

Social Assistance Policies Amid the 2024 Presidential Election Contestation: An Islamic Political Economy Perspective

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Abstract

This research examines the dual function of social aid in Indonesia as a social safety net and as a political tool for the upcoming 2024 Presidential Election. This research used Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis through the policymaking process of social assistance programmes, including articles in the online media, social aid (PKH, BPNT, KIP, and others), and the dynamics of public opinion from January to June 2024. The analysis of the data showed that in election years, the social aid budgets are increased. The social assistance is therefore politically motivated. However, these programmes help to some extent reduce poverty and improve access to education and health. Because of the political motivation, the assistance programmes lose their main social purpose. From the perspective of the Islamic political economy, the social assistance programmes should be based on *maṣlaḥah al-ʿāmmah*. The underlying principle is the equitable social welfare of the people and the politically unmotivated equitable social wealth. This research demands that these assistance programmes and services be legally and politically unmotivated, and social welfare programmes be legally focused on the redistribution and social justice of the people, be oriented to the long-term social welfare of politically and legally unmotivated social welfare programmes.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Islamic Political Economy; Presidential Election; Social Assistance

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Introduction

It is important for governments to safeguard those in economically, socially, and environmentally vulnerable circumstances, and this requires carefully managing budgetary allocations. In Jakarta, social protection is demonstrated by such public initiatives as the Family Hope Program (PKH), Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT), the Indonesia Smart Card (KIP), and other social aids aimed at the impoverished and economically insecure. In general, social assistance is intended to function as a social 'safety net' in poverty alleviation programs and help elevate the overall public welfare. However, in social assistance programs, there is often a tendency to utilize social benefits as an opportunity to gain electoral advantage for political interests, especially during election times.

Numerous studies conducted demonstrate the effectiveness of social services in addressing the issues of poverty (Suryahadi & Al Izzati, 2018; Nawaz & Iqbal, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2021; Yulia et al., 2022; Kuntjorowati et al., 2024; Agustanta et al., 2024), increasing economic productivity (Tamsah et al., 2020), improving the welfare of the people (Niño-Zarazúa, 2019; Nnaeme et al., 2020; Marson et al., 2023), improving food and nutrition and health (Swanson & Chavez, 2020; Leroy et al., 2021; Yokobori et al., 2023), and increasing school attendance (Norman et al., 2020; Setyawan et al., 2025; Suputra & Eddyono, 2025). However, social assistance tends to become politicized, shifting from being a purely social safety net to a means of entrenching patronage (Mares & Young, 2016). The social aid assistance, especially social assistance benefits, has been shown to help in garnering political support to be Sponsor Cripple (Fried, 2012; De La O, 2013; Van Gils & Yörük, 2017; Frey, 2019; Abdulai, 2021; Yörük & Gençer, 2021; Mulyadi et al., 2024; Achmad, 2024; and Daffa Ladro Kusworo & Titi Anggraini, 2024). This duality consequently leads to two important questions: How does social support achieve its welfare purposes, and how are social supports being used for electioneering?

Assisting social protection is often seen as a political tool to gain the people's support and make the politicians look good. Offering social assistance is a way for politicians to present themselves as the concerned protectors and the primary responders to the community's needs. This has become especially common during election years. However, assistance is prone to manipulation. Thus, social assistance is often exploited by politicians for their electoral gain (Rosadi, 2024). For incumbents, social assistance is "political capital" that they receive for free to use in their political competition.

Money politics is pervasive in Indonesia due to the deeply entrenched patron-client networks. The patron-client relationship sustains money politics in the system, particularly in the reproduction of the status quo. Some argue that these relationships should not be viewed as mere social relationships, but rather as socio-cultural constructs that make their removal nearly impossible. Moreover, the solidification of patron-client networks occurs in countries that have complex political institutional arrangements, multi-party systems, weak political integration, high ethnic fragmentation, and low economic development (Muhtadi, 2013). This is because such circumstances further entrench the dominance of money politics. Because of this, money politics is consistently and brazenly re-circulating in every political contest (Fardian, 2021).

Muhtadi elaborates what constitutes political violations as money politics as well as others like the instrumentalization of social aid. This intertwining of politics and social aid policy is particularly evident during the moments of political contestation- like in a general election year, for instance, 2024. The allocation of the social aid budget is determined by social and political variables, leading to an exacerbation of the inequities in aid distribution, spending, and policies as determined by politics rather than the genuine welfare of the constituents (Rosadi, 2024). The practices fundamentally contradict the essence of social assistance, which is to promote public welfare.

Policies behaving on social assistance have to unscrupulously attend to the public good as opposed to specific interests on the social assistance from the perspective of Islamic Political Economy. Thus, it would be unreasonable for any one group to assume ownership of social assistance policies and abuse political preferences for any social assistance policies. This primary argument is why it seems of such interest to investigate the issue from the perspective of social assistance in political economy. Social assistance must be returned to its basic function as a tool of the state for the sustenance of social rights, among which is the right to a decent life. This right is of such primary importance that it must always be guaranteed by the state, especially when its realization is beyond the capability of the citizens (Muhajir, 2017). Hence, it is of the essence that any Islamic Political Economy construction be based on the concept of *maṣlaḥah*.

In Islam, politics is aimed at achieving *Maṣlaḥah* though, in politics, achieving *maṣlaḥah* is still dependent upon political leadership, individuals categorized as *al-hakim* Shihab (2023) who mitigate and avert greater harm (*mafsadah*) while realizing and facilitating greater benefits (*maṣlaḥah*) and convenience (*taysir*). This

should be the presumed ideal outcome if the management of public funds is done in accordance with the *maṣlaḥah al-‘āmmah*. [Ibn Khaldūn \(1993\)](#) the focus of this principle is on the ideal and perfect state. However, this does not mean that the state's interests should be neglected, as is the usual contention. Rather, the state's budgetary allocations must be equitable and professionally balanced so that the interests of public welfare and the interests of the public administration as a government, in this case, are harmonized.

To understand the concept of the political behaviour of the state within the framework of *maṣlaḥah al-‘āmmah*, one must understand the value of the political behaviour of the state within the theory of social assistance distribution. This is because, within political economy, the behaviour of politicians is always assumed to be strategic ([Yustika, 2014](#)). Politicians, for the most part, do not act purely altruistically. In essence, politicians, as individuals with specific political power, have interests that are self-serving and positional. In this light, the political behaviour of the state's elites and not the official state should be analyzed to a greater extent to obtain a finer understanding of the distribution of social assistance and the principles of *maṣlaḥah al-‘āmmah*. So that social aid should not be a political 'cash cow' for the few powerful. The distribution and control of social assistance should be undertaken in a manner that is for the enduring welfare of the people.

This study analyses the social assistance in the social aid system and the social and political contestation relations in the 2024 Presidential Elections as a form of social protection and as a means of manipulation of the electorate in the 2024 Presidential Elections. This study illustrates the political assistance relations and public assistance and helps to develop social policy to reconcile the political instruments of social policy in order to promote public interest (*maṣlaḥah al-‘āmmah*) in attitudes of a complex and pragmatic politics.

Literature Review

The state has the responsibility to ensure the welfare of its citizens, particularly in safeguarding the protective needs of marginalized communities, and social support is one of these responsibilities. [Van Ginneken \(1999\)](#) and [Ferreira & Robalino \(2010\)](#) identify and describe the social protection programs within the framework of social aid and social insurance. On the other hand, [Scott \(2012\)](#) provides a more extensive framework in which he identifies social protection programs into four main categories. The first is social assistance, which entails the

provision of cash or in-kind transfers, including food and education, with no obligations from the beneficiaries. The second is social insurance, which is a protection against certain losses, such as in health and pensions, on a contributory basis. The third is the interventions in the labour market, which encompass programs for training the unemployed. The fourth is the programs that involve the community, where the local people are collaborators in the design and execution of the programs, such as in the development of the village.

Social Assistance in Developing Countries Case Studies 70 – 85% of the Social Assistance role in Developing Countries Social Assistance Social support systems' primary role is to provide a social safety net to the poor and vulnerable members of society. Social assistance addresses the basic needs of people in society, food, shelter, and health care. Promoting investment in human and productive assets. Social assistance programs seek to create medium to long-term opportunities through educational sponsorship, skills training, and micro business support. These programs help poor communities build the capacity to participate in economic activities, enhance social mobility, and break the cycle of poverty. Strengthening the agency of the poor. Social assistance aimed at empowerment include the beneficiaries in the planning and implementation processes, thereby ensuring they are not only passive recipients, but also active agents empowered to make choices and manage life's challenges. The empowerment approach to social assistance programs targets poor communities and enhance their self-sufficiency and self-reliance ([Barrientos, 2011](#)).

Most social support programs aim to alleviate poverty and reduce risks. There is proof that social support is often the simplest and most effective way of addressing extreme poverty. Social support programs can improve poverty alleviation through the provision of resources to poor populations and can increase standards of living, decrease poverty, and improve income through the provision of income, and or goods and services. Social support is validated to effectively decrease poverty and reduce vulnerabilities ([Barrientos & Niño-zarazúa, 2011](#)). In the case of social support programs, there is proof, especially in cash transfers that, social support programs do increase the effect of alleviating poverty and reaching the destitute ([Fiszbein & Schady, 2009](#)). [Nawaz & Iqbal \(2021\)](#) used household poverty data to estimate the effect of cash transfer program (BISP) Benazir Income Support Program, on poverty in the neighbourhood. The results greatly confirmed that the BISP program did reduce poverty in the neighbourhood, but this differed by province, and so again regional disparities and heterogeneity were presented as

pivotal. Also, [Nugroho et al. \(2021\)](#) found that integrated social programs in Indonesia contributed to the reduction of poverty in the rural and urban centers.

As reported by [Arnold et al. \(2011\)](#) social assistance consistently results in reduction of poverty and income inequality. For instance, microsimulation modeling, based on household survey data, estimates poverty inequality to fall by around 20 percent for the Progres/Oportunidades program in Mexico and by 47 percent for the child support grant in South Africa. Additionally, in Brazil, social assistance programs such as the elderly pension, disability benefits, and the Bolsa Família cash transfer program were collectively responsible for 28 percent of the 2.7 percentage point decline in the Gini coefficient between 1995 and 2004. This was a result of the social programs implemented and their impact on poverty and income inequality.

Social support programs have long been associated with policies that alleviate poverty and improve well-being. Assistance programs have also been linked to and examined within the realm of politics. As noted by [Saragintan & Hidayat \(2017\)](#), there seems to be a pattern in which the distribution of grants and social support appears to be a political maneuver directed toward the active electorates and powerful religious constituents. The distribution of certain public resources that are characterized as “pork barrel” spending has been found to be significantly related to the outcomes of an election. Some key factors that determine the success of pork barrel spending deals with the political party in power, whether there is an incumbent, as well as the socioeconomic makeup of the voters ([Atilano-Tang & Moreno, 2023](#)).

In light of social assistance shaping voter preference, it is often employed for political purposes. Indeed, it has been shown that providing cash to impoverished households is a more effective means of gaining political support than the provision of goods and services to impoverished communities ([Linos, 2013](#)). The social assistance given by political candidates, especially those that are already holding a political office, has a significant impact on people’s likelihood to vote for those candidates. Contextual elements influence the association of cash assistance programs with pro-incumbent voting ([Ponce & Curvale, 2020](#)). According to [Barrientos & Pellissery \(2014\)](#) the interplay between social assistance and the political system is bidirectional. Social assistance is organized and executed within the political framework, but it is also vital in influencing the direction of the political framework.

The social assistance and welfare policies' momentum during the 2024 Presidential election was also underlined with the same "unclear relationship". The politics of social assistance became a political commodity which "supports" politicians of the incumbent ([Theodora, 2024](#)). This situation is even more fascinating when investigated more with the help of public choice theory. A more profound and comprehensive analysis of the actions of each public actor and participant in politics is possible with public choice theory. This is because public choice theory is derived from the premise that any government, politician, or bureaucrat is a self-serving individual in any public office ([Yustika, 2014](#)). Therefore, the study of public choice theory focuses on individuals as political actors. According to Caporaso and Levine, the primary analysis of public choice theory is individual actors who hold certain positions or positions, whether acting as members of political parties, bureaucrats, elected public officials, ordinary citizens, or corporate leaders ([Caporaso & Levine, 1992](#)). As mentioned above, the political actor is determined by an assortment of variables and factors on the policies in question. In addition, [DeAngelo et al. \(2020\)](#) particular positions of political actors can be shaped by certain offers that influence election outcomes, bureaucratic politics, culture, profit motivation, emotional stances, risk-taking, and normative frameworks. These elements pertain to some of the non-market variables that influence the policy of political actors occupying specific positions.

Public Choice Theory states that every individual engages in constructive irrational thinking. Each individual is believed to behave in ways that further their individual goals, objectives, or well-being. Each individual is perceived to behave in logical thinking patterns and pursue goals in ways that in an ideal economy, would be considered rational. This fundamental principle that governs individual actions is referred to as *homo economicus*. Individuals act as if they were rational economic calculators and make decisions by carefully assessing the qualitative and quantitative aspects of rational activities. In the context of politics, it is expected that voters will choose the candidate who will bring them the most value in every sense. On the other hand, politicians employ methods that will guarantee them the highest chances of obtaining the votes needed for them to be re-elected ([Meade et al., 1963](#)). However, a rationality-based argument lacks consideration of victims may be driven to behave irrationally for other reasons. In rational political theory, politics is not real. Political psychology research demonstrates that the behaviour and decisions of individual voters are driven by other factors that are not always economic ([Jones & Baumgartner, 2005](#)).

Just as economic markets contain consumers and producers who are always looking to optimize their benefit, in the field of politics and public choice, it is also assumed that voters, politicians, and bureaucrats are looking to optimize self-interest. Voters, in some instances, partake in elections, not because of altruistic concern for the public interest, but rather because they anticipate unmediated advantages from the policies they can support. For instance, some voters employed in particular sectors may champion policies from candidates that support their employment in targeted subsidized jobs. In contrast, to maintain their electoral support and vote capture, politicians also offer “populist” policies that are beneficial to particular interest groups as they attempt to monopolize societal benefits (Niskanen, 2017). In the same way, with respect to bureaucracies, it may be that bureaucrats want to increase their budget and their power, not because of efficiency or societal benefit, but simply because they want to achieve self-interest benefits such as job security and promotion (Olson, 1965). In addition to the framework of public choice theory, the social assistance phenomenon, as well as the political behaviour of the actors involved, will also be examined in the context of the Islamic political economy. Islamic political economy is a concept that combines Islamic teachings on economics and politics, the main objective of which is to achieve social justice and prosperity for all. The concern is not just on individual wealth, but also on the extent to which the economy is able to serve the community. The social benefit is what is characterised by public welfare (*maṣlaḥah al-‘āmmah*), which in Islamic terminology goes by *maṣlaḥah*.

From the Islamic perspective, the welfare of the people goes beyond the justifiable increased income and wealth to fulfil the basic needs as well as equitable distribution, but also the spiritual fulfilment. To achieve human welfare will also ensure that the economic growth is sustainable, which is the ultimate goal. To fulfil these needs is a birthright to human beings, and is what Islamic literature touches on under *maqasid al-shari’ah* (Chapra, 2008).

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to uncover power relations and ideology in social assistance narratives during the 2024 Presidential Election (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough's model was chosen because of its ability to analyze texts across three dimensions: (1) textual analysis (linguistic features, diction, framing), (2) discursive

practice (production, distribution, and consumption of media discourse), and (3) sociocultural practice (socio-political and economic context) (Fairclough, 2010).

The primary data relied on online media articles published in the political year of 2024, encompassing a time period when the election campaign gained momentum and after the elections. In the selection of media outlets, target audiences, and levels of credibility are taken into account (Krippendorff, 2018). Secondary data included official policy documents provided by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Affairs, such as State Budget reports of 2023-2024, various Ministerial Regulations, and press releases; and statistical data from Statistics Indonesia-BPS and National Team for the Protection of Children and Children-TNP2K related to the allocations and beneficiaries of the social assistance programs (Sugiyono, 2013).

The analysis was done systematically through the following stages, namely: (1) data organization and codification per themes (policy narratives, politicization, socio-economic impacts); (2) news reporting textual analysis to identify rhetorical strategies, metaphors, and framing (Dijk, 2015); (3) discursive practices analysis to explore how narratives are created and consumed by mass media and the public; (4) sociocultural practices analysis by linking discourse findings to the context of Islamic political economy about *maṣlaḥah* and distributive justice (Wodak & Meyer, 2009); (5) data triangulation by comparing findings of media discourse against official budget data, program distribution calendars, and political campaign timelines to verify the claims of politicization (Flick, 2009); and (6) synthesis and formulation of conclusions.

Finally, source triangulation was conducted to validate findings by comparing media narratives with official policy documents, state budget allocation data (APBN), and schedules of aid distribution provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Miles et al., 2014). The anomaly in the budget increase in the first and second quarters of 2024 was verified by comparing historical data from 2019 through 2023 to identify the political cycle patterns.

Results and Discussion

Realization of Social Assistance During the Political Year

Citizens unable to satisfy welfare requirements can utilize state amenities such as social assistance (Rosadi, 2024). Reductions in disparities in economic welfare and social welfare can theoretically be accomplished through social assistance

(Niño-Zarazúa, 2019). Both components should constitute state obligations. Providing all citizens equal access to fundamental requirements is the state's responsibility. Social assistance also functions as a social safety net and as a tool of a larger welfare system. It is meant to discourage high levels of poverty among at-risk groups. Such groups are destitute and lacking in the most basic requirements, such as food, clothing, and shelter. It is also important to note that such groups are lacking in other important requirements, such as education, health, and decent work (Daigneault, 2014). State social assistance is meant to reduce the socioeconomic vulnerability of individuals and families to enable them to maintain at least a minimum decent standard of living.

While social assistance is important for poverty alleviation, so is the strategic role of the state for economic and social equilibrium toward inclusive and sustainable development (Simangunsong & Sihotang, 2023). However, social assistance implementation and utilization have not been carried out optimally. In the election year 2024, social assistance became evident as being manipulated for the benefit of a few political actors. This assertion can be seen through the large increase in the nominal social assistance budget allocated in that year. The 2024 budget changes for social protection reflect a 20 trillion IDR (2023 budget 476 trillion IDR, 2024 budget 496.8 trillion IDR). Social protection payments 496.8 trillion IDR. Social Affairs. Staple assistance Food Card, Family Program Hope (PKH), social rehabilitation 75.6 trillion IDR. Education, Culture, Religion, Affairs 30 trillion IDR Smart Program Indonesia (PIP), Smart Card Indonesia (KIP). Health insurance Ministry 49 trillion IDR National Health Insurance (JKN) premium subsidy 10.7 billion IDR direct (BLT) Cash Assistance Sub District (Village) Social, 49 trillion IDR. Social Protection 330 trillion Social Protection Program in the Social budget NON ministerial classes. Social Protection Support and Social and Subsidized Funds for the Provision of Energies in the form of LPG (Gas) Fuel Subsidy, Electricity, Fuel, LPG, Electricity, Fertilizer Subsidies, Service Subsidy in Public Obligations, Micro, Disaster Subsidies, housing loans) Water Subsidy Interest Social Subsidy Disaster Preparedness.

Prior government's social protection prioritizations include the Family Hope Program (PKH) serving 10.0 Million Beneficiary Households, the staple food aid program serving 18.8 million beneficiary households, social rehabilitation assistance to 38,000 children, 32,600 elderly, 58,300 persons with disabilities, premium subsidy assistance to 96.8 million participants of the national health insurance, the smart Indonesia program for 20.8 million students, smart Indonesia

card for 1.1 million university students, 19.58 million kilo liters of fuel subsidies, interest subsidies in people's business credit to 6.09 million debtors, and village direct cash assistance to 2.96 million beneficiary households. There have been complaints from some sectors of the public about the rapid growth of support and the number of people who are receiving social support. Analysts and public policy specialists claim that this is the result of the political contention that took place in that period. Presently, political actors in positions of coalition parties are accused of having social support at their disposal and using it as a political tool to strengthen their control in the electoral struggle. Social assistance programs are used as mechanisms for political patronage or vote mobilization in a patron-client relationship (Rosadi, 2024). At this point, social support has been transformed into an intentionally designed political instrument that is aimed at extracting the highest level of public empathy, especially from those people the support is intended to aid (Achmad, 2024).

Social Assistance and Political Actors' Behaviour: Between Welfare Framing and Electoral Framing

Social assistance programs intend and serve to protect the well-being of the most disadvantaged individuals and families by helping to reduce and mitigate poverty and improving quality of life through various means. As a social buffer mechanism, social assistance protects the general population from the negative effects of possible economic crises, including depressions, natural disasters, and pandemics. It functions as a safety net to help social instabilities. Moreover, social assistance within these buffer mechanisms may help to rise and facilitate upward social mobility. Should the vulnerable individuals and especially groups become unemployed, social assistance functions as a safety net to take care of their basic needs. During highly unpredictable and extreme crises, a strong negative socio-political response is possible, and social assistance programs, if well designed and implemented, would help minimize these through socio-political stability from the positive response. Moreover, long-term social programs in, for example, education and health, may lead to positive changes and advances in the economic condition of individuals and families.

The first expected effect of social assistance is its capacity to reduce poverty. It is believed that social assistance enables families to meet minimal needs in terms of food, clothes, and shelter. Social assistance helps to reduce poverty. For instance, in Indonesia, the BPNT (Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai) program assists poor families

with money to buy food. [Nugroho et al. \(2021\)](#) found evidence that poverty alleviation programs, like food-based assistance, empirically verified that the programs targeted at poverty alleviation, such as assistance in food and energy, were designed to improve the purchasing power of the households, food, and energy poverty. In contrast, the cash transfers that have conditions (PKH), Family Hope Program, educational assistance (KIP), and subsidized health insurance premiums (PBI-JKN) were directed to improve people's skills and capabilities to address poverty in the long run. [Nugroho et al. \(2021\)](#) stated that findings were also reported in the study by [Ridha & Rumayya \(2024\)](#), which showed that recipients of BPNT, poor agrarian households, increased their food expenditure, on average, by 6.52 percent.

Economic support is just one of the ways that social support helps the poor improve their lives. One of the goals of social support programs is to help low-income households obtain the basic necessities such as food, education, and medical care. One example in Indonesia is the Family Hope Programme (PKH). PKH is a program that offers conditional cash transfers to poor families. If a family qualifies, they receive a given amount of cash regularly based on their circumstances. The Programme aims to assist impoverished families in obtaining and using critical social services such as health care, education, food and nutrition, and social care and support services. PKH has been cited as a major factor in reducing the school dropout rate among the poor [Rohmawati et al. \(2022\)](#). The education expenditure of the households is, hence, in general, positively impacted by PKH. [Putra & Pujiyanto \(2020\)](#), mention that in the long term, PKH can help improve the educational attainment of children from poor families. The children of poor families receiving PKH are expected to improve the family's socio-economic status. PKH leads to positive behavioural changes, such as obtaining medical care. For instance, pregnant women are more likely to visit health care facilities when they are in the PKH program compared to women outside the program.

Empirical evidence shows that people born in dangerous environments, with threats to their safety, and where established structures fail to maintain law and order, are more likely to develop anti-social behavioural patterns. In such settings, people are left to construct their human environments. Growing up in danger has psychological ramifications, where one reflects in isolation, thus giving rise to dangerous ideas that manifest as threats. People in dangerous environments are at particular risk of manifesting extreme behavioural and psychological patterns. In such settings, society is left to construct its human environments. The scope of

behavioural discipline is likely to be conceived in an extreme form, driving deep psychological constraints.

The social assistance given by the President and some ministers during the 2024 Election Campaign has been questioned and raised suspicion of ulterior political motives. Some believe not only the care for the poor and the vulnerable initiated political activity pertaining to the President's endorsement of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the Vice Presidential Candidate for Prabowo Subianto. This has been interpreted as the President's active partisanship in the campaigns to influence the elections in favour of a specific candidate (Singgih, 2024). Therefore, the large-scale social assistance disbursed during the campaign has been interpreted to contain the electoral potential of the social aid and as an effort to improve the Prabowo-Gibran ticket's appeal to the poor. What the government was providing as a justification to the opposition for the increased budget and recipients of the social assistance was explained by the Minister of Finance during his argument to the Court of Constitution (MK) Presidential Election Dispute 2024. He explained that the reason for the increase in social spending and the assistance that was provided was due to the adverse economic and climate conditions. The world economic situation is adversely impacting the economic welfare of the people, and together with the extreme El Niño phenomenon, droughts and dry seasons that economically destabilizing the country. Thus, to protect and ensure socio-economic stability, social assistance is a form of essential support to relieve the immediate needs of the poor people (Gianie, 2024).

The predominant criticism of the distribution of social assistance has to do with its coincidence with the election campaign. Social assistance is a mechanism that is meant to provide the poor people to have easier access to basic needs for survival and food. The issue is that social aid is being provided during a presidential campaign, which has caused people to accuse the incumbent of trying to manipulate the target voter by using the program to gain undivided allegiance from the poor people. In an election year, it can be very difficult to objectively analyze social assistance programs. During these times, it can be very difficult to decipher what can be considered socio-economic goals and what can be considered political interests, as the line is very thin, and at times it is completely blurred. This thin line makes it very difficult for both the public and analysts to determine whether the social support a government offers is a genuine concern for the vulnerable or whether it is an attempt to gain political support and sympathy for the elections.

Social Assistance Policy in the Perspective of Islamic Political Economy

In Islamic political economy, welfare and social responsibility are clearly ordained and are the concerns of the state ([Ad-Dimyathi, 1995](#)). The primary principle underlying Islamic economics is that development should be collectively achieved and income generation should be distributed equitably by the state to avoid disparities in economic and income conditions ([Mawdudi, 2011](#)). In this context, the leaders or rulers are required to ensure the welfare of every citizen, regardless of status, whether poor or otherwise. This is not a matter of political expedience but a moral and legally binding obligation emanating from their position and roles as leaders. Well-being within the context of an Islamic political economy is not a condition of material life but a social, spiritual, religious, and moral one ([Mawdudi, 2011](#)). That indicates that well-being is not measured by how much money one has, but by the general quality of life. Thus, the state is obliged to establish a system that helps attain common well-being, where every individual is assured care and receives equal opportunity to excel.

The essence of Islamic political economy is the equitable distribution of wealth. Islamic teachings forbid the accumulation of wealth by a few individuals or groups, which can result in social and economic inequality, as stated in Q.S. al-Hashr: 7. Therefore, it is the role of the government to enforce policies that guarantee equal resource and wealth distribution ([Al-Shadr, 2023](#)). Such instruments would include progressive taxation, social assistance programs, and inclusive economic development; all these channels aimed at reducing the disparities between the rich and the poor. The Islamic leadership should act as a role model by striving to use the resources at its disposal effectively, ensuring their equal availability to all citizens, and setting up favorable environments for growth and development. A leader will always put the interests of his people first and try to eliminate suffering, particularly in their economic lives ([Yusuf, 1979](#)). This obligation is also an intrinsic legal duty on the part of the government for all the welfare needs of its people. In light, there exists such a principle wherein it is said that every action made by each leader has to be in accordance with religious teachings and legal norms ([Muhajir, 2017](#)). Such leadership practice promotes the concept of integrity and accountability: when leaders lead by breaching the trust put in them to satisfy political or personal interests at the cost of public welfare, they have violated this obligation ([Tajmazinani & Mahdavi Mazinani, 2021](#)).

Therefore, welfare and social responsibility remain inherently intertwined and inseparable entities ([Al-Shadr, 2023](#)). The government is expected to take up the

mantle for the development of welfare in society through equitable distribution of wealth and pro-people policies while executing leadership in accordance with applicable moral and legal principles (Chapra, 2006). Leaders in an Islamic political economy are supposed to ensure all policies are based on the public good of all (Suyuthi, 1990). They have to provide *maṣlaḥah* when formulating critical political policies to ensure that none are in conflict with Sharia, even if they do not emerge from the primary sources of Islam, that is, the Qur'an and Sunnah (Muhajir, 2017). Within the Islamic political economy, social assistance is not limited to being a simple economic instrument but entails the application of the religious, moral, and ethical values embedded in Islamic teachings. Another point that this perspective underlines is the importance of social justice, equal distribution of wealth, and the state's responsibility for attaining social welfare, with special concern for the vulnerable and the underprivileged (Al-Shadr, 2023).

The main goal of every system of government, as well as in the Islamic context, is social welfare, otherwise known as *maṣlaḥah al-āmmah*. Welfare can take any form of policy so long as it is not against *Sharia*, even if not based on primary sources of Islam (Ayyub, 1995). Islam confirms that every person, regardless of their economic background, has the right to live with dignity and well-being (Akan, 2015). Regarding that, social assistance works as a bridge to ensure poor, vulnerable individuals or families are not left behind during development and growth processes. This is not only about allowing them to meet their daily needs but also about enabling their contribution to social and economic life. The concept of socio-economic welfare parallels the respect for human rights (Mawdudi, 2011). Social welfare is instrumental in giving the needed substantive assurance to the community through the direct provision of support for individual and family economic well-being. Given through cash transfers, food subsidies, education, or other forms, social assistance minimizes the adverse effects of financial burdens and makes it possible for them to meet their basic needs daily (Achmad, 2024).

Distribution of Social Assistance in Islamic Political Economy

Islam understands that collection of wealth creates responsibilities and duties, and that policies of government, owing to the interconnectedness of society through social justice, need to facilitate the policies of the poor. This social justice principle can also be reflected in Islamic constitutional law (*fiqh al-siyasah* or *siyasah syar'iyah*), where it is stated that if the collection of zakat is insufficient to meet the needs of the poor, it is obligatory to imposit further zakat from the rich

(Muhajir, 2017). The focus of this assistance in the context of social justice also represents and reinforces the civilizational principle of the social responsibility of the rich (*aghniya*) towards the poor (*fuqara*). With this, the government assumes a pivotal role as a partner, establishing and controlling the duties and responsibilities of the rich and the poor in pursuit of *maṣlahah al-‘āmmah*, that is, the economic justice balance among the members of a civil society.

In Islam's understanding of collective responsibility, Islam emphasizes the *ta'awun* and *maṣlahah al-‘āmmah*, concepts of mutual assistance and the common good', as fundamental ideals in the economy. Islam considers wealth not as an absolute right, as it contains the right of others, of the poor. Wealth in Islam has the dimension of *amana*, in being a trust to be administered and utilized equitably and wisely. In the context of a nation-state, the government has a role as a facilitator and manager of the *amana* in the sphere of wealth redistribution through welfare, zakat, and social equitable taxation. The redistribution of wealth generated from diverse sources, however, should not only be in cash and kind but should be, more so, to empower the poor to a position of economic self-sufficiency. The government has to ensure that the dispossessed acquire a decent living through guaranteed access to training, education, and other supportive resources. In this regard, the government helps to break the economic bondage of the poor and socially uplift them to become active participants in the development of the society.

Aside from offering social support through cash and non-cash means, the government also has to streamline social support to include the strengthening of economic capacity through skills training activities. The impoverished will gain the ability to construct and create their own economic independence. This espousal of the government is escapable from the dependency model of social support; rather, it is the beginning of long-term self-sufficiency and social assistance of the impoverished. Self-sufficiency means the poor will be self-sustaining in their lifetime (Watkins, 2020). In this case, the government is a mediator means that there is an order to social support to be offered in intervals, but also in a just manner, where there is a right to a decent, and more so, a sustainable life. Thus, within an Islamic political economy, social assistance is purely a government responsibility that is political by nature but has no political electoral interests. The government is supposed to be a mediator and facilitator in the provision of social assistance to the economically vulnerable, to the public resources, the state's wealth.

Conclusion

This study examines the social assistance being provided to the people of Indonesia during the 2024 presidential elections, and its paradox of serving either social welfare purposes or serving the needs of social control for profit and politics. On the one hand, social handouts, like PKH, BPNT, and KIP, have benefitted the poor and increased the access of vulnerable people to welfare, education, and healthcare. On the other hand, however, there is the tendency toward the politicization of social assistance, whereby social assistance is aimed at vote-garnering, primarily by the incumbents. The fact that the 2024 election cycle is associated with a huge social assistance budget increase has raised eyebrows regarding the social welfare reprogramming of funds, as there is a predisposed understanding that social welfare funds serve social control purposes. Public choice theory addresses this phenomenon as a description of rational self-interest, whereby politicians steer social assistance with the intention of securing votes.

Social inequalities that necessitate social assistance must be rendered by authorities with no political motivation from an Islamic political economy stance, but from the political economy's *maṣlaḥah al-ʿāmmah*, which denotes the principle of public assistance of social wealth. Every state must be neutral and unbiased with social assistance that is legally and morally due to the people, and must be politically neutral of any electoral gain and bias from the elections. There should be laws that the government can design to restrict social assistance to the public in every election. For example, social assistance is no longer to be labeled with the names and/or pictures of any officials. It is enough to just have the name of the social assistance, the source of financing it is from the local or national government, and the local or national government. Another measure is that public officials elected by the people should not be present in the exercise of the social assistance given to the people. In social assistance given to the people, priority should be given to certain groups using a *fiqh al-aulawiyāt* approach to determine the priority of assistance to be given, and it should be based on the people's economic condition. Further, the government will have to integrate the short-term social assistance policy with the social assistance policies on access to education and health care for the improvement of welfare on a sustainable basis in the long run.

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