

Islamic Scholars in Local Political Dynamics: An Analysis of Islamic Scholars' Involvement in 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election

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Abstract: Islamic scholars (*ulama*) have played important roles in Islamic history both as individuals and groups. In Indonesia, Islamic scholars held a central role at the time of colonialism and during the revolutionary of Indonesia. At the time of colonialism, Islamic scholars were in the front row to fight the colonization. Similarly, during the revolutionary of Indonesia, the Islamic scholars participated in defending Indonesia's Independence. Islamic scholars have also involved in various aspects of of the nation from Indonesia's Independence Day up to the present reformation era, which include their involvement in politics, especially in 2018 North Sumatra Governor election. Their participation as campaigners in representing Islamic organizations, such as Nahdathul 'Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Al-washliyah is quitesignificant to show their supports in 2018 North Sumatra Governor election. This research aims to analyse the involvement of Islamic scholars in 2018 North Sumatra Governor electionfrom Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) as well as other Islamic organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and Al-washliyah. This study applied qualitative research methodology using in-depth face-to-face interview as the instrument of data collection. The findings of data analysis reveal that the Islamic scholars from MUI and other Islamic organizations actively involved themselves as the campaigners in 2018 North Sumatra Governor election. However, their involvement varied from firm and formal to indirect and informal. Furthermore, it is also found that some of their involvement is in line with the political attitudes of their organizations while some others opposed. This study concludes that Islamic scholars still play crucial role in political world in Indonesia, particularly in 2018 North Sumatra governor election.

1 INTRODUCTION

Islamic scholars (*ulama*) have played important roles in Islamic history both as individuals and as groups (Fogg, 2013; Katimin, 2017; Liddle, 1996; Van der Kroef, 1958). Their roles can be observed from their involvement in various aspects, such as; education, Islamic da'wah, agents of change, politics, and etc (Katimin, 2010; Katimin, 2017). Some famous Islamic scholars such as; Buya Hamka and K.H. Abdul Wahab Hasbullah, are considered as individuals who concern about the educational world in Indonesia. Similarly, Zainal Abidin and Ahmad Natsir are the Islamic scholars who directly involved in politics. Some other Islamic scholars are also noted as Indonesian national heroes such as; Pangeran Diponegoro, Haji Piobang, Haji Miskin, Cik Ditiro, and Cut Nyak Dien. The list is still going on as many others are not only concerned about

religion, but also participated in defending Indonesian Independence.

The central position of Islamic scholars was appreciated by the society. They are very respectable with very little (if not none) negative view exists due to their multiple roles in Indonesia. The multiple roles played by the Islamic scholars are continuing up to the present day, and it emerges the view that Islam is not only as a system of religion or belief, but also as a system of society. In other words, Islam is the way of life for its worshippers.

However, in line with the issues of religious integration after the abolition of *khilafah* system, there are currently diverse views on the role and function of the Islamic scholars among Islamic societies. Related to this, there are two views in the society: First, the opinion which assumes that Islamic scholars are individual figures who need to take care of religious matters only and their involvements in non-spiritual matters are considered

inaccurate. Second, the opinion assuming that Islamic scholars are the heir of prophets who should not only take care of the religious matters, but also play an active part in political matters as what had been practiced by the prophets and their companions.

The different views on the roles and functions of Islamic scholars in society also exist among societies in Medan, North Sumatra. Related to those different opinions, this study aims to analyze the involvement of Islamic scholars in 2018 North Sumatra Governor election. This study is important because it identifies the views of society related to the involvement of Islamic scholars in politics. This study can also provide educational value in the form of information about the roles of Islamic scholars in Islamic history. Moreover, considering this year (2018) and next year (2019) are political years in which the general election of Indonesia's president will be held, this study is served as a consideration to all parties involving Islamic scholars in the context of nationality and society.

2 THE ROLES OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARS IN NORTH SUMATRA GOVERNOR ELECTION

As other provinces in Indonesia, North Sumatra also held the Indonesian Local Election (Pilkada) in 2018. There are two governor candidates and two vice governor candidates in 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election. There were two candidates running for the governor and vice governor. The first candidate is known as *ERAMAS* (Number 1) standing for Edy Rahmayadi and Musa Rajekshah who were supported by two political parties; Golkar, Hanura, PKS, PAN, and NASDEM; and the other candidate is *DJOSS* (Number 2) standing for Djarot Syaiful Hidayat and Sihar Sitorus who were supported by PDIP and PPP.

Islamic scholar took part in supporting those two candidates and their involvement can be categorized into three models; 1) direct and firm support through official declaration; 2) indirect support done either individually or in group; and 3) vague and neutral support, or also called as the two-legged political term which is also done either individually or as a group. The vague support here means that the Islamic scholars individually or as a group support both candidates (the *ERAMAS* and *DJOSS*).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied qualitative method. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews with a number of Islamic scholars from the Indonesian Ulama Council (NU) and other Islamic organizations in Indonesia in order to see their involvements in political dynamics in Medan, North Sumatra. This study was particularly aimed to find out Islamic scholars' roles and attitude in facing 2018 North Sumatra Governor election. This study also analysed whether the attitude and political roles of Islamic scholars of Indonesian Ulama Council are in line with those from other Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah, NU, and Al-Jamiatul Washliyah. This study was conducted from March to May 2018.

4 DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

4.1 The Political Attitudes of Islamic Scholars in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

As an organization, NU is not allowed to get involved in politics. However, NU still gives opportunity to its members to choose their own political attitudes. Therefore, it is understood that the Islamic scholars from NU provide support in a variety of ways during the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election.

Related to the Governor Election in June 2018, NU held a meeting in the regional office of NU four months prior the election day. The result of this meeting confirmed about NU neutral position in facing the 2018 North Sumatra Governor election.

Nevertheless, based on the observations and interviews conducted with a number of Islamic scholars from NU, it can be seen that the members of NU have different political attitudes in supporting the Governor and Vice Governor candidates. In this case, the members of NU are divided into four groups. The first group consists of 50% of Islamic scholars from the regional board of NU, and they are the campaigners for the candidates of Governor and Vice Governor in North Sumatra. Some of them support *ERAMAS* (Edy Rahmayadi & Musa Rajekshah), and some others support *DJOSS* (Djarot & Sihar Sitorus). However, the number of campaigners of *ERAMAS* is bigger than that of *DJOSS*. The second group consists of Islamic scholars who support one of the candidates but are not included as the campaigners for both candidates.

The third group consists of the Islamic scholars who are in neutral position and do not involve in supporting one of the governor candidates, and they usually come from the Academic scholars. The fourth group consists of Islamic scholars who are the campaigners of both parties (*ERAMAS* and *DJOSS*). The form of their support for the Governor candidates is usually vague. The four groups of Islamic scholars can be concluded as the consequences for NU's decision for being in the neutral political attitudes in 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election.

4.2 The Political Attitudes of Islamic Scholars of Muhammadiyah

Based on the interviews in May 2018, it shows that as Islamic organization, the Muhammadiyah has conducted meetings for the regional leaders concerning on the strategic issues such as; consolidation of the organization, and the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election. The meeting clearly decides three points; 1) confirming the supports for the candidate of the Regional Representative Council, the member of Muhammadiyah, Abdul Halim Siagian, 2) confirming their supports for Muslim candidates for 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election, and 3) encouraging the cadres of Muhammadiyah to participate in the legislative election. This decision is based on the paradigm of Muhammadiyah which states that the issue of politics can not be separated from *Aqidah* (Islamic creed).

The paradigm of Muhammadiyah is in line with some of classic Islamic philosophers. One of them is Al-Ghazali (1059 – 1111 M). Al-Ghazali describes the links between religion and political power as follows: “the Sulthan (the political powers) is an obligatory for the world policy; the world policy is an obligatory for the religious policy; the religious policy is an obligatory for the success in hereafter”. Explicitly, according to Al-Ghazali, the relationship between religion and politics is described as the relationship between Sulthan and his guardian. The religion is the foundation, and Sulthan is the guardian.

In regard to the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election, the regional meeting decides that Muhammadiyah should elect the Muslim candidates for Governor and Vice Governor in North Sumatra. Therefore, the Islamic scholars from Muhammadiyah have clearly put their decision on *ERAMAS*. This political attitude should be followed by the 28 regional leaders of Muhammadiyah in

North Sumatra. When it comes to the consequence for those who oppose this decision, the leader of Muhammadiyah states that they will be warned and given some advice.

However, in practice, there are some members of Muhammadiyah who oppose this decision such as the members of Muhammadiyah in the residential area called *Dadap* who declared their support to *DJOSS*. Some others are individuals who do not agree with the programs proposed by *ERAMAS*. A participant stated that Edy Rahmayadi as the candidate of governor does not seem to understand much about governance. He furthermore stated that as an army, Edy demands too much from Islamic scholars in Medan to support him but cannot provide anything in return.

In general, it can be said that Muhammadiyah succeeded in directing his members to give political supports for the certain governor candidates in 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election. The support seemed so systematic and massive through organizational mechanisms at every level. Nevertheless, the symbols or attributes of the supported candidates are not allowed to be installed in the mosques or in the educational institutions in Muhammadiyah.

4.3 The Political Attitudes of Islamic Scholars in Al-Washliyah

The political supports of Islamic scholars from Al-Washliyah in North Sumatra approaching the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election can be seen in the meetings of regional leaders in January 2018. The results of the meeting conclude that Al-Washliyah supports *ERAMAS* as the Muslim candidates for 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election. The supports of Al-Washliyah for the Muslim candidates (*ERAMAS*) is based on *Fiqh Siyasah Al-Washliyah* which follows Imam Syafi'i. Other than that, the decision of supporting *ERAMAS* is also based on the agreement between *Dewan Fatwa*, a council a ruling on a point of Islamic law and *Dewan Pertimbangan* (advisory council) of Al-Washliyah. The full support of Islamic scholars in Al-Washliyah can be seen from the involvement of all Islamic scholars in Alwashliyah as the campaigners of *ERAMAS*.

As the members of Islamic organizations, the involvement of Islamic scholars in supporting the Governor Election is an effort to improve the roles and social function of their organization either personally or institutionally. It is just that the approach used is sometimes different; some people

use a subtle and wise way, and some others use excessive and emotional way.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Ulamas are Islamic scholars who master the sciences of *Al-Qur'an* and *Al-Hadith*, as well as the Islamic teachings. Ulama (Islamic scholars) have quite important roles both as individuals and groups. It can be seen from the involvement of Islamic scholars in various aspects, such as; education, Islamic da'wah, and politics. However, the roles and involvements of Islamic scholars are argued in Islamic society. In the one hand, Islamic scholars are regarded as people who only take care of spiritual issues. On the other hand, Islamic scholars are also considered able to deal with non-spiritual matters, especially politics. Related to these issues, this research was conducted to see the involvement of Islamic scholars in the political world and in facing 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election. The findings show that the Islamic scholars from the Indonesian Ulama council (MUI) and the three biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia; NU, Muhammadiyah, and Al-Washliyah, involved in 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election, in different forms. Some of their involvements are in line with the political attitudes of their organizations while some others are opposed. The findings of this study may provide educational value in the form of information about the roles of Islamic scholars in Islamic history. Furthermore, this study may also serve as a consideration to all parties involving the Islamic scholars in the context of nationality and society.

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