

## Political Strategy of Nahdlatul Ulama Party in Cirebon Regency during 1952-1967

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### Abstract

At the 1952 Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Congress in Palembang, 1952, NU officially broke away from Masyumi and declared itself a political party. From then on, NU emerged as a growing force in both local and national political scenes. In the 1955 elections in Cirebon, the NU party emerged as the winner and the only branch in West Java that received the most votes. The political strategy of the NU Party in Cirebon in the run-up to the 1955 general election was based on the instructions of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) to immediately organize party activities; among others by recruiting non-party members and preparing funding. The emergence of local kiai (religious leaders) who had extensive networks in the villages and Islamic boarding schools also contributed to the NU party's victory. After the 1955 elections, the Cirebon NU Party highlighted unilateral actions by the PKI. During the September 30, 1965 Movement (Gestapu), mass killings broke out in Central Java and East Java but similar violence did not occur in Cirebon, though there was small outbreaks of violence. In response to the political situation in Indonesia and considering the situation at the local level, PBNU held its 24th Congress in Bandung 1967. By employing the historical method, this study discusses the political strategy of the NU party in Cirebon Regency before and after the 1955 election.

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### Introduction

Tracing the history of NU's existence as one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia is a topic that never ceases to be relevant. At the outset of its founding, NU was engaged in the religious field. At a later development stage, the organization became involved in party politics after breaking away from Masjumi through the 19th NU Congress in Palembang in 1952. Three years later, NU participated in the first general election in 1955. For NU, this was the new face of political Islam. Defying expectations, NU was able to compete with other parties at the 1955 election and finished 3rd nationally. Support came from rural areas and Islamic boarding schools,

which formed that basis of its supporters across Indonesia, Cirebon in West Java being one of them.

NU's entry into Cirebon could not be separated from the presence of KH. Abdul Halim Leuwi-munding, KH. Amin Elder Babakan Ciwaringin, KH. Muhammad Abbas Abdul Jamil Buntet, KH. Said Gedongan, KH. Idris Kamali Kempek, KH. Jauharul Arifin Balerante, and KH. Abdullah Syatori Arjawinangun (Sujati, 2021, pp. 159-161). Cirebon was among the first places in West Java where NU gained foothold. This was attributed to strong collegial ties between the kiai of East Java and Cirebon. Cirebon has a strategic position in NU's journey, being the first in West Java to host an NU Congress, in 1931 ("Congres Kaping Nenem," 1346 H). Furthermore, after NU transformed into a political party and participated in the 1955 general election, the NU party in Cirebon achieved strong results by emerging as the winner, the only branch in West Java that achieved that feat (Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 2309, ANRI, 2015).

The winning strategy of the NU party in Cirebon Regency came despite internal and external dynamics that affected the stability of the party, including propaganda promoted by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) that NU was the kiai's party while the PKI was the people's party. The conflict between the two continued amid unilateral acts by the PKI and peaked during the Gestapu events. The NU Party through Ansor Banser and Barisan Santri in Cirebon Regency condemned the PKI and demanded it be disbanded, leading to its dissolution on March 12, 1966 (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, pp. 35-38). With NU having a political upper-hand, government officials in Cirebon Regency who were suspected to be members of the PKI were dishonourably dismissed and NU members occupied strategic positions in the Cirebon Regency government (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, pp. 13-18, 35-38, and 82).

Political upheaval at the local level resulted in PBNU taking a stance to neutralize the situation for the sake of state security. The PBNU convened the 24th Congress in Bandung in 1967 as a counter measure by moving the masses in various regions to eliminate the influence of the PKI (Bruinessen, 2004). At the congress, Pancasila Democracy was declared with the aim of reinforcing the position of Pancasila as the state ideology. All branches of NU parties in Indonesia accepted the decision, including the Cirebon Regency branch of NU, marked by the Resolution of the NU Congress in Bandung (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 683).

Specifically, the purpose of this research is to highlight the efforts made by NU that contributed to its victory in the 1955 election in Cirebon Regency. The NU Party was chosen as the object of study because of its achievement of finishing 3rd nationally in its first election, and coming out as the first winner in Cirebon. For NU, this was a very satisfying achievement as a new Islamic party. After the elections, it was not all smooth sailing for NU on the local political stage. This study looks at the history of NU's establishment in Cirebon, its strategy and political activities as well as its competition with the PKI.

## Method

This study employed the historical method by trying to reconstruct past events systematically, objectively and critically based on historical sources using four stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Sources of the study include the NU Textual Archives Inventory stored in the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI). Other sources include magazines and newspapers containing publications about NU stored in the PBNU Library, among others, *Duta Masyarakat*, *Majallah Berita Nahdlatol Oelama*, *Majallah Soera Nahdlatol Oelama*, *Majallah Al-Marwaidz and Majallah Al-Lisaan*. In addition, photo sources were obtained from the Office of the Library and Archives of West Java Province, the Office of Archives and Library of the Cirebon City and Regency. As for oral sources, the researcher obtained information from Cirebon Regency NU leaders who were in the Pesantren Buntet, Pesantren Gedongan, Pesantren Kempek Palimanan, Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin, and Psantren Arjawinangun. Sources were then criticized internally, externally, interpreted and analyzed and then compiled into a series of complete and chronological stories in a historiographical work.

## The Emergence of NU Party in Cirebon Regency Before 1952

NU is a religious organization formed by the leaders (kiai) of traditional pesantren in the village of Kertopaten, Surabaya on 16 Rajab 1334 H, or January 31, 1926. Literally, NU means "the awakening of Islamic scholars". In the period 1926-1940 NU was active in expanding its organization to other regions, including Cirebon. Cirebon was the first regency in West Java where NU had presence. Based on textual records, the scientific tradition of pesantren became the main factor in the spread of NU in Cirebon because it had close relations with several NU figures such as Kiai Kholil Bangkalan Madura, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, and KH. Wahab Hasbullah. Thus, when NU was declared, the kiai in Cirebon automatically followed suit, including KH. Amin Sepuh Ciwaringin, who was a student of Kiai Kholil and a teacher in Bangkalan, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari had a son-in-law named KH. Idris Kamali Kempek and some of his students were KH. Solihin Ciwaringin, KH. Abdullah Syatori Arjawinangun and KH. Muhammad Abbas Abdul Jamil Buntet (Sujati, 2021, pp. 157-162).

It should be noted that KH. Muhammad Abbas Abdul Jamil Buntet was among KH. Hasyim Asy'ari's first students in 1899. Kiai Abbas' support for NU was shown by establishing *Madrrasah Abnoul Wathan* in 1928 as a successor to *Nahdlatul Wathan* and *Taswirul Afkar* (Hasan, 2014, pp. 81-82). In addition, Kiai Abbas also served as an envoy for the chairman for the NU Cirebon branch to attend the 4th Congress in Semarang 1929, the 13th in Menes Banten, the 14th in Magelang and the 15th NU Congress in Surabaya 1940 (*Verslag Congress N.O. 4th, 14th, 15th*). Kiai Abbas was known as an independence fighter during the battle of Surabaya in 1945. Before the birth of the Fatwa Resolution of Jihad, he attended the meeting of the Consul Ulama for Java and Madura on 21-22 October 1945. Then he was directly involved in the Surabaya battle by arranging tactical steps to deal with the allies who had entered Surabaya, such as

preparing *Hizbullah* and *Sabilillah* troops at Pondok Buntet Cirebon and sending troops to Surabaya (Hasan, 2014, pp. 91-92).

KH. Abdul Halim Leuwimunding was a close friend of KH. Wahab Hasbullah when they were both studying in Mecca. Before NU was formed, KH. Abdul Halim was the only delegate from West Java who attended the declaration of NU in Surabaya in 1926 and after the founding he was appointed as khatib tsani or Second Secretary in the NU structure (Ulum, 2016, p. 127). KH. Abdul Halim is also known as a pioneer in the economic field by establishing *Coperatie Kaoem Moeslimin* (Muslim Cooperative or CKM) in 1929 (Anam, 2010, p. 92). KH. Abdul Halim's decision to join NU and the establishment of Madrasah by Kiai Abbas indicated that in 1926-1928, NU Cirebon was believed to have been established, though not officially.

Following the mandate of the 3rd NU Congress in Surabaya 1928 to expand its presence on the islands of Java and Madura, the *Lajnah Nashihin* (Propaganda Commission) was formed. KH. Bisri Syansuri, KH. Wahab Hasbullah, and KH. Abdul Halim Leuwimunding served in Central Java and West Java. (Anam, 2010, p. 86). Meanwhile in Cirebon, to formally introduce NU, the 6th NU Congress (*Congres Kaping Nenem*) was held from 10-12 Rabi'us Tsani 1350 H/ 25-27 August 1931 AD. The congress lasted three days in two different places - at Hotel Orange Cirebon on 10-11 Rabi'us Tsani 1350 H/ August 25-26 1931 AD and at Pesantren Buntet on 12 Rabi'us Tsani 1350 H/ August 26, 1931 AD ("Congres Kaping Nenem," 1346 H).

During the period 1934-1940s, branches and representative offices in Cirebon had expanded to several places including Karang Sembung, Sindang Laut, Plered, Kejaksan, Karang Suwung, Babakan and Gebang ("Verslag ringkes," 1936, "Verslag debat taqlid," 1936, "Openbare debat vergadering," 1932). The early activities of NU Cirebon can be traced through the PBNU Congress which was attended by NU Cirebon officials, including the 4th NU Congress in Semarang 1929, the 11th NU Congress Banjarmasin 1936, the 12th NU Congress in Malang 1937 ("Notulen Rapat," 1929, "Nama-nama Oetosan," 1936). Furthermore, the 13th NU Congress in Menes Banten 1938, the 14th NU Congress in Magelang 1939, the 15th NU Congress in Surabaya 1940 (Lakpesdam PBNU, 1938)

During the Physical Revolution (1946-1948), the involvement of NU Region III Cirebon was recorded through the activities of the *Hizbullah* army formed by Kiai Abbas. He then appointed KH. Hasyim Anwar as *Hizbullah* Commander. Laskar *Hizbullah* Cirebon consisted of three units. Battalion 4 led by Danu based in Indramayu, Battalion 5 led by Kiai Abdullah Abbas based in Mundu. He was later appointed as Chief of Staff of *Hizbullah* Cirebon with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The 6th Battalion led by Sumario was based in Arjawinangun (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2014, p. 25).

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the presence of NU in Cirebon cannot be separated from the kinship and pesantren religious tradition. The kiai were central figures and were always synonymous with NU, because NU was born with the involvement of the kiai. Meanwhile, pesantren were a breeding ground for figures who would later carry on the leadership at NU. NU's base in Cirebon was

in rural areas and pesantren. Islamic boarding schools in Cirebon affiliated with NU adhere to *ahl sunnah wa al-jamaah*, which follows one of the four madhhabs (schools of thought). Pesantrens in Cirebon were geographically very strategic, with Pesantren Buntet and Pesantren Gedongan in the east, as well as Pesantren Babakan Ciwaringin, Pesantren Balerante, Pesantren Khas Kempek, and Pesantren Arjawinangun in the west.

### **From Religious Organization to Political Party**

At the 19th NU Congress in Paembang in 1952, NU officially left Masjumi and declared itself a political party. NU's transformation prompted local branches to follow suit, as did the Cirebon Regency branch of NU. Initially there was opposition some NU members and pesantren staff who were still affiliated with Masyumi. Mustamid Abbas as the administrator of the Cirebon Regency branch was forced to follow the decision of the congress that NU was no longer a religious organization but a political party with the *ahl sunnah wa al-jama'ah* orientation. (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 1977, pp. 567-568).

During the 1953-1955 period, NU Cirebon Regency organized a recruitment drive for skilled personnel by recruiting professionals, expanding the membership, opening new branches, and forming various new fields to serve support groups such as laborers and workers, students, and build a strong funding base (Fealy, 2003, pp. 136-137). The drive was part of preparations for political contests at the national and local levels. The full composition of the NU board of the Cirebon Regency branch, which was located at Jalan Pamitran No. 947 could not be established with certainty, but through letters that PBNU received in the run-up to the 1955 election, it was learned that KH. Mustamid Abbas and KH. Abdul Halim served as the Commissioners of the Cirebon branch. During 1957-1958, Machbub Badjurie served as Chairman of the *tanfidziyah* (executive council), and Mahfudz Sirna as Secretary of the Cirebon Regency branch (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 416 and No. 377).

Following up on the PBNU program, Cirebon Regency NU recruited Machbub Badjurie. He was an official at the Cirebon Regency Department of Religion. Furthermore, before NU became a political party, NU in Cirebon Regency already had two Autonomous Bodies (Banom), the Ansor Youth Movement and Muslimat Fatayat. Although the two bodies mainly engaged in social activities, they also participated in political movements in Cirebon. In 1958, the Nahdlatul Ulama Student Association (IPNU) was established. This was followed by the establishment in the 1960s of the Indonesian Muslim Labor Union (Sarbumusi), the Nahdlatul Ulama Peasants Association (Pertanu) and the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (PMII) and the Indonesian Muslim Artists Association (Lesbumi). (Interview with *Nahdlyin* Residents, Ibrohim Rozi, 2021).

### **NU Party in Cirebon Political Scene 1955-1960**

#### ***Political Party Campaigns and Atmosphere Ahead of the 1955 General Election***

Towards the first general election in 1955, political parties in Cirebon prepared strategies to compete in the local political stage, leading to campaign friction among

them, especially the big four - NU, PKI, PNI, and Masjumi. Their methods of garnering support were diverse, included bringing in party and organizational leaders, holding meetings involving youth, religious gatherings or public lectures, film screenings, celebration of religious holidays and folk art performances that were popular with the Cirebon people at that time.

The following is a description of the campaigns of each party in Cirebon Regency ahead of the 1955 general election. First, the PNI. Prior to the 1955 elections, the PNI was considered one of the largest parties in Cirebon Regency. PNI campaigned on the platform of Marhaenism, touting itself as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist party. (Suluh Indonesia, 23 September 1955).

Second, the PKI. The party advertised itself as the party of the people. This was based on the fact that the basis of the PKI was urban workers, agricultural corporate workers and peasants. The party ran on the ideology of Marxism and the people's platform. The PKI's campaign messages were published in the *Harian Rakyat* (People's Daily) newspaper, which was used as the main tool of the communist party's campaign. Various articles were published in the newspapers, with the main theme being that the PKI was a political movement of the people to fight for their own destiny. (*Harian Rakyat*, 26 May 1955).

Third, the NU Party. NU, which was originally founded as a socio-religious organization with the *ahl sunnah wa al-jama'ah* orientation, adopted the brotherhood and religion platform to gain votes. Being a party with support base among traditional Muslims in villages and Islamic boarding schools was favourable for NU, because pesantren are an effective way to spread the party's influence. In addition, NU also adopted a moderate view of Islam. This was later developed in the NU campaign message that the party was founded to fight for the rights of Muslims and to protect Muslims and society in general. (Fealy, 2004, p. 147-148).

Fourth, the Masjumi Party. Masyumi was one of the largest Islamic parties in Indonesia. Masjumi was founded to implement Islamic teachings and law in the life of the nation to gain the pleasure of Allah. Masjumi touted itself as the only party for the aspirations of the Islamic ummah. The Islamic identity in this party was very prominent. Running on the platform of modernist Islam, many of its supporters were urban Muslims.

Ahead of the 1955 general election, campaign posters and photos were pasted on public transportation, streets, public buildings, government offices, in newspapers and cinemas, including in the Kejaksaan intersection, Prujakan, and Gunung Sari. (Dispusipda of West Java Province Audio Visual Archives No. 493). Meanwhile, the people of Cirebon showed their enthusiasm about the election by working together to build polling stations. In addition, communities were also involved by enlisting as party members and party sympathizers (Manuscript of Archives of Traces of Democracy in the 1955 General Election, ANRI, 2019).

In order to organize a safe and orderly election, cooperation between government and private institutions was necessary. The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Justice formed an election committee based on Law (UU) No. JB 2/9/3

dated 7 July 1953, Law no. JB 2/9/4 dated 23 April 1953, and 5/11/37/KDN dated 30 July 1953. The law stipulated that the Election Committee is formed in each electoral district, City/Regency Election Committee is formed at the city/regency level and Voting Committee is formed at the sub-regency level. In Cirebon, the formation, inauguration, and meetings of the election committee were held, among others, in Palimanan, Lemah Abang, and Buntet. Meanwhile, the election information outreach was held at the Palimanan Kawedanan pavilion and the Sindang Laut Sugar Factory, among others. (Dispusipda of West Java Province Audio Visual Archives No. 494, 495, 496, 497).

### *Results of the 1955 General Election in Cirebon Regency*

Cirebon Regency is a West Java area known for its heterogeneous society, socially, culturally, and politically, making it a favorable voting base for parties participating in the 1955 general election. The 1955 general election, held on September 29, 1955, to elect members of the House of Representatives (DPR) and on 15 December 1955 to elect members of the Constituent Assembly, went smoothly. The votes won in the 1955 election were a reflection of the success of each political party participating in the election. Competition and campaigning determined the level of success of the parties. In the 1955 election in Cirebon, four major parties won the most votes (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Votes of four major parties in the 1955 general election in Cirebon.

No.	Parties	Official number of votes
1.	NU	105,317
2.	PKI	70,143
3.	PNI	63,720
4.	Masyumi	46,261
<b>Total</b>		<b>222,504</b>

Source: ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU 1948-1979. No. 2309.

Based on the results above, the NU party came out as the winner and was the only NU party in West Java that achieved brilliant results (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 2309). According to Ibrahim Rozi as secretary of the NU party for the period 1968-1971. NU's victory could not be separated from the network of pesantren in Cirebon Regency. The role and influence of kiai in rural areas and Islamic boarding schools were very much dominant in traditional communities who were then affiliated with NU, making it easy for NU to win votes. The Cirebon Regency pesantren network was very strategic, with Pesantren Gedongan and Buntet in the east, Pesantren Ciwaringin, Kempek, Balerante in the west and Arjawinangun in the north (Interview with *Nahdlyin* Residents, Ibrahim Rozi, 2021).

Herbert Feith said that the average NU voters came from pesantren and rural areas, where the kiai had played the role of solidarity makers and unifiers of communities (Feith, 2006, p. 234). In addition, many rural communities voted NU with the belief that it was the party of the kiai (*NU kih partae para kiai*). Based on this

argument, many NU voters viewed that joining the kiai would be safer than joining other parties. (Interview with *Nahdlyin* Residents, Hasan Kriyani, 2021). The credibility and authority of the kiai in pesantren and rural areas in Cirebon Regency was very strong. Most people in Cirebon Regency had great respect for the kiai. When a kiai said "*enggih* [yes]," his followers would obey without question. In the context of socio-religious life, Cirebon was known as a santri community. Thus, it is very clear that the kiai had great influence, including in political affairs.

After the 1955 elections, the Cirebon Regency NU envoy, KH. Mustamid Abbas served as a member of the DPR-GR in West Java successively in 1956-1967 and 1967-1971. Kiai Mustamid was the third son of Kiai Abbas from the wife of Ny. Chofidoh, one of the leading figures in NU Cirebon. The following is the history of Kiai Mustamid's struggle, organization, and work; Head of Information for *Hizbullah* Battalion II, R.H. Division, 1945-1947, Head of Information III/B.NI/XIII Siliwangi Division 1947-1948, Head of the Department of BKS Ulama-Military security section of Cirebon Regency in 1960, Assistant to the Junior Minister for Liaison with the West Java Ulama 1959, Chairman of the Masyumi Astanajapura party from 1943 to 1947, from 1956 to 1957 he held concurrent positions at NU Cirebon Regency as chairman of the executive council and head of dawa, member of the Consulate of the West Java NU party from 1957 to 1960, Chairman of the Islamic Education Institute Buntet Pesantren 1960-1965, Rois Syuriah NU West Java and Advisor to the Center for *Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah Indonesia* 1967-1977 (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 1977, pp. 567-568).

### ***NU Party Strategy to Win 1955 General Election***

Preparations for NU Cirebon Regency to welcome the 1955 election began with the decision of the NU Congress in Palembang in 1952. At that time, PBNU instructed the party to immediately make structural improvements by holding a program for recruiting members, establishing labor and student organizations and building party funding. This instruction was then carried out by the NU Cirebon Regency branch. One of the first recruits was Machbub Badjurie. He was an official at the Cirebon Regency Department of Religion from 1953-1955 and previously served as Camat Losari 1949-1950. He was known for his expertise in diplomacy. After NU won the 1955 election, he was appointed as the Regional Head (Regent) of Cirebon Regency from 1957-1958 as well as the chairman of the NU executive council of Cirebon Regency, Member of DPRD-GR Cirebon Regency, member of BPH Cirebon Regency 1966 and lastly as Head of Statistics and Reporting Division of BAPPEDA Cirebon Regency in 1996 (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007).

The party held a meeting to discuss party funding, during which KH. Abdul Halim Leuwimunding gave directions to party officials regarding business enterprise, one of which was *Coperatie Kaoem Moeslimin* (CKM). Similar meetings were held until the 1955 general election (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 681). The General Elections Center (Lapunu) for the West Java Region made a financial contribution of 2,500 rupiah to each branch (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 77). Party officials also held a



Grand Meeting in Kota Besar Cirebon on April 3, 1955 at 8pm, which was attended by the General Chairperson of PBNU KH. Muhammad Dachlan, Secretary General of PBNU H. Saifuddin Zuhri, and the Muslimat Murtaziah Board. The meeting resulted in a decision to prepare all forms related to the election. Based on the letter received by PBNU that the Deputy Chairperson of PBNU Idham Chalid agreed to immediately form and hold the Cirebon Residency-wide Lapunu Conference. Then the board of Lapunu for the Cirebon Region was formed with the composition of Chairman Ch. Rochmat, Deputy Chairman K. Jasin, Secretary Mahfudz Sirna, Finance Moch. Azhari, Commissioner of Maemunah (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 935).

Furthermore, to serve the party, NU Cirebon Regency Branch relied on two bodies that had been formed before NU became a political party - the Ansor Youth Movement and Muslimat Fatayat, which were merged (14th Verslag Congres N.O. Magelang 1939). Although the two bodies mainly engaged in social activities, they were involved in political campaigning in Cirebon Regency. It was followed by the establishment of IPNU in 1958, Pertanu, Sarbumusi, and during the 1960s, PMII and Lesbumi (interview with Ibrohim Rozi and Ahmad Sayuti, 2021).

The next step was to bring in PBNU figures and the NU Consulate in West Java to conduct campaigns and lectures in several places in Cirebon, including the visit of KH. Abdul Halim in Plered on June 5, 1954, Secretary General PBNU H. Saifuddin Zuhri in Ciledug on June 6, 1955 (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 935). The placement of local kiai, both in rural areas and in pesantren, should also be taken into account. They adopted a cultural approach, including religious teachings and religious lectures, which became important points for gaining votes in the 1955 elections. In this case, pesantren and rural areas became the most effective places to spread party messages. NU took advantage the kiai as mass movers. Major kiai who became NU's voices for the eastern part of Cirebon Regency included Mustamid Abbas from Buntet, and Imam Dimyati from Gedongan. Meanwhile, in the west of Cirebon Regency there were Ali Kamali from Kempek, Masduki Ali from Ciwaringin and Abdullah Syatori Arjawinangun (interview with, Hasan Kriyani and Abu Bakar Mukhtarom, 2021).

Their campaign method involved routine activities such as *lailatul ijtima* (a kind of official or non-official meetings between administrators, NU members and residents as well as public religious gatherings, *tahlilan and yasinan*). This then became a campaign strategy. The NU with its Islamic orientation, *ahl sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*, had made it easy to coordinate these activities and they turned into the most effective campaign tool. That support translated into votes in the 1955 election. Usually almost all rural communities and pesantren would vote for a party according to the choice of their kiai (interview with Ibrohim Rozi, 2021).

The kiai's participation in politics was evident in their status and role as protectors and supporters of the party. The NU youth who were members of the Ansor Youth Movement also participated as campaigners. At that time, NU's most respected campaigner was Aqil Siradj, who came from Gedongan and later devoted himself to the Pesantren Kempek. Because of his oratory skills, a young Aqiel Siradj was appointed as a campaigner. Together with Kiai Ali Kamali, Aqiel Siradj was invited to

remote villages to attend routine religious gatherings. Given that opportunity, he campaigned even in areas that were previously the PNI's bases to influence them to switch their allegiance to NU (Interview with Ibrohim Rozi, 2021).

The PKI's aggressive propaganda posed a threat to NU's election chances. In Cirebon, the PKI lured poor people with promises of agricultural land. Some of them switched their votes to the PKI, including those in the villages of Karang Wareng, Lemah Abang, and Astanajapura. Details about this could not be established with certainty, but it is known that these areas were dominated by PKI sympathizers and members. This was the seed of conflict between the PKI and NU throughout the 1960s (Interview with Ahmad Mursyidin, 2021).

Another threat to the NU was Masyumi's move to enlist leaders of pesantren in Cirebon. Masyumi believed that kiai were central to its founding as a party, so that it hoped that the kiai could help mobilize the masses to support Masyumi. On the other hand, NU considered pesantren to its stronghold due to the kiai's affiliation to it since its establishment in Cirebon Regency. (Interview with Nahdlyin Residents, Hasan kriyani, 2021). Meanwhile, the PNI in Cirebon Regency lured government officials down to the village level with financial promises and threatened to punish them if they did not vote for the party. The PNI's treatment of village officials invited NU's response. As a counterpoint, NU then took advantage of members who served in the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) to use this opportunity to seek and persuade Muslims to support NU (Interview with Ibrohim Rozi, 2021).

## **NU and Local Political Dynamics 1960-1967**

### ***Pros and Cons of the Land-reform Program between NU and PKI***

In early 1964, PKI members who belonged to the Indonesian Farmers Front (BTI) and Pemuda Rakyat (PR) engaged in a unilateral campaign centered in Central and East Java (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 1977). This action began with the slow pace of the central government in implementing the Basic Agrarian Law which regulated the maximum and minimum limits on land ownership. The program had been slated to be completed in 1964, but as of 1963, due to ineffective administrative regulations and collusion between wealthy landlords and officials, only a very small percentage of land had been distributed. This then became the trigger for the PKI to implement a "radical" land-reform program. (Fealy, 2003, pp. 318-319).

The conflict extended to East Java and Central Java. Meanwhile in West Java, especially in Cirebon, it started with the arrival of D.N. Aidit at a PKI meeting in Lemah Abang, Cirebon. He branded opponents of land reform as village demons and warned people not to oppose Soko Guru. As a result, BTI took unilateral actions in various forms, including sabotaging railway signals involving railway workers, resulting in a train accident in Cirebon on May 14, 1964 (Samsudin, 2004, pp. xvii). In addition, BTI held a demonstration in Lemah Abang, which was prompted by landlords' ownership of 3-4 hectares, leading to their huge income. In fact, there were landlords who owned thousands of hectares of land, not to mention land leases through bonds, mortgages, and rents (interview with Ahmad Mursyidin, 2021).

The PKI's unilateral action had a tremendous impact on the community, especially landlords affiliated with NU, including kiai families who owned a large amount of land in the countryside in Cirebon. Therefore, those who owned large plots of land tried to avoid land-reform regulations by changing their names or even leasing or selling some of it (Interview with Ahmad Mursyidin, 2021).

Unilateral attacks continued throughout 1964 until mid-1965, including in Karang Wareng, Karang Sembung, Lemah Abang, Astanajapura, and Waled, causing Muslims to lose patience. For NU followers, the attacks were violations of Islamic law which clearly permits individual ownership and if it is taken by force it will be subject to severe punishment. In fact, people believed that unilateral attacks on the kiai's families had an adverse impact on them, because after all, part of their income came from ownership of land that had been used as agricultural land (interview with Abu Bakar Mukhtarom and Ahmad Mursyidin, 2021).

Therefore, whenever an incident occurred or there was a threat from the PKI, Muslims automatically moved with the kiai and leaders of Ansor Banser in several villages in Cirebon. The demonstrations and parades carried out by the PKI were an attempt to annex land and intimidate Muslim landowners and officials, prompting small-scale resistance. There were even rumors that the PKI used shamans to send bad spells to kiai families and conversely, the kiai families using their power or some kind of special prayers to fight the PKI (interview with Ahmad Mursyidin, 2021).

Events in Cirebon were not as dire as those in Central Java and East Java, where casualties were reported, but after all the increasing conflict in the regions was a local political issue that became a national political problem that must be resolved, because it not only threatened public order but also damaged the bonds among parties that adhered to the Nationalist Religion and Communism (Nasakom) concept, namely NU, PKI, and PNI. Therefore, a meeting was held on December 12, 1964 with the aim to stop the disputes at the local level immediately. Thus, the Bogor Declaration, which contained the agreement of all parties that the land reform program must be completed through peace talks, was born. Nevertheless, clashes continued sporadically in several areas in East Java and Central Java, culminating in the Gestapu event (Fealy, 2004, p. 324).

### *Purging the Bureaucracy and Demands for the Dissolution of the PKI*

After the **September 30 Movement 1965 Coup** (Gestapu), the influence of mass organizations and political parties waned in Cirebon. However, since the Military Command turned to Suharto and carried out Special Operations (Opsus), people from all walks of life, community organizations, and political organizations in Cirebon condemned the PKI's actions. The situation in Cirebon was out of control, with the crushing of the PKI, mass actions, scattered pamphlets, writings and graffiti on walls, buildings, offices, destruction of PKI offices and demands for the disbandment of the community party (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, pp. 36). NU through Mustamid Abbas turned Pesantren Buntet into the headquarters of NU's resistance to the PKI. Together with Banser, the students and alumni who were members of the Indonesian

Student Youth Action Unit (KAPPI), the Youth Action Unit Command (KOKADA), and the Indonesian Student Action Unit (KAMI) and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI), they demand the government to immediately dissolve the PKI. (Hasan, 2014, p. 129).

The conflict between NU, PKI and the military in Cirebon was not as critical as in East Java and Central Java, which resulted in large-scale casualties. Although not taking similar actions, small-scale movements were reported in several places. For example, in Indramayu, people who were suspected to be linked to the PKI were victimized. In Majelengka a PKI member almost killed his leader because he felt he had been defrauded. In Cirebon, mass organizations visited the PKI chairman Rangkila in the village of Karang Tinggi, Kapetakan and the chairman of BTI Cikecuk, Plumbon. They dragged Rangkila from the house and shouted "*sira kang gawe sengsara kita*" (you made us suffer). According to the Cirebon District Military Command 0614, Buchori, a PKI figure in a village was killed by its own members. However, such incidents were not widespread.

In Astanajapura, PKI members were targeted by the military. Some were tortured but there were no fatalities, some of them managed to escape (Feillard, 2017). Meanwhile, in Lemah Abang, Karang Wareng and Waled, according to information, PKI members were taken away by force by the military, resulting in frequent opposition (Interview with Ahmad Mursyidin, 2021). Villagers believe that a large plot of land in Rawa Urip Village was a dumping ground for the bodies of PKI members, but this rumour could not be confirmed.

Worried that things would get worse, the Governor of West Java, Lieutenant General of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) (Ret.) H. Mashudi, took preventive measures. He issued an order to prohibit the activities of the PKI by enacting rules to dismiss employees, government officials suspected of being PKI members. This was stipulated in the Level I Regional Regulation of West Java Province concerning Election, Appointment and Ratification, Temporary Dismissal and Dismissal of Village/Desapraja Heads, as well as other Village/Desapraja Apparatus in West Java Province (Sujati, 2021, p. 418-419).

Based on the above rules, the Mayor of Cirebon RSA Prabowo and the Regent of Cirebon Regency E. Harun Zainal Abidin (1960-1966) who were suspected to be PKI members were dismissed from their positions and were then imprisoned in 1966. To fill the vacancy, especially in the Regency, on October 29, 1965 R. Soemito appointed as regent of Cirebon cum chairman of the DPRD-GR and was sworn in by the Governor of West Java, Lt. Gen. TNI (Ret.) H. Mashudi (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, p. 11). R. Soemito together with the Regional Dwikora Implementing Authority (Papelrada) of Cirebon Regency then dismissed officials and government officials suspected of being PKI members and imprisoned them at the Cirebon Kodim 0614. The following is a list of Village Heads, Employees, Officials in Cirebon Regency who have been dismissed or suspended.

"Out of 294 villages in Cirebon Regency, 29 Village Heads were dishonorably dismissed, 1 Village Head was suspended, 2 Village Heads were suspended but were

not proven to be PKI members. To fill the vacancy, the Regent and Papelrada of Cirebon Regency placed 20 Village Heads from members of the TNI-AD, 5 from AKRI members, 4 from Pamong Desa, 1 from the people of former Village Heads, 1 from Veterans members and 1 from members of the National Front" (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, pp. 13-14).

The transfers of power that took place from March 2 to May 17, 1966, benefitted the NU party as three of 11 members of DPRD-GR who were dismissed were replaced by NU party members, including Hasan Rahmat. Hasan was the Chairman of the NU executive council for the 1960-1968 period and was appointed as chairman of the DPRD-GR, which was sworn in on March 2, 1966. (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, p. 12). Mohammad Tarjadh S.A and Mashum Shaleh were sworn in as members of the DPRD-GR on April 14, 1966 (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, p. 18). Meanwhile, NU members who served as DPRD-GR members included Abdullah Nasichin, Maemunah Zaidin, H. Anwar, H. Muslim, and H. Rumli (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, p. 82).

NU's position at that time could not be separated from the consolidation carried out by Achmad Saichu, Deputy Chairman of the Central DPRD-GR from the NU Faction. On March 20, 1966 after the PKI was dissolved, he was present in Cirebon to commemorate the 40th Birthday of NU. On that occasion, apart from attending the event, he took the time to meet with the local government to discuss the political situation in Cirebon Regency, especially regarding the changes in the DPRD-GR. After the meeting, NU's position became more strategic compared to other parties such as PNI, PSII and Parkindo (Dispusip Cirebon Regency, 2007, p. 35).

### **The 24th NU Congress in Bandung 1967**

On 6-9 July 1967, NU held its 24th Congress in Bandung. The congress presented an assessment of PBNU's stance towards the political situation in Indonesia in the wake of the Gestapu incident. Previously, PBNU had taken counter steps by mobilizing the masses in various regions to eliminate the influence of the PKI. The NU militancy and its autonomous bodies, especially the Ansor youth movement, have become a counter force against the PKI in society, both in East Java, Central Java and in the West Java region (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 683).

However, the PKI did not take into account the strength factor of the NU circles. They assumed that the failure of the coup was due to the Army factor. Therefore, NU then mobilized the masses by destroying PKI symbols and its buildings in various locations, with the support of the local people. In the end the situation became more calm after new order components emerged, marked by large-scale student rallies, even though the PKI was disbanded on 12 March 1966 (Sujati, 2021, p. 413).

Bandung was chosen as the venue for the congress because it was considered the most strategic. In addition, after the Gestapu, the political situation there was not too vulnerable, with only small events reported. Bandung was considered the safest place and the local government was very supportive of the event. According to the NU board, Bandung's safety paved the way for the best ideas to emerge from congress participants (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 683).

The congress in Bandung was part of efforts to stem the influence of communists in Indonesia and to reaffirm the position of Pancasila as the state ideology. Several decisions of the congress, apart from establishing a new leader in the PBNU body, included the declaration of Pancasila Democracy. Pancasila democracy is a democracy based on the 1945 Constitution. Pancasila democracy emphasizes that the highest power is in the hands of the people, through institutions whose members are elected in free and democratic elections. While in the field of religion, Pancasila Democracy recognizes the rights and obligations of adherents of a religion. The declaration of Pancasila Democracy was fully supported by all participants in the congress, including the Cirebon Regency branch of NU, which supported the "NU Conference Resolution in Bandung 1967" (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip NU, No. 683).

### Conclusions

NU underwent a remarkable transformation during the period 1952-1967. NU emerged as a group of inexperienced politicians. NU's strategy both at the national and local levels during the 1950-1960s proved its seriousness in gaining votes in the 1955 elections. NU's actions were a mixture of accommodative and militant attitudes, depending on the situation. Local kiai became mass movers in both religious and political matters. The main argument in this study is that kiai affiliated with NU always gave the highest priority to protecting the position of Islam and its followers. This study revealed a number of important facts about the NU party in Cirebon Regency from 1952-1967. Although NU's behavior was often seen as power-hungry and prioritizing the interests of its party, this was their way of fulfilling their main obligation, to foster Islamic progress. In other words, NU has always put the interests of the nation first.

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