

Political Parties and Churches: The Process of Political Party Infiltration into GMIM Indonesia

Adrian Yoro Naleng*, Ari Pradhanawati, Teguh Yuwono, Yuwanto

Department of Politics and Government Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Diponegoro

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between religion and secular political parties has shown a complex configuration and has given rise to various political dynamics. GMIM or The Evangelical Meshi Church in Minahasa is currently the most important religious institution in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, with a strong network and structure extending to the service environment. This article aims to determine how political party infiltration into GMIM as a church organization contributes to a broader and more comprehensive understanding. This qualitative research uses a case study approach with the number of informants targeted in this group category of 15 people. The results of the study found that the infiltration of secular political parties into GMIM occurred through various efforts; one of the efforts that led to the political infiltration of secular parties into GMIM was an effort to weaken BIPRA's (Ministry of Fathers, Mothers, Youth, Teenagers, Children) strength which cut from within BIPRA itself. The occurrence of the infiltration process in GMIM is an internal problem in the Church itself. The weak regeneration of clergy is also a problem of easy infiltration in GMIM. This effort to weaken and marginalize church cadres lasted almost 49 years. The infiltration process occurs because of problems in decision-making at GMIM. Decision-making in GMIM currently ignores the role of the congregation's elder missionary premise. The method of contesting the selection of structures in GMIM also has many problems. The paradigm of democratic elections with various sound stages has changed to a transactional-oriented election. This is the basis that the critical group in GMIM no longer provides filtering of influences that enter GMIM. The infiltration process or movement in the GMIM structure has been going on for a long time. Political parties, through their political elites, dominate the management structure of GMIM, which impacts church decisions influenced by political content.

Keywords: Political parties, Church, Infiltration, GMIM

INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions such as the Church have different natural domains. They are normatively separated from political parties, but many case studies confirm that religious institutions have played a significant political role in inspiring social movements and driving the country's economic policy packages (Vassallo and Wilcox 2005; Gidengil and Karakoc, 2014; Bernek, 2019), establishing relationships with political parties that lead to the politicization of religion (Husser, 2012; Raisyde, et al., 2017; Carbonelli, 2018; Stokke, 2019), or religious institutions that are dynamically involved in renegotiations a new post-reform social contract in Indonesia (Karim, 2020).

Political parties are complex and constantly evolving dynamic processes that can be analyzed scientifically. Because of this, this study places the arena of political party competition outside the mainstream. Whereas

in the context of the social structure at the local level, where the powers of the Church have a dominant position and show their ability to dominate formal politics, and on other hand, party access to the Church cannot be achieved through money politics.

GMIM is currently the most significant religious institution with a strong network and structures down to the service environment (column), which spans seven districts-cities with statistics of 32% (BPS Sulawesi Utara, 2018) of the population in North Sulawesi. As an independent religious institution at the local level, GMIM carries out three main public programs, namely education, health and welfare programs, as pioneers of congregational empowerment. These public roles make GMIM present not only in the theological face of the church pulpits but also in the public space in people's daily lives.

The long experience of democracy in the church tradition and Indonesian Minahasa culture has made GMIM encourage church members and elites to actively participate in the local democratic process (Kumayas, 2010). This has led many church members and church elites to take part in practical political activities as party activists and administrators. Its role has become increasingly evident in electoral democracy since direct elections were held in 2005. The church elites who contested the polls gained broad access to GMIM resources (Malensang, 2016) in the contestation process, which led to victory. The victory of the political elites from GMIM in this contest is often seen as part of a candidate's informal network strategy through the Church in practical politics (Sumampouw, 2018).

The importance that underlies this study is the change in the political-government governance system that has changed from centralized to decentralized systems. This change has shifted political dynamics to the local level (Hadiz, 2010). That means there are many local community interests designed by government institutions at the local level. Political parties at the local level, in this case, have a strategic role in the aggregation and articulation of community interests. However, studies that precisely capture the dynamics of political parties at the local level are still minimal (Tomsa, 2014). Existing studies of political parties are still focused on parties' roles in the context of electoral democracy. A limited focus on electoral democracy tends to disguise the depth of the proper local context, as it is trapped within the formal, procedural analysis framework of the political process.

Relationship between religion and political parties studies of religious and political relations specifically see that the relationship between secular political parties and the Church is still minimal. As far as researchers can detect, reflections on the connections between political parties and churches develop in the paradigm of comparative politics in each country, as described by Mohseni and Wilcox (2012). Or the relationship between religion and political parties in America, which sees aspects of the affiliation of religious movements with political parties (Wilcox 2007a), in Poland, which sees the Catholic Church as a force that encourages political party movements to oppose non-democratic regimes (Byrnes 2002), in the Netherlands old parties have experienced a drastic decline while new parties that cover religious and anti-migrant issues have increased (Lacardie 2004; Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003), while in Indonesia studies that focus on the relationship between the Church and political parties are still very limited. The studies mentioned above describe the relationship between the Church and political parties at the national and even global level in comparative studies, using a political economy or social movement approach.

This article will aim to find out the relationship between religion and political parties and explain how the process of political party infiltration into GMIM as a church organization contributes to providing a broader and comprehensive understanding of local politics in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design; this is because the qualitative approach is very compatible with answering the problem in depth because of the reality of the infiltration context. The diversity of

informants' meanings of empirical reality is the ontological basis of a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014) so that through this approach, researchers can touch deeply on the various meanings and views of informants, can reveal in more detail the context of secular party infiltration in a very symbolic way, and the dynamics that occur in political party competition and the resulting form of linkages based on context.

Case studies make it possible to complement and contrast various pieces of evidence (Yin, 2003: 8) to obtain an in-depth, holistic picture of the political process. Therefore, primary data, which is the result of interviews or observations and secondary data in the form of relevant documents, written opinions and publications will be combined and complement each other in this study.

The informants in this study were categorized into three main groups, namely the core group consisting of individuals who were directly involved and became the main actors or key figures in the process of forming political links through party infiltration into the internal structure of the Church, including the leading supporting candidates and coordinators. Therefore the informants targeted in this group category were 15 people, consisting of five categorically selected and not selected candidates (10 people) and five support team coordinators. This group informant is also a key informant in this study.

This study chose a combination technique that relied on observation, media coverage and documents, interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Selecting the four data collection techniques is intended to be able to complement information as well as cross-check and measurable validation. Observation is a way of collecting data by directly observing the research object in its original condition (Kellstedt and Whitten, 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Montesquieu had a strong belief that religion should be a part of politics because "religion provides social unity, harmony and stability" (Barbier, 1999). Thomas Hobbes, in many of his works on religion and politics provides critical arguments in the context of the relationship between religion and the state. Hobbes argues that religion is essential for politics because "religion encourages people to obey, makes them familiar with laws and how to live in a peaceful society" (Barbier, 1999). Habermas, known as a post secularism thinker in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (2011), also stated that "religion is the moral intuition of democracy", which cannot be separated from politics.

In the relationship between religion and the state as entities of political power, at least three variants of views are formed (Sadzali, 2018); First, theocracy, which is a view that explains the unification of religion and state. The state, in this case, is controlled and run based on religious values. Second secular understanding, namely the view that carries the separation of state and religion. While the third is moderate understanding, or what is called the middle-way view. The relationship between religion and the state in this understanding moderates theocracy and secularism.

Later, Bryce (1921) stated: "that political parties are inevitable, there is no free country without political parties and nothing shows how representative government can work without parties". Schattschneider (1942) also summarized his opinion on the importance of political parties by stating that "modern democracy cannot be saved without political parties". Entering the 90s, political scientists became increasingly convinced of the role of parties in a democracy. As Stokes (1999) explains, parties are "endemic to democracy, a part of democracy that cannot be avoided". In the American context, people believe that "political parties lie at the heart of American politics" (Aldrich, 1995). In Western Europe, the same belief has developed that "European democracy is not only parliamentary democracy but also party democracy" (Müller, 2000).

The importance of role of political parties has a place in modern democratic practices that emphasize

representative democracy. In the context of representative democracy, political parties play a crucial role (Mayer, 2012) as (1) agents that aggregate the interests of society, the aspirations of interest groups which are packaged into political agendas and platforms of struggle through general elections, (2) political parties are agents who have the capacity to articulate values and general interests in society through binding legislation or public policies. Differences in values, interests and segmentation in various societies require parties to build characters that show party identification, orientation and typology in competition.

Gunther and Diamond grouped political parties into 5 (five) groups or genera, namely first, elite-based parties; second, mass-based parties; third, ethnicity-based parties. On ethnicity), the fourth electoral party (party based on electoral power), and the fifth movement party (party based on the strength of the movement)

The dynamics and development of political parties in post-reform Indonesia are grouped into various typologies. Sleter (2004), Ambardi (2009) and Mietzer (2013) reveal the facts of political competition, which also practices political cartels. In essence, all three agree (with their own variants of argument) that parties in Indonesia are connected to each other in cartelization because parties experience institutional, ideological and party financial problems. Thus we can classify the party typology into a cartel party topology.

In the Indonesian context, political parties experience institutional, ideological and financial problems with Sleter (2004), Ambardi (2009) and Mietzer (2013). This problem makes party analysis on the economic and ideological dimensions alone irrelevant. Besides that, in the formal arena, political parties in Indonesia also practice a paradoxical typology; on the one hand, they compete and fight fiercely, but on the other hand, they build political cartels (Ambardi 2009). Therefore, in the midst of increasingly competitive political party competition, electoral parties (in the category of Gunther and Diamond, 2003) with catch-all parties tend to build relationships with political forces in the Indonesian political context to increase the chance of victory.

The Church is a religious institution or organization which is a social entity or community of believers that can be categorized as a political actor insofar as they are involved in power relations with secular political actors. Even though GMIM is intertwined in the same belief community, formed in strong theological and cultural moral bonds, this study follows a theoretical path that separates church leaders as individuals and churches as organizations.

In practical terms, the Church is not a single actor, where the interests of church officials are not fully aligned with the interests of the Church as an organization. Church leaders have personal preferences that are separate from church preferences. In simple terms, this study combines the motivations of church leaders into three categories. First, church leaders are motivated by their position as the dominant local elite in the Church (Malensang, 2016). This is related to the status of an extraordinary servant or elder (Pnt) who is considered to have prestige in the social position of the community and the scope of authority to carry out services within the area of his elder's duties. Second, church leaders naturally care about their reputation with fellow ministers, church members, and the general public. Maintaining a reputation for morals and faithfulness as an Elder helps a church leader gain the obedience of church members, and a good reputation confers its own non-material benefits in terms of prestige. Third, church leaders are motivated by moral and religious beliefs (Sech, 2001; 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The process of infiltration of secular political parties into GMIM occurred through various means; one of the efforts that led to political infiltration of secular parties into GMIM was an effort to weaken BIPRA's strength which was cut from within BIPRA itself. This makes the critical groups in GMIM begin to

decrease, resulting in infiltration movements from outside quickly entering the GMIM structure. The rapid infiltration movement that has occurred in the Church is due to the fact that currently, the Church itself has marginalized the role of BIPRA.

One of the causes of the infiltration process in GMIM was the existence of internal problems within the Church itself. The weak regeneration of clergy is also a problem of easy infiltration in GMIM. This effort to weaken and marginalize church cadres lasted almost 49 years. The critical group in the trained group at GMIM is marginalized by the Church itself. This resulted in a political affair between Perus and the political parties.

Other informants explained that the infiltration process occurred due to problems in decision-making at GMIM. Decision-making in GMIM currently ignores the role of the congregation's elder missionary premise. Elders are presently replaced by priests, and the decision-making process of the laity is undermined by the priests. Finally, political infiltration occurs in structural, strategic positions in the Church, which are entered by people who have substantial capital. This is reinforced by the existence of a close relationship between elite church institutions and political and bureaucratic groups.

The infiltration process occurs because of problems in the contestation process at GMIM. The democracy that took place at GMIM was originally going very well. The stages and procedures are carried out in scenes from the congregation to the synod level. The following is a picture of the election process for the Chairman of the BIPRA Synod GMIM.

Figure 1. Election of BIPRA Chairman of the GMIM Synod



Several findings indicate that there are problems in the contestation process at GMIM. For example, the problem occurred in the existence of vote buying on behalf of the transportation money that was given during the election. Besides that, the involvement of political parties in consolidating the winnings and the facilitation of synodal activities by regional heads.

The process of contesting the selection of structures in GMIM also has many problems. The paradigm of democratic elections with various sound stages has changed to a transactional-oriented election. This is the basis that the critical group in GMIM no longer provides filtering of influences that enter GMIM so that the infiltration process can more easily enter into the GMIM structure.

In the contest for the BIPRA GMIM Synod election, the Governor of North Sulawesi became the General Chair of the Election Committee. The Governor of North Sulawesi Olly Dondokambey (OD), was elected

Chair of the Election, and the Deputy Governor of North Sulawesi, Steven Kandouw. The committee was appointed by the Chairman of BPMS GMIM, Rev. HWB Sumakul. It is known that the Governor of North Sulawesi is one of the cadres of the PDI-Perjuangan party. This indeed becomes a dilemma when the election requires democratic and objective results, but the committee structure is led by party cadres.

The democratic election model in GMIM, both procedurally and substantively, has problems. Procedurally, the regulations that are made tend to be confusing because they are dominantly regulated by other groups that should be the one that regulates the elections from the synod. Substantively, in various scientific studies, there is a struggle between the pleris group and the synod. Ideally, those who hold church services are lay people and lay people are in the assemblies in the congregation, in the region or in the synod.

There are other groups who want to rule internally in GMIM. In order to do that, procedurally and substantively, the method used violates the rules. On the other hand, the complex process of contestation in the GMIM structure resulted in many party members occupying important structures in GMIM. Although institutionally, GMIM takes advantage of this phenomenon to survive and be strong in the socio-political realm. This is because, internally, the boundaries regarding candidates who occupy strategic positions within the GMIM structure are still vague and unclear, so many people who are not from cadre results can enter and occupy strategic positions in GMIM.

In terms of regulation, there are no clear rules regarding who may and may not hold structural positions at GMIM. But ethically, the organization is essential when dialogue efforts are made by political parties or bureaucrats who wish to join, as long as they use sincere intentions and not use the Church as a springboard. Currently, the problem is whether the Church wants to open space or even intimate space for dialogue. In the context of GMIM what happened was that they fully accepted without filtering groups that wanted to enter and occupy the structure in GMIM.

The infiltration process or movement that occurs in the GMIM structure has been going on for a long time. Political parties, through their political elites, dominate the management structure of GMIM, which has an impact on church decisions that are influenced by political content. The dominance of political parties in the GMIM structure makes competition between political parties occur within the GMIM body. Everything is done by political parties in order to form a strong bond between politics and religion.

The process of infiltration of political parties into the GMIM structure cannot be avoided. Rev. Allok Ghulö (2013) states that the relationship between Church and state is heavily influenced by local political conditions. The Church's relationship with the state is not the same in every place and period. The political role of the movement to influence the state is usually bigger and more aggressive. The Church can even get into practical politics. If necessary, the Church can become a political party and participate in the revolution. This role is intended to change the behaviour of the organizers from dictatorship to more democratic. However, in a relatively free state, such as in a democratic country, the political role of the Church tends to be smaller and simpler. In an open political system where citizens have freedom of speech, the Church plays more of a role as a mediator both as a political and educational institution, an extension of the community's lobby and a moral enforcer.

GMIM, through every level of existing services starting from the group of Synod, Region, to the Congregation, has tried to program activities that provide political education to GMIM members, where this political education is intended to provide knowledge to GMIM residents that life as a nation and as a state every day. Church members, as well as citizens, have an essential role in the political field, which cannot be separated from the rights and obligations of citizens in the political area. Appeals and directions submitted by the BPS GMIM are carried out periodically to be forwarded to the congregations in each GMIM service in order to maintain stability, harmony and peace, with the understanding that every difference is beautiful and that difference is not a barrier to being able to reconcile each other.

James Emery White (2012) explains that the Church can take an official position, as long as it does not directly support or oppose candidates in the election process. The Church can help citizens to understand what choices are good for them, but this is okay as long as they (citizens) are directed at all eligible voters and not towards just one political party. The Church can also invite candidates to a forum to discuss issues specifically such as poverty, health and matters relating to the welfare of citizens. Each candidate is asked to provide solutions to the topics discussed. Through this forum, the Church gives citizens the opportunity to assess which candidates and programs they trust the most.

The Church must also be open to candidates' visits. The Church must treat all candidates in the same way, namely, praying for them and reminding them of morality both in the election process and when he presides. The Church also may not send support to a candidate using the official church letterhead. Political signs may not be displayed on church property. The Church can support either candidate, but that support must be given indirectly. For example, as a person, a pastor can influence people he knows, including his own congregation. He can do that through daily conversations, like talking in the parking lot etc. But the clergyman may not convey support to the candidate from the podium. Chaplains, personally, may work for the candidate and provide financial support. However, the Church cannot institutionally offer financial aid to a candidate, even if church members have agreed to do so. As a person, the pastor can write in the mass media as a form of support for the candidate. The pastor can use his title and church affiliation.

GMIM's political accommodation efforts for political party elites made the process of infiltration easy to occur. Based on the results of the research described earlier, it is known that there are several things that can cause the process of infiltration of political parties into GMIM, including efforts to weaken cadres in the Church, problems with the contestation of the BIPRA synod election, GMIM which is always accommodative to the interests of political parties, and there is another model of the democratic process in the Church.

CONCLUSION

The process of political party infiltration into GMIM has been going on for a long time. The factor that resulted in the infiltration of political parties into GMIM was the existence of internal church problems. Apart from that, the weak regeneration of clergy is also the cause of readily accepted infiltration in GMIM. The infiltration process was also influenced by the existence of a critical group in GMIM that the Church marginalized. The democratic process that occurs in GMIM also has various problems that affect the contestation process in GMIM, which results in the infiltration process of political parties in GMIM.

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