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Original Article



The Role of Community Organisations as Interest Groups in Palu City: A Case Study of Alkhairaat Organisation

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Abstract

The study analyses the role of the Alkhairaat Community Organisation (Ormas) as an interest group in Palu City, Central Sulawesi Province. As an interest group, Alkhairaat can impact regional and national political policy formation. This articulates society's needs with the limited ability of political parties due to differences in ideology, beliefs, and goals. This study is based on the concept of interest groups by Gabriel Almond in 2004. This research uses qualitative research methods. The study was conducted in Palu City, Central Sulawesi Province. Data was collected through interview techniques determined by purposive sampling, besides conducting participant and direct observation. The secondary data is in books, journals, reports and other documents. The results showed that Alkhairaat had a role in policy formulation through the involvement of Abnaul Khairaat, who served as a member of the Indonesian Parliament and Regional Heads representing the Sejahtera Justice Party (PKS), Golkar and Democrat. The study concluded that Alkhairaat has a role in policy formulation, both regional and national policies. The position of interest groups in the political system lies between the government and the people. In fact, with interest groups like Alkhairaat, the government must create a space as big as it is and place it precisely because it has helped the government articulate the community's wishes.



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1. Introduction

The effectiveness of a political system can essentially be seen and measured by its ability to respond to political demands and support received and formulate them in the form of appropriate policies or outputs. The result of a policy is part of the political process that reflects the diverse aspirations that arise because of the diverse interests of society. However, in the political system, not all aspirations that arise can be channelled through formal political forces, such as political parties that have official functions as aspiration channelers, but also other forces, namely interest groups (Maiwan, 2016).

To a certain extent, the limitations of political parties, whether due to material resources, human resources, ideological orientation, culture of factionalism,

communication, personnel relations, and others, sometimes cause political parties not to be expected to convey societal aspirations effectively. This situation causes people to focus more on conveying their aspirations through interest groups.

Indonesia is one of the countries with a majority Muslim population. Therefore, it is not surprising that many community organisations (CSOs) in Indonesia have an Islamic background. Most Islamic organisations in Indonesia have their own mass base. Hence, it becomes a power for CSOs to influence government policy and politics for the purpose or interest of the CSO in determining the direction of political policy. Interest groups become one important component. Besides that, CSOs can also be used as a tool for political battles such as general and regional elections. According to Faizin

(2017), this is because political parties realise that there are other forces in democracy besides political parties, such as Interest Groups. Community organisations (Ormas) are interest groups because they have goals and interests for their own groups. This paper will discuss how Alkhairaat articulates its interests in producing government policies that follow its goals.

Putnam (2006) says two different concepts of power are adopted in social science: Firstly, power is the ability to influence other individuals, and Secondly, power is the ability to influence collective decision-making. In Indonesia, many Islamic organisations have potential, such as Nadhlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Alkhairaat, LDII and others. One of the potentials in question is the large number of mass bases.

Alkhairaat is one of the largest Islamic organisations in eastern Indonesia. It was established in 1930 and is based in Palu City, Central Sulawesi Province. Alkhairaat was founded by Sayyid Idrus bin Salim Al Jufrie (Old Teacher), a Hadramaut (Yemen) scholar. The old teacher's aim in establishing Alkhairaat was to make Alkhairaat a place or means of piety and educating the nation, especially the people of Central Sulawesi.

Over time Alkhairaat became one of the political forces in Central Sulawesi, especially in Palu City, because of the increasing number of schools, boarding schools, science and dhikr assemblies under Alkhairaat and the increasing mass base. Unsurprisingly, many local and national politicians visit and establish communication with the elites in Alkhairaat to get blessings and political support (legitimacy) in facing political battles. Apart from visiting, of course, politicians usually spread political promises. For example, they will help the organisation to carry out its work programmes.

The gathering activities occur because of a symbiotic relationship of mutualism for certain interests to achieve the interest group's goals or at least get feedback in the form of assistance from the supported political elite. On the other hand, political elites or political parties will gain legitimacy from the Kiai, Habib, or ulama as material for the campaign. Interest groups utilise this to influence policy for the group's goals. The Interest Group's efforts are guaranteed to build groups and support the government. This action is taken so that every policy issued by the government does not have a negative (detrimental) impact on the group.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have examined the existence of Alkhairaat and the political behaviour of the Alkhairaat Organisation in "Pilkada" using the theory of patronage and clientelism. As a way of implementing popular sovereignty in provinces, regencies, or cities, Pilkada can also be understood as the election of governors and regents or mayors, with the results being determined by Pancasila and the Republic of Indonesia's 1945

Constitution. However, previous research only focused on Alkhairaat's involvement in the Governor and Deputy Governor of Central Sulawesi election in 2015 without seeing Alkhairaat's role in influencing government policy. This void will be the focus of this research discussion, namely related to the role of Alkhairaat as an interest group that has a role and influence on a policy. As David Easton explained, in the political system theory, community participation is one of the important components in formulating or changing a policy (Magriasti, 2011).

This study uses the Interest Group theory. According to Almond, interest groups are defined as organisations that seek to influence a policy produced by the government without (at the same time) wanting to obtain public office, namely political positions in government. That is what makes the fundamental difference between interest groups and political parties.

Schattschneider argues that with every democratic principle, political parties, as the drivers of the majority, have a claim on the public that is more valid and higher than what is asserted by interest/pressure groups that only mobilise a minority. In addition, he also believes that the duties and functions of political parties are now being questioned. There is a perception that political parties are "damaged goods" to connect people's aspirations in government, and interest groups are considered capable of filling that void (Jordan & Maloney, 2007)

This is because sometimes political parties have limitations, whether due to material resources, human resources, ideological orientation, short-term interests, limited communication networks, interest in issues, and others, causing political parties to not be expected to convey the aspirations desired by the community effectively. This condition causes people to focus on conveying their aspirations through interest groups. In addition, internally, the effectiveness of interest groups in influencing the government is also determined by; the ability to direct the support, energy, and resources of members, as well as the extent of resources owned, such as financial capacity, number of members, political skills, organisational unity, achievements in the eyes of the public and government decision-makers (Mas'ood & MacAndrews, 2000)

The strategies or ways used to influence government policy according to (Janda et al., 2009) First, lobbying establishes direct communication with relevant government officials on the issues being fought for. Second, using mass media to attract public attention and public sentiment. Third, interest groups carry out grassroots pressure to mobilise support and convey certain issues to the lower levels of society.

3. Materials and Methods

Every research requires planning, so a research design is needed. Therefore, to analyse Alkhairaat's Role as an Interest Group. This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods. The research was conducted at the PB Alkhairaat office in Palu City, Central Sulawesi Province and Palu City Government, with Purposive sampling data collection techniques through literature studies and interviews with the Alkhairaat Executive Board, the Mayor of Palu and Academics. The data sources referred to in this study have two classifications: secondary and primary data. Primary data collection is carried out through in-depth interviews with relevant interested actors. Primary data is also related to direct and participant observation and secondary data collection from reports, books, journals and fieldwork notes. The data collected will be transcribed and analysed thematically. The data will be presented in a qualitative narrative.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Actualisation of Alkhairaat as an Interest Group

Alkhairaat is an interest group that has a clear vision and mission. Alkhairaat has played an important role in community empowerment in various fields, such as education, economy, and social activities. Alkhairaat has a well-structured organisational structure down to the village and sub-district level, making it one of Indonesia's most effective interest groups.

4.2. Leadership Structure of Palu City Community

In 1930, the foundation of the Alkhairaat organisation was built by Sayyid Idrus bin Salim Aljufrie (old teacher). The old teacher was an ulama from Hadramaut (South Yemen). The arrival and establishment of Alkhairaat brought many changes and reforms in the religious, educational, social and economic fields for the people in Central Sulawesi.

By making breakthroughs and significant changes in society within 39 years, Alkhairaat expanded its distribution in various regions in Central Sulawesi and its surroundings by building 420 madrasah schools (Ishak & Agustiyara, 2017). Some of these madrasahs are in Palu, its surroundings, and Central Sulawesi. Some are in North Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Irian Jaya, Maluku and East Kalimantan. That is why the people of Central Sulawesi honoured Sayyid Idrus by making the name of the founder of Alkhairaat the name of the airport in Palu City.

Apart from that, the leadership structure of Central Sulawesi, especially in Palu City, is broadly similar to those in urban areas with religious communities, such as in East Java. They have the principle of *Samina wa'athona* in the hierarchy of obedience in their culture

of life. This principle is still strongly attached to the people of Palu City, especially the Abnaul Khairaat. This is inseparable from the teachings of Islam attached to most of the people of Central Sulawesi, especially Palu City.

The *Samina Wa'athona* principle of listening to and obeying orders is not unfamiliar in the lives of Muslim communities in general. The principle of *Samina Wa'athona* is a construction of collective life that takes place over a relatively long historical period. This principle is produced by and, at the same time, produces social life, so the principle becomes a force that structures social life and a force that is structured by social life.

The people of Palu City, especially the Muslim community, consider Habib or Habib as a leader in the world and the hereafter or as a successor to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who became God's representative on Earth. In addition, the Habib title can only be attached to the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad Saw through his grandson, Sayyidina Hasan Bin Ali. The identity of Habibs in Indonesia is that of religious figures who have a direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. They have been recognised and have played an important role from the colonial period until today. (Alkatiri & Karim Hayaze, 2022). Therefore, the title Habib for the Muslim community of Palu City is not only given to the Dzuriyah of the Prophet, who owns an Islamic boarding school, but it is also usually placed on Dzuriyah figures who have charismatic and always teach and spread religious knowledge through travelling to villages other than their place of origin.

Habib's charisma gained public support because he was seen as having moral stability and the quality of faith that gave birth to an attraction for his followers. With his charisma, Habib is classified not only as a religious elite but also as a pesantren elite and as a community figure who has high authority in disseminating Islamic religious sciences and is competent in colouring the style and form of leadership.

This socio-cultural condition does not separate from the influence of Sayyid Idrus Bin Salim Aljufrie (Old Teacher), the founder of Alkhairaat and a Habib or Dzuriyah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Alkhairaat has a place in the hearts of the people in Central Sulawesi, especially in Palu City. It is because the role of Habib Idrus as the founder of Alkhairaat made the institution a means of Da'wah and education for the people of Central Sulawesi.

Apart from that, what makes Alkhairaat different from other Islamic Community Organisations such as Nadhlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and LDII is the process of selecting its leaders. The position of Alkhairaat leader can only be obtained by Dzuriyah or descendants of Habib Idrus (the old teacher), then among several

descendants of Habib Idrus, they are elected through the National Deliberation of the Alkhairaat Executive Board.

Based on the socio-cultural conditions and the Habib title attached to the descendants of Habib Idrus (the old teacher), it is unsurprising that they are used as local elites in Central Sulawesi who have a role in local politics. The role of local elites in politics is carried out to influence the desired political conditions. This is in line with the concept of Elites and power in the book by (Mas'oed, 2006) Robert Dahl concept: first, power is the ability to influence other individuals and second, power is the ability to influence collective decision-making. In short, one person has power over another, which means that the first person can make the second person act according to what the first person wants, and the second person cannot choose another action himself. When we talk about the political power possessed by the Ulama or Habibs in Palu City, what is imagined is that they can change the behaviour of individuals and their ability to influence policies on Da'wah and education run by the government.

4.3. Alkhairaat's involvement in policy formulation

This sub-chapter will explain the role of the Alkhairaat Organisation in regional policies and central government policies as an *interest* group. In line with the opinion of Budiardjo (2008), interest groups aim to influence government policies to be more favourable to them. Alkhairaat prefers and positions itself as an interest group for social movements and religious education that is not political and does not enter the world of practical politics. However, in its development, Alkhairaat has a certain involvement with political parties and, to a certain extent, is active in practical political activities. Practical politics is the involvement in political activities directly involved in the struggle for power for political positions in government.

In Indonesian political practice, we can find several ways for interest groups to influence policy and convey their aspirations to the government. According to Jordan & Maloney (2007), interest groups usually take two steps; *first*, they raise issues that have been articulated so that they can be "bought" by political parties. This step is usually taken if the existing political system is democratic and open, where political parties compete fairly and fairly, and public trust in political parties is high. *Second*, interest groups directly convey their articulated aspirations to the government. This process is usually carried out through propaganda, debate, or extensive polemics in society through the mass media.

Apart from the two methods mentioned by Jordan and Meloney (2007), the results of field research on Alkhairaat found another way, namely by articulating its wishes through its cadres in government and parliament. The results of interviews with Hamdan Rampadio, an academic, reinforce this method. He said Abnau

Khairaat, who is in the DPR, influenced many local and central government policies. Some of them are the first to make the founder of Alkhairaat, Sayyid Idrus Bin Salim Aljufrie, a National Hero. The second is to make the Alkhairaat area a religious tourism area, and the third is to name the Palu City airport the Mutiara SIS Aljufrie Airport."

Alkhairaat's role in national and regional policies can also be seen through the activeness and vocalisation of Alkhairaat cadres (Abnaukhairaat), namely Hj Sakinah Aljufrie and Anwar Hafid in the Indonesian parliament in fighting for the aspirations of the people of Central Sulawesi regarding education and Da'wah. This can be proven by the approval of the Pondok Pesantren Bill and thousands of underprivileged children in Central Sulawesi being given a scholarship assistance programme from elementary school to university level.

As an interest group that aims to influence a policy, Alkhairaat certainly has a role in the birth of a regional policy of the Palu City government. This was recognised and validated by Hadianto Rasyid, SE, as the Mayor of Palu. He said that Alkhairaat, the largest Islamic organisation in Eastern Indonesia, certainly has a role in formulating the policies of the Palu City Government. The government must receive input because the government is mangayomi its people as long as it is good and beneficial for many people. However, Hadianto Rasyid did not reveal the specific role of Alkhairaat in the policies of the Palu City Government because the government must be neutral and not take sides only with certain groups.

5. Conclusions

The role of Alkhairaat as an interest group that aims to influence a policy of the Palu City Government can be analysed in three ways. First, Alkhairaat can articulate its interests by lobbying the National and Local governments through its cadres who are in the government. Second, Alkhairaat has two Radio stations and one print media (newspaper) to conduct propaganda through Mass Media. The third is the grass-roots pressure Alkhairaat can actualise to all its potential at the root level (society). This can be seen from the activeness of its wing organisations, WIA and HPA, which actively respond to social, educational and economic issues through demonstrations (Demo). The existence of the Alkhairaat organisation in Palu City helps the government advance the quality of human resources through education and Da'wah. This can be seen in schools, Islamic boarding schools, and universities owned by Alkhairaat in Palu City.

The existence of a Regional Government policy that establishes the Alkhairaat area as a religious tourism area has an economic value that advances the economy of the small communities around it. Apart from that, it attracts local and foreign tourists on certain days, such

as the Old Teacher's birthday (Haul), which Alkhairaat carries out once a year. So, it means that Alkhairaat can influence the advancement of Palu. Alkhairaat's role can also be seen in the Ponpes Bill Policy, which the Central Government recently inaugurated. Alkhairaat's involvement in formulating the Ponpes Bill policy can be seen through its cadres, who serve as DPR RI and DPRD members. In this way, Alkhairaat articulates its interests.

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