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## **Political Communication Strategies of Muhammadiyah: Case on Medan City Mayoral Election in 2020**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to analyze the political communication strategies employed by the leadership of Muhammadiyah in the Helvetia branch during the 2020 Medan City Election. A qualitative descriptive method was utilized, incorporating an informal selection process and triangulation of sources to ensure data accuracy. While examining Muhammadiyah's organizational structure, it becomes apparent that the union does not have a formal commitment to endorse a specific mayoral candidate. However, at the leadership level, individual roles are assumed, and personal efforts are made or instructions are given to subordinates and colleagues within the organization, as well as to trade unions. Political communication within Muhammadiyah, particularly by branch leaders in the context of the 2020 Medan City Election, is not governed by specific union regulations. Nevertheless, the leadership provides an overview to union members regarding the selection of a mayoral candidate, aiming to align organizational aspirations without causing harm to the union's interests. The Regional Head Elections, as a democratic mechanism, are founded on the principles of people's sovereignty

and are implemented to strengthen Indonesian democracy. The alignment of organizational leadership, notably within Muhammadiyah, provides guidance to its union members, conveying the organization's support for a particular figure or candidate for the mayoral or regional leadership positions. Muhammadiyah's involvement in politics is part of its cultural movement, contributing to the shaping of local governance and societal development.

Keywords: Political Communication, Muhammadiyah, Mayoral Election, Medan

### **Abstrak**

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis strategi komunikasi politik yang digunakan pimpinan Muhammadiyah cabang Medan Helvetia selama Pemilihan Kota Medan 2020. Metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan, dengan melibatkan proses seleksi informal dan triangulasi sumber untuk memastikan keakuratan data. Saat mengkaji struktur organisasi Muhammadiyah, terlihat bahwa serikat ini tidak memiliki komitmen formal untuk mendukung kandidat walikota tertentu. Namun, di tingkat pimpinan, peran individu diemban, dan upaya pribadi dilakukan atau instruksi diberikan kepada bawahan dan rekan-rekan dalam organisasi, serta serikat dagang. Komunikasi politik di dalam Muhammadiyah, khususnya oleh pimpinan cabang dalam konteks Pemilihan Kota Medan 2020, tidak diatur oleh regulasi serikat yang spesifik. Meskipun demikian, pimpinan memberikan gambaran kepada anggota serikat mengenai pemilihan kandidat walikota, dengan tujuan menyelaraskan aspirasi organisasi tanpa merugikan kepentingan serikat. Pemilihan Kepala Daerah, sebagai mekanisme demokratis, didasarkan pada prinsip kedaulatan rakyat dan dilaksanakan untuk memperkuat demokrasi Indonesia. Keselarasan pimpinan organisasi, terutama dalam Muhammadiyah, memberikan panduan kepada anggota serikat, menyampaikan dukungan organisasi terhadap sosok atau kandidat tertentu untuk posisi kepemimpinan walikota atau regional. Keterlibatan Muhammadiyah dalam politik merupakan bagian dari gerakan budaya yang berkontribusi pada pembentukan tata kelola lokal dan pembangunan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Politik, Muhammadiyah, Pemilihan Walikota, Medan

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Legislative Election and the Presidential Election in Indonesia hold immense strategic significance as they serve as pivotal moments in shaping the trajectory of the country's democratic consolidation. This consolidation aims to foster a substantive democracy that prioritizes the welfare and progress of its people. This moment also related to the glorious history to the political transition from authoritarianism to the reform era in the future has also provided invaluable lessons on fortifying democratic principles (Labolo & Ilham, 2015). However, these lessons have not been without challenges in terms of institutionalizing democratic values within political entities (Randall & Svåsand, 2002; Schedler, 1998). In the context of elections, it refers a sense of hope permeates the atmosphere, with various aspirations coming to the fore. One of these hopes is the emergence of a non-governmental movement that seeks to criticize corrupt politicians and rally support for ethical and competent leaders. Utilizing the vast reach and influence of new media platforms on the internet, this movement represents a novel phenomenon within the realm of electoral democracy since the

reformation period in Indonesia. Therefore, it becomes crucial to reassess the rule of law in a manner that promotes competitive elections and ensures a fair distribution of power between proponents of the previous regime and advocates of the new democratic era. This process necessitates a careful renegotiation of legal frameworks to foster an inclusive and participatory political environment.

The Legislative and Presidential Elections serve as instrumental milestones, allowing Indonesian democracy to solidify its foundations (Kimura, 2010). These elections provide an opportunity to learn from the past, address the challenges of institutionalizing democratic principles, and set forth a path that prioritizes the welfare of the people (Gastil & Richards, 2013; König & Wenzelburger, 2020). Through the involvement of non-governmental movements and the utilization of new media platforms, the hope for a cleaner and more competent political landscape becomes attainable (Sarok & Azahar, 2017). As the nation progresses, the lessons learned during the transition from authoritarianism to democracy continue to shape Indonesia's democratic journey. By navigating the complexities of power distribution, renegotiating the rule of law, and empowering the voices of the people, Indonesian democracy can further evolve into a robust system that upholds the values of transparency, accountability, and socio-economic progress for all its citizens.

As highlighted Asshiddiqie (2015), the regional head election, also known as direct Pilkada, plays a crucial role as a democratic mechanism in the selection process of leaders at the local level. It allows the entire population to exercise their right and freedom to choose candidates who compete under fair and equal conditions. Regardless of how well a country is structured democratically, its true democratic nature is contingent upon leaders being freely elected by the people themselves. The demand for direct regional elections stems from three significant factors. Firstly, the community seeks greater accountability from regional heads, emphasizing that they should be answerable to the voters rather than the political party factions that supported their candidacy or other government officials following the election. This aspiration underscores the importance of leaders being responsible to the people they serve. Secondly, there is a desire for regional heads to be more oriented towards the interests of the voters. This inclination allows voters to determine their own interests, and if deemed suitable, re-elect the same regional heads for a second term. This fosters a closer alignment between the aspirations of the voters and the actions of their chosen leaders. Thirdly, direct elections establish the foundation for regional heads to be accountable to genuine voters, transcending mere political interests and party power dynamics. By empowering the electorate, the direct election system ensures that regional heads prioritize the needs and concerns of the people who have entrusted them with their votes. Since the amendments made to the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia's constitutional system has undergone significant changes. Among these changes is the transition towards a direct election system for regional heads and deputy regional heads. This transformation reflects the nation's commitment to deepening its democratic processes and ensuring that local leadership selection aligns with the principles of fairness, transparency, and popular participation.

Direct elections represent a significant aspect of the democratization process within regional contexts. The selection of Regional Heads and Deputy Regional Heads occurs through a single candidate pair, following democratic principles such as direct participation, public involvement, freedom of choice, confidentiality, integrity, and fairness. The nomination of candidates for Regional Heads can be accomplished through political parties or party coalitions that hold seats in the Regional Representative Council (DPRD), provided they meet specific requirements. Alternatively, individuals can also run as independent candidates, subject to their own set of requirements. The crucial element in this process is the community's ability to make informed choices, ensuring that elected regional heads possess a vision aimed at enhancing the

welfare of the local populace (Holzhacker et al., 2015; Xue, 2018). By enabling direct participation and ensuring the election process adheres to democratic principles, direct elections empower communities to actively shape their local governance and contribute to the realization of their shared aspirations. The emphasis on welfare enhancement underscores the importance of selecting leaders who prioritize the well-being and progress of the regional population. Through direct elections, communities can choose leaders who can effectively address their needs, envision, and implement policies that foster development, and ultimately contribute to the overall advancement and prosperity of the region. Therefore, the establishment and adherence to direct elections as a democratic practice within regional governance play a pivotal role in ensuring the representation, legitimacy, and accountability of elected Regional Heads, while actively involving the community in the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives.

The Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) serve as a democratic mechanism that should be rooted in the spirit of people's sovereignty and implemented in a democratic manner, as it plays a vital role in strengthening Indonesian democracy (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2020). To achieve this, it is essential to ensure favorable conditions for citizen political participation (Sutrisno, 2017). Pilkada represents a contest of ideas with the goal of providing the best outcomes for the people, thus emphasizing the importance of carefully considering winning strategies (Trihartono, 2014). In 2020, the people of Medan once again participated in the regional head election to elect the mayor and deputy mayor of the city (Kodiyat & Siagian, 2020). An intriguing aspect to explore in the context of the 2020 Medan mayoral and deputy mayoral elections is the political behaviour of the Medan community following three consecutive election cycles. The series of elections since 2017 serves as a factor contributing to political change, making it particularly interesting to study its impact on voter political behaviour (Ubaid & Subandi, 2022). The process of selecting the mayor of Medan exemplifies the implementation of leadership elections at the municipal level. In this context, the focus lies on conducting the election process with honesty and fairness, guided by the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. The Pilkada implementation unveils the political dynamics that unfold in a heterogeneous society, showcasing the diverse cultural fabric (2020) possessed by the people of Medan.

By adhering to democratic principles and conducting Pilkada in a transparent and inclusive manner, the election process in Medan can effectively represent the will of the people and ensure that their voices are heard. Examining the political behaviour of Medan's population across multiple election cycles allows for a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics and preferences of the community. Ultimately, the democratic process of Pilkada serves as a platform for the people to actively participate in shaping their local governance and influencing the direction of their city's development.

The Regional Head Election (Pilkada) conducted in the Municipality of Medan holds significant importance as it serves as a platform for the community to express their aspirations and contribute to the advancement of civilization. The aim is to realize the collective aspirations of the people while promoting inclusivity, regardless of ethnicity, culture, or religion. Pilkada implementation follows democratic principles (Nugroho, 2015), allowing every citizen of Medan to have a say in determining future leaders. These leaders are often endorsed by political parties, and in this case, religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah play a notable role. Although Muhammadiyah does not explicitly provide instructions on voting for specific candidates, their leaders offer guidance and descriptions that influence the perception of potential leaders in each region. The alignment of Muhammadiyah's leaders provides a patronage system and shapes the members' understanding that the organization supports certain figures or candidates for mayoral or regional leadership positions. Muhammadiyah, as a

cultural movement, engages in community development and forms interest groups, indirectly increasing people's participation and influencing politics. Muhammadiyah's influence is particularly significant due to its wide membership that extends to the neighborhood (*Kelurahan*) level, making it an influential organization in Medan's political landscape.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The data utilized in this research was obtained through qualitative methods (Creswell et al., 2007), which aim to comprehensively understand various phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions. Qualitative research employs descriptive language and words to provide a holistic understanding of these phenomena within their natural context, utilizing the surrounding environment (Moleong, 2017). According to Hendryadi et al., (2019), qualitative research involves a naturalistic inquiry process that seeks a deep understanding of social phenomena.

The key informants for this study were the chairman and secretary of the PC (Regional Executive Board) of Muhammadiyah Helvetia. Data was processed by reducing, summarizing, and sorting the main data, while focusing on important aspects. After the data reduction process, the findings were presented. The collected data was then compared against the chosen benchmarks. The results of the research will be presented in the form of narrative text, (Trihartono, 2014). Lastly, the final stage of this research process involves drawing conclusions and making recommendations. Therefore, qualitative research is conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of various phenomena, and in this study, the chairman and secretary of the PC Muhammadiyah Helvetia served as informants. The collected data was processed and analyzed, and the findings will be presented in a narrative format. The research process concludes with drawing conclusions and providing recommendations, emphasizing the importance of the researcher's grasp of the social context being investigated.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

When examining the communication patterns of Muhammadiyah, it becomes evident that this Islamic organization holds a significant position in Southeast Asia, being considered the strongest Islamic organization by anthropologist James L. Peacock from the United States (Suara Muhammadiyah, 2020). As a modernist Islamic movement, Muhammadiyah has played a crucial role in the struggle for progress in Indonesia (Anis, 2019). Although Muhammadiyah is primarily focused on societal and cultural aspects rather than structural politics or political organizations, it has been intertwined with politics since the time of its founder, KH. Ahmad Dahlan (1868-1923). Kiai Dahlan himself was not only the founder and chairman of Muhammadiyah but also actively participated in political movements such as Budi Utomo, a pioneer of nationalist political movements, and the Islamic Union (SI), a pioneer of Islamic political movements, both of which emerged during the colonial era. Despite this political involvement, Kiai Dahlan never formulated a "political ideology" for Muhammadiyah (Nashir, 2015). In this sense that, Muhammadiyah was never intended to be a political organization or to have a defined political perspective.

As an Islamic-based organization, in addition to rectify deviant beliefs and eliminate practices considered as superstitions and innovations (*bid'ah*) (Fadli, 2021). Muhammadiyah's core objective is to propagate the teachings of Islam as inherited from Prophet Muhammad, focusing on education and other social activities. It positions itself as both a cultural and societal movement through community development and the formation of interest groups, indirectly influencing political participation. Unlike Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has a large mass base reaching down to the regional level, Muhammadiyah's political influence is characterized by its quantity and consistency in politics. Both Muhammadiyah and NU are

generally reluctant to openly declare their involvement in political contestations (Kosandi, 2015). However, it is undeniable that the political roles played by the elites of these institutions, particularly in terms of political communication styles, can significantly impact various aspects, including the outcomes of general elections. Therefore, it becomes evident that they make concerted efforts to navigate the political landscape and respond to the various political challenges and dynamics that occur in the country. This is particularly prominent during political seasons, which encompass the selection of leaders at various levels, from the President to regional Regents/Mayors, as a direct expression of popular sovereignty in a democratic system. In this context, communication patterns that involve extensive lobbying and engagement with different segments of society become crucial elements of political events.

To understand communication in this context, it can be defined as the process of transferring information, coordinating meaning between individuals and audiences, sharing information, ideas, attitudes, and behavioral elements, or even ways of life, through a set of rules that enable mental adjustment and the creation of shared symbols in participants' minds (Sendjaja et al., 2014; Silviani, 2020). Communication involves the sharing of personal experiences and internally held thoughts with others, as well as the transfer of information from one person or group to another, often using symbols. As Wahid (2016) states, communication is an activity that we engage in almost continuously, closely tied to the fundamental nature of humans as social beings, driven by curiosity and the need for connection. The term "communication" is derived from the Latin word "communis," meaning "the same," and "communicare," which means "creating the same meaning." On the other hand, the term "politics," as defined by Marsh & Stoker (2019), refers to the allocation of resources and the exercise of power and influence by those in authority. It encompasses the distribution of values and the actions undertaken to maintain or expand power, thereby influencing other political actions. Political communication, as an integral part of the political system, is the process and activities that shape political attitudes and behavior. It involves the use of symbolic methods to convey messages and ideas within the political realm (Adeni & Harahap, 2017). Therefore, political communication plays a crucial role in navigating the complex dynamics of political events. Mass organizations and political actors employ various strategies and communication patterns to engage with different segments of society and address political challenges. Communication, as a fundamental aspect of human nature, involves the transfer of information, coordination of meaning, and the sharing of ideas and attitudes. In the realm of politics, it becomes a powerful tool for shaping political attitudes and behaviors within the political system. Ultimately, political communication is integral to the distribution of power, the exercise of influence, and the pursuit of political goals (Bail et al., 2018; Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Prior, 2013).

A comprehensive explanation of political communication can be formulated as a form of communication aimed at exerting influence in a manner that binds all citizens through jointly determined sanctions by political institutions. According to Shahreza & El-Yana (2016), political communication serves the purpose of connecting political ideas within society, encompassing thoughts within groups, institutions, associations, or sectors of political life with the political life sector of the government (Kantaprawira, 2015).

The process of political communication focuses on how messages from interest groups, such as political parties or organizations, are conveyed through direct channels such as campaigns or indirectly through mass media platforms like newspapers, radio, and television, in order to reach the wider public. This traditional process is also known as the mediation process, where communication is predominantly one-way, from rulers or leaders to the people (Pureklolon, 2016). The study of political communication specifically examines politically significant content or messages that involve issues of power and positions within authoritative

institutions. Sumarno's viewpoint further supports this by proposing that political communication encompasses a process, procedure, and activity that shapes political attitudes and behavior within a political system (Adeni & Harahap, 2017). In that sense, political communication addresses several key aspects: firstly, it is conveyed by political communicators; secondly, the messages carry political weight, involving power and the state; and thirdly, it is integrated into the broader political system. Overall, political communication serves as a mechanism through which influence is exerted, political ideas are disseminated, and political attitudes and behavior are shaped within society. It encompasses the transmission of messages by political actors, focuses on politically significant content, and is an integral part of the functioning of the political system.

Muhammadiyah's political communication plays a significant role within the broader national political culture of Indonesia. During the authoritarian New Order regime, the political culture in Indonesia was heavily influenced by Javanese sub-culture, which manifested in the reinforcement of traditional Javanese values as the national political culture. This is evident in various aspects, such as the selection of elites for positions like ministers, which prioritized loyalty and personal connections rather than merit or competence. Moreover, the patron-client power dynamic, known as "kawulogusti," was also prevalent in the political landscape. This relationship involved a reciprocal bond between two individuals, often characterized by a higher-status individual (patron) utilizing their influence and resources to protect and benefit those of lower status (client). Within this framework, the client is expected to reciprocate by offering public support and assistance, including providing personal services to the patron. Meanwhile, officials are perceived as "gusti" or rulers, while the general population is viewed as "kawulo" or those who are controlled. The relationship between officials and the people is characterized by a sense of reluctance and *ewuh-pakewuh*, an attitude of hesitation and ambiguity. In essence, the dominance of Javanese sub-culture has contributed to a feudalistic nature within the Indonesian political culture. In this feudalistic system, the principle of "sovereignty of my master" takes precedence over the principle of "sovereignty of the people." Unfortunately, this means that the concept of "people's sovereignty" is subordinate to the authority of those in power (Nisa, 2019).

As an integral part of the Islamic movement, Muhammadiyah's political culture is deeply rooted in Indonesia's broader Islamic political culture. The political communication within the Islamic unity framework is a political construct that requires practical steps and implementation. It serves as a political vision and guidance for the members of the Islamic Unity congregation. This political communication of the Congregation for Islamic Unity aligns with the *Aqidah* (faith) of Islamic Unity, which reflects the steps of Islamic *da'wah* (proselytizing) based on political *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) developed by the Islamic Association. It has transformed into a pattern of political communication within the framework of Partai Persatuan Islam. Political dynamics, as an empirical reality, significantly influence the power relations between Islamic Unity and politics in every political moment, ultimately shaping the political culture of the Congregation of Islamic Unity (Turmudi, 2020).

The style of Indonesian Islamic political communication can be broadly categorized into two groups: 1) Modernists, represented by Muhammadiyah, and 2) Traditionalists, represented by NU (Nahdlatul Ulama). The distinction between these two categories of Islamic political culture goes beyond the methods or strategies used; it also encompasses theological and philosophical foundations. Muhammadiyah tends to adopt a direct, principled approach with a rational inclination, supported by its theological and philosophical foundation as a movement of renewal and purification. On the other hand, NU tends to employ a more flexible, opportunistic approach, characterized by a theological and philosophical basis rooted in multiple *fiqh* (jurisprudence). In this sense, the style of political communication developed by

Muhammadiyah from its inception and still relevant today is centered around the da'wah communication of enjoining good and forbidding evil (amar ma'ruf, nahyi munkar). This approach is intrinsic to the definition and identity of the movement, as stated in the Muhammadiyah Statutes, Chapter 1, Article 1 (2023).

Muhammadiyah's style of political communication is deeply influenced by the organization's distinct personality. One key aspect that shapes their communication approach is the doctrine of da'wah communication, specifically the principles of amar ma'ruf and nahyi munkar. These principles, derived directly from QS. Āli 'Imrān verse 104, hold significant importance within Muhammadiyah and are often regarded as representative of the organization's core values. Amar ma'ruf emphasizes promoting and enjoining good deeds and virtuous actions, while nahyi munkar focuses on discouraging and prohibiting acts that are considered sinful or harmful. These principles serve as a moral compass for Muhammadiyah's political communication, guiding their leaders and members in their interactions with political candidates and the wider community. By adhering to these principles, Muhammadiyah aims to contribute positively to society, advocating for just governance, ethical conduct, and societal development. This unique approach to political communication reflects Muhammadiyah's commitment to aligning their actions with their religious teachings, ultimately shaping their engagement in the political landscape.

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ فُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

*Meaning: And hold all of you to the rope (religion) of Allah, and do not be divided, and remember Allah's favor upon you when you were enemies (in the Jahiliyah era), so Allah united your hearts, then you became because of Allah's favor, those who brothers; and you were on the brink of hell, then Allah saved you from it. Thus, Allah explains His verses to you, so that you may be guided.*

The principles of political communication within Muhammadiyah are rooted in the verses of the Qur'an, which serve as a fundamental basis for their discussions. From a communication perspective, specific verses are given priority, focusing on historical methods to extract relevant principles (Purwosusanto, 2017). Islamic communication, particularly verbal communication, can be found in various verses of the Qur'an, including Qaulan Sadida, Qaulan Baligha, Qulan Ma'rufa, Qaulan Karima, Qaulan Layinan, and Qaulan Maysura (Purwosusanto, 2017). These verses are considered as guiding principles in Islamic communication. Within Muhammadiyah, the da'wah doctrine of 'amar ma'ruf and nahyi munkar is communicated and implemented, serving as the foundation for their political endeavors. These principles, deeply rooted in Muhammadiyah's practical-historical approach, guide their movement and progress in the political field. The dimensions of Muhammadiyah's political communication encompass various aspects (Nisa, 2019).

Muhammadiyah's non-school character is grounded in the dimensions of ijtihad (independent reasoning) and tajdid (renewal), derived from the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. The organization's system serves as a means to actualize the ideals of the struggle, shifting personal interests and safety towards broader social interests. Muhammadiyah exhibits an 'anti-establishment' pattern concerning religious institutions in the practical realm of society. Furthermore, it demonstrates adaptability to the evolving demands of the times, enabling Muhammadiyah to remain agile in advocating for aspirations while upholding the fundamental principles of its struggle throughout Indonesia's changing social landscape in different eras.

Muhammadiyah's religiously oriented cultural strategy is evident through its role as a tajdid movement, emphasizing renewal, innovation, restoration, and modernization (Daulay &



Tobroni, 2017). As a *tajdid* movement, Muhammadiyah aims to revitalize Muslims' understanding of their religion by reintroducing authentic Islamic teachings derived from the Quran and al-Sunnah, enlightening the hearts and minds of the people (Zarkasyi, 2013; Zarkasyi et al., 2016).

Based on the author's observations, the religious element holds a distinct position in Muhammadiyah's political journey, much like other social and political forces in Indonesia. Islamic parties, in particular, utilize religion as their political vehicle. This assessment is further supported by the political reality, as evidenced by the presence of numerous Muhammadiyah political elites. Apart from being associated with the traditions of *pesantren* communities, Muhammadiyah can also be readily identified as a political community, as it engages with politics through a political lens.

The political dimension of the Muhammadiyah movement cannot be overlooked, as it has made significant contributions through its political organizations. This raises the question of whether Muhammadiyah has a political culture. From the author's perspective, the emergence of Muhammadiyah in 1912 represents the movement of urban Muslims seeking to formulate their religious and national identity, as well as the identity of the community or nation they aspire to build. These two aspects are crucial because they demonstrate the organization's commitment to offering an ideology that aligns with society and the nation's values. The development of Muhammadiyah can be observed through three phases: Firstly, the phase of self-identification. In this phase, Muhammadiyah positioned itself as a modern Islamic movement based in urban areas, promising change. Its strategic choices in religion, social issues, and education aimed to culturally revitalize Islam and serve as a solid foundation for its broader political ideals. Gradually, Muhammadiyah gained widespread support, allowing it to establish its 'ummah' model that blended Western and Islamic elements, appealing more to urban Muslim rationalists than to traditionalists or secular groups. Secondly, the ideological-political phase. Muhammadiyah's established mass base provided legitimacy for the practical involvement of its elite figures in politics and the formulation of Islam as a political ideology. The Muhammadiyah figures aligned themselves with the 'religious socialist' group, which shared the same religious character as Muhammadiyah. This group advocated for a modern Indonesian society, both socio-economically and politically, based on Islamic teachings (*sharia*). Muhammadiyah's participation in various political organizations such as the Indonesian Islamic Party (PII), MIAI, BUPKI, Masyumi, and Parmusi represented their commitment to upholding Islamic ideology and politics in Indonesia. However, Muhammadiyah faced opposition from secular nationalists, non-Islamists, and traditionalist Muslim groups, which led to ideological debates and political tensions during the Old Order era. Islam's perceived power in that period was viewed as a potential threat. Despite these challenges, Muhammadiyah remained dedicated to its social, religious, and educational projects, which constituted the core of its movement. Lastly, the era of depoliticization and ideologicalization came with the collapse of the Old Order and the establishment of the New Order regime. Muhammadiyah saw an opportunity to continue its political struggle, but it had to conform to the political restructuring of the New Order in the pursuit of national stability and development. Consequently, Muhammadiyah had to accept that its political ideology rooted in Islam must be set aside. It, along with other mass organizations, had to undergo a process of 'political adjustment,' embracing political pragmatism as the only viable approach.

The era of depoliticization and de-ideologization in Muhammadiyah has taken a definitive shape with the implementation of *Pancasila* as the sole principle. However, the resurgence of Islamic culture, partly influenced by the declining popularity of Islamic politics and parties, has also contributed to the revival of political engagement within the Muhammadiyah community. Many individuals within Muhammadiyah, including notable

figures and those who feel emotionally connected to the organization, have become activists involved in social and political organizations (Kartiko, 2009). A significant portion of these activists align themselves with the Golkar party. Several factors contribute to this trend:

- a. The majority of Muhammadiyah members are civil servants, which positions them within the government apparatus and potentially influences their political involvement.
- b. Muhammadiyah's influential cultural presence has inspired numerous state leaders, including the president, to openly identify themselves as 'Muhammadiyah people.' This declaration plays a role in mobilizing Muhammadiyah members to engage in political activities and demonstrate unity with their leaders (*ittibā'*) (2017).
- c. Their participation in political power is seen as strategically important, aiming to further enrich political discourse and, in Muhammadiyah's terminology, promote '*dakwah bi al-hikmah*' (Nazirman, 2018). However, this does not imply neglect of other political parties such as the PPP.

Addition to that, several factors have contributed to this repoliticization: (1) the need to overcome apathy resulting from disappointment and disengagement from politics in 1971, (2) the emphasis on the political dimension of Islamic cultural revival that has gained momentum in recent years, (3) awareness of marginalized social groups who face political and economic marginalization, as political-economic accumulation has been concentrated among certain groups, and (4) the recognition that the existing political system is considered insufficient in promoting an ideal balance of power, political openness, democracy, and maximum public participation. However, it is worth contemplating the fact that unlike the era of political ideology, Muhammadiyah now appears to rely more on the expertise of its lobbyists. This suggests that without effective lobbyists, Muhammadiyah's "*da'wah bi al-hikmah*" functions would be hindered. Considering Muhammadiyah's cultural and religious character, its political relationships, the agenda of democratization, and other pertinent issues, Muhammadiyah writers believe that strategic choices must be made. Muhammadiyah should maintain its freedom to engage responsibly in politics while closely attending to the strategic aspects of national life. Moreover, Muhammadiyah needs to formulate a precise model of "*da'wah bi al-hikmah*" to present itself as an alternative model for the greater society.

As the effectiveness of political communication is influenced by an organization's uniqueness, Muhammadiyah plays a crucial role in the political system. It becomes a decisive agent in processes such as political socialization, political culture formation, political participation, and political recruitment. Therefore, within mass organizations like Muhammadiyah, political communication can be carried out by charismatic leaders who possess specific traits. Muhammadiyah's political communication bridges two interests: conveying political information from the top down and representing the interests of the people or *ummah* to those in power.

Cultural movements are carried out through the involvement of Muhammadiyah figures in activities such as recitations, sermons, health walks, and social services. Structurally, these movements are reinforced through consolidation and victory meetings. Additionally, Muhammadiyah's cultural movement can manifest in religious practices that resonate with the traditions of the local community.

## CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah's political communication holds great potential as an ideal approach within the Indonesian political landscape, particularly under the leadership of the Helvetia Branch. It serves as a manifestation of the reciprocal relationship effect resulting from the convergence

process between cultures inherent in every community member and the need for communication during social interactions. The culturally and structurally embedded process of social communication has brought this largest Islamic mass organization in Indonesia to confront the political reality, often perceived as a dilemma. Within this context, there are certain elements of communication whose functions remain unclear.

One key aspect is the relationship between the communication process and political attitudes and communication within Muhammadiyah during the Medan City Mayoral Election in 2020, in which plays a pivotal role in the political system as it significantly contributes to political socialization, political culture formation, political participation, and political recruitment. Apart from that, advocated for maintaining the organization's freedom to engage responsibly in politics, even without direct involvement, while ensuring that all citizens have the liberty to exercise their political choices. Therefore, Muhammadiyah's political communication possesses significant potential and can be considered an ideal approach within the Indonesian political landscape. Its leadership, particularly exemplified by the Helvetia Branch, embodies the reciprocal relationship effect arising from cultural convergence among community members and the need for effective communication during social interactions. Muhammadiyah's role in political socialization, culture formation, participation, and recruitment underscores its importance within the political system. While relying on skilled lobbyists, Muhammadiyah should make strategic choices that enable responsible political engagement while upholding citizens' freedom to make their own political choices. This approach aligns with Muhammadiyah's cultural and religious character, the trajectory of its political relations, the democratization agenda, and various other relevant factors, as highlighted by Muhammadiyah writers.

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