Political Economy of the Islamist Party in a Muslim Democracy The experience of PKS of Indonesia

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the effort of PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Justice and Prosperous Party) to win the heart of the people, and to build relatively solid party-mass relations. Considering that the newly emerging democratic Indonesia, which is characterized by rampant money politics as well as corrupt, pragmatic, or opportunistic behaviors among elites and broader electorates alike, the promotion of piety and morality to secure the loyalty of electorates is not sufficient. Under such conditions, PKS needs to compromise and adopt pragmatic strategies, by playing down their idealistic goal. One important strategy in this regard is the community-building, launched to provide welfare services. This strategy is engineered to build close linkages between party elites and electorates. Not only creating image of the party as ‘caring’ and ‘religious’ among people who receive the party’s welfare service, this community-building strategy also acts as a remind for the cadres that the party still struggle in the original path of dakwah, i.e. a religious struggle to build an Islamic society with justice and equity. It is argued that the party’s well-disciplined organizational structures and ‘community building’ strategy to provide social welfare services that fill both material and spiritual needs of pragmatic electorates are the key to explaining the party’s ability to build a relatively solid mass support base.

Key Words: Political Islam, Welfare, Islamist Party.