

The Rise of Islamic Populism and Social Alliances of the Muslim Middle-Class in the West Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the manifestation of religious populism through a case study in West Sumatra, highlighting its rise to power and the consequent shift towards religion as a central factor in public policy decisions. In West Sumatra, where the *Minangkabau* reside, Islamic populism received support from the economically established, middle-class traders. It occurred due to the change within *Minangkabau* society, where the clan's traditional role in meeting the needs of its members has been disrupted by modernization. Replacing the clan's roles, financially stable middle-class Muslims have come to support the needy and community activities, eventually leading to the rise of Islamic populism. This transformation, from clan-based to multi-clan alliances, has provided the consolidated middle class with the impetus to advocate for a conservative Islamic agenda. The research findings also underscore the necessity of considering contextual factors, including urban-rural dynamics and community-specific socio-cultural structures. Data for this research were collected by employing vis-à-vis interviews and active observation from August 2019 to December 2020 in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Keywords: Islamic populism, middle-class, social alliances, West Sumatra

INTRODUCTION

The rise of populism has often been explained from the perspective of a structural, political, economic, and political style, yet less by society or communal identity. This article links to the change from traditional to modern society that contributed to the development of Islamic Populism in West Sumatra. In this article, we analyzed how changes in *Minang* society strengthened the sense of community or *Minang* communal identity, which further made the moral intervention

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by the middle class to the poor stronger, more expansive, and more legitimate. The rise of Islamic populism occurred not just due to concerns but also due to social capital generated by the middle class to form an interclass alliance with the lower class. Meanwhile, conservative Islamic groups in West Sumatra encourage politicians to bring up the issue of morality in the public sphere. With support from local politicians and the government, Islamic groups dispelled the inflow of Chinese conglomerates that had long been assumed to have been able to disrupt economic dominance. Chinese entrepreneurs are assumed as potential anxiety, yet in other areas such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan, the Chinese have long dominated the economy.

The support from the local politicians is a logical consequence of the strength of Islam in West Sumatra. Supported by politicians and clerics, the local government implemented local regulations pertaining to moral politics. By using moral anxiety, particularly the issue of the spread of LGBT and the potential anxiety that will dominate the Chinese' economy, Islamic populism targets mostly the middle class in West Sumatra.

The development of populism has become a phenomenon in several countries. In Indonesia, according to Hadiz and Robison (2017) and Hadiz (2018), the strengthening of populism is due to the pressure to elevate or survive has made Muslim youths and professionals turn to religion for their life. This situation follows the characteristics of urban society, where

the pressure to survive and succeed must be added to an urban environment that tends to be individualistic. Jati (2013) also views the urbanization of rural communities into cities as a trigger for economic inequality. Hadiz and Robison (2017), Hadiz (2018), and Jati (2013) emphasize the socio-historical aspect of the emergence of populist Islam in Indonesia, especially during the New Order era, where Chinese entrepreneurs received various economic privileges.

This situation follows the characteristics of urban society, where the pressure to survive and succeed must be added to an urban environment that tends to be individualistic. However, the debate on Islamic populism brought by Hadiz (2018) leaves a gap between Indonesia's socio-economy, which can vary greatly, and what he describes as the typical characteristics of urban society. Meanwhile, rural area people who still rely on communal life - helping each other will have different conditions. His approach also lacks an explanation for how we understand the local community's social structure so that it can strengthen populism. Unlike Hadiz and Robison (2017), who stated that Islamic populism supporters come from an anxious middle class concerned about their future, West Sumatra's key supporters of religious populism come from the established middle-class, especially traders. More importantly, the support from the middle class raises a puzzle as to why the middle class resonates with Islamic populism in West Sumatra while they are not economically threatened and unstable.

Despite the success in economic growth, the inflow of Middle Eastern immigrants has triggered concerns over economic stability and disruption of local culture. Similarly, with the populism in the United States, where Trump, under the slogan of 'Make America Great Again' had garnered support from various white privileged groups, in Europe, the anti-immigrant issue has become the platform of political parties as the concern over the immigrant's inflow disrupts the economic stability. The notion that the development of populism targets more on the middle class has also been suggested by Mietzner (2020), who claimed that populism no longer attracts the poor but instead, the middle class that feels anxious and has anxiety that the other groups could overtake their domination.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected by means of employing face-to-face interviews and active observation. The researcher herself is part of the local community, who has lived and become part of the *Minangkabau* community in West Sumatra. As a local, the author has observed the rise of identity politics followed by the attempts to illegitimate minority groups, especially the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) community. One of the events that served as a milestone of the attempt to illegitimize the group initiated by the government was the event that took place in November 2018, where the Mayor of Padang, Mahyeldi, presided over the anti-vice and anti-LGBT declaration.

The researcher also documented several local mass media as well as conversations on social media, including WhatsApp groups, as references to the discourse on Islamic Populism. The aspiration of the authoritarian mostly dominated local media, whereas social media and WhatsApp groups contained more diverse members with variations in opinions.

Before conducting the interview, the researcher provided an overview of the questions. The selection of informants was conducted by means of both purpose and snowball samplings. Within the time range from August to September 2019, the researcher initially interviewed the informants that the researcher had known to obtain the background of conditions in West Sumatra. The researcher asked about the general condition of life in West Sumatra, especially the informants with minority backgrounds (LGBT, non-Muslim, and non-*Minangkabau*). There were ten informants interviewed as part of the initial data collection.

Subsequently, within the time range from September 2019 to December 2021, equipped with the initial data, the researcher conducted further interviews with local politicians, merchants, journalists, and religious-based groups and organizations. The questions were on the rise of Islamic movements in West Sumatra and the involvement of mostly merchants' Muslim groups that supported the Islamic activities in West Sumatra. Further interviews involved 15 informants.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher could not return to West Sumatra, and thus the data collection was performed by an assistant researcher from November 2020 to December 2021. Besides the data collected by the assistant researcher, the researcher also conducted online interviews.

Islamic Populism

According to Oztas (2020), Islamic populism is a subtype of populism. Islamic populism aims to replace the secular authoritarian system with religious people who run the government for the benefit of the *ummah* (the whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion) to attract the attention of its supporters. Oztas uses the AKP party in Turkey and the PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*: Prosperous Justice Party) in Indonesia as examples of politicians' efforts to use Islamic populism to gain support, especially from the conservatives. This opinion is in line with Nilan and Wibowanto (2021), who see Islamic populism as a form of opportunist politics that utilizes political identity. Yilmaz et al. (2021) argue that in a country with a majority Muslim population, Islamic populism creates a categorization of supporters based on religious identity and the degree of piety of religious adherents.

In his work, Oztas (2020) proposed Islamic populism as a political approach aimed at supplanting a secular government while highlighting the influence of Islamic political parties in promoting identity-based political rhetoric. Meanwhile, Hadiz (2018) expressed that Islamic Populism

accepted democracy by entering formal institutions and implanting their agenda into the democratic system. Democracy became the path to obtaining social and economic benefits so *ummah* could prevail. He then made the Muslim middle class the basis for Islamic Populism. While Hadiz and Oztac highlighted Islamic Populism and criticized the establishment that was considered not in favor of the Islamic groups, in West Sumatra, the Islamic groups implemented identity politics to sustain power. In line with Hadiz's structural political and economic approach that capitalism serves as the horseblock of Islamic Populism, the West Sumatran middle class, as a group with good financial capacity and established, became supportive and even nurtured capitalism as the basis for the growth of the Islamic environment.

However, the debate on Islamic populism brought by Hadiz leaves a gap between Indonesia's socio-economy, which may vary greatly, and what he describes as the typical characteristics of urban society. The pressure of having to face class systems within larger groups of society has made Muslim youths and professionals turn to religion in their life. This situation follows the characteristics of urban society, where the pressure to survive and succeed must be added to an urban environment that tends to be individualistic. Meanwhile, people in rural areas who still rely on communal life—helping each other will have different conditions. Hadiz's approach also lacks an explanation of how to understand the local community's social structure so that it can

strengthen populism. The study of populism is inseparable from the character of society. His argument about Islamic populism is characterized by a class antagonism between Islamic middle classes who are frustrated because they feel structurally discriminated. Expectations as middle class and educated to be able to move up the class; in fact, the structural power of the economy dominated by Chinese Non-Muslims made it difficult for them to develop. Hadiz's approach can explain this phenomenon at the macro and structural levels. Nevertheless, every region and the cases that emerge could be the cause of the emergence of the phenomenon of Islamic populism, not only because of class antagonism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Minangkabau Society Transformation

In order to track the development of Islamic Populism in West Sumatra, one needs to understand the socioeconomic changes and cultural transformation in West Sumatra. Changes that occur under the migration and high mobility in the *Minangkabau* community have had implications for changes that occur in the social and economic structure of the hometown. Along with the modernization of clan property that initially served as the economic support for the clan and community members, it has become impossible for clan property to accommodate all the needs of its members. This condition forced the *Minangkabau* to expand their affiliation to rely on the clan and the community. As a well-established economic group in West Sumatra, the

Muslim middle class is the economy's driving force that provides jobs and economic support to those in need.

The traditional system in *Minangkabau* can provide for the needs of clan members through communal land that is jointly cultivated for the benefit of the clan. Oki (1977) quotes Schrieke, a professor of ethnology and history of Indonesia, who uses the term "primitive communism" to explain the communal workings of traditional *Minangkabau* society. It is in line with a statement from a senior journalist from West Sumatra, Hasril Chaniago, who revealed that the *Minangkabau* were never too rich or too poor. According to Fanany and Fanany (2018), this way of life is to avoid the possibility of poverty and suffering, especially for *Minangkabau* women and children. Along with modernization, social changes within the *Minangkabau* community have also undergone several shifts. We will explain the transformation experienced by the *Minangkabau* society, especially how social migration has resulted in changes to the role of *Mamak* (maternal uncles), changes in systems and customary land ownership, and expanding affiliations.

On 15 February 1958, in Padang, West Sumatra Province, the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (*Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, PRRI*) officially declared a revolt against the central government of the Republic of Indonesia. The revolt broke out partly due to regional dissatisfaction with the central government led by Soekarno. The province later became the center stage

of the battle and struggle of the uprising. The defeat of the PRRI left the *Minangkabau* wounded and traumatized, which up to the present, has become a key part of the disinclination of the *Minangkabau* to vote for PDIP (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), a party with strong historical ties to Soekarno. Many *Minangkabau* decided to leave their home villages. Naim (1984) noted that prior to the PRRI uprising, the *Minangkabau* in Jakarta was estimated to have reached one hundred thousand people. After the defeat of PRRI, the figure doubled.

Following the end of the PRRI and Soeharto dictatorship, the *Minangkabau* community underwent a significant transformation characterized by extensive and enduring migration. Migrants, who previously tended to be individuals (Kato, 1978), were dominated by *Minangkabau* men in the search for wealth and knowledge. After PRRI, the migration pattern was transformed from individual to familywise: men brought their children and wives from their hometowns (Kato, 1978). It is possible that at the early phase of migration, a man would go alone, and once he finds a good livelihood, his wife and children would be taken along with him. Being far from the home village makes the father much more responsible for the well-being of the children. Fathers cannot rely on rice fields (agriculture) anymore. Likewise, not everyone can afford and have access to education. It makes the trade sector a main and rational livelihood. *Merantau* (out-migration) is also a livelihood transformation from the original agrarian society by the

cultivation of tribal land as the economic foundation into more reliance on the trade sector, primarily by making relations or contacts as a founding capital in the world of business. In the beginning phase of *merantau*, men will serve as apprentices in a business owned by relatives. Once they understand the business's ins and outs, they will establish their own business and become independent. Once they manage to become established traders, *Minang* migrants will invite their relatives and provide them with starting capital or teach them business and even access to education overseas (Iman & Mani, 2013). The notion that support from families became an important factor was also suggested by Hastuti et al. (2015); extended family kinship adopted by the *Minang* ethnic groups was in the hope of upholding the family's common interests.

The transformation that initially took place among migrants eventually spread to their hometowns, a logical consequence of modernization. The population in the home village was increasing while the *pusako* (inheritance) land was limited, making the existing assets no longer capable of sustaining their livelihood. On the one hand, modernization requires land for development; land without legality and entitlement paper works creates skepticism for investors. On the other hand, according to Hanandini (1996), through the Agrarian Act of 1960, the government mandates the certification of custom-based lands, changing the nature of customary land that initially belonged to the clan to be in the name of individual ownership.

This social change has encouraged the *Minangkabau* people, especially those living in the cities of Bukittinggi, Payakumbuh, and Padang, to seek other forms of affiliation outside their clan. The cities of Padang, the capital city of West Sumatra, and Bukittinggi, the trade center, have become places of migration for residents of regencies within West Sumatra. Many have migrated to Padang City, leaving their hometowns and customary lands. In Padang, they had to find a new source of income.

Despite the shift in the characteristics of the traditional *Minangkabau* communal society, it is still practiced outside their hometown. Simon (2007) explained that the demand for integration is very high in the West Sumatra neighborhood. Research from Hofferth and Iceland (1998) suggests that people from urban areas are required to be independent and individualistic, which is different from rural area communities with stronger bonds with the family. If they experience difficulties, they will likely be given financial support from their family. Communities used to be communal, but they had to expand other affiliations because their land or clans could no longer afford all the needs of their clan members. In order to survive, they have to find assets for livelihood outside their clan; economically weak clan members get support from the clan and outside the clan, especially the middle class in their community. Aside from the support obtained from family, support could also be gained from the surroundings of the community. For instance, the top minimarket chain in West Sumatra,

“Budiman,” is owned by Yasmar. Suppliers of cakes in the minimarket chain came from the circles of friends from *majelis taklim* (Islamic Forum). Likewise, suppliers for plastics in Pasar Aur Kuning also came from the circles of friends from *majelis taklim*.

Muslim Middle-Class Challenging the Stability

The strengthening of identity politics marks the critical point for the transformation of populism in Indonesia, and it places polarization based on religious sentiment as a precondition for the effectiveness of populist strategies in electoral mobilization (Margiansyah, 2019). This finding is in line with Garadian (2017), who assesses grassroots strength as the key to the success of Islamic populism. This condition is also supported by robust political vehicles and populist narratives that can attract people from various classes. The roles of regional regulations that have *Sharia* (Islamic Law) nuances have undeniably played a vital part, but those regulations emerge because there is support from the community. The shift toward greater regional autonomy in Indonesia since 2000 has enabled regional and local governments in West Sumatra to institute.

The trade sector in the provinces of Sumatra was controlled mainly by *Minangkabau* traders, while the Chinese-descent control agents or trade representatives. At the same time, the West Sumatra government issued a policy to ban the operation of small store chains to protect local businesses within the province.

Besides the retail trade, the apparel industry, such as the manufacture of uniforms, is also ethnically dominated by the *Minangkabau*. The industry is indeed a small-scale industry that, yet, has the ability to employ many workers. Usually, confection entrepreneurs involve tailors to make their ordered clothes. West Sumatra's economy depends on small industry that is very dependent on markets. Bureaucrats, traders, medium-scale entrepreneurs, and professionals in Jakarta are lower-middle class, but in a city in West Sumatra, they may be considered "elites" (Van Klinken, 2014). The middle-class Islamic group comes from the circle set up, which depends on the real sector, namely the basic needs of society, such as clothing and groceries.

Why are traders involved in religious activities in West Sumatra? There are several reasons. First, from observations and interviews, it appears that relatively established traders are more interested in being active in religious activities. Businesses that already have trusted people and are relatively stable give traders more time to devote themselves to religion. The second factor is that traders have flexible time. If office workers are bound by working hours, traders are relatively more independent and can arrange their time to participate in the *majelis taklim* (religious study groups). In contrast to traders who are already involved in religious activities at their productive age, employees usually start their involvement after entering the retirement period. In their retirement, they spend much time in the mosque, join

majelis taklim, and dedicate time and energy to the community where they live. One of them is Yenmis, a 69-year-old retiree of West Sumatra Public Works Agency. After retiring, he actively participated in religious studies. Where he lives, Yenmis is a prominent citizen who will not hesitate to help residents that are in trouble, ranging from providing financial assistance even up to providing capital for trading.

Patron Client; Middle Class and Local Politicians

According to Winters (2013), wealth is the most potent power source in influencing political decisions; in oligarchy theory, power resources are essential. The power resources possessed by the middle class are not as crucial as in the oligarchy. Historically, the middle class has had a vital role in Indonesian politics. Structurally, the middle class is closer to the lower groups, and this facilitates coalitions between classes when mass mobilization is needed to confront problems. The 1998 demonstration serves as evidence of the role of middle and upper-class groups who support the 1998 movement financially by providing food supplies to demonstrators and students who incidentally come from the educated middle-upper class. The middle class of West Sumatra is the supporter and activator of Islamic groups such as the *Subuh Berjamaah* movement (consisting of 212 West Sumatra alumni), Front Pembela Islam (FPI), and the Community Development Forum (FPU). Most of its members work as traders and entrepreneurs in West Sumatra. They are

willing to allocate time and funds for the development of *dakwah* (preaching of Islam) in West Sumatra. An established economy allows them to provide financial assistance to the surrounding community, including those closely related to the local political figures.

The support of the upper-middle class to Islamic politicians, especially those from West Sumatra, is not new. The closeness between the middle class and politicians started because of the same mission, but it is undeniable that this closeness eventually gave rise to a pattern of patron-client; no free lunch. We interviewed using Zoom Buya Gusrizal, head of the West Sumatra MUI (Council of Ulama). He also received support from traders, especially from Bukittinggi. With their support, he founded the *Surau* Buya Gusrizal in Bukittinggi. According to Buya Gusrizal, constructing the three-story building cost him 8 billion Rupiahs. He had dreamed that this *Surau* would become a center for the study and guidance of the *ummah*.

Buya Gusrizal lives in the *surau*. There, he usually meets directly with the community, conducts teaching, and *taklim*. In keeping up with contemporary development, Buya Gusrizal also utilizes communication technology in preaching. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people experienced economic difficulties, yet the government was slow to assist. The community turned to clerics or their closest relatives for help during the pandemic. He expressed that should anyone need help. He would just share the information on

WhatsApp groups. Later, other congregation members who are financially more capable would donate in response. *Ulama's* ability to raise funds and provide assistance directly to society is a form of community belief as well as trust, and this shows strong root movements. In political matters, Buya Gusrizal has never been directly involved in the world of practical politics, but if someone asks for support and the programs carried out are in the interests of the *ummah*, he will provide support. He also carried out relations with Middle Eastern donors. As a graduate of the region, he maintained good relationships with several donors for constructing the mosque in Padang. It is not unusual for middle eastern graduates to return to Indonesia to bring knowledge and connections; they can connect to donors who will later be targeted to help the Islamic activities in their area.

The community also actively carried out fundraising per group Khairul Azmi, who coordinated Umrah pilgrims' alumni through his travel agent. The group itself is the average merchant by profession. Azmi directed the funds he earned for orphans and orphanages. In addition to using the WhatsApp group, Azmi also made use of a Facebook page. For example, in April 2020, he raised funds for 600 grocery packages at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to raising funds from alumni donors for the *Umrah* pilgrims, Azmi also received assistance from Andri Warman (candidate Mayor for Agam Regency) for Rp 10 million.

Hadiz and Robison (2017) argue that the absence of liberal and left-wing groups contributes to the rising right wing in Indonesia. So far, the liberal group (Hayamotsu, 2013) has been overwhelmed to hook up the Muslim community's attention. Apart from the lack of government support (Hayamotsu, 2013), the narrative and the values expressed by the liberals are still unfamiliar to the Muslim grassroots. Unlike the conservative groups working at the grassroots by carrying out social activities like philanthropy, the liberal groups practically only spread discourse without forming grassroots groups. In the Soeharto era, the elite determines who is the leader of a region. Following Soeharto's collapse, the political system also changed, for instance, the implementation of local elections and decentralization. Local elections are expensive and require intensive, significant efforts for resources. It is no wonder local politicians rely on support groups to help their maneuvers. Local politics election involvement: Religious leaders are not directly involved, but grassroots are moving to raise funds and support groups.

What motivates the middle class to dedicate their time, energy, and money to be actively involved in society? The most important factor is the demands of religion. In Islam, *dakwah* is crucial in inviting people to be kind. *Dakwah* can be performed in any form according to individual abilities. For instance, giving alms and inviting people to be kind. The call to do *dakwah* is the main reason for activating religious activities, and aside from religious obligation, giving

charity a ladder to climb political life. However, Fauzia (2013) believes that religion-based generosity gives rise to patron-client relationships. Donors have a political interest in attracting the attention of their voters by helping community members. Especially in the era of local elections, one vote is important. Therefore, it becomes relevant that givers of charity, society, and politicians have their respective interests. According to Fauzia (2013), there is a link between the state and philanthropic practice. If the state is not powerful and weak, Muslim civil society will use philanthropic practices to support social change to challenge the state.

Patron-client relationships are not always in the form of money but can also be connections. Khairul Azmi, the owner of *Umrah* travel in Bukit Tinggi, is one of Mahyeldi's campaign team members. When running for Governor of West Sumatra, Mahyeldi was nominated by the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and was finally elected Governor of West Sumatra for 2020–2024. As a campaign team member, Azmi struggled to visit residents' homes to campaign for the Mahyeldi ticket. Before becoming a travel entrepreneur, Azmi had worked in the USA, Bali, and on cruise ships. With his tourism experience, he aspired to advance the field of tourism in West Sumatra. "He (Mahyeldi) will put the right people in each institution. It is good that I have experience in the field of tourism."

Besides maneuvers in close proximity with candidates of regional leaders, Islamic groups coalesce with *adat* groups

in encouraging the government to protect local entrepreneurs, especially from the onslaught of Jakarta-based conglomerates dominated by Chinese entrepreneurs. In 2013, Mayor Fauzi Bahar of Padang granted the work permit for the construction of Lippo Mall and Siloam Hospital in Padang City. The Lippo Group was owned by the Chinese-descent conglomerate James Riady. The closeness of James Riady with Evangelical Christian groups had sparked fear over Christianization in Padang. The joint meeting of *Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI)* and *Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau (LKAAM)* with Islamic groups in West Sumatra on 3 June 2013 decided to deny the construction of Lippo/Siloam Super Block and demanded the government to revoke the work permit.

The rejection was initiated by one of the Islamic groups called *Forum Masyarakat Minangkabau* (Minangkabau Community Forum), an organization chaired by Irfianda Abidin, a *Minangkabau* entrepreneur who was also actively involved in politics. In order to accomplish the struggle to reject Lippo business in the city, FMM demanded commitment from candidates running for the mayoral election in 2013 to sign a statement to scrap Lippo Group's investment in Padang if elected. In the end, the planned establishment of Lippo Mall was finally canceled. In the end, Lippo Group had to withdraw their Rp 2 trillion investment plan.

The incident should not be understood as a rejection of Lippo Group as a business holding that stands close to the Non-Muslims, but more as a form of dismay from

the Muslim middle class with the economic stability they have managed to maintain. Embracing capitalism is a consequence of globalization and consumerism, an act that the middle class does to compete with the Chinese-descent entrepreneur group. Unlike in other areas of Indonesia, especially Jakarta, the indigenous-Chinese descent relations in West Sumatra are based on economic envy. Although the tension merged due to differences in ethnicity and devout conviction, they are unequivocally tied to running the local economy, politics, and other public issues. In the context of business, they are viewed as good for businesses. For *Minang* people, the Chinese are trustworthy and professional business partners; establishing business relationships with the Chinese can make a business grow faster (Alfirdaus et al., 2014).

Even though the Chinese are considered a profitable business partner, the *Minang* people still want to be dominant and in control. Reflecting on the condition of other provinces, where local entrepreneurs do not play an important role in the economy, *Minangkabau* entrepreneurs approach politicians to keep the interests of local entrepreneurs in mind. Khairul Azmi states:

“For the Muslims to grow and develop, they have to be meticulous. Pardon me for expressing that or political issues. Why have I from the very beginning been persistent on voting for Buya and Audy (Gubernatorial and Lieutenant-gubernatorial candidate of West Sumatra (2021–2024)). That is for the sake of the *ummah*. When he is governor, there will be no more *Indomaret*

or anything like it. My sole concern is only the improvement of the people's economy. We can see that in the neighboring province, particularly Pekanbaru, now you can't find stalls by the road, just because *Alfamart* and its kind are allowed to run."

Khairul Azmi expressed his concerns if no protection is provided to local entrepreneurs. It is then imperative for the local entrepreneurs and the regional government to have a similar vision to support a condition where the existing dominance of local entrepreneurs in the economy remains in place. Moreover, he thinks those convenience stores will shut down local businesses, which will only profit Jakarta, the people in West Sumatra will just be pure consumers. In his mind, a popular political economy is an economy that defends and benefits the local economy.

The dismay can be perceived from the perspective that Chinese descent will seize and disrupt the domination of the Muslim middle class that had been constructed for quite a long time. As Jean Baudrillard (2019) mentioned, the middle class is also an anxious class, ever aware that there is a limit to their social mobility. It is this very concern that led them to reject the granting of business permits for *Indomaret* and *Alfamart* convenience stores in West Sumatra. Potential anxiety would be dominated by concerns over the Chinese grip on the economy, particularly upon glancing at the national economy and comparing it to the surrounding areas of West Sumatra (Riau, Jambi, and North Sumatra). There will be potential anxiety if the economic protection that has run so

far ceases to be in effect. Populism serves as an instrument to maintain the political and economic stability dominated by the Muslim middle class in West Sumatra. Rather than disrupt the system and stability, Islamic populism in West Sumatra is a kind of attempt from the conservative Islamists to maintain proximity to the power and, at the same time, gain access to benefiting access on economy and politics.

Conformity, Morality, and Identity Politics

While the concern over the inflow of Chinese entrepreneurs to West Sumatra became the populist's agenda to maintain the interests of local entrepreneurs to economic dominance, the issue of morality became the populist's attempt to maintain far-right supporters. Kitley (2008) explains why Indonesia considers morality issues necessary, especially in the post-reform era. Kitley argues that the freedom and democracy emerging after the fall of Soeharto's governance caused the Muslim conservatives to fear uncontrolled freedom from happening caused by Westernization and globalization. One example of Western-style liberation being feared is pornographic content in *Playboy* magazine, an adult magazine franchise from America. Conservatives argue that the content on *Playboy* is dangerous if viewed by minors since it is difficult to monitor and distribute in Indonesia. The presence of LGBT, pornography, and free sex induces moral panics. Therefore, it is no wonder many parents persuade their children to go into

Islamic education and wish to be introduced to the religion early.

Conformity is part of West Sumatra culture. Simon (2012) argued that conformity ties to tradition and religion. The desire to be a good Muslim is encouraged not only by individuals but also by society and institutions. This statement is supported by the research of Indrizal et al. (2009), which describes the implementation of moral selection for mosque aid programs. The aid recipient is supposed to be amid misfortune, be a good Muslim, and uphold Islamic religious values. Less religious people would find it difficult or be unprioritized to receive aid. This scheme is carried out by *Forum Ummat Islam* (FUI), which provides basic needs assistance to the congregation, intending to make the community loyal and motivated to pursue the studies they hold.

Furthermore, according to Simon (2012), strong social bonds are linked to the nuances of a binding tradition. At this stage, one Muslim's mistake belongs to the individual and is formed and bound by the community, where religious ideology is not the central aim, but the realization as a pious human being is prioritized and has the primary place in society. Simon believes that this strong kinship bond is an influential factor in imposing group rules at the expense of the individual. Individuals are shaped and evaluated by the community perspective. The belief that obedience does not belong to the individual but must be spread throughout the community motivates people to correct, control, and remind one another.

Efforts to remind each other are joint in communities in West Sumatra. For example, Irsyad, a cellphone shop owner in Bukittinggi, admitted that he did not hesitate to immediately warn if he found actions and thoughts considered different and not following religious teachings. "One of my employees is gay, I advise him, I invite him to pray, he does it because of the influence of his friends. In my opinion, being LGBT is the worst sin against Allah wrath and is worse than other sins, such as alcohol consumption and adultery."

How does religion come into play with populism? Riesebrodt (2010) argued that the intersection of faith and populism is superficial, merely a continuation of tradition instead of a form of religious obedience. The piety depicted is more related to cultural righteousness, which he refers to as religious tradition. Religious populism is more readily accepted and grown in society when linked to culture. Alienation was successfully established through empowerment between religious institutions and populist actors to maintain power. Besides, populists could sustain alliances with religious institutions as long as they could 'impose their vision of religion' on the religious authorities or co-opt them Roy (2016). The populist did that in West Sumatra and received support from the administration and traditional leaders.

In West Sumatra, the Islamic and cultural groups collaborate to gain power by utilizing morality issues. Andoni (2009) argues that the cultural group tends to benefit from their control over Nagari resources, but the religious group can frame morality

issues as something to be fought for in the form of ABS-SBK (*Adat basandi Syarak, Syarak basandi Kitabullah*, which means “Customs is based on the *sharia*, the *sharia* is based on the Holy Book.” ABS-SBK became the reference for the legalization and promulgation of regional ordinances with *Sharia* nuances in West Sumatra. According to Hadiz (2018), local customs act as a cultural idiom, unifying varying interpretations of religion. Those who support the *Minangkabau* customary rules also use *Sharia* to legitimize their point of view. Solok City is a pioneer in issuing regulations with nuances of *sharia* in West Sumatra by issuing regulations on reading and writing the Holy Quran in 2001 and a law concerning the obligation to wear Muslim clothes (hijab) for women in 2002. After Solok issued these regulations, other cities in West Sumatra followed. During the administration of Fauzi Bahar as Mayor of Padang City (2003-2013), a local regulation concerning the obligation to wear Muslim clothes for women was issued for civil servants and students at public schools in Padang.

One of the indications of strengthening Islamic populism is the emergence of the dichotomy of “us” versus “them.” Polarization is essential for populism to create images of who is part of the group and who is not. In Indonesia, to attract voters from the Islamic background, religious and nationalist political parties support *Sharia*-based regulations. It is due to the fluidity of Indonesian parties’ ideology which quickly changes depending on their interests. This

condition is under the political logic of populism initiated by Laclau (2005). In our case study, I believe that, following decentralization, the opportunity to gain power provided a way for developing Islamic populism. By utilizing an identity politics approach politicians and the Muslim middle-class use *adat* (*customary law*) approach, especially the ABS-SBK jargon, which emphasizes that in West Sumatra, customs and religion go hand in hand. This argument is in line with Simon (2009), who stated that decentralization stimulates the growth of moral politics in Indonesia, mainly West Sumatra Decentralization, which has brought changes in the boundaries of social and political systems in the province. The changes in the political system to a direct election system open up opportunities for patronage between local elites and community leaders in a community; this raises public pragmatism that considers politics as only an elite game. The customs (*adat*) revitalization also brings religious revitalization, in line with the philosophy of the *Minangkabau* people, that custom is based on religion, and religion is based on tradition.

In the end, the politicization of morals dissolved the real problem of corruption. Kahin (1999), a researcher with a broad research experience in West Sumatra, is concerned about the increasing number of corruption in West Sumatra. Oztas (2020) also viewed that the populists were much too occupied by the doctrines of the faith, while the main issues the constituents are facing remain forgotten. Although corruption

occurs nationwide, Kahin concerns the political system as the cause for West Sumatra being left behind compared to other regions. According to him, West Sumatra no longer surpassed other areas in the quality of education available for its people, and its people are no longer highly represented in Indonesia's intellectual and political life.

CONCLUSION

What occurred in West Sumatra was an example of how religious populism came to power. Yabanci (2016) argued that when populists are in a ruling position, religion becomes the primary reference in public policymaking, and there are only things pinned to populists as a representation of the people. With authority given to them, populists can take action or condemn those who criticize their actions. One of the indicators of the strengthening of religious populism is the silencing of civil rights. Civil rights indicators include freedom of speech, discriminatory rules, and the threat of violence due to gender and ethnic reasons. In addition to the action initiated by the Muslim group, the government supports the campaign to issue a regulation, especially relating to anti-LGBT issues. The impartiality of the group of minorities is causing the homosexual community to conceal their identities as homosexuals, especially those affiliated with the government and education institutions. Moreover, political morality is one indicator of the strengthening of Islamic Populists.

The research revolves around the strengthening of Islamic populism in West

Sumatra. The author criticizes Hadiz's opinion about the anxious middle class being a supporter of Islamic populism. In West Sumatra, cohesive social alliances emerged due to traditional into modern transformations that changed the *Minangkabau* cultural order and values. This transformation has made the social alliance of the *Minangkabau* community expand not only to a clan alliance but also to a multi-clan alliance. An established middle class supports this cohesive alias. This middle class is capable of moving forward with the conservative Islamic agenda in West Sumatra. These findings differ from Hadiz's, which claims that class conflict is the cause of Islamic populism. The style of urban and rural settings and differences in the social structure and culture of the community should be considered when analyzing Islamic populism.

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