

## **POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND THE CASE OF AHOK'S RELIGION BLASPHEMY IN THE 2017 DKI JAKARTA ELECTION**

Syairal Fahmy Dalimunthe<sup>1</sup>, I Wayan Ardika<sup>2</sup>, I Nyoman Darma Putra<sup>3</sup>,  
I Gst Bagus Suka Arjawa<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Medan State University, <sup>2,3,4</sup>Cultural Studies Study Program, Faculty of Arts, Udayana  
University

email: <sup>1</sup> [fahmydalimunthe@gmail.com](mailto:fahmydalimunthe@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup> [ardikawayan52@gmail.com](mailto:ardikawayan52@gmail.com),  
<sup>3</sup> [idarmaputra@yahoo.com](mailto:idarmaputra@yahoo.com), <sup>4</sup> [suka\\_arjawa@yahoo.com](mailto:suka_arjawa@yahoo.com)

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### **ABSTRACT**

Identity politics are often used in political contestation. Primordialism in similar religious and ethnic contexts creates the division and color of whose groups and supports whom. The purpose of this study is to understand and explain the politicization of religion and ethnicity in the DKI Jakarta 2017 elections. This study uses a cultural study approach with interpretive analysis techniques. The case of blasphemy by Ahok triggered the politicization of religion and ethnicity in the 2017 DKI Jakarta elections. Mass mobilization in the form of boycotts and the use of holy verses in choosing leaders was very massive carried out during the campaign period to increase the electoral effect. Identity is no longer purely a social movement to fight for a positive change, but rather a tool for the political elite to compartmentalize the masses in an effort to achieve their group goals. The identity politics that was triggered by the case of blasphemy by Ahok created a process of group exclusivity towards other groups on the basis of religion and ethnicity in winning a political battle.

Keywords: Identity politics, blasphemy of religion, Ahok, primordialism

### **INTRODUCTION**

DKI Jakarta Regional Election was attended by 3 candidate pairs namely Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono-Sylviana Murni who got sequence number 1, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama-Djarot Saiful Hidayat got sequence number 2 and pair Anies Baswedan-Sandiaga Uno got sequence number 3. The election was warm with primordial issues loaded with identity politics by bringing up issues of religion and ethnicity. The 2017 DKI Jakarta Governor Election can be said to be a campaign full of the most hectic political intrigues of identity when compared to other regions. The case of blasphemy by Ahok which happened deliberately continues to

be "fried" in the hope that it can have a snow ball effect so that it can have a positive electoral impact on Ahok's political opponents.

The case of blasphemy on Ahok, which is more brought to the domain of religion and ethnicity than to the realm of violation of the law itself, causes the community to be increasingly segmented against certain groups. These identities become clusters that are used by political elites as weapons to win public sympathy, especially for the people of DKI Jakarta who simultaneously carry out the Governor election.

Identity politics provides a clear line to determine who will be included and who will be rejected. Because the lines of determination appear to be irreversible, the status as a non-member member necessarily appears to be permanent. So that we can interpret that identity politics is a politics of difference. In general, identity is divided into two categories, namely, social identity which includes class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This determines the position of the subject in the relation or social interaction. Second, political identity regarding nationality and citizenship (citizenship). This determines the position of the subject in a community through a sense of ownership (sense of belonging) and at the same time marks the position of other subjects in a distinction (sense of otherness) (Setyaningrum, 2005).

So, in this context there is an emphasis between groups that are recognized and groups that are not recognized. So it is not surprising that identity politics are always used by dominant groups to maintain and even seize power domination. This further crystallizes differences and seems to confirm the existence of certain social groups based on the identification of primordialism.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Based on the background of the problem, this study uses a cultural study approach with qualitative analysis. The qualitative approach chosen aims to understand phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects holistically, and describe phenomena in the form of words and languages, in a special natural context and by utilizing various scientific methods (Moleong, 2007: 6). Sources of research data are primary data and secondary data obtained from various data sources, namely from the video reporting on the blasphemy case by Ahok and the results of interviews with related parties. Secondary data in the form of information originating from online media, related websites, YouTube, social media and other media that are still related in reporting the blasphemy case by Ahok.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the current political context, identity is no longer only used as a means of mobilizing social movements to achieve change but is also widely used as a tool to gain political office. The Ahok case which correlates with the DKI Jakarta elections as a practice of identity politics which will be elaborated further on the basis of religious identity and ethnic identity. Ahok's controversial speech turned into a mass-raising issue behind a religious and ethnic blanket that was packed by political elites in fighting for the electability of candidates.

### **1. Politics of Religious Identity**

One of the dominant discourses that has always been raised in identity politics is the issue of religion. The war of religious discourse in politics is not the first time this has arisen, but has existed even before Indonesia's independence. The relation between the political power of religious identity and the state in Indonesia is present in four parts of our state era, starting from the period before independence, post-independence, new order and post-reformation that indicated the presence of Islamic-based movements.

At the beginning of its emergence, the issue of identity politics was mainly driven by the oppressed and left groups who fought for the promotion of justice and equality. In its development, identity politics then experienced an expansion where the right group also began to play an identity politics in which religious entities, ethnicity and nationality were used as political tools to mobilize movements and seize power (Afala, 2018: 3). At the end of 2016 a mass mobilization movement emerged that demanded law enforcement against Ahok. This condition was triggered by the dissatisfaction of the protesters against the government's reaction in cracking down on the Ahok case. Starting with the Islamic Defensive Action I which was held on October 14, 2016, then at its peak occurred the Islamic Defending Action III which is quite well known as "Peace Action 212" on December 2, 2016.

Islamic actions I, II and III that occurred showed the show of force of Muslims in addressing the conditions of the blasphemy case. In addition to the pure intention to defend the faith in carrying out the action, the demonstration was also infiltrated by the political elite to achieve certain goals because at the same time the 2017 DKI Jakarta election campaign was held. Christian governor. Identity politics is carried out by mainstream groups, namely majority religious groups, with the intention of getting rid of minorities whom they deem deviant or deviate (Mulia in Maarif, 2012: 45).

The political strategy of highlighting Islamic identity is expected to reduce the incumbent's power that has always campaigned for the performance it has done while serving as governor. The existence of the Ahok case makes a justification that DKI Jakarta needs leaders who come from Islam. In accordance with the opinion of Gerry van Klinken that local political movements in the reform era, colored by the phenomenon of identity politics whose formation is religious and ethnic. This phenomenon does not only occur at the level of local politics, but also at the level of national politics. (Klinken, 2007)

A group of masses from different parties also took counter-action by mobilizing a mass with the theme of Indonesian unity called the Diversity Parade. The action that took place on December 4, 2016, 2 days after the Islamic Defender Action volume 3 put forward the importance of unity by embracing differences. The parade, which was attended by thousands of participants, was filled with exhibitions of various Indonesian cultures on 10 stages spread along Jalan MH Thamrin-Jalan Sudirman. But it is unfortunate that the event was filled with political overtones with many political attributes, such as party flags and hundreds of visitors wearing party logo.

Various narratives were created by both parties to wrap up the discourse in achieving certain goals. The formed discourse is a form of knowledge in order to seize power in the form of justification of the issues that are formed. The discourse is then understood in a uniform perception within the same identity group. Identity is then used to achieve certain interests of the group concerned (Burke 2003: 1).

Religious issues that are pitted with nationalist issues continue to rise to the surface, and develop into soft products in the election political campaigns in DKI Jakarta. The issue of identity in the name of religion became a popular issue to win 2 governor candidates who happened to be Muslim. Donald L Morowitz implicitly said that identity politics is a political categorization that determines access to politics. In other words, identity politics is understood as a power mechanism to exclude other groups (Afala, 2018: 32).

Campaigns that use religious identity are no longer a taboo political activity to be displayed in front of the public. Kemala Chandakirana who stated that identity politics is merely a political rhetoric that is used as a tool to fulfill the interests of the elite (Afala, 2018: 32).



Figure 1.  
Provocation in DKI Jakarta election 2017  
(From various sources)

The power of religion is made a motivating factor in maximizing the electability of candidates in winning contestation. Ahok, the only candidate from outside Islam, was constructed as a candidate for governor who had to be removed. Even more extreme is the form of discourse up to which candidate is chosen, as long as not Ahok.

## 2. Ethnicity Politics

Politics with the issue of ethnicity is inappropriate to do in political contestation, but in its implementation it is a matter that is commonly used to win voters' sympathies. Ethnic boxing is one of the political strategies of identity in increasing the electability of candidates. The case of blasphemy by Ahok led to an exclusive political attitude by Ahok's political opponents.

The 2017 DKI Regional Election Contest last showed the strong identity politics sentiment in which the indigenous ethnic specializes and rejects the existence of non-native groups. Issues developed around the economic sector where minority Chinese (Chinese) control most of the wheels of the economy in Indonesia. Based on historical facts in the era of Dutch colonialism it was stated that after being given a favorable position by the Dutch, the Chinese dominated the Indonesian economy and oppressed Indonesian society and prevented native people from wanting to become entrepreneurs (Coppel, 1994: 26).

The incumbent Ahok figure is a citizen of Chinese ethnicity and Christianity came from Bangka Belitung who was the Deputy Governor of DKI Jakarta accompanying Joko Widodo in 2012. Identity Politics in Indonesia, as quoted by Ma'arif in his book "Politics of Identity and

the Future of Indonesian Pluralism "Explains that especially in Indonesia, Identity politics is more related to ethnicity, religion, ideology and local interests represented generally by political elites with their respective articulations (Ma'arif, 2012: 55).



Figure 2.  
Some Action against Ethnic Chinese regarding the Ahok case  
Source: <https://www.kaskus.co.id>

The post-1998 reform era made this difference even more complicated. The riots that arose in various cities in Indonesia due to economic disparities between ethnic groups were too conspicuous so that social jealousy ensued resulting in Chinese community groups becoming the target of hatred. No different from the case of blasphemy by Ahok, the Jakarta regional election which tried Ahok's case was considered as a momentum for the rise of political Islam and the natives who were described as the majority and left behind from the economic side. The government is described as being a tool of the economic rulers of that ethnicity to perpetuate their capitalism practices.

Freedom of politics and equality of citizenship positions, especially ethnic Chinese since the era of President Gusdur, created a movement to support fellow ethnic groups in Jakarta. The spirit of ethnic Chinese politics re-emerged and formed Chinese political parties, but most peranakan Chinese leaders wanted to take the path of assimilation with indigenous parties and groups with the aim that Chinese identity was still firmly rooted among the Chinese in general (Suryadinata, 2010: 187).

## **CONCLUSION**

The democratic party in the 2017 DKI Jakarta regional election contestation which brought Ahok to court on blasphemy charges is a strong indicator that primordialism and identity politics in Indonesia are still very strong and have the potential to interfere with

idealized democratic development. Religious and ethnic identity should be the potential wealth of developing democracy for a pluralistic country. Identity politics, which should have been used as a tool to fight backwardness and marginalization, turned into a weapon that divide the Indonesian people into divisions. The exclusivity of certain groups that ignores other groups creates polarization with the aim of getting support from homogeneous groups for the achievement of temporary goals. Ironically today, the interest of certain groups / parties in winning a political contestation is more important than maintaining the integrity, unity and tolerance in Indonesia with its diversity.

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