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ISLAM, POPULISM, AND EDUCATION: THE REPRODUCTION OF IDEOLOGIZATION IN HIGH SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how Islamic populism is reproduced in secondary education settings in Indonesia. This study examines how populist Islamic ideology is articulated in the curriculum, social practices, and symbolism in senior high schools (SMA), and how educational actors (teachers, students, and school officials) are involved in this process. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study method, in several high schools in Indonesia that exhibit diverse characteristics in terms of school policies related to religion. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and principals, participant observation of school activities, and document analysis of the curriculum and teaching materials. Thematic analysis techniques were used to identify patterns of ideologization of Islamic populism in the school environment. The research findings indicate that the reproduction of Islamic populism in Indonesian senior high schools is manifested in three main dimensions: (1) Normative, where populist Islamic teachings are implicitly or explicitly integrated into the school curriculum and policies; (2) Practical, where religious-based student organizations and extracurricular activities play a role in shaping students' ideological understanding; and (3) Symbol, where certain Islamic attributes are used to represent ideological identity. The research also shows that there is tension between populist Islamic narratives and moderate Islamic discourse within the school environment, reflecting broader ideological dynamics in Indonesia. This research reveals that high schools are not only places of academic learning but also arenas for ideological reproduction, where Islamic populism is negotiated and socialized.

KEYWORDS: Islamic Populism, Secondary Education, Ideologization, and Ideological Socialization.

INTRODUCTION

The 212 Defend Islam rally, held on December 2, 2016, in Jakarta, was one of the largest social movements in modern Indonesian history. It was sparked by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama's (Ahok) controversial statement regarding Surah Al-Maidah 51, which some Muslims considered blasphemous. The rally successfully gathered large crowds from various regions across Indonesia, demonstrating effective mobilization based on religious sentiment (Muhid, 2024; Nuryanti, 2020).

As the majority religion in Indonesia is Islam, namely 229.62 million people or around 87.2% of the total population of Indonesia (Ministry of Religion, 2020), so this religion occupies an important position in various aspects of national life, including politics. Indonesian political scientists agree that the majority religion, Islam, has been widely exploited for political purposes by populist leaders and groups in Indonesia (Hadiz, 2018; Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021; Nuryanti, 2020; D. B. Pratama, 2021; Suseno, 2018; Syarif & Hannan, 2020). The terminology used to frame this phenomenon is Islamic Populism. The term Islamic Populism, of course, is not always negative. According to Rosidi and Hanafi (2024), the 212 Action, which consisted of several volumes, did not actually threaten religious tolerance in Indonesia. The movement was merely an accumulation of symptoms of public piety among the Islamic community in Indonesia (Rosidi & Hanafi, 2024).

The post-212 incident brought a new trend in political studies in Indonesia. The massive demonstration held on December 2, 2016 in Indonesia is one of the case studies that offers an opportunity for cross-sectoral analysis of populism between politics and socio-cultural phenomena. Many Indonesian political scholars and intellectuals examine this Islamic populism event with various approaches and perspectives, including: Suryana (2023) discusses the role of radical Islamic groups, namely the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), and Salafi, in pioneering the 212 populist Islamic Movement (Suryana, 2023), on the other hand, Rosidi and Hanafi (2024) consider that the 212 Action, which consists of several volumes, does not threaten religious tolerance in Indonesia and is not part of a radical movement but a form of piety in implementing one's religion (Rosidi & Hanafi, 2024). In addition, many Indonesian scholars consider the 212 movement to be a form of Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2014, 2016, 2018; Kusumo & Hurriyah, 2019; Nilan & Wibowanto, 2021; Nuryanti, 2020; Riesebrodt, 1994; Shaira, Nurida, &

Hidayat, 2021; Suseno, 2018; Syarif & Hannan, 2020; Urbinati, 2019).

Previous research (I. Y. Pratama, 2021; Triantoro, 2018) has highlighted student involvement in the 212 Movement, identifying factors such as religious solidarity, the influence of social media, and the leadership of religious organizations as drivers of their participation. However, studies specifically examining the involvement of high school students in this movement are still limited. Understanding high school student participation is crucial because they are in the identity formation phase and are heavily influenced by their educational and social environments.

In the context of education, schools function as agents of socialization, playing a role in shaping students' values, norms, and ideologies. High school students' involvement in the 212 Action may reflect the ideologization process occurring within the school environment, both through the formal curriculum and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the influence of social media and religious communities within schools also plays a role in shaping students' political and religious views. Over time, the 212 Action has evolved into a more structured phenomenon, with annual reunions that continue to attract mass participation. These reunions not only serve as a consolidation platform for previous participants but also attract younger generations, including high school students, who may not have been involved in the initial action (Muhid, 2024). This suggests that the ideology espoused by this movement continues to be reproduced and disseminated, including among students.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the ideologization process related to Islamic populism occurs in high schools in Indonesia. This study will examine the role of the curriculum, extracurricular activities, the influence of social media, and religious communities in shaping students' religious and political views. Thus, it is hoped that this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of ideology among students and its implications for education and socio-political life in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research applies a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine the dynamics of ideologization in secondary education, particularly in the context of Islamic populism in senior high schools (SMA). The case study method was chosen because it allows for a more in-depth exploration of

how populist Islamic ideology is formed, spread, and negotiated within the school environment (Yin, 2012). This study was conducted in several high schools in Surakarta City, Indonesia, which have different religious policy characteristics. The schools studied included public and private senior high schools that implement a neutral policy toward religion, as well as public and private Islamic high schools (Madrasah Aliyah) that integrate Islamic values-based curricula into their educational systems.

The data collection techniques in this study consist of several main methods, namely In-depth Interview, Participatory Observation, Document Analysis, And Focus Group Discussion (FGD). In-depth interviews were conducted with various educational actors, such as teachers, students, school management, and alumni, to understand how populist Islamic ideology is internalized and distributed within the educational space. Participatory observation was used to observe social dynamics within the classroom, extracurricular activities, and the use of Islamic symbols within the school environment. Meanwhile, document analysis was conducted by examining various written sources, including textbooks, school policies, and the vision and mission of the educational institution. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with students and teachers to gain a collective perspective on how ideologization occurs within the educational space. In analyzing the data, this study applied thematic analysis, as developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis stages include transcription of data from interviews, observations, and FGDs, followed by the process of coding based on three main dimensions: normative, practical, and symbolic. Next, key themes representing the dynamics of Islamic populist ideology in schools were identified. As a final step, the findings were interpreted and validated through a data triangulation process to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the analysis. Through this approach, the research "Islam, Populism, and Education: An Exploration of Ideologization in High Schools in Indonesia," "It is hoped that this will provide a comprehensive understanding of how the ideologization process takes place in the secondary education system, as well as how schools become a space for reproducing the discourse of Islamic populism in Indonesia.

Becoming Islamic Populism

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has also experienced the

phenomenon of Islamic populism, especially in the last decade. Hadiz (Hadiz, 2016, 2018) highlights how the Islamic populist movement in Indonesia emerged in the form of mass mobilization by conservative Islamic groups. One of the most prominent examples is the 212 Action carried out by the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and other Islamic organizations, which demanded justice based on Islamic principles. Mietzner (2020) adds that Islamic populism in Indonesia has unique characteristics because it operates within a democratic framework (Mietzner, 2020). This movement not only opposes secular elites but also exploits the democratic system to gain political legitimacy. This is evident in support for political candidates who promote a conservative Islamic agenda. Furthermore, Jati argues that, from the perspective of Islamic populism, radicalism arises from a spirit of liberation to free Muslims from economic injustice and political marginalization (Jati, 2013). Jati also argues that Islamic radicalism in Indonesia is closely linked to the history of Islamist movements both locally and globally.

The phenomenon of religious populism is one of the products of the reform process (Munabari, 2017, 2018). The problem of populism as a '*thin ideology*' and political strategies are among the influences contributing to intolerance in Indonesia (Shaira et al., 2021). The school arena has become crucial in religious populism through "ideological preaching." Furthermore, the resurgence of Islamic populism is inextricably linked to the turmoil of national politics at the end of 2016 (Muslim et al., 2018). This was triggered by the blasphemy case by a political figure named Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, which then led to identity politics in the Jakarta gubernatorial election. Mass actions tagged "Action to Defend Islam 212" and "Action to Defend Islam 411" contributed to the reproduction of religious populism, not only in politics but also in education. According to MAARIF Institute (2018), under the pretext of defending religion, students in several schools in Cianjur Regency and Sukabumi Regency, coordinated by school teachers, went to Jakarta to participate in the 212 Islamic Defense Action. Similarly, in Yogyakarta City and Padang City, several students in the city uploaded their actions, both 212 and 411 on social media Instagram and Twitter (Muslim et al., 2018). Islamic populism that occurs in schools occurs due to the ongoing social and cultural reproduction process. According to MAARIF Institute research (2018), there are at least three main doors of penetration of school habitus based on radicalism and religious populism, namely through extracurricular activities, the role of teachers in the teaching and learning process, and

weak school policies in controlling the entry of various radical ideologies (Muslim et al., 2018).

Education and Ideological Reproduction

Education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge, but also an arena for the reproduction of ideologies that shape ways of thinking, acting, and understanding the social world. In the tradition of critical sociology, education is often viewed as a non-neutral instrument. Louis Althusser (1970) in his theory of *Ideological State Apparatus* emphasizes that schools are one of the state's primary tools in disseminating and maintaining dominant ideologies (Althusser, 1970). Through curriculum, teaching practices, and school rules, the education system instills values that support the existing social order. Meanwhile, in the context of the sociology of education, various theories have highlighted how educational institutions play a key role in maintaining or changing dominant social structures

and ideologies. One of the most influential perspectives in understanding the reproduction of ideology in education is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction.

For Bourdieu (1990), school institutions are important sites in maintaining cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Collins, 2009), one of which is ideology. Pierre Bourdieu developed the theory of social reproduction to explain how social inequality continues from one generation to the next through various mechanisms, especially in education. The structure of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction can be explained through several key concepts: habitus, field, capital, and symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The following is an explanation of the four concepts in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, faced with processed data from field research related to the reproduction of ideologization:

Table 1. Pierre Bourdieu's Key Concepts in the Ideologization of Education in Indonesia

Draft	Explanation	Ideologization of Education in Indonesia
Habitus	A system of dispositions shaped by an individual's social experiences since childhood. It functions as a mental structure that guides how they think, act, and perceive the world.	Teachers or other actors in schools who have a conservative or populist habitus will reinforce exclusive ways of thinking towards other groups, for example by teaching Islamic history in a frame of conflict versus the "enemy" or spreading the idea that Islam is the only solution to socio-political problems.
Field	A social arena where individuals and groups compete for position and influence.	Schools as a domain are a place where various ideologies compete. In some secondary schools in Indonesia, the educational domain can become a place where certain actors (teachers, student organizations, principals, and even external groups such as Islamic organizations) seek to dominate the ideological narrative.
Capital	Bourdieu divides capital into several main forms that play a role in social reproduction: social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital.	Islamic populism in schools, alumni networks or relationships with Islamic organizations can be capital that strengthens populist ideology.
Symbolic violence	Symbolic violence is a form of domination that is unconsciously accepted by the individuals or groups affected by it.	Symbolic violence occurs when the discourse of Islamic populism is normalized as the only truth. For example, when teachers or curriculum convey that Islam is under threat from certain groups (e.g., "foreigners," "aseng," or "liberals"), students accept this narrative without question.

Source: Researcher Processed Data

Several educational institutions in Indonesia are affiliated with Islamic organizations or movements, such as Salafiyah educational institutions, Salafi Wahabi educational institutions, Integrated Islamic Schools with the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Hidayatullah educational institutions, Nahdlatul Ulama educational institutions, and Muhammadiyah (Hefner, 2009). In addition, many other Islamic organizations, such as the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute (LDII), the Al-Quran Interpretation Council (MTA), the Diponegoro Islamic Foundation, Al Irsyad, and the Islamic Union (Persis), each have their own ideological characteristics. The diversity of Islamic organizations and movements in Indonesia has given rise to a diversity of Islamic habits.

Islamic-based public schools, such as the State Islamic Senior High School (MAN), differ from the habits of integrated Islamic schools or other Islamic-based private schools. For example, in everyday conversation, Islamic-based schools in Indonesia have diversity. Some schools commonly mix Arabic terms in conversation at school, while others do not, in other words, use Indonesian. Terms frequently used include: ustadz, ustadzah, afwan, syukron, antum, ikhwan, akwat, and so on. According to Hilmi, an informant, "We usually use these terms in everyday conversation both at school and at home as a form of social piety" (Hilmi, personal interview, February 14, 2025). Meanwhile, Jasmine, who studies at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri, said that we are not used to or used to using Arabic terms, but sometimes friends from

Islamic boarding schools are careless in using them (Jasmine, personal interview, 16 February 2025).

Ideologization of Islamic Populism

In the context of education, the ideologization of Islamic populism refers to the process by which populist Islamic values are taught, discussed, and reproduced in schools. This process is often associated with a narrative that constructs a dichotomy between *oppressed Muslims* versus *secular elite group* (Hadiz, 2016; Lindsey, Makruf, & Pausacker, 2023). Thus, schools serve not only as a

place to transfer knowledge but also as an arena for the reproduction of certain ideologies. In some Islamic schools, the curriculum not only teaches Islamic teachings in a spiritual context but also fosters an understanding of Islam as a political ideology that opposes the values of liberalism and secularism. There are three important aspects of the ideological trajectory in the educational arena or schools: normative, practical, and symbolic. The following table 2 illustrates the three aspects of the ideologization of Islamic populism in high schools in Indonesia, based on research results:

Table 2 Three Aspects of the Ideologization of Islamic Populism in Schools

Aspect	Explanation	Implementation Form
Normative	Reflecting on how school regulations and policies shape the enabling or constraining environment for the ideologization of Islamic populism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School Vision and Mission - Teaching Curriculum - Rules and regulations ex: dress code
Practice	Seeing how the ideology of Islamic populism is implemented in everyday life at school through various activities and social interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extracurricular activities - Interaction between teachers and students in class - Social Media Influence
Symbolic	Looking at how Islamic symbols are used to shape students' religious and political identities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Symbolism in School Space - Religious Identity Clothing - Colloquial language at school

Source: Processed research data

The first and most important aspect of the process of ideological reproduction in schools is the Normative Aspect (School Rules and Policies). This aspect reflects how school regulations and policies shape the environment that enables or limits the ideologization of Islamic populism. Of course, in examining the normative aspect in schools, it is important to examine the rules reflected in the school's vision, mission, and curriculum. The vision and mission of secondary schools in Indonesia, which prioritizes belief in God, aligns with the national ideology of Pancasila, which places "Belief in the One and Only God" as its first principle. Therefore, Indonesian schools prioritize the goal of developing students who are devout to God. This mission is further implemented in literacy activities, such as reading the Quran every morning before class. This practice is common even in public schools.

One form of implementation of the normative aspect is the curriculum. The high school curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of religion and politics. In public schools, subject matter tends to be presented neutrally. However, teachers' interpretations of this material can carry certain ideological overtones. Conversely, in Islamic schools, the curriculum explicitly integrates Islamic values into various subjects, such as history and civics, which can influence students' perspectives on their religious and political identities. In public schools, the curriculum tends to be religiously neutral, but

teachers have the freedom to interpret the material, which can lead to ideological bias. Meanwhile, in Islamic schools, the curriculum explicitly instills Islamic values in various subjects, such as history and civics, which can contain elements of Islamic populism within religious and political narratives.

In addition to the vision, mission, and curriculum, school rules and regulations also impact the habitus of students and the school community. Rules such as dress codes or uniforms also construct student habitus. For example, some Islamic schools require the hijab to be worn by female students, while some public schools also encourage the use of the hijab. According to Ustadz Oki (personal interview, November 16, 2024), his school stipulates specific requirements for hijab use: the hijab must cover the chest at least three finger widths above the elbow. Furthermore, more conservative schools implement gender segregation rules in teaching and learning activities and certain extracurricular activities, such as in integrated Islamic schools. According to informants, both teachers and students at the State Islamic Senior High School implement gender segregation in the learning process, especially for students in boarding classes. While full-day and regular classes are not separated between boys and girls.

The second aspect of school habitus is the Practical Aspect. This aspect examines how the ideology of Islamic populism is implemented in daily school life through various activities and social interactions.

One particularly important interaction in the reproduction of habitus is the interaction between teachers and students. Some religious and other subject teachers have a significant influence on shaping students' thinking, particularly when they bring subjective interpretations to Mumtazah (Personal interview, February 16, 2025), a student at a State Islamic Senior High School in Surakarta. According to her, her physics teacher often links his teaching materials to Islamic perspectives, the Hadith, and the Quran. In addition to classroom and school interactions, teachers also frequently use social media to disseminate lectures or specific views.

Several studies and research (MAARIF Institute, 2021; Muslim et al., 2018; PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2018) note that the existence of Rohis (Islamic Spiritual) activity organizations sometimes becomes a space for the spread of populist and fundamentalist Islamic ideas. Based on the results of this study, public schools provide more space and monitor religion-based extracurricular activities, while Islamic schools encourage activities that strengthen religious identity. The role of Rohis (Islamic Spiritual) organizations, with their various names, is very central to Islamic da'wah in schools. Their various programs include conducting regular weekly study sessions led by Ustadz from outside, religious teachers, and/or fellow Rohis members. In addition, they produce various posters, both digital and printed, as well as da'wah tabloids. This indicates that organizations such as Rohis become a primary vehicle for the spread of Islamic populist discourse, especially when influenced by external groups with specific agendas.

Some schools also experience social segregation between student groups. This segregation pattern is often influenced by religious identity, with students' views often being influenced by religious beliefs. Furthermore, social media interaction is crucial in today's world. Students are exposed to Islamic populist content through platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, which often reinforces the narrative of "oppressed Muslims." The social media content they frequently follow includes content from popular Indonesian religious teachers, such as Hanan Ataki, Felix Siuw, and others. This digital content influences how students debate and interact with peers who hold differing views.

The third aspect of this habitus reproduction process is symbolic. This aspect examines how Islamic symbols are used to shape students' religious and political identities. Symbolism is often present in school spaces. Islamic-based schools typically display Islamic symbols prominently, such as

calligraphy of holy verses, photos of religious scholars, and flags bearing the monotheism. Meanwhile, in public schools, similar symbols are sometimes found in posters produced by the Rohis (Islamic Spiritual) organization. Furthermore, the presence of these dominant worship facilities emphasizes that religious activities receive greater priority than other academic aspects, a phenomenon that further reinforces the role of religion in the education system. The placement of places of worship, such as mosques, in the front and main areas of schools has its own symbolic significance.



Figure 1 of the front of the school that was the subject of the research study

Another symbolic aspect is reflected in the way they dress. The use of Islamic clothing, such as the syar'i hijab for female students and cingkrang pants for male students, often serves as a marker of a particular ideological group. In some cases, there is social pressure for students to adhere to more religious dress standards. Furthermore, a significant symbolic aspect in the reproduction of habitus is the symbol of language. Language, as a symbol of communication, also reflects a particular identity. In several schools

that were the subject of the study, a mixture of Arabic is used as a lingua franca. Common terms used include *afwan*, *syukron*, *akhi*, *ukhti*, *akhwat*, *ikhwat*, and so on. In class discussions or extracurricular activities, such terms are frequently encountered. Some students also adopted anti-Western or anti-secular rhetoric in their discussions about politics and nationality.

CONCLUSION

Islamic populism in education in Indonesia is a growing phenomenon alongside the rise of Islam-based political mobilization. Schools have become a crucial arena for reproducing this ideology through the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and social interactions within the educational environment. Therefore, it is crucial to balance Islamic values-based education with a more inclusive approach to prevent exclusivism in the educational space. There

are three important aspects in the reproduction of habitus in education: the normative aspect, the practical aspect, and the symbolic aspect. The results of this study indicate that the process of ideologizing Islamic populism in high schools occurs through three main channels: First, the normative aspect, where school regulations and the curriculum can influence how Islamic ideology is taught and implemented. Second, the practical aspect, where social interactions, extracurricular activities, and the influence of social media shape students' mindsets about Islam and politics. Third, the symbolic aspect, where religious symbols and identities reinforce ideological differentiation among students. This study provides insights for policymakers in designing a more inclusive and democratic education system and opens up space for further research on the role of education in shaping ideological discourse in Indonesia.

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