

Masyumi's Campaign Strategies in the 1955 Election in Jakarta

Ajeng Kusuma Ayu*, Singgih Tri Sulistiyono, Alamsyah

Master Program of History, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University

*Corresponding Author: ajengkusuma91@gmail.com

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Abstract

In the capital's 1955 election, Masyumi established itself a place among the winning parties with 167,707 votes, surpassing their biggest rivals PNI, PKI, and NU in parliamentary votes. Nevertheless, it was not an easy victory. This study questions on why Masyumi was able to win the capital's 1955 election and made PNI failed to gain the upper hand in Jakarta, despite the region being politically heterogeneous and thus theoretically an easy territory to conquer by the nationalists. By using the historical method, this study answers the above questions. The result of this study is a fact that the race between Masyumi and PNI to gain votes was one of a riveting story. As the centre of power where major political, social, and economic activities were conducted, the political constellation in Jakarta was comparatively more dynamic to regions outside the capital. Hence, Masyumi's triumph over the other major parties holds some historical significance. The fact that Masyumi triumphed over PNI (who were the winner on a national level) deserves a study unto itself, through which we can analyze Jakarta's political composition at the time, the political strategies employed by competing parties, voters' attitude, people's political participation and furthermore, Masyumi's campaign strategies.

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Introduction

The 1955 general election is the first general election ever held in Indonesia. The first legislative phase to elect members of parliament was held on 29 September 1955, while the second phase, held on 15 December 1955, elected members of the Constitutional Assembly. The election turned out to be a vibrant, tightly-contested one due to Indonesia's multi-party political climate of the time (Budihardjo). The result saw four parties emerging as winners of the election: the Indonesian National Party (PNI), the Council of Indonesian Muslim Association (Masyumi), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI).

Masyumi's rise in Indonesian politics can be traced back from the early Parliamentary Democracy era, where M. Natsir, an influential Masyumi cadre, was appointed as the fifth prime minister. Internal dispute over party's political orientation raged when the cabinet under Natsir proposed a bill for a general election, which some people argued as contradictive to the party's end goal to establish an Islamic state. The

move itself was also considered unconstitutional, since no articles in the constitution mention general election as a procedure for appointing representatives and leaders.

From a historical perspective, the 1955 general election was held in a time which Ricklefs termed as “the democratic experiment”: a phase where Indonesia was constantly on the search for forms of government and political systems to best suit the domestic situation (Ricklefs, 2008, p. 28); a time that most people now see as the most dynamic in the history of Indonesian democracy. While the election had served as an exercise in democracy, its ultimate goals were to constitute a parliament that accommodated all political spectrums, put an end to frequent cabinet crises, and create cohesion among political parties; in other words: political stability. Not only the first ever election taught valuable lessons in democracy, it has now also become a reference in how to set up an election for today’s historians, lawmakers and politicians (Todung, 2007, p. 171).

The idea for a nationwide election had been tossed around since it was first proposed in October 1945. A month later, the Government Edict of 3 November 1945 about the establishment of political parties was issued as a preliminary step towards a national election (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1984: 622; Sekretariat Negara, 1975: 56). The proposal gained a legal foothold with the 1948 Election Act (Law No. 27/1948,) which were later amended with the 1949 Act (Law No. 12/1949).

The 1949 Election Act stated that the election was to be held indirectly, a consideration based on the fact that the majority of Indonesians at the time were illiterate and it seemed that the proposal for a direct election had to be shelved for the time being. Nevertheless, the talk for a direct, nationwide election began for the second time as the new election draft became one of the priority programs under the Natsir Cabinet, which was constituted in the late 1950 (Feith, 1962). The planning were conducted by the Sahardjo Committee of the Kantor Panitia Pemilihan Pusat (Central Election Committee Office) and the results were brought to the parliament. As a side note, at that point Indonesia had returned to the unitary system, which replaced the 1949 Republic of the United States of Indonesia.

After the dissolution of the Natsir Cabinet just six months later, the talks for the election draft continued under the Sukiman Cabinet (also from Masyumi like his predecessor). This time the draft had become a constitutional necessity since the Article 57 of the 1950 Provisional Constitution ruled that members of the People’s Representative Council be elected through a direct election (Elson, 2013, p. 387). Just like the previous cabinet, Sukiman’s cabinet also failed to finalize the draft. The talks dragged on until 1953 when the draft was finalized into 1953 Election Act (Law No. 7/1953) under the Wilopo cabinet, which served as the legal basis for the upcoming 1955 election. Hence, the ‘indirect’ election act of 1948 and 1949 were no longer valid.

The 1955 used as system called proportional electoral system. This system was proposed to eliminate the weakness of the district system. The proportional system dictated that the allocation of seats should adhere to a predetermined, and agreed upon, ratio. For example, since the ratio was determined as 1:400,000 for every region, it means that a seat in the Assembly would be allocated for every 400,000 votes. The

number of representatives from a given region was determined by dividing the total number of eligible voters by 400,000. For this purpose, the nation was divided into several electoral regions (comprised of several counties and cities), which was comparatively bigger than districts (Budihardjo, 1977: 177–180).

The preparation phase began during the First Ali Sastroamijoyo Cabinet (31 July 1953–12 August 1955). After the election act had been issued, Panitia Pemilihan Indonesia (Indonesian Election Committee) was formed and inaugurated on 28 November 1953 through a presidential decree dated 7 November 1953, followed by a handover between Kantor Panitia Pemilihan Pusat and the newly formed PPI. S. Hadikusumo from PNI was appointed as PPI's head, and members were handpicked from various political parties and organizations such as NU, PSII, PRI, PRN, Partai Buruh, BTI, Perti and Parkindo (Feith, 1962: 384).

The PPI was tasked to: (1) form national and regional election committee, (2) determine the electoral regions. On 16 April 1955 it was decided that the parliamentary election would be held on 29 September 1955 and the Constitutional Assembly on 15 December 1955. The campaign phase had officially begun (Feith, 1962: 46). However, several electoral regions declared themselves unable to hold the parliamentary election on the stipulated date due to several reasons. So the PPI gave a two months window for those regions to hold the parliamentary election on their own schedule, which were due on 29 November. These regions were Aceh Barat, Aceh Timur, Aceh Utara, Riau, Bengkalis, Batanghari, Sanggau, Kapuas Hulu, Barito, Kotawaringin, Kotabaru, Bulungan, Poso, Donggala, Manggarai, Maluku Utara, Maluku Tenggara, dan lain-lain (Ahmad, 2016: 53).

Masyumi as a political party only lasted fifteen years, from 1945 to 1960. The party's 1945 constitution stated that Masyumi was to be the 'one and only Indonesian Islamic political party'. Given that Islam was the religion of the great majority of Indonesians, it was only natural that Masyumi leaders expected the party to be a dominant force in future elections. Suffice it to say, they were off for a rough start.

Right from the outset, Perti, a small faction of Sumatran traditionalists within Masyumi refused to join and established themselves as a rival party to Masyumi. Changes in Masyumi's leadership and organisational structure in 1949 alienated their NU bases and they eventually seceded in 1952 after being denied a seat in the Wilopo cabinet by the party board. NU became an independent party soon afterwards and formed the Indonesian Muslim League (Liga Muslimin Indonesia) with Perti and PSII as a rival group to Masyumi.

In the proto-parliament (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat: KNIP) of 1946-1949, Masyumi was allocated 60 seats, but this was never delivered. Similarly, in the provisional parliament of 1950-55, of which the composition was determined by the consensus of political elite, Masyumi only got 2146 of seats despite being virtually the largest party. Indonesia's first general election in 1955 also failed to achieve their goal for a sweeping victory. (Fealy, 2005, 80)

Since the early 1950s, Masyumi was often referred to in the context of a broader constituency known as the 'Keluarga Besar Bulan Bintang'. This included not only

Masyumi members but also members of affiliated or sympathetic organisations. This group was overwhelmingly modernist in their views and their key 'member organisations' were Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam (Islamic Association), Al-Irsyad, the Indonesian Muslim Youth Movement (GPII), the Indonesian (Tertiary) Students Association (HMI) and the Indonesian (Secondary) Students' Association (PII). Masyumi leaders and publications often referred to this 'Bulan Bintang Family' as if it was a cohesive group, but in reality it was an amorphous and shifting category (Suyoto & Redjeki, 2005)

For the modernist Masyumi, mobilization was used as a mean to maximize votes, particularly around the issue of threat from the communists, secular nationalists and the West. Masyumi concentrated on presenting itself as the guardian of the Islamic faith against the Indonesian secular state. Interpretation of Islamic symbols was also undertaken, by adapting the story of the Prophet Muhammad for political purposes. For Muslim leaders, the electoral outcome represented a devastating defeat. It reversed their expectation that the Muslim majority would wish for a constitution based on Islamic laws in Indonesia. Another shocking development, especially for modernist Masyumi leadership, was the rise of PKI who emerged as one of the biggest parties. Masyumi's failure was largely rooted in its inability to attract grassroots support from nominal Muslims (especially the *abangan*). The election also confirmed the secular-religious cleavage in the electoral arena. That it divided the electorate down the middle signalled for a continuing ideological battles. This result was repeated with small variations in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly.

The 1955 electoral outcomes revealed a clear division in the party choice of modernist and traditionalist Muslims. Partai NU's dominance in Central and East Java as well as South Kalimantan illustrated the strong role of traditional ulama and its pesantren networks. The Partai NU was also satisfied at increasing its number of seats from 8 in the DPRS to 45 in the Parliament. In contrast, Masyumi gained a majority in the Outer Islands and West Java, where Muhammadiyah and other reformist-oriented organizations were most active (Munhanif, 2012, 24).

Masyumi's anti-communist propaganda centered around presenting what they considered to be the real face of communism. The party leaders unrelentingly called on people to return to the very sources of their political enemies' doctrine. Natsir recalled Lenin's teachings concerning the elimination of the Revolution's opponents. In a speech made in Tandjung Priok in March 1954, Jusuf Wibisono referred to what he had experienced in a trip to Moscow, "the centre of communism", which led him to the conclusion that a compromise between religion and communism was impossible. Masyumi's leaders also warned their fellow countrymen about PKI's proposal to replace the reference to a single God in Pancasila with a simple affirmation of a principle of religious freedom, which would be the first step in a programme aimed at establishing a "freedom of anti-religious propaganda" (Madinier, 2015, 148).

Confrontations between the two parties sometimes went further than the usual polemics. From 1954, the Masyumi press regularly reported on violent clashes, and one of the most enlightening of these happened on 28 April 1954, at a PKI rally held in

Malang which was also attended by Masyumi supporters. In front of the rostrum from which the PKI's first secretary made his speech, a banner was unrolled which read: "Woe upon the terrorist-bandits of the BKOOI and Masyumi." According to the account given on D. N. Aidit's speech in Abadi, he explained that the PKI was anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, and also refuted any accusations presenting him as anti-religious.

Masyumi leaders' attacks on the PKI were not confined to the question of religion, however. Having convinced the Indonesian public of the dangers of the Soviet system, Masyumi went on to explain why it appealed to the PKI. The Muslim party needed to show that behind the old tune which the Indonesian communists banged out about offering an original path for their country to follow, the face of totalitarianism lurked menacingly. One of the most commonly used arguments was to refer to the portraits of international communist figures which could be seen at PKI rallies. Concerning threats made against Masyumi, the party's press often incriminated the communists whenever its members were beaten up by unknown individuals (Madinier, 2015, 152).

There were several reasons as to why the election could only be held in 1955. The nation had been preoccupied with defending and consolidating its territorial integrity in the years following the proclamation of independence. The lack of legal basis for election and bureaucratic inefficiency also proved to be a major obstacle.

Method

This research uses historical method through which past events are analyzed and evaluated. The method is further divided into four steps: heuristics, source analysis, interpretation, and historiography. This research uses Masyumi's official documents, which include the party's articles of association, party regulations, programs, profiles and various decrees issued by the party. Other sources include articles from Masyumi newspapers, periodicals and magazines, mainly Abadi newspaper, Hikmah magazine, and *Berita Masjumi* owned by Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia in Jakarta. Additional sources are also obtained from Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, KPU (General Elections Commission) Pusat and several institutions run by ex-Masyumi members. Secondary sources and references include books, journals and scholarly articles from private collection, Universitas Diponegoro library, Universitas Indonesia library and Perpustakaan Nasional.

The sources were then classified, verified and analyzed in preparation for the last step, which is historiography. Historiography includes all bodies of historical work, be it undergrad/graduate theses, dissertations or historical books.

Partai Masyumi in 1955 General Election

Mass media played a key role as a political instrument in the years leading up to the election. At the time, every party had their own publications; PNI with their daily *Suluh Indonesia Muda*, Partai Sosialis had *Pedoman*, NU had *Duta Masyarakat*, the Communist Party had *Harian Rakjat* and Masyumi had *Abadi*. Partindo even owned

three newspapers: *Pemandangan*, *Merdeka* and *Bintang Timur*. They were also *Sin Po* for left-leaning Chinese and *Keng Po* for the non-leftists (Hamad, 2004, p. 72).

Naturally, these newspapers promoted and propagated ideologies of the parties they were associated with. The newspapers also became a medium in which ideas and party programs were put forward and proselytized. Political jabs aimed at rivals was a common occurrence in newspapers of the time, since ideological polarization had reached an alltime high. Therefore the proliferation of newspapers at the time can not be simply explained with economic rationale. Ideas and discourse can be easily communicated and propagated to a wider audience through mass media, and political power no longer rested in the hands of political parties, but also to those who owned the means to sway public opinions.

Masyumi's leadership recognized the power of mass media as an instrument to propagate the party's political platforms and programs. In one of his books Daniel Dakhidae postulated that newspapers serve as a middlemen between capital and power. While processing information and texts, the newspapers also turn themselves into texts, and in other time into capital and eventually power (Dakhidae, 2003, p. 361). Masyumi distinguished themselves from other parties by having the highest number of official and affiliated newspapers. These official or Masyumi-affiliated newspapers were: *Abadi*, *Suara Masyumi*, *Berita Masyumi*, and *Hikmah* weekly. *Berita Masyumi* was published by the Central Committee's Department of Information and only internally circulated, while *Abadi* and *Hikmah* were aimed for wider readership and managed mostly by sympathizers or affiliated groups.

For the 1955 campaign in Jakarta Masyumi had big names like Sukiman, M. Natsir, Burhanuddin Harahap and M. Roem as their campaign spokespersons and strategists. It was no surprise that Masyumi relied heavily on mass meetings and put their renowned list of campaign speakers into good use. Their targets were as clear as day: Jakartan Muslims.

Masyumi Against Its Rivals

In the 1955 election Masyumi contested against the other three big parties: PNI, NU and PKI. NU finished third and this came as a surprise to a lot of people. The nationwide results for the three parties are as follows: PNI won the election with 8,434,653 or 22.3% votes, Masyumi came second with 7,903,886 or 20.9% votes and NU in third with 6,955,141 or 18.4% votes (Feith, 1999, p. 37).

Table 1 indicates that having just split up from Masyumi, NU's results came as a shock. For a party that was considered as an inexperienced splinter group of Masyumi, their performance in the election exceeded all expectations. Only 43,104,464 out of 77,987,979 people were eligible with only 37,787,569 valid ballots for the first phase. The big four represented the three dominant socio-political classes of the time, which is *abangan* for PKI, *santri* for Masyumi and NU and *priyayi* for PNI.

Rivalry between Masyumi and PKI was perhaps the fiercest among others due to their ideological incompatibility. *Harian Rakjat's* headlines often took a jab at Masyumi and Masyumi's newspapers did the same in retaliation. One example was

the “*Masyumi memalsu Ronggowarsito*” headline by *Harian Rakjat* that accused Masyumi of plagiarizing Ronggowarsito’s works and in return *Abadi* made “*Provokasi baru*” to counter *Harian Rakjat*’s accusation. Provocative banter was also common during campaign, one example involves one PKI speaker who jokingly stated during a speech that Lapangan Banteng (Ind. Bull’s Field, a public field in Jakarta) will be renamed Lapangan Onta (Camel’s Field) if Masyumi ever won the election, and Masyumi stated that the aforementioned field will be renamed Lapangan Beruang (Bear’s Field, after PKI’s ideological ties to Moscow) (*Kompas*, 27 Agustus 1997).

Table 1. The Big Four in 1955 Election

No.	Parties	Vote Count	%	Seats
1	Indonesian National Party (PNI)	8.434.653	22,3	57
2	Masyumi Party	7.903.886	20,9	57
3	Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)	6.955.141	18,4	45
4	Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI)	6.176.914	16,4	39

Source: Feith (1999).

While Masyumi clerics brought party propaganda into their Friday prayer speeches, PKI embraced traditional folk theater as their medium for propaganda. In Central Java, Lekra-affiliated Bakoksi (*Badan Koordinasi Ketoprak Seluruh Indonesia*/All-Indonesian Ketoprak Coordinating Board) went town to town performing plays with provocative titles such as “*Matine Gusti Allah*” (The Death of God), “*Gusti Allah Manten*” (God’s Wedding), *Malaikat Kimpoi* (When Angels Mate) and “*Gusti Allah Ngunduh Mantu*” (God’s Son-in-Law). Christians also became a target of this mockery through a play titled “*Paus Rabi*” (Pope’s Wedding) (Said, 2018, p. 42)

Through Hikmah’s *Kawan dan Lawan* column Masyumi urged their readers to take a precautions and observe the way communist parties rose to power in Russia, Poland and Romania (Hikmah, 1 Januari 1955). The party through its Central Consultative Assembly went even further by issuing a decree titled “*Communism in Islamic Law*” during the party’s 7th conference on 23–27 December 1954 which proclaimed that communism was incompatible with Islamic values and the communists could therefore be considered as infidels (*kufir*). This shows just how extreme and militant both sides were ideologically.

As I have stated previously, Masyumi finished second behind PNI. Though the result cemented PNI’s and Masyumi’s place in the national politics, neither were ecstatic with the result. At the same time the result saw the emergence of NU and PKI as strong contenders to the status quo. Each PNI and Masyumi could only secure 57 out of 257 seats, while NU and PKI saw an increase in their allotted seats, with 45 and 39 seats respectively (before the election both parties only had 8 and 17 seats in the Provisional Assembly). Masyumi previously boasted that they had around 40 millions members and symphatizers, so they had all the reasons to be disappointed with the

outcome (Maarif, 1996, p. 122). If we split the result into ideological lines, the Islamic parties (Masyumi, NU, and other Islamic parties) won 45.2% of the votes (116 out of 257 seats), while the Nationalist parties came second with 27.6% (71 out of 257 seats) and the communist/Marxist parties finished third with 15.2% (39 out of 257 seats). The remaining seats were divided among smaller socialist or leftist parties.

The rift between Masyumi and the nationalists over forms of government in the early days of the republic was reignited when Mei Kartawinata, member of Persatuan Rakyat Marhaen Indonesia/Permai (Indonesian Marhaen People's Union) issued a blasphemous statement that accused Muhammad as a false prophet (Feith, 2007, p. 350). As a result, around 500,000 Betawi muslims took to the street in protest over the statement. A PNI member named Hardi also caused a stir when he stated that the Quran was obsolescent (Schroder, 2003).

In response to the statements made by Permai and PNI members, Masyumi and other Islamic organizations launched a mass protest in February 1954. In reality, this protest can be considered as a continuation of the previous protest over the replacement of Masyumi-backed mayor with Sudiro, who was a PNI member. This precedent changed the composition of the Election Committee just a year before the election was about to be held, which put Masyumi at a disadvantage. The protest was also aimed at the government's inaction regarding the blasphemy case.

Masyumi's Campaign Strategies in Jakarta

According to Feith (2007, p. 23) several campaign issues that had been proven to be successful in galvanizing support in the countryside could not be utilized by Masyumi in Jakarta due to the city's moral climate. Therefore in Jakarta, Masyumi's campaign revolved around Islamic solidarity (*ukhuwah islamiyah*) instead of factionalism.

The 1955 election result in Jakarta put Masyumi as the winner. An open meeting was held at Taman W. R. Supratman on 23 October 1955 to determine the winner for the six allocated seats in the DPR (People's Representative Council) from Jakarta region. Of all participants, Masyumi and PNI were the only parties that secured the guaranteed one seat since their vote tallies exceeded the vote threshold. According to Jakarta Regional Election Committee, out of the total 791,046 ballots, the number of valid ballots was 766,764 and the invalids 24,282. Based on the result, the committee agreed to determine the threshold by dividing the number of valid ballots by six, which is 127,794 votes per seat (*Merdeka*, 24 October 1955).

Masyumi won in the Jakarta region with 174,043 votes and the result proved that the party had a significant amount of support in Jakarta. Their victory can be attributed to effective campaign strategies and the support of Muhammadiyah members. The election in Jakarta went relatively smoothly.

The first strategy employed by Masyumi was to maximize the role of their media outlets. There was a trend even long before the election in which party-affiliated newspaper to start opinion wars between themselves. This mostly resulted from their supposedly irreconcilable ideological and political differences. The quarrel between

Abadi and *Harian Rakjat* really started in 1952 when an article in *Harian Rakjat* accused Masyumi of being pro-*nekolim* (neo-colonialist) and pro-Western after the under-the-table signing of the Mutual Security Act by Prime Minister Sukiman, which received widespread condemnation and criticism (*Abadi*, 2 February 1952). *Abadi* returned the favor by issuing an article which likens PKI, who were very vocal about land-reform issues, to the Bolsheviks before the 1917 Revolution. *Abadi's* anti-PKI rhetorics reflected Masyumi's fervent anti-communist attitude and most of their anti-PKI communist propaganda was about discrediting communism. And this hostile exchanges had a polarizing effect that made supporters from both parties more militant.

From the outcome of the election we can infer that partisan media outlets had had a huge role in Masyumi's campaign. And this was probably a strategy that Masyumi was forced to take since Masyumi had lost lots of their support base after the split of NU and PSII from Masyumi's rank. Masyumi's other strategies involves cooperating with Muhammadiyah in their community outreach programs, e.g. healthcare, communal recitation and religious education (Hefner, 1997, p. 81). The party also focused their campaign in the form of mass meetings, from branch to national level. In these meetings Masyumi's big names from Jakarta like Sukiman and Natsir would give speeches. In this case having big names on their side became Masyumi's big advantage.

During the canvassing phase Masyumi cadres would go door to door promoting Masyumi's programs, slogans and logo through pamphlets and posters, sometimes even forums where people could inform their needs and grievances. In this meetings, Masyumi members and speakers would also stressed Masyumi's involvement in the independence movement along with other muslim clerics. Masyumi had a rather unfrontational attitude towards other Islamic parties because there was an unwritten agreement in place to uphold the sense of muslim solidarity (*ukhuwah islamiyyah*) and to keep these parties from being involved in a political quarrel.

The result of the 1955 election gave Masyumi much needed legal-parliamentarian basis for the pursue of their political and ideological goals. In support of this, Masyumi's Central Consultative Assembly issued a fatwa regarding the election, which stated that it was mandatory for every muslims to be involved in the effort to constitute a parliament and the Constitutional Assembly (Samsuri, 2004, p. 76).

Conclusion

From the study, it can be inferred that Partai Masyumi and their rivals relied heavily on their news outlets during their campaign, both to spread their political programs and to inform the public about their agendas and platforms. In this front, Masyumi outcompeted their rivals through sheer number. Masyumi's news outlets consisted of *Abadi*, *Berita Masyumi*, *Hikmah*, *Suara Partai Masyumi* and *Suara Masyumi*. The number of news outlets employed by rivals such as PNI were much smaller in number, in this case PNI only had *Persatuan Indonesia* and *Banteng*. However, their effectiveness made up for their small number.

All in all, the 1955 election was a lively one. Every party made use of their well-known cadres and members in their campaigns to gain votes. In Jakarta Masyumi members went from neighborhood to neighborhood on their canvassing effort to gain grassroot votes. The party, just like other parties also held mass rallies and meetings. During the campaign phase, clashes between rivaling parties (Masyumi, PNI, NU and PKI) were common; inflammatory slogans and songs reflected the animosities between these parties. Masyumi's mass media campaign and door-to-door approach proved to be the keys to their success in Jakarta.

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