

The Politics of Hegemony: Ideological Struggle in Indonesia's First Democratic Election (1955)

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Abstract: As a newly independent nation, Indonesia faced significant fragility in various aspects, particularly in establishing a stable state ideology. Although Pancasila had been affirmed as the foundational ideology in Sukarno's closing speech at the session of the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence (BPUPK), ideological contestation persisted in the years leading up to the 1955 General Election. The aspiration of several political forces to replace Pancasila or incorporate their respective ideological principles into state regulations found its most constitutional channel through the 1955 Election. This election thus became a crucial arena of ideological struggle among political parties, marked by the prominence of three major ideological streams: the Religious/Theistic foundation represented by Masyumi Party, the Nationalist foundation represented by the Indonesian National Party (PNI), and the Marxist foundation represented by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Each party sought to establish ideological hegemony and secure popular support by promoting its vision of the state and national identity. This study conducts a historical analysis of the ideological contestation surrounding the 1955 Election by applying Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. It examines how political parties mobilized discourse, influence, and public persuasion in their struggle to dominate the ideological landscape of post-independence Indonesia.

Keywords: 1955 General Election, Ideological Contestation, Political Parties, Hegemony.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 1955 General Election (Pemilihan Umum, hereafter Pemilu) was the first national election conducted by Indonesia following the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945. As a newly independent state, Indonesia lacked adequate infrastructure to immediately organize a general election. From the early days of independence, the Indonesian government made continuous efforts to establish the institutional foundations of a democratic state, including the formation of the House of Representatives (DPR) and the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) through general elections (Feith, 2007; Adam et al., 2024; Rahman & Weda, 2019). Approximately two months after independence was proclaimed, the government sought to realize this goal by assigning the Central Indonesian National Committee (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat, KNIP) to exercise the legislative powers of the DPR and MPR until those bodies could be formally established. This arrangement was stipulated in Vice Presidential Decree (Maklumat) No. X, which granted KNIP legislative authority and the power to participate in determining the broad outlines of state policy, while its daily functions were carried out by a Working Committee responsible to KNIP due to the urgent situation at the time (Lev, 2009; Thahara et al., 2019; Pratiwi et al., 2026).

The issuance of this decree followed the establishment of KNIP during the third session of the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence (PPKI) on August 22, 1945. KNIP proposed to the President that it be granted legislative authority until the DPR and MPR were formed. In addition, KNIP was authorized to participate in formulating the Broad Outlines of State Policy (GBHN). The government also approved KNIP's request to establish a Working Committee.

To avoid misunderstanding, an explanatory supplement to the decree was issued by the KNIP Working Committee, signed by Sutan Sjahrir as Chairman and written by Soewandi. The explanation clarified that, under Vice Presidential Decree No. X, the Working Committee had the authority to jointly determine the GBHN with the President and to enact laws together with the President concerning all governmental affairs. However, it did not have the right to interfere in the government's daily policies, which remained under the President's authority, assisted by ministers and civil servants. The explanation further stated that, starting October 17, 1945, KNIP (and on behalf of it, the Working Committee) no longer had the authority to manage matters related to governmental execution (*uitvoering*). These powers were temporary and would remain in effect only until the MPR and DPR were established in accordance with the Constitution.

This decree clearly demonstrated the government's intention to organize a general election. About a month later, this intention was reinforced through Vice President Mohammad Hatta's decree of November 3, 1945, which encouraged the formation of political parties. The government urged the immediate establishment of political parties, expecting that they would strengthen Indonesia's struggle to defend independence and ensure public security.

The decree also emphasized that the government welcomed the emergence of political parties, as they could channel and organize the various ideological currents within society in an orderly manner. (Mietzner, 2009; Sujoko et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2022) Therefore, it was hoped that political parties would be well established before the planned election of MPR and DPR members in January 1946. To support the decree on political parties and the implementation of elections, the government established the Central Election Office (*Kantor Pusat Pemilihan, KPP*), regulated by Government Regulation No. 10 of 1946 concerning the Establishment of the Central Election Office to administer the election of DPR members. The regulation was signed by Vice President Mohammad Hatta and enacted in Yogyakarta on September 26, 1946.

Despite these preparations, the general election was only realized in 1955. The 1955 General Election was conducted in two stages: the first on September 29, 1955, to elect members of the DPR, and the second on December 15, 1955, to elect members of the Constituent Assembly (*Konstituante*). This arrangement differed from the earlier decrees, which had envisioned the January 1946 election as one to elect members of the DPR and MPR, without mention of a Constituent Assembly (Bourchier & Hadiz, 2014; Pertiwi et al., 2024; Akhmar et al., 2022).

The delay in holding the election was caused by both internal and external challenges. Domestically, the government was not yet fully prepared to organize elections, and the necessary legal framework had not been completed. Internal rebellions, such as the 1948 uprising of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia (DI/TII) rebellion, diverted the government's focus. Externally, Dutch military aggression posed serious obstacles, including the First Dutch Military Aggression on July 21, 1947, and the Second Dutch Military Aggression on December 19, 1948.

Nevertheless, efforts to conduct elections continued with the enactment of Law No. 27 of 1948 concerning the DPR and the Election of Its Members. This law introduced a proportional representation system, in which seats were allocated to political parties in proportion to the votes they obtained—hence also known as the balanced representation system. The entire territory of Indonesia was initially considered a single electoral district, but due to its vast size, it was divided into multiple districts based on population proportions (Aspinall & Fealy, 2010; Mesquita et al., 2025; Mahdori et al., 2025). The law was later amended by Law No. 12 of 1949. When Mohammad Natsir of the Masyumi Party became Prime Minister in 1950, the government made the general election a cabinet program. Under the Sahardjo Committee of the Central Election Committee Office, discussions on the Election Bill resumed before being submitted to parliament.

Although the discussion was not completed during the Natsir Cabinet, it continued under the Sukiman Wirjosandjojo Cabinet and later under the Wilopo Cabinet of the Indonesian National Party

(PNI) in 1953. During Wilopo's administration, Law No. 7 of 1953 concerning the Election of Members of the Constituent Assembly and the DPR was enacted, providing the legal framework for the 1955 General Election. Since its enactment on April 4, 1953, the election originally planned under Law No. 27 of 1948 to elect DPR and MPR members was transformed into an election to choose members of the Constituent Assembly and the DPR.

To ensure proper implementation, voter registration was conducted for six months, from May to November 1954. Indonesian citizens aged at least 18 years or already married were eligible to vote. During this period, 43,104,464 voters were registered out of a total population of 77,987,879. Based on this population, 520 seats were allocated for the Constituent Assembly and 260 seats for the DPR. The election for the Constituent Assembly, held on December 15, 1955, was contested by 39 political parties, 23 mass organizations, and 29 individual candidates. The DPR election, held on September 29, 1955, was contested by 36 political parties, 34 mass organizations, and 48 individual candidates.

From that point onward, competition among political parties intensified, especially during the campaign period, particularly among parties representing Religious, Nationalist, and Marxist ideological foundations. Although ideological contestation had existed since the emergence of political parties in Indonesia, it had not previously been so overt, as party leaders had been primarily focused on achieving national independence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Politics as a Critical Study

The emergence of political parties was initially rooted in the belief that forming an organized platform would unite individuals who shared similar ideas, enabling their thoughts and orientations to be consolidated. This effort aimed to strengthen the influence of a group (political party), particularly in decision-making and in the implementation of political policies. The study of politics has produced various perspectives. In her book, Miriam Budiardjo (2007) presents several definitions of political parties proposed by classical and contemporary scholars. For example, Sigmund Neumann defines a political party as an articulate organization of society's active political agents—those concerned with controlling governmental power and competing for popular support with other groups holding divergent views (Neumann, 1956).

Similarly, Friedrich (1967) views a political party as a group of human beings, stably organized with the objective of securing or maintaining control of government for its leaders, and, through such control, providing both ideal and material benefits to its members. Meanwhile, Giovanni Sartori (1976), whose work remains a key reference in party studies—defines a political party as any political group that presents candidates in elections and is capable of placing them in public office through the electoral process. Miriam Budiardjo herself defines a political party as an organized group whose members share similar orientations, values, and ideals. The group's objective is to obtain political power and seize political office—generally through constitutional means—in order to implement its programs (Budiardjo, 2007).

In addition, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) was established. In one of his speeches, Aidit (1955) explained that the birth of PKI was preceded by the formation of the railway workers' union SS Bond in 1905. In 1908, the militant railway workers' union VSTP (Vereniging van Spoor- en Tramwegpersoneel) was founded. However, as class consciousness among Indonesian workers developed, there emerged a desire for an organization that extended beyond trade union struggles. In May 1914, the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV) was established in Semarang by Henk Sneevliet.

Substantively, socio-democracy encompasses political, economic, and social democracy. Political democracy recognizes the equal rights of every citizen to determine the direction and structure of the state. Economic democracy affirms each individual's right to shared prosperity. Social democracy acknowledges the equal dignity of every person as a social being and recognizes

the equal right of all individuals to achieve the highest level of advancement in accordance with their talents.

Accordingly, socio-national democracy advocates: A) In the political sphere: a nationalist struggle characterized by Indonesian identity and a governmental structure based on popular sovereignty. The form of government should reflect the will of the majority and take the shape of a constitutional state—the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. B) In the social sphere: a society structured on mutual cooperation (a collectivist society), rejecting individualistic social arrangements.

The collectivist society envisioned by the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) was a socialist society that rejected private ownership of the means of production when such ownership enabled exploitation and oppression by one individual or group over another. Article 3 of PNI's statutes stated its objectives: a) To defend and uphold the sovereignty of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. b) To establish a state structure based on popular sovereignty and a society founded on social justice (a socialist society). c) To cooperate with other nations on the basis of equality in order to realize a new world order grounded in humanitarianism and justice. One of the principal party programs stated in Article 4 was the eradication of capitalism, imperialism, and fascism.

B. Antonio Gramsci's Hegemony Method

This article employs the concept of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks* to conduct a historical analysis of ideological contestation in Indonesia from the post-independence period to the 1955 General Election. Gramsci defines hegemony as a form of leadership achieved not only through political domination but also through moral and intellectual consent within civil society. As noted by Thomas (2009) and Green (2011), hegemony operates through cultural, ideological, and institutional practices that shape “common sense” and legitimize particular political interests.

Using this framework, the study examines the ideological struggle among three major party foundations in the 1955 Election: Masyumi (Religious/Theistic foundation), Partai Nasional Indonesia (Nationalist foundation), and Partai Komunis Indonesia (Marxist foundation). Each party sought to construct moral-intellectual leadership and gain popular consent in order to secure political dominance through constitutional means.

The research applies historical methods, beginning with heuristic source collection from both primary and secondary materials, including party statutes, electoral documents, and scholarly interpretations of Gramsci's thought. These sources are subjected to criticism, interpretation, and analytical description to produce a comprehensive understanding of ideological contestation, moving beyond a simple presentation of historical facts.

III. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative historical method combined with a critical political analysis framework. It applies the concept of hegemony formulated by Antonio Gramsci to examine ideological contestation among political parties in the period leading up to the 1955 General Election. Gramsci's notion of hegemony—understood as moral and intellectual leadership exercised through consent rather than coercion—serves as the primary analytical lens for interpreting how political parties sought to construct ideological dominance within Indonesian society.

Data were collected through heuristic techniques, including the identification and gathering of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of official election documents, party statutes and bylaws, campaign materials, government regulations, and archival records related to the 1955 Election. Secondary sources include scholarly works on Indonesian political history and contemporary interpretations of Gramscian theory.

All sources were subjected to historical source criticism (external and internal criticism),

followed by interpretation and qualitative analysis. Through this method, the study aims to provide a contextual and analytical explanation of ideological struggle, focusing on how political parties mobilized discourse, institutional mechanisms, and public persuasion to achieve hegemony in Indonesia's early democratic era.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Historical Facts

1. The Beginning of Political Parties in Indonesia

Political parties in modern states are no longer unfamiliar institutions and are closely associated with the exercise of power. Nevertheless, their emergence is relatively recent, dating back to the late nineteenth century. Political parties first developed in Western European countries alongside the expansion of representative institutions and the growing recognition of citizens as legitimate participants in political processes. As noted by Katz, and Crotty, (2020), political parties evolved as mediating institutions linking society and government within emerging democratic systems. Similarly, Ware, Alan (2021) emphasizes that parties became essential mechanisms for interest aggregation and political representation in constitutional regimes.

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in countries such as United Kingdom and France, political activity was initially concentrated among elite parliamentary factions, often aristocratic in character. Over time, however, the expansion of suffrage, the influence of social contract theory, and the institutionalization of the separation of powers encouraged broader political participation. As suffrage widened, parliamentary factions transformed into organized mass parties capable of mobilizing voters beyond the legislature. According to Mair (2013), this transformation marked the shift from elite-based representation to mass-based party politics, making political parties a defining feature of modern democracy.

In Indonesia, early political organization emerged during the colonial period. The Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV), founded in 1914, brought together Indonesian and Dutch revolutionary intellectuals to spread Marxism among workers. On May 23, 1920, ISDV transformed into the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), inspired by Marxism–Leninism and the 1917 October Revolution in Russia—also known as the Bolshevik Revolution—which led to the establishment of the world's first socialist republic.

Subsequently, on June 4, 1927, the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) was founded by members of the Bandung Study Club under the leadership of Soekarno, with Iskaq Tjokrohadisoerjo serving as secretary. Other prominent figures included Cipto Mangunkusumo and Ali Sastroamidjojo. PNI actively propagated the idea of Indonesian independence and initiated cooperation among nationalist organizations through the Permufakatan Perhimpunan Politik Kebangsaan Indonesia (PPPKI), which contributed to the broader nationalist movement, including the 1928 Youth Pledge. Dutch colonial authorities, perceiving PNI as a threat, intensified repression, culminating in the arrest of Soekarno and other leaders in December 1929.

After independence, efforts to reorganize nationalist forces continued. Archival records from the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (2019) document that in November 1945, several political groups with similar principles—including Serikat Rakyat Indonesia (Serindo) led by S. Mangoensarkoro, regional PNI branches, and other republican parties—held negotiations in Jakarta. During the First Serindo Congress in Kediri on January 28–29, 1946, these groups merged and formally established the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) under the leadership of S. Mangoensarkoro. This consolidation illustrates how political parties in Indonesia evolved from colonial-era movements into structured organizations that later became key participants in the 1955 General Election.

2. Political Ideologies of Parties in Indonesia

In the early development of political parties in Indonesia, ideological differences were not yet sharply pronounced. This was largely because these parties shared a common objective: achieving independence and resisting Dutch colonialism. Nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment served as a unifying force, which explains why many party leaders were arrested, imprisoned, or exiled without trial by the colonial authorities. However, after independence, ideological tensions became increasingly explicit. Political parties competed for influence, seeking to persuade the public to adopt their respective ideological orientations. In societies with limited access to formal education at the time, political socialization often took an indoctrinative form, fostering strong militancy. While this militancy sometimes intensified conflict, it also functioned as political capital in confronting both internal instability and external threats.

Broadly speaking, Indonesian political parties were divided into three major ideological streams: Religious/Theistic, Nationalist, and Marxist/Communist. The Religious stream included parties such as Masyumi, PSII, Perti, Parkindo, and the Catholic Party. The Nationalist stream included the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI) and several other nationalist-oriented organizations. The Marxist/Socialist stream included the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), the Socialist Party of Indonesia, Murba, and labor-based parties. Scholars such as Herbert Feith (2007) and Rex Mortimer (2011) note that ideological polarization intensified in the 1950s, particularly among PNI, Masyumi, and PKI, each of which sought to shape the ideological foundation of the newly independent Republic.

The contestation became visible during debates within Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (BPUPKI) concerning the state foundation and the formulation of the Jakarta Charter. The removal of the “seven words” regarding the obligation to implement Islamic law marked a critical compromise between Islamic and nationalist groups. Subsequent rebellions—including the 1948 uprising associated with PKI and the Darul Islam movement led by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosoewirjo—reflected unresolved ideological tensions. As argued by Robert W. Hefner (2018), these conflicts illustrate how competing visions of Islam, nationalism, and socialism shaped Indonesia’s early democratic trajectory, culminating in the intense ideological competition of the 1955 General Election.

3. The Ideological Struggle in the View of Antonio Gramsci

An examination of the principles, objectives, and programs of the three major parties reveals significant differences, particularly in their socio-economic and political visions of the Indonesian state. The most striking ideological contrast was between Masyumi and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). These parties, along with the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), were engaged in an intense struggle to establish ideological hegemony within society, especially leading up to the 1955 General Election.

Hegemony (egemonia), derived from the Greek term meaning domination of one group over another, in Gramsci’s conception refers to a form of consensus in which subordination is secured through the acceptance of the ruling class’s ideology by subordinate groups. Hegemony is not domination through coercive power, but leadership achieved through political and ideological consent. It represents the victory of a ruling class obtained through consensus among various socio-political forces.

Hegemony operates when subordinate groups—including the proletariat—adopt and internalize the worldview, values, and ways of life of dominant elites. According to Gramsci, this process generates compliance, as people accept prevailing conditions without critically questioning them because the hegemonic ideology is absorbed uncritically.

B. Discussion

In Gramsci's view, there are three phases in the formation or development of hegemony, corresponding to different levels of political consciousness.

The first phase is the economic-corporate level, the most basic moment. At this stage, individuals perceive themselves as independent and equal to others, while feeling a moral obligation to support one another. However, they have not yet developed a sense of solidarity based on shared collective interests. In the Indonesian context, this phase can be seen in the early colonial period, when solidarity among the indigenous population had not yet fully emerged and resistance against colonial rule remained fragmented.

The second phase is the solidarity of interest stage, where awareness develops among members of a social class based initially on shared economic interests. Over time, this solidarity expands into other domains, particularly politics. In Indonesia, this occurred when educated elites began to recognize their shared condition as colonized subjects. Organizations with common visions emerged, especially among educated groups (organic intellectuals), and later evolved into political parties that openly challenged colonial authority.

The third phase is the hegemonic phase. At this point, a group becomes aware of the need to articulate broader interests that transcend narrow economic concerns and claim to represent the interests of other subordinate groups as well. In this phase, one group seeks to universalize its values and ideology, presenting them as beneficial and necessary for all. It is at this stage that intense ideological struggles emerge, as competing groups attempt to institutionalize and sustain their respective ideologies.

This dynamic was clearly visible in the early years of Indonesian independence, particularly during debates over the state's foundational ideology. Nationalist, Islamic, and communist ideologies competed fiercely to shape the identity of the newly independent nation. While the economic-corporate and solidarity phases tend to develop naturally, the hegemonic phase is marked by deliberate political engineering and ideological contestation aimed at controlling national discourse. The effort to establish hegemony generated significant friction. Given that much of the population was still illiterate, ideological dissemination often took doctrinal forms, producing highly militant cadres. This militancy became evident during the 1955 Election campaign.

To sustain hegemony, these parties built organizational and ideological apparatuses. The PKI, for instance, required its cadres to deepen class consciousness and study Marxism-Leninism, while mobilizing workers, peasants, and oppressed groups in class struggle against the bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, according to its statutes, Masyumi aimed to uphold state sovereignty and Islamic principles, promote Islamic political awareness, strengthen Muslim unity, and cooperate with other groups in defending national sovereignty, while grounding social and political life in Islamic teachings of justice, humanity, and equality.

According to the Political Program of Masyumi as stated in the Resolution of the Fourth Masyumi Congress, point 5 (in the field of Party Organization) affirms that the party sought to strengthen Masyumi's relations with Islamic movements throughout the world in cultural, economic, and other domains. This reflects its broader commitment to situating Indonesian Islam within a global Islamic community. Meanwhile, the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), which promoted itself as the "People's Party," stated in Article 2 of its statutes that its foundational principle was Socio-National-Democracy (Marhaenism). Socio-Nationalism was defined as nationalism rooted in the socialization of society. This nationalist ideology became the core doctrine continually advanced by PNI to win popular support. According to PNI, nationalism had to be championed because it emerged from shared historical experience, common suffering, and a collective interest in living together as One

Nation (Natie).

In the PNI conception, Socio-Democracy encompassed political, economic, and social democracy. Political democracy recognized the equal right of every citizen to determine the direction and structure of the state. Economic democracy acknowledged the right of each person to achieve shared prosperity. Social democracy affirmed the equal dignity of every individual as a social being, including equal opportunity to attain the highest possible level of development in accordance with individual talents. Nationalism and democracy proved highly influential in the early years of independence, eventually overshadowing Islamic and Marxist ideologies promoted by Masyumi and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). Over time, these ideas expanded and increasingly appeared as common sense—perceived as the only legitimate way of organizing society.

The efforts of these three parties aimed at shaping the collective consciousness of society so that their respective ideologies would be widely accepted. In practice, however, both the PKI's Marxist ideology and Islamic political aspirations challenged the early post-independence consensus that established Pancasila as the state ideology and philosophical foundation—particularly after the removal of the “seven words” from the Jakarta Charter and the non-accommodation of Marxist ideology within the constitutional framework. In Gramsci's theory, two instruments of power function as mechanisms of hegemony. The first is the coercive apparatus (hard power), which involves enforcement through institutions such as law, the military, the police, and prisons. This apparatus compels society to follow the will of the dominant group. The second is the consensual apparatus (soft power), which persuades society through cultural institutions, religion, education, art, and even the family. This mechanism seeks voluntary consent rather than force.

These two instruments may operate simultaneously. At times coercion establishes control first; subsequently, consent is cultivated to sustain and legitimize that control. The use of such mechanisms by Masyumi, PNI, and PKI intensified ideological competition at the grassroots level. The struggle for influence among the people often generated horizontal conflicts, and in some regions even resulted in violent clashes. As noted by Antonio Gramsci, the supremacy of a social group manifests both as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership. A group must exercise leadership even before attaining governmental power and must continue to lead after securing it. For Gramsci, domination alone cannot be sustained indefinitely; it must be complemented—and eventually replaced—by hegemony grounded in consent. Thus, power initially achieved through coercion can gradually be stabilized through intellectual and moral leadership.

Within hegemonic processes, Gramsci emphasized the presence of ideological constellations in which the dominant group attempts to universalize its own interests as the interests of all. This is evident in the PKI's statutes, which declared Marxism-Leninism as its foundation and aimed at establishing a socialist society in Indonesia, where the means of production would be collectively owned and utilized for the common good. Article 3 further stated that the party would pursue its objectives through revolutionary class struggle, mobilizing workers, peasants, and oppressed groups against the bourgeoisie.

Similarly, Masyumi 1945 sought to position its Islamic ideology as the most appropriate foundation for governing the state and society. Its statutes declared the goals of upholding state sovereignty and Islam, implementing Islamic ideals in governance, expanding political awareness among Muslims, strengthening Islamic unity, organizing social life based on faith and justice, and cooperating with other groups to defend national sovereignty. The PNI also pursued ideological consolidation. Socio-National-Democracy called, in the political sphere, for a national struggle grounded in popular sovereignty within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia under the rule of law. In the social sphere, it advocated a collectivist society based on mutual cooperation (gotong royong), rejecting individualistic social structures. The collectivist

society envisioned by PNI was socialist in orientation, opposing private ownership of the means of production that could enable exploitation by one individual or group over another.

Here, Antonio Gramsci emphasizes the presence of intellectual actors behind the operation of hegemony. His argument regarding the nature of intellectuals is reflected in his well-known statement: “The notion of ‘the intellectuals’ as a distinct social category independent of class is a myth. All men are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social function.” In Gramsci’s view, everyone is essentially an intellectual. The distinction lies in whether one’s intellectual capacity functions socially—whether it is capable of generating change, mobilizing society, or merely maintaining the status quo. Gramsci divides functional intellectuals into two categories: “traditional intellectuals” and “organic intellectuals.” Traditional intellectuals are those who historically emerged within the feudal mode of production. They function primarily as mediators or disseminators of ideas between the ruling class and the lower classes.

Organic intellectuals, by contrast, are both intellectuals and political organizers who are consciously connected to the social class they represent. They constitute the real and organic vanguard of a particular class. Their function is to act as agents who organize hegemony within civil society and secure dominance. Organic intellectuals not only explain reality scientifically but also live within and directly experience it. They are capable of articulating the lived experiences of their communities—experiences that might otherwise remain unexpressed—and thus play a crucial role in directing and mobilizing social transformation.

For a newly independent country, ideological struggles carried out by such functional intellectuals were highly significant. In this context, Gramsci describes a “war of position” among intellectuals. These intellectuals, operating as part of the hegemonic apparatus, were aligned with different political parties and actively sought to influence society through their respective party ideologies. This ideological struggle continued throughout the campaign period and during the implementation of the 1955 General Election. Parties promoted various work programs and political slogans to attract voters. Hegemonic instruments moved swiftly into the realm of public consciousness. Campaign strategies heavily emphasized ideological narratives competing for popular trust.

During the campaign, each party elaborated its political ideology through concrete programs offered to voters. The competition was not limited to policy proposals; it also involved sharp rhetorical exchanges, including ridicule of rival parties and their symbols. Campaign speakers explained not only their party’s ideology and programs but also the meaning of party symbols, while simultaneously attacking opponents—sometimes mockingly disparaging their platforms and emblems. Party symbols and slogans were essential, particularly in a largely illiterate society, as they enabled voters to easily recognize and remember their preferred party. Interpretations of symbols became effective tools for forging emotional bonds between parties and the public. In the 1955 campaign, party representatives explained the meanings of their symbols. A spokesperson of the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), for instance, described the bull—long a symbol of nationalism—as representing the Indonesian people: patient and slow to anger, yet unstoppable once provoked.

In Mengislamkan Jawa, historian M. C. Ricklefs records that a spokesperson of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) proclaimed: “PNI is the party of the priyayi, Masyumi and NU are the parties of the santri, but PKI is the party of the people.” PKI campaigners urged poor voters to choose the hammer and sickle, arguing that voting for it was like plowing the fields. They emphasized that farmers should hold the “hammer and sickle,” not the “star and crescent” (Masyumi) or the “nine-star globe” (NU), because farmers worked with sickles.

Masyumi, on the other hand, called on voters to choose the crescent and star, symbols that

illuminate the lives of Muslims. Islamic symbolism became a central campaign strategy for mobilizing Muslim voters. According to political scholar Herbert Feith, it was common for parties to attack rivals by disparaging their symbols. In certain areas of Java, Masyumi's crescent and star were even attacked through superstition, being labeled as symbols of evil. Masyumi also targeted the PKI, branding it a "kafir" (infidel) party and warning that supporting it would render one an infidel. Satirical attacks were directed even at religious leaders seen cooperating with the PKI. As recorded by Achmad Zainal Huda in *Mutiara Pesantren: Perjalanan Khidmah KH Bisri Mustofa*, ridicule and symbolic mockery became part of the political contest.

Not only did Masyumi attack the PKI, it also criticized other Islamic parties such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII), arguing that their Arabic-lettered symbols were sacred and that piercing them with a ballot would desecrate them. Yet at times Masyumi and NU similarly claimed that voting for their party would lead one to paradise, while failing to do so risked damnation. Meanwhile, the PNI firmly identified itself as the party of Soekarno. It criticized both PKI and Islamic parties, warning Indonesians not to be drawn toward "Arabia" or "Russia," and asserting that PNI had long fought for independence. Campaign rhetoric ranged from serious accusations capable of inciting unrest to humorous satire. Journalist Alwi Shahab recounts a PKI campaigner joking in Jakarta's Banteng Square in September 1955: "If Masyumi wins, Banteng Square will be turned into Camel Square." The competition for hegemony during the 1955 Election created a vibrant and often heated political atmosphere. Mutual criticism and symbolic attacks became daily features of political life, as parties competed to win the support of an electorate in which many were still illiterate. Consequently, beyond articulating ideology and policy programs, parties relied heavily on slogans, rhetoric, and symbols to secure popular consent.

V. CONCLUSION

The ideological contestation surrounding Indonesia's early independence, particularly during the 1955 General Election, reflects a profound struggle for hegemony within a newly established nation-state. Competing political forces—the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), Masyumi, and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)—did not merely compete for electoral victory, but sought to shape the ideological foundation of the state and define the direction of Indonesia's socio-political future. Nationalism, Islam, and Marxism emerged as the three dominant ideological currents, each attempting to universalize its vision as the most legitimate framework for organizing society.

Through the analytical lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this contest can be understood not simply as a political rivalry, but as a struggle for intellectual and moral leadership. The parties mobilized both coercive and consensual instruments—organizational structures, education, religious networks, political rhetoric, and symbolic campaigns—to cultivate consent among the masses. The role of organic intellectuals proved crucial in articulating class interests, shaping public consciousness, and transforming ideology into a lived political force.

Ultimately, the 1955 Election demonstrated that democracy in Indonesia's formative years was deeply intertwined with ideological competition. The struggle for hegemony unfolded not only in formal political institutions but also within civil society, public discourse, and grassroots mobilization. Although these ideological tensions later evolved into sharper political conflicts, the 1955 Election remains a significant historical moment in which competing visions of the nation openly contested the hearts and minds of the Indonesian people within a democratic framework.

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