

## 212 MART MOVEMENT IN PALEMBANG: *The Failed Experiment of Islamic Populism*

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### Abstract

The case of blasphemy charges against Basuki Cahaya Purnama, also known as Ahok, in Jakarta in 2017 sparked a wave of mass protests, calling themselves the 212 Movement. Based on various criteria and characteristics, scholars have labeled it as an Islamic populist movement, which later inspired various articulations of the movement in different locations. This article explores the articulation of this movement in the economic field under the name 212 Mart in Palembang, South Sumatra. Using the framework of Social Movement Theory, there are two main findings. First, the 212 Mart movement attempts to articulate the ideology of Islamic populism as the framing of the movement through identity sentiments and the strengthening of the community's economy. The ideology of Islamic populism positions the Muslim community as socially and economically marginalized. Second, the failure of the experimentation of Islamic populism in the 212 Mart movement is attributed to the weakening of economic opportunities and the structure of political opportunities. Thus, this article has contributed to studying Islamic populism through social movement theory by revealing the failure of the 212 Mart movement in Palembang.

**Keywords:** Islamic Populism Ideology; Socio-Economic Movement; Mobilization of People's Resources

### Abstrak

Kasus tuduhan penistaan agama Islam oleh Basuki Cahaya Purnama alias Ahok di Jakarta pada 2017 melahirkan gelombang protes massa yang menamakan diri Gerakan 212. Berdasarkan berbagai kriteria dan karakteristik, para sarjana menyebutnya sebagai gerakan populisme Islam, yang kemudian menginspirasi beragam artikulasi Gerakan di berbagai tempat. Ini mengeksplorasi artikulasi gerakan tersebut dalam bidang ekonomi yang menamakan diri 212 Mart di Palembang, Sumatera Selatan. Dengan kerangka analisis Teori Gerakan Sosial (Social Movement Theory), terdapat dua buah hasil temuan. Pertama, gerakan 212 Mart mencoba mengartikulasikan ideologi populisme Islam sebagai framing gerakan melalui sentimen identitas dan penguatan perekonomian umat. Ideologi populisme Islam meletakkan umat Islam sebagai kelompok yang termarginalkan secara sosial-ekonomi. Kedua, kegagalan eksperimentasi populisme Islam dalam gerakan 212 Mart disebabkan faktor melemahnya peluang ekonomi dan struktur peluang politik. Dengan demikian, artikel ini telah berkontribusi ke dalam kajian isu populisme Islam melalui teori gerakan sosial dalam mengungkap kegagalan gerakan 212 Mart di Palembang.

**Kata Kunci:** Ideologi Populisme Islam; Framing Gerakan; Mobilisasi Sumber Daya Umat

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic populism poses a significant challenge to pluralistic nations in nurturing harmonious coexistence among religious communities. Frictions in the religious domain are often exploited as moments for the unexpected emergence of populism due to diverse interpretations in social life. In 2016, an extraordinary turmoil arose caused by a politician through the manipulation of religious content within political narratives. Religious narratives became distorted into a major polemic utilized as identity politics through symbols of religious defence.

The Islamic populism movement gained momentum following the blasphemy case preceding the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2016-2017. The strengthening of the Islamic populism movement stemmed from the political narratives of Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as Ahok, which were perceived as insulting to Muslims by quoting verses from the Qur'an during his campaign in front of the Thousand Islands community. Ahok believed that many people who disliked him were using Qur'anic verses as a tool not to vote for him in the election. Ahok's statement, considered as blasphemy and insulting to Muslims, is as follows (Amal et al., 2020):

*"In the hearts of fathers and mothers, perhaps they feel unable to choose me because they have been deceived using Al-Maidah verse 51. So, if you cannot choose me because you are afraid of being cursed to hell, you do not need to feel anxious because you are being fooled. It is okay."*

Islamic populism grows alongside identity politics amidst conflicts that claim to represent religion. Populist groups effectively utilize the issue of blasphemy in mobilizing large numbers of people from various regions in Indonesia. The first "Defend Islam" action took place on October 14, 2016, and was attended by around 50,000 people. The second "Defend Islam" action was held on November 4, 2016, and was attended by more than 200,000 people. The third "Defend Islam" action continued on December 2, 2016, and is popularly known as the "212 Defend Islam Action," which also marked the peak of the Islamic populism

movement as it was attended by more than 500,000 people (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018).

Supporters of the 212 Defend Islam Action claim that the number of attendees reached over 7 million people. However, the number of attendees based on mathematical calculations from Google Maps is estimated to be 2.3 million people (Ichwan, 2016). Regardless of the discrepancies in the claims mentioned above, the 212 Defend Islam Action has become a contemporary historical event showcasing the success of Islamic populism in mobilizing the masses, predominantly from the lower and middle urban classes (Hadiz, 2018). Explicitly, the 212 Defend Islam Action, led by Islamic groups, not only aimed solely to overthrow Ahok but also had ideological agendas (besides political agendas) intending to delegitimize the status quo and implement Islamic agendas at the state level (Amal et al., 2020).

The 212 Movement openly declares its identity in opening up new public spaces as a movement in accordance with religious guidance and Islamic lifestyle. The 212 Movement employs various methods to garner support from constituents, utilizing religious symbols as tools against the dominant economic system (Hassan, 2019). Anti-Chinese and anti-non-Muslim sentiments, manifested in the Ahok case, are reinforced due to the dominance of the economy by individuals of Chinese descent.

The emergence of economic sentiments is supported by data indicating that the assets controlled by the 40 wealthiest individuals in Indonesia are 580,000 times greater than the per capita income (Madung, 2018). This data highlights a significant disparity between the common populace and a small elite controlling immense wealth. It is this socioeconomic inequality that provides fertile ground for the rise of identity-based Islamic populism, as exemplified by the 212 Movement, in broader public spaces.

The expansion of Islamic populism, previously focused on the political dimension, has now spread into economic issues through the agenda of religious solidarity. The 212 Movement has become a new attraction by uniting people from various marginalized groups. The

212 Movement has successfully gained massive grassroots support, which is focused on empowering the people economically to challenge various forms of dominating socio-economic systems. Based on the latest data updated as of December 31, 2018, on the 212 Sharia Cooperative website, the 212 Movement mandates 100 investor members in each outlet. It has grown to 205 outlets spread across various regions of Indonesia (Koperasi Syariah 212, 2018).

Palembang has become a city with a massive distribution of 212 Marts, despite being a metropolitan city inhabited by various ethnicities and religions; this does not hinder the Islamic populism movement. The strengthening of the 212 Mart movement is supported by the abundance of conventional minimarkets, which are predominantly owned or controlled by non-Muslims, sparking the emergence of Islamic populism at the local level. According to data from the Palembang City Department of Investment and One-Stop Service (DPM-PTSP), there are 208 new conventional minimarket outlets continuously expanding. The distribution of minimarkets is dominated by Indomaret, with 318 outlets, and Alfamart, with 209 outlets spread across 18 districts in Palembang (Rizal, 2021).

The presence of conventional minimarkets is the root cause of the disappointment felt by the Muslim community regarding the dominance of the economy by non-Muslims. This disappointment leads them to the 212 Mart movement as an alternative to building a representation of power against this dominance. In this context, the 212 Mart movement offers an alternative path akin to romanticism in the interpretation of the Muslim majority as capable of managing the economy independently. The existence of the 212 Mart movement gradually continues to evolve into a form of transformation, becoming a newly favoured movement among the community.

Progressively, the 212 Mart movement began in 2017 and has continued to experience a significant increase in outlets in the city of Palembang. From 2017 to 2019, it marked the peak phase of the 212 Mart movement. There are four Sharia Cooperative 212 communities in Palembang. Firstly, the Muhajirin Pakjo

Sharia Cooperative 212 community has 1 212 Mart outlet; Secondly, the Talang Kelapa Sharia Cooperative 212 community has 1 212 Mart outlet; Thirdly, the Surya Barokah Plaju II Sharia Cooperative 212 community has 2 212 Mart outlets; Fourthly, the Warmart Veteran Utama (WVU) Sharia Cooperative 212 community has 13 212 Mart outlets.

The years 2017-2019 marked a golden period for Islamic populism in the economic sector. However, in 2020, this success began to decline, and setbacks occurred within the 212 Mart movement in Palembang. This was characterized by the closure of 1 outlet of the Talang Kelapa Sharia Cooperative 212 community due to licensing issues. The setbacks were followed by the Warmart Veteran Utama community, one of the communities with the highest number of outlets, experiencing a collapse and having to auction off all 212 Mart outlets. Furthermore, the Surya Barokah community lost one out of its three outlets, and the Muhajirin community was left with only 1 212 Mart outlet during this critical period.

In the end, the 212 Mart movement, founded on religious identity to gather resources from a cross-class alliance, could not sustain itself in the diverse public sphere. The decline of the 212 Mart movement indicates that community-based support can flexibly shift towards claims of truth values based on the understanding and experiences of the populace within the Islamic populism movement. The decline of the 212 Mart economic movement, historically linked to the direction of the Islamic populism movement, which originated from a Defend Islam Action, has turned into a failed economic movement due to its reliance on religious identity symbols in a diverse society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The selection of several study references aims to obtain refinement through the concept of Islamic populism closely related to this article. The choice of these reference types is intended to find a deeper refinement of Islam-

ic populism in social, economic, and political dimensions. Based on the literature review conducted, several articles intersect with the Islamic populism movement. These articles include Vedi R. Hadiz (2017), who explains that political Islam is the leading articulator of social justice issues facing contradictions related to capitalist development in Indonesia. Complaints about social injustice continue within the framework of Islamic cultural references, especially in the implications for Indonesian democracy. There is an assumption that economic modernization leads to secularization, but it actually leads to the growth of religiosity, including in politics. Social complaints are increasingly exacerbated by cultural and religious references resulting from post-Islamist Islamism, leading bureaucratic rationality towards a tendency of pluralism, contributing to an excess of moral conservatism.

According to the World Bank data in 2016, some inequalities had implications for social and political issues in Indonesia. These inequalities resulted in vulnerability to several social problems, supported by unmet aspirations, making identity politics the primary vehicle for political mobilization. Additionally, Vedi R. Hadiz (2018) has presented empirical evidence regarding the mobilization strength of mass events as the principal capital in perpetuating Islamic populism in Indonesia. This study explain the efforts of Islamic populism to mobilize across classes in the competition for power dan resource. The effort of populism groups have paved the way for the development of Islamic populism, which comes with socioeconomic and political transformation in Indonesia.

Based on the fifth literature reviews that havCas Mudde (2004) defines populism as a political stance that pits the general populace against a corrupt elite in an opposing or antagonistic manner and sees politics as an expression of what the general public generally desires. While much of the research on populism has focused on economic crises and difficulties as the leading causes of populism, contestation within the ideological spectrum has shown that Indonesia is following new trends in populism, which are just beginning to be recognized by the literature. Populists of

the 21st century have shown a diversity of perspectives between right and left, secular and religious, and various economic principles as claims to represent the 'pure people' against the status quo. Mudde's definition is handy for countries with solid ideological tensions, such as Indonesia's Islamist-pluralist divide (Mietzner, 2020).

Referring to Mudde's opinion (2004), populism is positively related to democracy because it focuses on representing people's will. The positive impact of Islamic populism on the economic dimension lies in the representation of mobilizing marginalized groups, the formation of cross-class collectivities, and the emphasis on accountability within the 212 Mart movement. The grassroots economic actions of 212 Mart carried out by various community elements (civil society) can correct the attitudes and policies of elites that are perceived as failing to achieve welfare and justice for all elements of society.

The article by Afdil Hafidh and Eva Lidya (2019) illustrates the significant role of populist groups in the growing appeal of 212 Mart among middle-class urban Muslim communities in Palembang. The 212 Mart movement has become a promising new identity offering collective material exchanges (jamaah) by leveraging Islamic economic principles. This article articulates the 212 Mart movement, viewed from the early development of Islamic populist ideology within the local economic scope. Based on this study, a small overview of the early development of one 212 Mart community is found, thus allowing for a broader exploration of the articulation of Islamic populism within the local context.

Based on several literature reviews presented, there are two intersections and limitations of Islamic populism that serve as the basis for this article. First, this article emphasizes Islamic populism at the local level as an ideology that generates mobilization of economic resources. Hadiz serves as the entry point for exploring Islamic populism, managing the people's grievances as a vehicle to mobilize the masses. Meanwhile, in this article, the articulation of Islamic populism functions as an explanation of the framing of the 212 movement

in managing the form of people's dissatisfaction as a means to mobilize local economic resources and commodities. Second, the failure of Islamic populism experimentation at the local level occurs due to the weakening of economic opportunities and political movements. Economic and political opportunities become crucial parts of the 212 Mart Islamic populist movement in nurturing communal networks.

## METHODOLOGY

In this article, a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach is utilized as a tool to elucidate and comprehend the meaning originating from individuals or groups (Creswell, 2015), within the Komunitas Syariah 212 in Palembang, with informant criteria as follows: 1) Manager of 212 Mart, 2) Former Manager of 212 Mart, 3) Investor, 4) Former Investor, 5) Employee of 212 Mart in Palembang. This article encompasses two types of data: Firstly, primary data is obtained directly from predetermined subjects. Primary data is acquired through field observations and in-depth interviews with informants. Data accuracy is ensured through detailed interview guidelines directed towards managers, former managers, investors, former investors, and employees of 212 Mart in Palembang. Secondly, secondary data, consisting of supporting documents, is used to complement primary data in order to acquire relevant and accurate information.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSTION

### Framing and Mobilization of Islamic People's Resources 212 Mart Movement

The concept of populism proposed by Canovan interprets populism as the appeal of the masses to challenge established power structures, ideas, and dominant values in society (Arditi, 2007), like the polemic of religious blasphemy, which was utilized as the main capital to reach a cross-class mass inte-

grated within the framework of the peaceful action of 212. Through Action 212, populism has strengthened and transformed into the economic dimension of 212 Mart. The agenda of 212 Mart represents an effort to perpetuate a movement that claims to represent the people. Local figures become an important foundation in gaining the trust of the people.

The case of strengthening contemporary Islamic populism is in line with Laclau's (1977) idea, which emphasizes that populist discourse can emerge from anywhere within the social institutional structure. Populist discourse often involves conflicts of interest between a collective "people" and "hegemonic elites". Populism can arise from the failure of elites to meet the demands of certain groups, leading to the dominance of the logic of equality and the emergence of antagonism between the people and the elites. Contemporary Islamic populism uses the concept of the ummah to replace the concept of the people. Conceptually, Islamic populism consists of various internal social interests by aligning with a group considered oppressive (Hadiz, 2019).

Social movements in Islamic activism are responses to pressures generated by different conditions and triggers. One of them is the socio-economic factor, which is the main cause behind the background of Islamic activism (Wiktorowicz, 2004). The discussion on the emergence and downfall of Islamic Populism in the 212 Mart movement can be understood through important factors in studying and analyzing social movements. Firstly, the political opportunity structure and obstacles that hinder movements (political opportunities). Secondly, formal and informal organizational structures that produce resistance (mobilization structures). Thirdly, the collective process serves as a link between opportunities and actions (cultural framing) (McAdam et al., 2004). Furthermore, the theoretical framework adapted from various sources will provide an overview of the 212 Mart movement:

### Theory Framework

The contestation among populist actors has been a significant contributor to the exis-



Source: Adapted from McAdam, McCarty, and Zald (Sukmana, 2016).

tence of the 212 Mart movement in Palembang. Through various crucial roles, the managers campaign and disseminate the movement's articulation, influencing the acquisition of community resources. Besides populist actors, the memory factor of the 212 Action facilitates the development of populist ideology within micro-level societal mechanisms, forming both formal and informal relationships among communities. Populist groups play a vital role in accessing community resources based on solidarity actions. Through framing identity sentiments in the economic dimension, populism has grown significantly, as evidenced by the calculation of the number of investors at the outset. From four 212 Mart communities, there were 3,353 members in the Surya Barokah Community in 2021, 150 members in the Muhajirin Pakjo Community in 2021, 130 members in the 212 Mart Talang Kelapa Community in 2019, and 2,468 members in the Veteran Community in 2019 (Hafidh, 2022).

The role of populist groups and the memory factor of the 212 Action indicate that populism takes on a fluid form, facilitating opportunities and structuring movements. Fluid populism refers to the way populist groups identify opportunities to form collective actions. Apart from being fluid, populism in concept can also be exclusive or inclusive in expanding influence. Categorically, the popu-

lism of the 212 Mart movement is inclusive because it attempts to unite people in opposition to the wealthy ruling class (Amal et al., 2020). This inclusivity is evident in the 212 Mart Islamic economic movement's utilization of collectivity as a tool to mobilize resources through 100 investors centralized in capital accumulation. Placing Islamic populism as the underlying ideology addresses sentiments regarding domination in the economic sector, framing the 212 Mart movement. Additionally, framing the movement serves as a means to manage community grievances as resources to support the movement's agenda (Hafidh, 2022).

The mechanism of mobilization structure in the Islamic populism movement of 212 Mart easily extends within a wide network. In this context, the factor of homogeneity in religious understanding and shared thoughts about the condition of the community drives how the movement can be accepted without conflicting or overlapping with Islamic culture. The involvement of the community is essential as suppliers of collective capital resources for the 212 Mart movement in its struggle to replace conventional minimarkets. In the 212 Mart movement, capital is obtained through the participation of the community contextualized in the resonance of religious values. The convergence point of framing in mobi-

lizing resources for Islamic populism resulted in success at the inception of the 212 Mart movement. The success of the movement is not only related to reactions to the formation of structures but also the recognized interests of the community in their condition. The 212 Mart movement can be positioned as a newcomer with market segmentation placed within urban community environments through the utilization of religious solidarity networks. This makes the 212 Mart movement part of a new Islamic sub-economy as an economic platform for the community. This section demonstrates how Islamic populism enters into the issue of the community's economy, based on concern as a provider of distribution channels for Muslim entrepreneurs, especially in the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector.

### **The Failure of Islamic Populism Experimentation in the 212 Economic Movement**

Observing the management of 212 Mart, which embraces the ideology of Islamic populism through religious symbols in the public sphere, the participation of the community becomes highly flexible. Community participation and support can change autonomously based on the understanding and interpretation of the movement. The setback of the 212 Mart movement indicates that the community's understanding continues to shift based on unsatisfactory experiences. Although the 212 Mart movement, using the strength of religious identity, can provide various economic resources, this situation can change due to shifts in community interpretation, ultimately leading to disappointment.

The Islamic populist ideology underlying collective action is not aligned with the original agenda created to facilitate the goals of the 212 Mart movement in managing the community's economy, both in the production, distribution, and consumption sectors. As common, social movements do not operate in a vacuum within broader social environments and contexts. They are always characterized

by the fluid configuration of capabilities and constraints that shape movement dynamics (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Support and participation in the 212 Mart movement do not last long. Participation is hindered because the basis of community support is highly flexible and limited. Essentially, the setback of the 212 Mart movement is caused by market competition and the loss of community trust as a force supporting and facilitating the movement.

The articulation of the movement aimed at building the community's economic movement is also framed with their hopes for community participation, which results in imbalance. The managers' high expectations and the different realities on the ground led to failure in the management system of the economy, which was considered unavailable before. The goal of accommodating the needs of the Muslim community with the branding of "212" as an attraction for various marketed products, such as the branded mineral water "212," actually does not appeal to the community due to the high selling price. Furthermore, various MSME products like "Ok Oce" are also considered unable to contribute to the marketing of 212 Mart in times of crisis.

The religious identity narrative utilized by the 212 Mart movement is merely a tool to achieve economic strengthening interests. Despite the effective use of identity sentiments by populist groups, the paradox of Islamic populism in positioning the community as a marginalized majority does not imply that participation and support can endure disappointment. Strengthening economic disparity dominated by the ethnic minority Chinese and economic elite oligarchy over the majority society is one variable driving populism in Indonesia (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). Identity sentiments and inequality issues are no longer effective tools for gathering resources due to the movement's inability to facilitate the community's economy. Populism in Indonesia has been less successful because it has become a significant business component. Populist groups propagate Islamic identity through cross-class involvement in the contest for power and resources. The community, serving as the main vehicle for Islamic organizations, is increasingly caught up in a chaotic logic

based on material values (Hadiz, 2018).

The ideology of Islamic populism within the 212 Mart movement is linked to the historical contingency of the Action Defending Islam as a crucial element in the growth of populism in Indonesia. However, the connection to the Action Defending Islam does not guarantee political strength for the 212 Mart movement in harnessing community resources in the long term. Essentially, apart from the lack of political support, the failure of the 212 Mart movement is due to the inability of the movement's mobilization structure, managed by the middle class, to sustain a durable support base.

The factor of mobilization structure serves as a potential foundation for any action. If this factor is absent, the likelihood of collective action occurring is small (McAdam et al., 2004). The mobilization structure factor determines the 212 Mart movement in maintaining the trust of the previously established community. Mobilization structure through populist and Islamic approaches that previously promised material benefits has become a source of new complaints and disappointments. This situation can be illustrated by the mismatch of material reciprocation, leading to decreased participation of the community in the 212 Mart movement.

The resonance of Islamic populism is appealing due to the claims made by upholding a morally strong community in facing various threats (Hadiz, 2017). In this section, the political opportunity structure is related to the external resources of Islamic populism that influence the resistance of the 212 Mart movement. The failure of the 212 Mart movement is attributed to the lack of political opportunities in the public domain due to the loss of influential figures, such as the loss of various key figures from the Alumni 212 due to the shift in the movement's direction from purely religious struggle to practical political agenda.

However, amid the impending stagnation of the 212 Mart movement, the DNA of Islamic populism ideology, which tends to be fundamentally economic and politically radical, will remain ingrained in populist actors at the local level. They will emerge through new gaps

created by different conditions and potential agents. Populist factions will seize potential opportunities by addressing issues of inequality in new arenas of public struggle. This assertion about the situation and potential conditions is rooted in Laclau's (1977) concept, emphasizing that populism is an antagonistic relation against the elite in class relations that can originate from anywhere. Meanwhile, regarding potential agents, it is reinforced by Canovan's idea that antagonism always plays an ideational role in shaping key structural elements within populist movements (Arditi, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

The ideology of populism serves as the framing of the movement by positioning the Muslim community as socio-economically marginalized. Strengthening religious identity through economic sentiment results in significant participation and support from the community. The link between the mobilization structure factor of the 212 Mart movement and the community's actions leads to a situation of sensitivity to concerns rooted in dissatisfaction and disappointment over issues of inequality. The 212 Mart movement successfully manages community dissatisfaction by mobilizing resources to strengthen local capital and products. Based on the economic aspects of the community, populists believe that collective action can address issues of inequality and promote economic empowerment. The 212 Mart movement targets the urban Muslim community segment through religious solidarity networks, making the mobilization structure mechanism of the movement easily permeate widely.

The failure of the 212 Mart movement is attributed to the ideology of Islamic populism, which underpins collective action that deviates from its initial agenda of facilitating the management of the community's economy. The mobilization of resources by the 212 Mart movement serves merely as a means to pursue economic goals, with the community being positioned as subordinates functioning as means of production, distribution, and



consumption in the fight against capitalism. The failure of the 212 Mart movement about economic opportunities is influenced by the crucial role of organizers in conveying the framing of the movement's meaning and articulating it to the community. Numerous failures in maintaining network systems have led to the loss of key components of community participation. The political opportunity structure, integral to the 212 Mart movement, seeks to establish balance. The weakening of the 212 Reunion and the loss of central figures have impacted the circulation of the 212 Mart movement in restoring community trust through the interpretation of religious doctrines in the memories of the past.

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