects Salafi stands, who are pretty prominent and come from various regions in Indonesia.

Table 2. Several names of YouTube accounts managed by Jemaah Salafi

Number	Account Name	Category	Number of Followers
1	Masjid Nurul Iman Block M Square	Mosque	258 Thousand
2	Jakarta Mengaji	Community	379 Thousand
3	The Strangers Al Ghuroba	Community	114 Thousand
4	Khalid Basalamah Official	Ustad	3.4 Million
5	Safiq Riza Basalamah Official	Ustad	2.2 Million
6	Muhammad Nuzul Dzikri	Ustad	1.9 Thousand
7	Firanda Andirja Official	Ustad	915 Thousand

Research conducted previously by (Chaplin, 2018) shows that the Salafi congregation, some of whom come from young people, students and the middle class, makes the Salafi movement very adaptive to the development of information technology. From his research, Chaplin found a movement of young Salafi people in Yogyakarta who formed a digital media called Yufid TV. In addition to being a preaching platform, Yufid TV has developed as an online shopping platform. It means that in the view of the Salafi congregation, there is no dichotomy between the purity of Islam and the adaptation of information technology, which is the biological child of modernity.

In Medan City itself, the Salafi media that is quite well-known is Rasyaad TV. Initially, Rasyaad TV was a satellite TV that broadcasts Salafi-style da'wah content (TV, 2024). However, Rasyaad TV faced difficulties paying satellite TV fees worth twenty-five million rupiahs monthly along the way. To overcome this, Rasyaad TV switched to live streaming on YouTube. Salafi preaching is held in the Mosque and then broadcast via YouTube. One of the mosques routinely broadcast on the Rasyaad TV channel is the Al Muhawwidin Mosque, Medan.

Rasyaad TV has several categories of content on its YouTube channel. Da'wah content includes famous ustadz, special content for women, educational content, and Islam for children. In addition, the content with a natural background was created for the month of Ramadan. These contents are presented to reach a wider audience.



Figure 1. Rasyaad TV's preaching content, 2024

In general, Rasyaad TV contains various Islamic preaching content, including interpretation of the Quran, Hadith, and creed and preaching related to morals from an Islamic perspective. This sermon is usually associated with people's daily lives, motivation and inspiration about worship and creed, religious education for children, discussions, and questions and answers related to the preaching theme. The same pattern is found in YouTube content on several other Salafi preaching media, like Rodja TV, which started preaching on social media earlier.

The content is about faith, worship procedures, interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, and preaching with the theme of the people's daily life. If observed further, the most watched content on the Rodja TV Youtube channel usually depends on the name of the ustad who provides the preaching. Names include Ustad Abu Yahya Badru Salam, the late Ustad Yazid bin Abdul Qadir Jawaz, and Ustad Syaifiq Riza Basalamah. Another Salafi media outlet that is quite active on YouTube is Surau TV. This media comes from Padang, West Sumatra, where Surau means mosque or prayer room.

Interestingly, although Salafi is known for its puritanical teachings, we can see the strong Minang culture in the content of Surau TV. Some content uses the Minang language, not only in the communication of da'wah but also in the content thumbnails. For example, there is content with the category "Religious Consultation". The themes in this Religious Consultation content also use the Minang language, such as "Jan Jadi Laki Palakek Tangan", "Sasuai Tuntuan Indak Tontonan", "Maajkan Anak Caro Malindungi Diri". By adapting local culture (Minang), this strategy is carried out to attract viewers among the Minang community. Communicating using the local language makes Salafi da'wah on Surau TV more relevant and manageable for regional viewers.



Figure 2. Religious Consultation Content on Surau TV Youtube Channel, 2024

2013 was the beginning of Surau TV, which previously operated as Radio Ray, a private radio station aimed at young people with various music genres. The owner of Radio Ray donated his radio to the Radio Ray FM Foundation, now known as DEI FM. After that, the Ray FM team decided to develop da'wah through media. Starting by trying outstreaming Youtube, due to the high interest of viewers, we managed to broadcast 24 hours on the Palapa satellite beginning August 17, 2015.

“The name Surau TV is taken from the Minang term “babaliak ka surau”, which means returning to the surau or mosque. Our mission is to preach and teach religion to the community, especially when many people leave the mosque. We want to provide them access to religious knowledge, even though they cannot go to the mosque.” (Interview with Iwan Rusda, General Manager of Surau TV, July 11, 2024).

Surau TV was initially established without profit because of an agreement with donors. Previously, Surau TV tried to collect donations from the public, but the business was unprofitable. Surau TV's operational needs were unmet, and the public preferred receiving 100% content without ads. Advertisements and brands on television were considered annoying. Until now, Surau TV has not used AdSense on YouTube, although ads still appear. The decision not to use AdSense was taken because the activation meant that YouTube had the right to place advertisements that were sometimes irrelevant to Islamic content. Every month, Surau TV requires operational funds of 222 million rupiah. Because it is considered successful as a Salafi da'wah channel in Padang and its da'wah content is also accepted by the public, many regular donors continue to donate so that Surau TV's operations continue to run.

From several Salafi media da'wah channels, ranging from Instagram and YouTube channels to satellite TV, it can be analyzed that the development of Islamization, especially Salafi, has become a popular culture in Indonesia that aligns with developments in the digital world. Salafi groups use digital media to communicate, promote and emphasize their ideology to the public (Sorgenfrei, 2021) by digitalizing preaching and building communication with a localistic (cultural) approach to be accepted by society.

Salafi Collective Identity in the Framework of Islamic Populism

As a community, Salafis tend to build a collective identity to distinguish their group from other Islamic groups. This identity is built by constructing self-image, ideology, and lifestyle. This construction makes Salafis look different from other Islamic groups such as NU, Muhammadiyah, Jamaah Tabligh and Ikhwanul Muslimin. As a Puritan group, Salafis tend to want to appear as the group with the most correct and pure Islam (Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021).

Salafi is a Sunni Islamic school that strictly interprets the Quran and Hadith. Salafism

wants to restore the purity of Islam to the first three generations of Islam, namely during the time of the Companions, Tabi'in, and Tabi'ut Tabi'in. Historically, Salafi was born from the response of the Hadith Scholars to the Mu'tazilah group, which at that time had significant influence in the Ma'mum Caliphate of the Abbasid Dynasty. As the leader of the Hadith Scholars at that time, Ibn Hanbal had to be punished by the ruler due to his rejection. In its further development, Salafi grew as a response to Western colonialism in the Islamic world, as well as modernism, which was considered inappropriate to the conditions of early Islam during the first three generations (Salaf al Salih).

Salafis reject Sufi, Mu'tazilah, Shia, and Khawarij thought, as well as the ideas of philosophers who are considered to be influenced by Western culture, which is not by Islamic teachings. Through doctrine and the guardian of the universe, they distinguish between groups that contradict Islamic teachings and those that deny Islam. The implications of this doctrine in extreme conditions are seen in the tragedy of the siege of the Grand Mosque by the Juhayman group in the 1970s. Contemporary Islamic movements have failed to implement the principles of classical Wahhabism, which emphasizes hostility to infidels and polytheists. Alkandari & Alburaas (2023) believe that jihad must be carried out to achieve victory in the name of Islam.

There are three steps towards minhāj al-Nasr (the path of victory): first, spreading the truth while being hostile to shirk; second, migrating to a safer place due to the threat of persecution; and third, fighting against the infidels to establish an Islamic state. He believed that even though the number of those ready to fight was small, Allah would surely grant them victory. These people are called Al Ghurabah (Bunzel, 2023).

In Jakarta, a community is called Al Ghuroba (Muttaqien et al., nd). This community was formed from Salafi congregations who were former band members. Its followers were 54 young people who previously enjoyed a hedonistic lifestyle but claimed to have experienced hijrah. They left music, changed how they dressed (men wore pants above the ankles, women wore niqabs), and turned to the teachings of Islam. (Zahara et al., 2020). When writing this research, I found that this community has 116 thousand followers on Instagram and 64 thousand on YouTube.

The Al Ghurobah group, which prefers to be called the Majelis Taklim or Islamic study group, began to gain popularity between 2014 and 2017 by successfully recruiting several prominent indie and underground rock musicians into Salafism while calling for a ban on music. Among the musicians involved were Alfi Chaniago (former member of Upstairs), Reda Samudra (former member of Speaker First), Andri Lemes (former member of Rumah Sakit), Fani (former member of Innocenti), the vocalist of the former band Purgatory, and Madmor. Al Ghurobah is known for its expertise in utilizing social media and visual communication design to spread Salafi da'wah to the younger generation. The influence of this hijrah group also extended to the arts and music community in Bandung, leading to the formation of Sahabat's footprint in the city.

Al Ghuroba, in the Salafi context, refers to the concept of “the stranger” or “the outcast.” The term describes individuals or groups who feel alienated from the surrounding society because of their religious beliefs and practices. In many Islamic traditions, especially the Salafis, the term implies that the righteous are often considered different or not by standard social norms. Thus, Al Ghurobah reflects the spirit of struggle and dedication to preserving the authenticity of religious teachings amidst the challenges of the modern world (Abu Rumman, 2021).

Al Ghuroba became Salafi’s identity, especially in the context of facing the modern world. The negative public view of Salafi, which tends to see this group as radical, harsh in interpreting Islam, or considered as other, is a risk as Al Ghurobah. Salafi congregations believe that even though they are considered different, they are the people who are on the path of truth. One of the sources with the initials D in this study is a Salafi congregation who used to be a member of a punk music band and has a collection of tattoos on his body. He never received a formal Islamic education. He first became acquainted with Salafi studies through the alum community of Al Azhar School, Jakarta. Together with his wife, he routinely attended Salafi studies and decided to undergo the hijrah process. After being involved in Salafi studies, he changed his appearance by wearing pants above his ankles and growing a beard. This change triggered various responses from his family and friends. However, he convinced them that the hijrah he underwent was the best choice in his life.

Currently, D works as an employee in a private construction company. He believes that his work as a private employee does not conflict with Islamic values because it is not related to usury or taxes, which are often opposed in the Salafi Manhaj. Although in his workplace, there is free interaction between men and women, as well as Muslims and non-Muslims, D remains in his position. Interestingly, his boss is a non-Muslim, but D still shows respect and carries out his duties well, so he does not face problems in daily interactions.

Meanwhile, another source with the initials S is a Salafi congregation who works as a civil servant lecturer at Medan Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at a state university. Just like D, he has never received a formal Islamic education. S got to know Salafi through regular religious studies ten years ago. As a civil servant, S faces dual identities: as an academic bound by bureaucracy and as a Salafi congregation. Although these two identities often conflict, he tries to find a middle ground between religious beliefs and modern reality. For example, a civil servant receives a salary through a conventional bank, which is considered to generate usury. To overcome this, S sets aside interest from his savings to be given as charity to cleanse his wealth. Consistent with Salafi teachings, S abandons customs considered heretical (*bid’ah*).

S himself did not perform the flour-flour ritual during his children’s weddings. He also did not participate in Maulid activities, even though he was invited by his surroundings, and refused to donate to activities considered heretical. He also forbade his wife from attending reunions and social gatherings with her friends because, according to him, it would only

lead to things that were contrary to Islamic values. Maintaining Islamic values that are considered valid (returning to the early generation of Islam) amid modern life requires various strategies. Being a civil servant and a Salafi congregation (which generally forbids taxes) is a contradiction with D, who works as a private employee where he must interact with the opposite sex, something that has permanently been banned in Salafi teachings. Contradictions are unavoidable because the Salafi imagination wants to restore the context of the early Islamic era amid an entirely different modern life (Hasan, 2019).

S and D, despite never experiencing the early generation of Islam and never even having formal Islamic education, still maintain what they believe to be pure Islam. It is what is called the Al Ghuroba identity. However, the Al Ghuroba identity cannot be understood as a complete resistance to the modern world, considering that Salafis also consume culture produced by the contemporary world. The former Noah band member, Uki Kautsar, also experienced maintaining pure Islamic values in modern life. Uki is a member of the Noah band, which is quite famous in Indonesia and neighbouring countries.

However, in 2019, Uki decided to migrate and leave the band Noah. His decision began with the Umrah pilgrimage he performed with his wife. At that time, he met a somewhat famous Salafi cleric, Ustad Syaifiq Riza Basalamah. From there, Uki then followed Salafi's studies even though he was still active as a band member. After convincing himself, Uki decided to migrate completely and leave as a band member. He felt that his job as a band member was not by Islamic values because the music was forbidden, and the places where he played music sold alcoholic beverages, which Islam forbade.

Even though he has left the band, Uki has not entirely left the entertainment world. His current business is still related to his popularity as an artist. He manages a clothing, culinary, umrah travel and content creator business. In addition to promoting his own company, Uki is a content creator promoting other people's businesses. Uki actively shares promotional content on his Instagram account for products and services. What is felt by some individuals who decide to convert to Salafi is experiencing disorientation in life or being involved in actions that are prohibited by religion. In addition, dissatisfaction with existing Islamic groups because of their perception that these kinds of Islamic practices are not pure and less authoritative causes some individuals to leave and join Salafism, which is considered more authoritative and pure (Rosadi, 2022).

To understand this phenomenon, the researcher refers to Ariel Heryanto's view on the rise of Islam after the New Order, especially in the consumption of popular culture. Heryanto (2014) describes the phenomenon of hijrah among young people after the New Order. In this study, the phenomenon of hijrah and the strengthening of Islamic identity among the middle class cannot be separated from the social structure after the New Order. The long repression of Islam during the New Order made Islamic politics move into the underground preaching space. Industrialization and urbanization gave birth to a new middle group of Muslims centred in urban areas. This condition gave birth to Islamization, which

was intertwined with capitalism. On the one hand, a more pious Islamic identity emerged, but it could not be separated from the wave of modernism.

A study (Sunesti & Azca, 2018) about the experiences of young Salafis who decide to wear the niqab is essential to see. So far, Salafi studies have focused more on male congregations, and few have looked at the perspective of female congregations. This study examines how young Salafis who wear the niqab respond to their social environment. Given that Salafi teachings encourage women not to be active in public spaces, prohibit listening to music, limit television watching activities, and prohibit dating. This study found that young people, like other Salafi congregations, come from secular environments and have never received formal Islamic education. They learned about Salafi studies from friends on campus.

After attending the study, these young people were moved to migrate and wear the niqab. Maintaining the teachings of the Salaf al Salih during modern life is not easy, but these young people continue to negotiate. Borrowing Macleod's theory of accommodating protests, the negotiations of these millennial niqabs emphasize their persistent struggle to accept the Salafi method on the one hand and to find alternatives for their youth activities on the other. From the informants' experiences, it can be seen how new Islamic groups emerged from the middle class. They never received formal Islamic education. Instead, they were born on secular campuses and were active in urban areas. Previously, they consumed products and services resulting from modern culture. Although they claimed to have undergone migration and wanted to adhere to pure Islamic values, they still could not avoid the wave of modernity. They played a role in consuming and reproducing modern culture (Rijal & Masturi, nd).

Salafi and Government Relations

On the other hand, (Irwansyah & Muary, 2024) It was found that although Salafis claim to be apolitical, their followers as citizens still have political aspirations. A prominent Salafi cleric in Medan, Ustad Syahrul, admitted that when faced with a situation where there is a choice of candidates for public office between Islam and non-Islam, then the people must choose Islam. In this condition, although Salafis do not recognize the democratic system (Ali, 2019), to prevent leadership from non-Muslims, the people must participate in the election. Indeed, the Salafi political stance has experienced fragmentation, even though, on the surface, they always claim to be apolitical and obedient to the government. In the 2024 Election, Ustad Syafiq Riza Basalamah created content on his social media when he went to the Polling Station (TPS- Tempat Pemungutan Suara) to vote (Official Syafiq Riza Basalamah, 2024). This attitude is surprising, considering that Salafis are known to be anti-democratic and anti-election systems.



Figure 3: Ustadz Syafiq Riza Basalamah is exercising his right to vote in the 2024 Election, Source IG @syafikrizabasalamah_official

Several studies show that Salafis do indeed refuse to participate in practical politics. Research (Wahid, 2014) describes the Salafis as putting forward the concept of ahl al-hall wa al-aqd' (those who untie and bind), which refers to individuals who are knowledgeable in the fields of religion, defence, politics, economics, and social and cultural. Only those who have this ability are considered capable of electing a ruler. If a ruler abuses his authority,

then the ahl al-hall wa al-aqd' are the ones who have the authority to replace him. In Salafist thought, the principle of one person, one vote does not apply as in democracy; only specific individuals, namely the ahl al-hall wa al-aqd', are allowed to elect the leaders of society (Mudde, 2017).

From the various Salafi preachings related to the government, there is indeed a tendency to build an image that the Salafi congregation will always obey the government. However, the Salafi ideology inevitably influences hardline Islamic groups such as Laskar Jihad and Jemaah Islamiyah. According to (Hadiz, 2016), The radicalism of Islamic groups is not free from the hands of the authorities. Even if the Salafis are currently moving more towards the middle (moderate), it is most likely to avoid state repression against them. Especially considering the somewhat harsh repression experienced by the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI- Front Pembela Islam) as part of reasonably influential Islamic politics.

Afterwards, the Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY), invited Ustad Syafiq Riza Basalamah to preach at his residence. It is a new step for the Salafi ustad, who seems unable to access the country's rulers so far. So far, NU, as the most prominent Islamic organization in Indonesia, has played a central role in the political constellation. However, AHY's strategy is not surprising, considering that previously, SBY also had a reasonably close relationship and tended to accommodate Islamic politics during his administration. In addition to politics, Salafi educational madrasas in Indonesia also received governmental operational permits and assistance (Saparudin, 2017).

The question that arises from the narrative of obedience to the government is, can Salafi be called part of Islamic populism like other Islamic politics? It cannot be denied that Saudi Arabia greatly influences apolitical Salafi in Indonesia. The great Salafi scholars there have experienced depoliticization carried out by the Kingdom. Scholars who dare to criticize and make political manoeuvres (such as the Sahwa group) will be repressed by the Kingdom (Jahroni, 2020). The narrative of the obligation to obey the government developed in Indonesia along with the increasing number of Indonesian Islamic activists who studied in Saudi Arabia. The internalization process through education plays a role in strengthening the Saudi Arabian political narrative in Indonesia. Salafi congregations in Indonesia sympathize and imagine Saudi Arabia as an ideal Islamic state. It can be seen from Salafi's social media content.

Answering the previous question, Salafis can still be considered part of Islamic populism because even though the narrative of obedience to the government is constructed in such a way, their teachings show an oppositional attitude towards the status quo. Research (Irwansyah & Muary, 2024) shows Salafi's teachings to refuse to salute the flag, attend ceremonies and celebrate Indonesian Independence Day. However, they continue to negotiate this according to the context of the social environment so as not to cause chaos and accusations of radicalism. In addition, the attitude of refusing to be involved in practical politics is still clearly visible. The Salafi Jamaah sees the current political system as not by Islamic values and tends to be

corrupt, so it must be avoided.

Another characteristic of Islamic populism is the collective construction of the community that opposes the status quo. It can be seen from the emergence of Islamic businesses established by Salafi congregations. The emergence of Islamic businesses is not seen as a trend but as an effort to fight the economic system that is considered “infidel”, so a more Islamic alternative system is needed. There is a tendency among Salafi congregations to initiate bazaar activities based on Muslim entrepreneurs. Various Salafi communities, especially those centred in urban areas, often hold grand tabligh events and bazaars. It is an opportunity for congregations who have products to sell their products. As explained earlier, a business community has also emerged among Salafi congregations.

Although the efforts they pioneered were not always large-scale, from here, it can be seen that the Salafi movement in Indonesia, although claiming its movement as apolitical, still contains political aspirations. This political aspiration is a response to disappointment in the political system, which does not follow Islamic values. The struggle of the Salafi congregation is not always by engaging in practical politics like the Muslim Brotherhood, HTI, or FPI; they fight through digital preaching.

The anxiety about the economic and political system is shifted to the private sphere. Religion becomes a cure for disappointment and anxiety about the social system. It is another characteristic of Islamic populism. The Salafi congregation’s view of the rottenness of the political and economic system is fought against by forbidding politics. It is through politics that public policy can be fought. The long repression of Islamic politics has made this movement learn to be more careful so that it chooses to walk in the middle (moderation). Social problems are then brought into the private sphere as part of the trials given by God.

CONCLUSION

In its development, the Salafi movement on social media can be analyzed as a form of Islamic populism. In simple terms, Islamic populism sees Islamic political movements with the following characteristics: first, it is a consolidation of various social classes and different interests; second, constructing its group as an ummah and other groups as “infidels”; third, its movement is opposed to the status quo; fourth, although opposed to the status quo, because it does not have an economic resource base, this group ends up confirming the status quo itself. Various results of literature and field studies in this study show that Salafis grow in urban centres consisting of heterogeneous communities in terms of social class. However, they imagine their group as a unified identity of the Islamic community that has aspirations to confirm Islamic values that are applied in the system’s structure and values in society to strengthen the community’s identity. Other groups that are considered different from them are needed. In the Salafi context, this other group is another Muslim community that is considered “less Islamic” and the “infidel” group. Like other Islamic politics, Salafi developed to respond to social systems that were considered un-Islamic. These social systems

are mainly in the economic and political aspects. For this reason, this movement, although claiming to reject using violent methods in upholding Islamic values, continues to voice its aspirations through preaching and education. Because the context of Salafi development occurs mainly in urban areas, it is unsurprising that its congregation is a middle-class group with higher technological literacy. So, the preaching and education that they develop are centred on social media. Various Salafi preaching content shows their attitude of rejecting democracy, elections, taxes and the established economic and political system (status quo). This rejection can be read as an oppositional attitude towards the status quo. However, this movement, like other Islamic politics, confirms the status quo because it does not control economic resources. It can be seen from the strengthening of the Salafi cleric network in the government and business patterns that follow the logic and system of capitalism that they have always considered haram.

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