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Moderating Anti-Feminism: Islamism and Women Candidates in the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)

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Abstract

As Indonesia's leading Islamist party, the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) has attracted much scholarly interest, prompting debate on the extent to which the party's inclusion in electoral politics has required it to moderate its initially strict ideological vision. In this article, we extend consideration of this "inclusion-moderation" thesis to the party's attitudes and practices regarding women. PKS has a large and active female support base, but it emphasises that women's political and social roles should be secondary to their primary duties in the domestic sphere. Through a close study of female PKS candidates in Indonesia's 2019 legislative elections in East Java, we show that women members of the party are moderating the party's anti-feminist stance. Though they do not explicitly challenge party ideology, they demonstrate significant independent agency in their campaign practices, engaging in outreach to female voters in a strongly practical rather than strictly ideological mode.

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Keywords

Indonesia, Islamism, feminism, women's agency, women's representation

Introduction

The participation of women politicians in the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) in legislative elections in Indonesia presents a window into how Islamist parties organise women's representation.¹ Modelled on Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation that has inspired Islamist movements around the globe, PKS is generally seen as one of the most consistently Islamist of Indonesia's political parties, promoting thorough Islamisation of Indonesian state and society. The party is generally conservative on social issues, including on the role of women, with party documents promoting and valorising women's role in the family and domestic sphere rather than in public affairs. The party leadership is heavily male dominated. As members of a highly disciplined party where the rank-and-file follow policies determined by the party leadership, the female members of PKS generally support and promote their party's views on all public issues, including the role of women. In this context, advocates of women's rights in Indonesia sometimes view the election of PKS women negatively. Many feminists regard the party as having an anti-feminist agenda (e.g. Kartika, 2019); indeed, PKS female politicians sometimes state openly that they reject feminism.

Yet as we show in this article, the role of women candidates in PKS is deeply ambiguous. While still adhering to formal party positions on the status of women that give primacy to women's domestic role, female PKS politicians often engage in forms of political agency that lead them to press against the limits implied by such positions. In part, the electoral incentives of the party explain this ambiguity. Like many Islamist parties that participate in electoral politics, PKS and its politicians face a dilemma: on the one hand, they want to strongly defend the ideological principles of the party; on the other hand, they wish to win enough votes to be able to exercise meaningful political power. This dilemma has led to internal party conflict between the original supporters of the party and its newer supporters (Tomsa, 2012). The electoral incentive requires them to appeal beyond a core base. This process of seeking broader appeal gives rise to what has been called the "inclusion-moderation" thesis in studies of Islamism (Tezcür, 2010a, 2010b). Advocates of this thesis suggest that as Islamist parties are drawn into democratic and participatory politics they tend to moderate their initially hard-line positions on social and political issues. There has been considerable debate about the extent to which this dynamic applies to the PKS (see especially Buehler, 2012; Tanuwidjaja, 2012; Tomsa, 2012), though it is clear that a process of moderation of sorts has been underway in the party, particularly since 2008 when the PKS declared itself (not without debate) to be an "open party." Even when the party displays moderate tendencies, however, some experts (e.g. Hamayotsu, 2011) and rival parties see this ideological adjustment as constituting only an electoral tactic aiming to make the party's ultimate ideological agenda – the Islamisation of politics and the state – more palatable.

Scholars have largely not yet addressed the question of whether this inclusion-moderation dynamic also applies to the party's attitudes on gender issues, the role of women within the party, and the party's outreach to women voters. At first glance, the 2019 election suggests that this might be the case. Unlike during the 2009 and 2014 elections, when most PKS party leaders thought of their women candidates as standing only in order to fulfil Indonesia's obligatory 30 per cent quota on female candidates, in the 2019 elections PKS prepared its female candidates thoroughly for electoral competition. Women candidates themselves took their campaigning seriously, holding intensive rounds of meetings with women voters, demonstrating both commitment and capacity. While the party's overall vote share improved modestly, from 6.79 per cent in 2014 to 8.21 per cent in 2019, the number of PKS women elected to the national parliament, the People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR), rose from only one in 2014 to eight in 2019. Women now make up 16 per cent of PKS members in the DPR, a dramatic rise from the 2.5 per cent in 2014, and the best result ever for the party's women candidates.²

To examine the role of women in the PKS, we conducted a period of intensive fieldwork in East Java province in the lead up to, and immediately following, Indonesia's 2019 elections. We conducted in-depth interviews with, and observation of, fifteen women PKS candidates in the cities of Surabaya and Malang. Three of our informants were running for the third time or more. Two were elected and won seats in the District Parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*, DPRD) of Surabaya. Other candidates for the DPR and for the East Java provincial DPRD were unsuccessful. East Java is not a traditional stronghold of PKS, with the nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, PDIP) and the pluralist, NU-aligned People's Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, PKB) both enjoying significant support in the province.³ Nonetheless, given that most studies of PKS are at the national level, we were interested to see how the dynamics of moderation and inclusion play out at the subnational level and so chose to focus on PKS outside its main centre of power.

We argue that PKS women candidates in East Java negotiate with and within their party's ideology in order to win the support of their constituents. These women do not adopt a position that could be described as feminist, and they never describe themselves as feminists. They endorse and support the party's view that women must prioritise their domestic roles and they do not explicitly challenge their party's patriarchal structures and ethos; they can only become candidates with the permission of their husbands and by convincing the party that their candidacy will not interfere with their duties on the domestic front. Even so, these candidates strive for a greater public role for women. They emphasise ideas about women's strength. They stress that women deserve rights in the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. As we show, the background of many of the PKS women candidates we interviewed as professional, educated, middle-class women shapes their thinking. In short, they *moderate* their party's anti-feminist stance. As a result, we argue that the party's views on gender have developed in a direction that, while still very distant from liberal feminism, can also be differentiated from the extreme gender conservatism of other Islamist groups found in Indonesia, such as

Salafi groups which seek to limit women's role to the domestic sphere (Machmudi, 2008).

We advance these arguments through four main sections. We begin with a discussion of the ideological and organisational character of PKS, tracing its origins as a strongly Islamist party based on campus activism towards a more open and inclusive party. In the second section, we focus on the place of women within PKS and its image of society, highlighting how party doctrine explains that women can contribute to the public sphere, but insists that such a contribution should always be secondary to their main contribution in the domestic sphere and family life. In a third section, we analyse participation by PKS women candidates in the election, noting the party's push to nominate more women in 2019 and how PKS women candidates negotiated the restrictions and barriers placed upon them while loyally adhering to the party policy and doctrine. A fourth section zeroes in on the campaign strategies and behaviour of women PKS candidates in Surabaya and Malang, showing how these women modelled female agency in their own campaigns and explaining how they targeted women by focusing on issues of practical benefit rather than emphasising either religious themes or a grand narrative of women's equality. We conclude by arguing that the party's inclusion within the electoral system – and its inclusion of women cadres and candidates – has over time moderated its attitudes to women and women's equality. While the basic shape of party ideology on women's role remains unchanged, the party provides greater space for women's agency.

The PKS, Islamist Ideology, and the Role of Women

The PKS is an Islamist party with relatively high and stable electoral appeal: since 2004, when it attained 7.3 per cent, the party's national vote share has ranged between a low of 6.8 per cent in 2014 and a high of 8.2 per cent in 2019.⁴ Accordingly, the party has received a great deal of scholarly attention from scholars. It has been studied from various perspectives, including its origins and ideology (Machmudi, 2008), the challenges it faces defending its ideology while seeking to gain electoral support (Muhtadi, 2012), and its tendency to moderate its ideology and political strategies over time (Buehler, 2012; Hamayotsu, 2011; Tanuwidjaja, 2012; Tomsa, 2012).

The Islamist ideology of PKS is inspired by ideas about Islamic politics that developed in the Middle East from the beginning of the twentieth century. To a large extent, the ideology of PKS can be traced to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organisation that was founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna in 1928. PKS took from the Muslim Brotherhood the core idea that the establishment of an Islamic state or Islamic system (*al-nizam al-islam*) was required for the Islamisation of society, but that this process should begin at the level of the grassroots, meaning the family (*nizam al-ausar*), through education (*tarbiyah*) and caderisation (*dakwah*) (Bubalo and Fealy, 2005). More recently, several studies posit an ideological affinity between PKS and the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP) in Turkey and view PKS as following in the footsteps of the AKP (Fealy et al., 2012; Tomsa, 2012), though of course differences in the historical and political landscapes of the two countries mean that PKS

has developed distinctive attitudes towards issues associated with politics, religion, and gender.

Within Indonesia, the PKS traces its origins to a campus-based Islamic movement (the Tarbiyah movement) that began to operate among students and intellectuals during the later years of the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–1998) (Permata and Van Dijk, 2016). The movement was strongest at some of Indonesia's most renowned state universities in Java, including the University of Indonesia, the Institute of Technology in Bandung, and Yogyakarta's Gadjah Mada University (Machmudi, 2008: 112). The end of the New Order in 1998 opened the way for the founding of new political parties, including those that promoted Islamic ideology. PKS was founded in 1999 by leaders of the Tarbiyah movement under the name the Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan*, PK) and represented the political articulation of that movement. The party took part in the first election in the democratic era in 1999 but failed to meet the electoral threshold, which would have qualified it to run in the next election. As a result, it changed its name to PKS in order to be eligible to register as a party for the 2004 legislative elections (Setiawan and Nainggolan, 2004).

To the present, the Tarbiyah movement continues to be the main recruiting ground for PKS members. The majority of PKS politicians, both male and female, come from this movement. The Tarbiyah movement is based on a system of religious study circles (*ta'lim*) in which movement leaders actively shape the views of members on religious and political matters. The PKS is organised in much the same way, and it is for that reason that the party is often considered by scholars a cadre-based party with a high level of internal discipline – arguably the only such party of any significance in Indonesia (Machmudi, 2008; Tanuwidjaja, 2012; Tomsa, 2010). As one leading PKS figure in East Java explained, those responsible for ideological and religious leadership in PKS – people known as *murabbi* – provide guidance to ordinary party members on matters of faith (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), and moral character or virtue (*akhlak*). In this way, the religious beliefs and behaviour of PKS cadres are continuously monitored. Moral integrity and obedience to ritual are criteria for cadres to be appointed to leadership positions in the party or to be nominated as electoral candidates, at least in theory (interview with Arif Hari Setiawan, 10 April 2019, Surabaya).

In its early years, PKS retained an ideological consistency regarding the unity of religion and politics – for example, the party promoted a constitutional amendment (the so-called Jakarta Charter) that would make Islamic law obligatory for all Muslims, and it upheld promotion of shariah across a range of areas of public policy (Permata, 2008a). This posture was not supportive of the notion of religious pluralism and implicitly harboured elements that were not democratic (Permata, 2008b). However, over time, some in the PKS elite began to believe that retaining a strictly Islamist image that was strict and exclusive would be an electoral disadvantage (Tomsa, 2012). To develop a more positive party image and allow it to compete more effectively in elections, PKS since 2004 began to promote a “softer” and more inclusive image. In 2008, it declared itself an “open party” that was welcoming of non-Muslims (Buehler, 2012). This step has been labelled “moderation” by some researchers, although there remains a question as to

whether an Islamist party such as PKS can ever be truly moderate (Künkler and Brocker, 2013; Schwedler, 2011). Although PKS has thus begun to accommodate cultural diversity and reduce its emphasis on Islamist ideology in its public outreach material, the support of PKS for the upholding of Islamic law in some policy areas – for example, in some regional regulations and through backing a 2008 anti-pornography law – indicate that it remains true to its origins.

In practice, for years now, there has been back and forth within the party between those who seek to defend the original Islamist goals and character of the party, and those who attempt to make Islamism relevant to the current political climate, leading to some tension and conflict among PKS cadres (Bubalo et al., 2008). As a compromise, there has been a softening of the platform of PKS, which no longer openly voices support for the Jakarta Charter, and which increasingly emphasises general welfare and policy issues. However, it remains difficult to deny the fact that PKS still adheres to a framework stressing implementation of aspects of Islamic law and norms in the public sphere in Indonesia, even if it does declare itself to be an “open party.”

Women in PKS

What is the place of women within the PKS image of society? Two contextual factors are critical here. First is the party’s background as part of a “textualist milieu [whose members] argue for a strict approach to interpreting Islamic texts” (Rinaldo, 2013: 115). As Rinaldo, 2013, 2014 notes, PKS women are much less likely to engage in extended theological inquiry or debate regarding the proper role of women than are many of the Muslim feminists associated with organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama; this is largely because PKS women view the meaning of core Islamic texts to be self-evident. A second contextual factor is that, although the party draws on a highly active mass of women members, its leadership bodies have since foundation been male dominated. The *Majelis Syura* (Deliberation Assembly), the highest decision-making organ in the party, is an entirely male body. The Central Leadership Board (*Dewan Pimpinan Pusat*, DPP) of PKS is also dominated by men, with, at the time of writing, only two women on the board out of twenty-eight: Wirianingsih is the head of the Section for Women and Family Resilience (*Bidang Perempuan dan Ketahanan Keluarga*, BPKK), and Ledia Hanifa is the head of Social Relations (Pks.id, 2019). Male dominance is also the rule in the regional branches of the party, including in East Java. Decision-making in the PKS remains highly patriarchal in structure.

In this context, party doctrine concerning women systematically prioritises women’s role in strengthening and maintaining a harmonious family life, even though party documents say that women are also the “partners” of men in building justice, welfare, and national dignity (Platform Kebijakan Pembangunan, 2017: 304). Within the PKS structure, there is the BPKK, which is the party organisation for improving the quality of female PKS members. The explicit mission of the BPKK is to serve the people by means of increasing the social and political role of women and defending the family. This section is also tasked with raising the capacity of women cadres as well as optimising

relations with other women's organisations. According to official PKS doctrine, meanwhile, PKS strives to:

present the figure of the essential woman, namely as an individual who is pious, prosperous, intelligent, acts in a principled manner, and who is empowered to dedicate her life to act as a servant of God, as a child, wife, mother and member of a society that has quality and is balanced. (Platform Kebijakan Pembangunan, 2017: 304)

The order is critical here: PKS cadres we interviewed repeatedly stressed that the “essential role” (*peran asasi*) of women lies in the domestic sphere, as wives and mothers; once these roles have been performed adequately, women are in a position to play a broader social or political role. BPKK documents likewise explain that PKS women must build their role in two dimensions: their “essential role” as a wife and mother, and their “extended role (*peran perluasan*) as a member of society who has the obligation to give voice to the political interests of women” (<http://pks.id/bpkk>). At the same time, the party platform proposes the “honouring” (*pemuliaan*) of women, acknowledging that Indonesian culture insufficiently respects women and “many women in Indonesia continue to experience discrimination” (Platform Kebijakan Pembangunan, 2017: 304).

Women Candidates

Historically, PKS had a poor record of women's representation. For example, after the 2009 election, the party had fifty-seven DPR members, of whom only three were women – the lowest rate of any party represented in the DPR at that time (Rinaldo, 2013: 124). In the 2014 election, only one of the forty PKS candidates to be elected to the DPR was a woman. However, in the 2019 election, the party placed much greater emphasis on supporting women candidates, in part for simple electoral calculations, believing that women (along with millennials) were an important voting block and one that, in the words of a local party leader, could be “extraordinarily loyal” to the party so long “as their hearts are touched” (Interview with Arif Hari Setiawan, 10 April 2019, Surabaya). The party prepared women candidates by providing them with special training on the issues that they should raise during the campaign, and strategies to win votes and political marketing. Fortnightly meetings were held with both men and women candidates so that they could co-ordinate their campaigns, report back to the group, and review their strategies. This change made the 2019 campaign in East Java, where we conducted our research, different from that in 2014 when Arif Hari Setiawan, the party's East Java chairperson, told us that women were only on the ballot sheet to fulfil the quota, not as serious contenders for office (Interview, 10 April 2019). Also in 2019, in East Java, the party nominated several women at positions one or two on the party candidate lists, whereas in 2014, only the incumbent, Reni Astuti (in the Surabaya city DPRD), was given list position number one.

Having such a strong base of women activists, PKS had no difficulty filling their 30 per cent quota for women candidates: overall, 40.8 per cent of the party's candidates for the East Java provincial parliament were women; in four electoral districts, women made

up between 50 per cent and 57 per cent of candidates (Kumparan.com, 2018). Moreover, despite a public perception in Indonesia that many women candidates are there just to “fill the quota,” in East Java PKS women candidates were generally very well qualified. They varied in age, level of political experience, and profession. Most had middle-class professional backgrounds as businesswomen, doctors, and trainers, alongside a few teachers; none were housewives. Most had been involved in the Tarbiyah movement, which had formed the basis for the formation of the Justice Party back in 1999. Women placed at one or two on the candidate lists had to fulfil certain criteria: they had to be married, have permission from their husbands, have children aged five years and above, and the family had to be financially secure (Interview, Arif Hari Setiawan, 10 April 2019; Interview, Aning Rahmawati, 30 May 2019). However, in the 2019 elections, the party also opened its party lists to a proportion of candidates who were not party cadres and who did not have Tarbiyah backgrounds but instead had strong grassroots connections. These women were “vote getters,” having influence in particular electoral districts where PKS either did not have cadres or had other reasons for wanting to boost its vote total.

As well as the political cadres who had already been nominated and run in previous election campaigns, East Java PKS leaders also nominated several younger, unmarried women cadres. Such women included Nisrina, Hizbiyatul Islamiyah, Shofura, and Margiyani, the first three of whom were all newly graduated from the State University of Malang. Such newcomers to the political process were aware that their first election campaign was part of a process of “caderisation” (*kaderisasi*); according to one young candidate, Nisrina, who ran for the national DPR from an electoral district in the Malang region, it was assumed that they would be successful in their campaigns in around ten to fifteen years (Interview with Nisrina, 14 April 2019, Malang). Most young candidates were placed low on candidate lists, and their nomination fulfils both the development of cadre for later elections and the need to have 30 per cent women candidates.

Candidates who were party cadres tended to view themselves as being at the party’s disposal, ready to run for office wherever and whenever the party wanted them to. In PKS, the Majelis Syura, in consultation with the Central Sharia Board (*Dewan Syariah Pusat*) and the Provincial Sharia Board (*Dewan Syariah Wilayah*), determines who is to be nominated and the order of nominees on candidate lists. Dedicated PKS members, who understand their party as a “dakwah party” (party of proselytisation, such that party engagement is a religious as well as a social duty) often state they feel unable to refuse what is referred to as *amanah*, or duty to the party, when approached in order to stand. Thus, for example, Yulyani, who represented PKS in the Surabaya DPRD in the 2002–2009 period, was nominated in 2010 by PKS to run as deputy mayor of Surabaya, but in the end found her candidacy withdrawn and her name replaced by another cadre. In 2019, the Provincial Deliberation Assembly (*Dewan Syura*) moved her from the electoral district where she had been well connected with a mass base since her earlier period in the DPRD; it appointed her to compete in a different district where she was less known – and where she was ultimately unsuccessful (Interview with Yulyani, 15 Maret 2019, Surabaya; confirmed by interview with Arif Hari Setiawan, 10 April 2019, Surabaya). Decisions of the party, particularly the *Dewan Syura*, are considered final, and must be accepted by candidates, even if, in Yulyani’s case, they are deeply disappointed

with those decisions. Aning Rahmawati had a similar experience. The 2019 election was her fourth attempt to win a seat in the Surabaya DPRD; each time, she competed in a different electoral district. Though the PKS women cadres we spoke to were reluctant to complain about such decisions, they did point out that such placements could make it harder to compete and win.

Although PKS leaders claim that men and women in the party have similar rights, the reality is that women candidates are generally given lower positions on the candidate lists, rather than first or second place. Among the PKS candidates we focused on, the two who managed to be elected were both placed at the top of the candidate lists in their respective electoral districts: Reni Astuti, the only female incumbent, and Aning Rahmawati, treasurer of the party board and a fourth-time candidate, were both elected to the Surabaya DPRD. With the election of these two women, women's representation in the PKS faction in the Surabaya DPRD stands at 40 per cent, or two women out of five representatives. It was the first time that more than one woman had been elected. No PKS women were elected to either the provincial or Malang DPRDs.⁵

In selecting women candidates, including determining their list position, PKS utilises a number of criteria connected with the family background, economic resources, and capability of female cadres. They are expected to have political capacity, experience, and a history of involvement in party activities. Critically, women candidates must have the permission and support of their husbands, and this must be given in writing to relevant party leadership bodies (Interview with Arif Hari Setiawan, 10 April 2019). Male PKS candidates do not require permission from their wives. Importantly, most women PKS candidates we interviewed did not express disagreement with this approach. The reason for this requirement, women candidates explained to us, comes back to the party's position on the "essential" role of women versus supplemental roles of women: to be eligible to run, women are expected to have no problems fulfilling their primary domestic tasks and to be economically secure. Reni Astuti, for example, an incumbent in the Surabaya DPRD, affirmed the importance of prioritising her tasks within the party and in the legislature because she did not wish to give fellow party members the impression that her family responsibilities were impeding her political role. Nonetheless, she stated that:

The primary role of women cannot be substituted for, that is as wife and mother. This is called the primary role. Whereas the supplemental role is the role that brings benefit not just to her family but also to society. This is called the public role. Women enact this supplemental role as politicians or members of the legislature. (Interview with Reni Astuti, 1 April 2019, Surabaya)

In the same vein, Aning Rahmawati, running for the party for the fourth time in 2019, explained that she was not anti-feminist. "If the understanding of feminism that is desirable is the equality of men and women, then my husband and I are partners, equal; there are no ordinates or subordinates in PKS" (Interview with Aning Rahmawati, 30 May 2019). Nevertheless, in standing for nomination by PKS, her husband's permission was necessary. Similarly, Yulyani, a PKS cadre who was also an entrepreneur, said that PKS

women had to be educated to become quality politicians: “Being number one [on the list] is a necessity even though it is the party that determines it, and if we are elected, we must fight hard” (Interview, 15 March 2019).

These and the other women PKS candidates we spoke to were unequivocal in expressing the view that they, and other women PKS members, were fully capable of playing a role in public affairs. Aning Rahmawati, a successful candidate for the Surabaya DPRD, explained:

In the PKS, men and women are partners. Women have to be active in the world of politics, and if I get involved in politics I will strive 100 per cent to fulfil the duty entrusted to me, and if I perform this perfectly at this level, I am convinced I will get to a higher level [that is, the East Java DPRD or the national DPR] in the future. (Interview with Aning Rahmawati, 18 June 2019, Surabaya)

These women showed they were serious candidates through the strength of their campaigns, including by challenging male candidates from their own party (e.g. it was widely rumoured that Yulyani, another candidate for the Surabaya DPRD, was defeated by a male PKS candidate on her list only because he resorted to vote buying to defeat her).

PKS women candidates did not view the requirement to secure their husband’s approval for their political activities as a form of gender discrimination. Overall, of course, that requirement indicates that the bargaining position of women in PKS is relatively weak. The party does not recognise and try to resolve the problem of women’s double burden in the domestic and public sphere by providing women with additional support; instead, it simply states that women have to prioritise the former. Although the PKS women we interviewed were strongly motivated to take part in practical politics, they were generally not close to the structures of power in the party and had limited ability to affect key party decisions. PKS women candidates freely admitted that their role was only to implement the duties and guidance of the party. At the same time, most of the women candidates we interviewed also felt that there was continued domination of male politicians in the party (in East Java, for example, no women were on the committee that selected candidates); however they were not critical of this situation nor did they state they resented having to obtain their husbands’ permission to stand as candidates. They did not describe themselves as feminists, nor did they say that they were anti-feminist. As Aning Rahmati explained:

None of us [PKS women] is anti-feminist. PKS didn’t demand the quota [of female candidates], but we want good-quality women to stand for the party. We prioritise quality, and in that way we will automatically fill the quota and provide quantity [that is, a greater number of women candidates]. (Interview, 30 May 2019, Surabaya)

In short, there is much ambiguity in the position of these PKS women. They are caught between, on the one hand, a patriarchal party structure and ideology, which they support

to the extent that they accept that their domestic role must come first, and, on the other hand, wanting to participate fully as equals in the political sphere. They modify their party's anti-feminist stance by supporting women's public role, but they do not accept that there is a problem with gender roles in the family or with women's double burden of domestic and public roles. In this way, they are distinct from feminist groups that problematise these roles and concepts. Instead, they argue that women and men are equal in the public sphere, often downplaying or ignoring those aspects of gender ideology that still place the husbands (and male party leaders) in leadership roles. Their position thus remains very different from that of feminists, which places greater emphasis on freedom and equality in all aspects of life and relationships.

Campaign Strategies: Religious Identity, Targeting Women, and Practical Politics

PKS female candidates expressed their commitment to women's agency practically, by way of the roles they played and the positions they advocated in their election campaigns. Most of the women candidates we interviewed said that, as well as being a form of service to the party, their candidacies were a way to advance the interests of women. They mostly targeted women voters in their campaign activities and did so using campaign teams that primarily consisted of women. Most of these candidates' campaign events we attended had audiences that were about 80 per cent women. While relying on their party for campaign themes and issues, these candidates often displayed great creativity and inventiveness in supplementing party campaigns with personal themes and approaches.

As cadres in what they see as a "*dakwah* party," most of these women understood their role in the elections, at least partly, in religious terms. Yulyani, who was a member of the Surabaya DPRD in the 2004–2009 period, considered her candidacy in 2019 to be an act of dedication and as a way to give service as an embodiment of worship and of God's rule. As she put it, she had become a candidate "because of the call of religion, and to gain access to heaven" and wanted "to do the best for religion via politics" (Interview, 15 March 2019, Surabaya). Nonetheless, when it came to campaigning, Yulyani mostly focused on practical issues, emphasising issues such as economic empowerment when she met with groups of women and approaching her constituents not as a PKS member but as a fellow Muslim.

This was very much the overarching theme of the campaigns of the women candidates we encountered: though the religious element was always present, it was often very much in the background of these women's campaigns, the focus of which was instead overwhelmingly on practical matters. To be sure, they touched on religious issues in their campaigns. In the 2019 election, national PKS leaders instructed candidates to campaign on the basis of four programmes, one to do with religion, and three associated with economic and welfare issues. The religious issue that PKS focused on was the protection of religious leaders (*ulama*) and religious symbols, condemning what it claimed was increasing persecution of Muslim clerics who were defending the Islamic

community (the background here was a heightened atmosphere of religio-political polarisation that accompanied the 2019 presidential election campaign; see Aspinall and Mietzner, 2019). This focus was chosen to reassure Muslim constituents that the party remained strongly loyal to its Islamic roots.

However, the candidates we encountered in East Java hardly took this theme up in their personal campaigns, because they regarded it as ineffective. They were much more likely to stress the other components of the party's national campaign – offering elimination of a tax duty for those who earned under eight million rupiah (around \$US580) per month, the abolition of tax on motorbikes, and life-long driver licenses – and to supplement these with their own efforts to reach out to voters in practical ways. Women candidates – in fact, following the lead of the party as a whole as demonstrated over the last several electoral cycles – realised that issues connected with Islamic ideology, an Islamic state, or the application of sharia-based regulations are not directly relevant to many of the constituents they encountered. Instead, they offered a programme and agenda that was directly related to the needs and wants of the community at the grass-roots. As one candidate explained: “today's community needs are economics, health and education; our *dakwah* (mission) is to supply these needs” (Interview with Iswiyati, 29 March 2019). Despite campaigning on a platform that differed from that put forward by the party leadership, the candidates we spoke to did not face pressure from the party. Candidates believed that they were free to interpret the techniques and campaigns strategies put forward centrally in accord with the needs of their own electoral districts.

While the religious networks of PKS women candidates such as religious study groups (*pengajian*) and the Tarbiyah movement provided women with social capital that they were able to access for their campaign teams, in seeking electoral support women mostly did not rely on religious constituencies or tap into religious sentiment. Instead, they reached out to their local communities and they used their professional competencies to do this. Different candidates had varied methods to reach out to their constituents and respond to their everyday needs. One staple employed by PKS women candidates was to provide activities associated with their professional backgrounds. For example, Aning Rahmawati running for the Surabaya DPRD had a background as a trainer. She conducted parenting training through various educational institutions affiliated with PKS and used this as way to campaign. Like other PKS women candidates, she targeted women voters. Aning Rahmawati regards women, especially mothers, as the key to family unity, the success of the husband, and education of the children (Interview with Aning Rahmawati, 30 April 2019, Surabaya). During the campaign period, Aning Rahmawati conducted training at two or three educational institutions per day as well as offering parenting training at the neighbourhood level in her electoral district. She was rewarded for her perseverance by being elected in 2019.

In a pattern typical of the party, several PKS women candidates provided free health services as part of their campaigns. Although the government provides health services in every subdistrict, many voters, especially poorer voters, appreciate the PKS programme of health checks known as *cuscus*, which measure blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure, for which they are charged only 2,000 rupiah (around 14 US cents) to cover the

costs of replacement syringes (much less than at government-run health clinics). Although not cheap, women candidates were able to share the costs by banding together to run this campaign. Lilik Hendrawati, a candidate for the East Java Provincial DPRD, explained that the medical team required for the service was assisted by student doctors who were PKS cadres and Tarbiyah members.

These were extreme examples, but part of a general pattern: because PKS women candidates targeted women at the grassroots level, they directed the substance of their campaigns towards the concrete needs of the community. In practice, in their campaign events and interactions they talked often about practical women's *interests* relating to their roles as mothers and household managers, rather than focusing on strategic gender issues directed at overcoming inequality at a systemic or structural level (Molyneux, 1985). They tended to dismiss broad issues such as gender equality, the importance of women leaders, or the role of women in society. They said such issues were too conceptual and did not relate directly to the needs of their constituents. Yulyani, running for the Surabaya DPRD explained that:

The defence of women doesn't have to be conveyed directly in the campaign, because at that time it can't be realised. Matters of budgeting for women's interests, the struggle to help pensioners, pregnant women and childbirth or other issues connected to women's interests are more important than women's issues which cannot yet be implemented. (Interview, 15 March 2019, Surabaya)

Reni Astuti, an incumbent in the Surabaya DPRD, had a similar view:

Women's issues are not always a magnet for women constituents. For one segment of women voters, the issues and political concepts put forward by women candidates are not interesting because they are regarded as just politics. What is needed are politicians and legislative members who have attitudes, concepts and programs that are pro-women, regardless of whether the politicians are men or women. (Interview, 1 April 2019)

In practice, this focus on practicalities meant that PKS women often had the opportunity to address women in terms of what party doctrine itself defined as their "essential role" – that is, their role as mothers and within the family. In their interactions with women voters, they often raised concrete issues to do with the family and welfare. PKS women candidates frequently used their own status as mothers and wives to gain sympathy from women voters, devising campaigning strategies to emphasise these aspects of their identity. They often used language or distributed gifts that conveyed gendered symbols and reinforced traditional gender roles. Reni Astuti, the incumbent campaigning for re-election in the Surabaya DPRD Surabaya, selected a small kitchen knife, a mirror, and a purse as gifts that she would distribute during campaign events. The knife she called an "onion knife," and when campaigning among men she told them:

Gentlemen, when you see this knife, you will surely be reminded of your wife. Why is your wife's cooking tasty? Because of the onion and the spices sliced by Bu Reni's knife. So when you taste your wife's cooking, think of me, Bu Reni.

She also made similar comments when giving the mirrors to women: "Have a look at your face in this mirror, you'll surely be beautiful. Think of Bu Reni, the one who gave you the mirror." Obviously, such gifts were highly gendered, and Reni reinforced gender stereotypes when distributing them, even though she herself did not agree with patriarchal views about confining women's role to the kitchen; she simply saw this a pragmatic way to win votes.

The use of this discursive strategy indicates that women PKS candidates paid particular attention to women voters and understood that these voters were the ones they needed to appeal to in order to win office. Women candidates in general have to work harder than men candidates, but, by putting forward issues and using strategies that are pro-women, and utilising gender stereotypes to focus on issues of interest to women, women candidates are able to increase their chances of electoral success (Herrnson et al., 2003).

Following Rinaldo (2013), it is possible to still view these campaigns as part of the pious trajectories of PKS women, in which the main mission of their campaigns remained an ideological one, focused on celebrating and defending the family. The party's ideology stresses that women have an important role in defending the family, and it emphasises that the family is central to the stability and prosperity of the broader community and nation. Hoiriyah, a DPR candidate in Surabaya (and a dentist by profession), expressed the view that:

Defence of the family is built through economic independence of the family as the smallest unit in society and the state through strengthening women. The family is the basis for national defence. This is what has become the strategic agenda for PKS women as a party of *dakwah*.

In such ways, PKS women candidates were able to reconcile what at first sight might appear to be conflicting goals of maximising the vote for the party by appealing to practical-minded voters while remaining true to the party's religious ideology, and of themselves presenting as active political agents in the public sphere while simultaneously upholding party doctrine stressing that women's primary roles were as mothers and wives.

At the same time, these female PKS candidates did talk to the female audiences they encountered about women's political, economic, health, and socio-cultural rights. Yulyani, for example, always told women at her campaign events that they needed to develop political knowledge and consciousness and that they should become politically literate – including when it came to choosing candidates who would truly represent women's aspirations in the legislature. As a candidate who had a background as a businesswoman, she also emphasised that women should get the right skills to enable them

to get work and so improve the economic fortunes of their families. Iswiyati, a doctor, emphasised women's rights to receive decent health services and health insurance; she spoke to audiences a great deal about how lack of accountability in the health care system harmed women's health. Along with Lilik Hendrawati, she provided cheap health services at campaign events (Interview, 3 April 2019, Surabaya).

In interviews, these female PKS candidates described how they needed to negotiate between their party doctrine and demands for women's rights that arose from the community. They negotiated their way around party positions that limited women's role to the family and domestic sphere, promoting greater opportunities for women, including themselves, to be involved in public affairs and to take on public positions. Yulyani, for example, stressed that plenty of women were just as competent as men in many fields – not only politics, but also in business, sciences, and various professions (Interview with Yulyani, 15 March 2019, and 13 April 2019, Surabaya). In such ways, it was no longer accurate to describe these PKS women as simple opponents of women's equality; many of them in fact endorsed core ideas about equality, even while expressing their views within the framework of party doctrine. In short, these women were engaged in a process of negotiation with their party's positions, softening the anti-feminist stance identified by other observers, and pulling the party's position on women towards greater moderation.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article indicates that the broad expectations of the inclusion-moderation thesis can be applied to PKS attitudes and approaches to women's political and social participation. The attitude of ambiguity we noted among women PKS candidates in the end was overcome through the need to focus on practical measures to win the support of the electorate.

The PKS began as a highly rigid ideological party with a view of women's role in society and politics that was extremely conservative. In its early years, even while many women were associated with the party as cadres or as members of the Tarbiyah movement, the party hardly featured women in public leadership positions and had very few women representatives in elected bodies. Over the last decade or so, this position has begun to shift, even if only slowly and haltingly. Our analysis illustrates the electoral dynamics underpinning the shift: the PKS as an institution, and its women candidates in particular, in the pursuit of non-ideological voters, have increasingly adapted to the expectations, needs, and desires of mainstream Indonesian society. The slowly evolving moderation of the party on women's issues and roles is a result, in other words, of a gradual and uneven process of negotiation between the party's ideological principles and demands for a broader public role for women in the context of the party's electoral interests. PKS women have been active agents of this shift: even while operating within an overwhelmingly patriarchal party structure, many of them have demonstrated through their own personal political agency –including their personal efforts to supplement their

family responsibilities with a public role – that a process of gradually negotiated moderation is occurring within the party.

Given that Indonesian society as a whole is largely governed by patriarchal norms and structures, it should not be surprising that this evolution has not led even the most outspoken female PKS leaders towards an open embrace of feminism. These women do not refer to their concept of women's struggle as being feminist. None of the women we encountered say they are striving for absolute gender equality. Even so, PKS women have in fact adopted and adapted elements of feminism, stating that they want to represent both their male and female constituents, including by improving the social, economic, and cultural status and rights of the latter, largely in response to expectations of their constituents, and in search of their support. They have done so, of course, in ways constrained by their interpretation of religious texts, and with great caution. In terms of practical politics, they insist that women's involvement in political affairs must not undermine women's domestic role, which remains primary. Yet these women also promote a public role for women in the field of politics and express ideas about the strength of women and the need to respect their social, political, and economic as well as cultural rights. Such views, while perhaps not quite feminism, are neither the anti-feminism of which PKS women are so often accused.

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Notes

1. Islamism is defined as the concept that Islam should form the basis for political ideology and the state, or a political movement that seeks to establish an Islamic state.
2. All data here are obtained from Indonesia's General Election Commission (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, KPU), available at www.kpu.go.id.
3. In 2019, KPU data show that PKS sent two representatives to the DPR from East Java, out of a total of fifty seats won, meaning that the increase in PKS seats in the DPR (up from forty in 2014) did not lead to an increase in the province. The number of seats in the Provincial DPRD fell from six in 2014 to four in 2019. The number of seats for PKS in the District DPRD of Surabaya remained the same (five).
4. All data here are obtained from Indonesia's KPU, available at www.kpu.go.id.

5. However, one female PKS representative – Lilik Hendrawati, one of the candidates we interviewed – was appointed to the East Java DPRD in January 2020 following the death of incumbent Arif Hari Setiawan in October 2019.

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