

The Failure of Islamic Populism in Indonesia's 2019 Election

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Abstract— This paper attempts to discuss the failure of Islamic populism in Indonesia. In the 2019 general election, populist jargons departing from Islamic teachings was used in the campaign to win the election. Islamic populist jargons are generally interpreted as an effort to voice the pure voice of the people, called the ummah, to fight a tyrannical regime which is sometimes also considered secular, corrupt and anti-Islamic. These jargons are mainly used by supporters of the opposition candidate Prabowo Subianto to defeat the incumbent President Joko Widodo. From the results of the General Election, the influence of Islamic populism, however, is very limited. In this paper, we argue that the failure of Islamic populism is due to three things, first, the support for the democratic process is still quite strong. Secondly, Islamic populism used by the Prabowo group is not part of mainstream Islam in Indonesia. Thirdly, in a long historical context, Islamic populism is always contestable in Indonesian politics so that its influence in politics is always debatable. To discuss this issue, this paper traces various campaign themes of the two Presidential candidates in various media and uses of statistical data from a national survey institution.

Keywords— *Islamic populism, Presidential election, Indonesia, Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to discuss the failure of Islamic populism in Indonesia, especially by referring to the 2019 Presidential election. The term Islamic populism itself is debatable. In general, as said by Vedi Hadiz, Islamic populism is related to the state of oppression and marginalization of Muslims both at global and local levels since the days of colonialism and their efforts to fight against this situation [1]. In Islamic populism, the concept of the people was replaced with the concept of the ummah [1]. Although this paper is more or less referring to this definition, the term Islamic populism used here refers more specifically to the uses of rhetoric of oppressed and marginalized ummah with the main goal of mobilizing mass power in winning the Presidential election in April 2019.

In this sense, Islamic populism is more interpreted as a political strategy or political style. Its supporters play populist issues including those outside the political mainstream or beyond what is generally agreed upon as political correctness in the political system [2]. They often

describe the government as not only unfair and detrimental to Muslims but inhibits the development of Islam and even supports the growth of communism which is a common enemy of Muslims. Using religious issues as well as other populist issues such as foreign threats in the context of Indonesian democracy, they sought to put the government as an enemy of Islam and mobilize people's power in various rallies and demonstrations.

Such populist politics are not unique to Indonesia. The politics of anti-political correctness has developed in Europe and especially the United States (US). In the US, campaign themes that deviate from political themes that are considered reasonable and need to be supported to ensure fairness and equality, have succeeded in attracting great support. Donald Trump, for example, condemned the use of political niceties in favour of civility, on the contrary he said frankly what problems faced by Americans such as the number of illegal immigrants that caused unemployment and the displacement of traditional values of Western society. In the case of the US, the use of communication that is seen as positive and supports regularity actually becomes a backfire in the middle of Trump's negative campaign [3].

However, in Indonesia, in the April 2019 presidential election which featured incumbent Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin against Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno, the uses of various populist jargon and negative campaigns considered as against the political correctness failed in attracting significant support to win the Presidential election. Why this happens is the main problem of this paper. The answer to this will refer to the Indonesian political context and the political conditions of Islamic ummah itself in the course of Indonesian politics.

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS AND METHODS

Before discussing this paper further, some issues about populism need to be elaborated. Populism is generally defined as a representation of the pure voice of the people against the domination of corrupt elites in power [4][5]. Experts differ in their view of populism. On the one hand, they support populism as an outpouring of the heart or genuine aspirations of the people to face an increasingly oligarchy of power in the elite. Therefore, for these experts, a populist movement is needed. In its extreme form it finds its

form in the view of pure democracy and forms of expression of the people who feel not represented in the political system, while they are actually sovereign [5].

But on the other hand, populism is seen as threatening democracy. This is especially so if populism is peppered with identity politics as written by Meléndez and Kaltwasser [6]. Populist movements can emerge if society has an anti-establishment political identity that is flavoured with the language of populism. In Indonesia, the emergence of populism spiced with identity politics has caused concern over political stability and the continuation of democracy because of the emergence of several large mass mobilizations in Jakarta [7]. In other cases, populism and nationalism can also take extreme forms so that they are used both to get rid of those who are seen as foreign and to discriminate against other groups. From this point of view, therefore, populism is seen as threatening democracy.

Populism in Indonesia has the above characteristics but does not fully follow the two patterns. According to Mietzner, Jokowi's populism for example uses technocratic terms that do not exist in populism in the West or what he calls as technocratic populism [8]. Jokowi's populism, especially in the 2014 presidential election campaigns, defined the interests of people more in terms of the importance of improving service and bureaucracy, and convenience for the public in the fields of health, education and poverty alleviation [8].

On the other hand, the populism of Prabowo and his followers did indeed use anti-foreign attitudes such as populism which generally developed in Europe and America. But they did not stop there, because they added the issue of religious identity and Islamic moral teachings to populism to get a strong appeal from the Islamic community. The merging of these issues indeed gave rise to militant identity and loyalty among Prabowo's followers and succeeded in drawing lines of identity between us and others [9].

The success of creating a religious and nationalistic anti-foreign identity and in a certain degree also siding with the interests of the oppressed ummah, allows Prabowo's supporters to distance themselves against the government that is considered not religious, immoral, and pro-foreign interests especially China. Prabowo's supporters also succeeded in mobilizing considerable power both during the Presidential campaigns and after the election was over. Claims of moral superiority over the incumbent and the assumption that they are fighting for pure democratic values and the interests of the wider community have succeeded in mobilizing the public to reject election results that are considered full of systematic manipulation and fraud. In this way, they consider it legitimate to fight the government through various protests and demonstrations.

Therefore, there are different variants in populism in Indonesia and in the West, although the essence remains the same, namely the claim to represent the voice of the people, which in terms of Islamic populism is interpreted as the voice of a pure ummah against the immoral and corrupt elites. Although the success of building strong militants with a considerable appeal, the question is why in the April 2019 general election, Islamic populism represented by Prabowo and his followers did not succeed in defeating Jokowi as incumbent.

In this paper, we combine quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data is obtained from surveys which are then processed and displayed again for analysis. The main data source was taken from Exit Polls conducted by survey institute Indonesian Political Indikator in the April 2019 Election. The population of Exit Polls was 3000 taken through systematic two-stage random sampling. Exit margin of error (MoE) is estimated at $\pm 2\%$ at a 95% confidence level, using simple random sampling. In addition to this, some data is also obtained from reports in the media.

III. RESEARCH RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The use of populist rhetoric was apparently not successful in raising the voice of opposition under Prabowo significantly in the presidential election. Even in the presidential election, the margin between Jokowi and Prabowo who also contested in 2014 election, widened as shown below.

Table 1. Results of the Presidential Election

	2014		2019	
	Jokowi-JK	Prabowo-Hatta	Jokowi-Ma'ruf	Prabowo-Sandi
Suara	70,997,833	62,576,444	85,607,362	68,650,239
Persentase	53.15%	46.85%	55.50%	44.50%
Total Suara	133,574,277		154,257,601	
Selisih	8,421,389		16,957,123	

In the 2014 elections, the difference between the two pairs of votes was only 8,421,389 while in the 2019 election the two candidates' presidential vote difference almost doubled to 16,957,123 for Jokowi's victory [10].

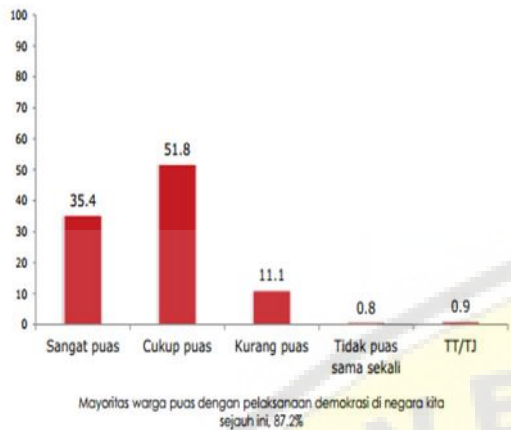
There are several answers to the problem of why Islamic populism has not succeeded in significantly increasing opposition voices, but there are at least three prominent reasons that should be discussed. First, political correctness in terms of support for the democratic process is still quite strong. Secondly, Islamic populism used by the Prabowo group is not part of mainstream Islam in Indonesia. Thirdly, Prabowo's Islamic populism is not a solid populism. We will describe these three factors in detail below.

First, although there is a fairly massive populism campaign spiced with religious sentiment, the survey shows that the level of acceptance of democracy is still large. The following table shows the acceptance of the democratic system by society.

Table 2. Implementation of Democracy

Pelaksanaan Demokrasi

Secara umum seberapa puas atau seberapa tidak puaskah Ibu/Bapak/Sdr/l/Sdr/Sdri dengan pelaksanaan Demokrasi di negara kita sejauh ini? ... (%)

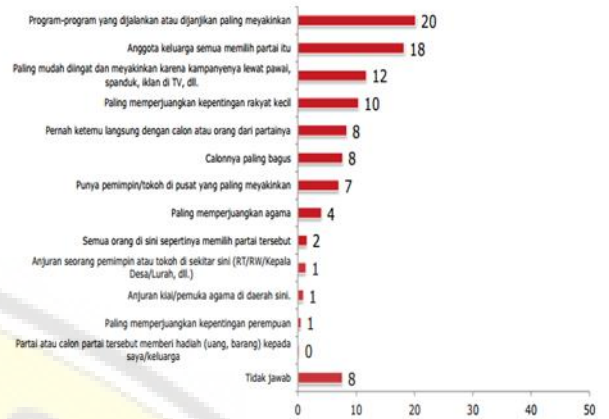


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Exit Poll Pemilu 2019 | 9

Alasan Memilih Partai

Mengapa Ibu/Bapak memilih partai atau calon dari partai tersebut? ... (%)



Pilihan kepada partai lebih banyak karena program partai tersebut 20%, kemudian mengikuti pilihan keluarga 18%, pengaruh sosialisasi 12%, dan keberpihakan pada rakyat kecil 10%.

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Although Indonesia's democratic ranking decline 20 levels and rank 65 or only one level above Singapore according to the report of The Economist Intelligence Unit [11], from Table 2 above, it can be seen that the public in general feels very satisfied with the implementation of democracy in Indonesia. In other words, for society, democracy in Indonesia is still on the right track with the instruments and institutions of democracy that have developed so far. In the general measure of the development of democracy, such a trend has contributed to the stages of the development of democracy from the transition stage to consolidation.

Although there was a fairly massive campaign using religious jargon, the reason for the people to vote was still based on rational considerations such as programs. As reflected in the following table.

Table 3. Reasons for Choosing a Party

It can be seen here that only about 4 percent of respondents consider religion as a factor in choosing candidates. Meanwhile, the majority votes because of good programs and because candidates fought for the interests of the people. This also means that the views about political correctness is still dominant.

In the same survey, it can also be seen that the public was not really affected by populist issues related to the religion of the incumbent President Jokowi.

Table 4. Negative Issues for Jokowi

Isu-isu Negatif Jokowi

Apakah Ibu/Bapak percaya dengan pendapat ... ? ... (%)



Cukup banyak pemilih yang percaya dengan isu negatif yang menyerang Joko Widodo, meski umumnya, pemilih tidak percaya. Paling banyak yang percaya bahwa banyak janji politik Joko Widodo yang tidak dilaksanakan.

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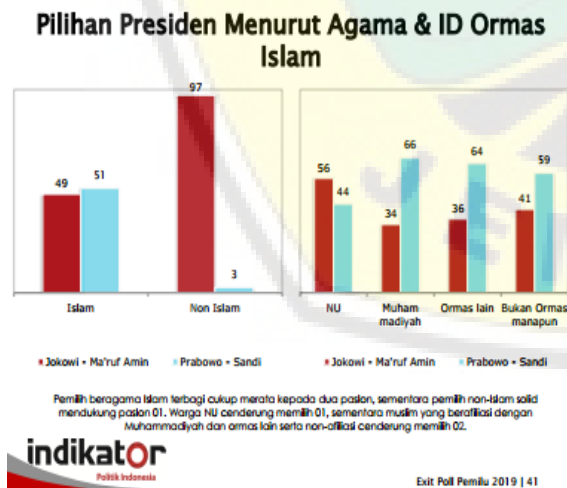
The populist issue used for example is that Jokowi is a communist and that he is easily influenced by foreigners, especially Chinese. Community members who believe in the issue of communist are quite significant at 11 percent. Even though the numbers are still small, the community began to be consumed with this sensitive issue. Likewise, with the assumption that Jokowi is pro-foreign, the opposition campaign is strong enough so that the number of believers reaches 30%.

Second, the populism of Islam promoted by Prabowo is a phenomenon that can be said to emerge in conjunction with the emergence of right populism, the use of post-truth and anti-political correctness. Such a phenomenon can be said to be new in Indonesia and such populist campaigns were not used during SBY. The use of the internet such as WhatsApp and Facebook as well as various analyses in personal web and blogs greatly influence the views of the community. The elites who supported Prabowo used simple moral issues in a transparent, black and white manner, which the public could easily digest. The description that the government elite is full of fraud and dishonesty as the cause of the nation's decline easily enters the minds of the ummah who generally understand religion in the absolute frame of right or wrong.

This phenomenon may be temporary because it depends on the interests of elites who want to rule and win the general election. It is also limited to a group of urban middle-class in big cities in Sumatra and West Java. But to a certain extent it has a strong appeal compared to the influence of major organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU which are already very well-established. These last two organizations are often considered barren and leave the wrong situation as something normal or at least tolerable. The problem is of course that moral issues like this are more used and manipulated by elites who have ambitions of power, than as a truly serious effort to overcome the nation's moral depravity. Efforts to overcome the state of corruption are certainly not as simple as the rhetoric they play. In other words, oligarchic groups from the opposition actually use populist religious issues to achieve their political goals.

Although there is such a tendency, in the broader national framework, the influence of this populist-moralist group has not succeeded in raising Prabowo's voice significantly as shown in the following table 5.

Table 5. Voting according to Religion and Religious Organization



The majority of respondents claimed to often consider religious orders or values in making political choices. However, based on religion, Muslims are divided relatively evenly into various parties, while non-Muslims are more solid in choosing the ruling Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP – Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle). Voters who choose parties based on religion are only around 4%. This means that having a religious attitude and thinking about religion are not directly related to the decision to choose a party based on religion. Muslim voters

are fairly evenly divided into two candidate pairs, while solid non-Islamic voters support candidate pair Jokowi-Ma'ruf. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) followers tend to vote incumbent, while Muslims affiliated with Muhammadiyah and other mass organizations and non-affiliates tend to choose Prabowo-Sandi.

The correlation between religion and political choice does not seem to be as significant as illustrated in table 3 where only 4% of citizens use religion as the reason for choosing. Mainstream Islam still believes in the Islamic intellectual tradition that is firm in NU and Muhammadiyah. President Jokowi, in a certain degree, also played Islamic populism by appointing Ma'ruf Amin as a vice presidential candidate who represented the mainstream Islamic circles of NU. He also embraced ulama figures such as Tuan Guru Bajang (TGB) Muhammad Zainul Majdi from West Nusa Tenggara. In this way, at a certain level Jokowi managed to break the concentration of support from the populist Islamic group behind Prabowo. These groups show that they see Pancasila as part of the struggle and are the result of national agreement and become a goal in the life of the state.

Third, Islamic populism is not a solid movement. It was mobilized sporadically for the political purpose of winning elections which consisted of various elements which even involved non-Muslims as well. Some scholars were mobilized to support Prabowo. Islamic populism may be said to have grown because of disappointment with the condition of the oppressed ummah. However, populism issues are also used by elites to support the power struggles they carry out. In Hadiz's terms [12], Islamic populism has been hijacked precisely to strengthen the oligarchy of power, something that contradicts the original purpose of populism itself.

The parties in the Prabowo coalition consisted of a combination of Islamic-based parties such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS – Justice and Prosperity Party) and Partai Amanah Nasional (PAN – National Mandate Party) with parties with a nationalist base such as Prabowo's party, Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Democrat Party and several new parties such as the Partai Berkarya. The combination of parties with diverse ideologies is indeed feared to present a coalition that is not intact. The Islamic parties use Islamic discourse which was later supported by religious leaders and Islamic scholars in a campaign to discredit the government as anti-Islamic. But parties like Democrat Party seemed reluctant to use Islamic rhetoric in their campaigns, even at a certain level they took their distance from Gerindra and its coalition parties on various campaign opportunities and after the presidential election.

IV. CONCLUSION

Islamic populism can indeed be said to have arisen. But its influence can still be said to be limited. Especially when viewed from the results of the last General Election, the influence of Islamic populism is not too significant. Nevertheless, Islamic populism cannot be ignored. Like it or not, it will become a phenomenon in Indonesian society. It is a reflection of the feeling of being oppressed and marginalized from some Muslims, which is a fertile ground for the ruling elite to raise it as an issue for elections. This phenomenon will only be reduced if the government and elite really try to overcome the root causes of the feeling of

being oppressed and marginalized within Muslim community.

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