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The fires of identity politics: North Sumatra gubernatorial election of 2018

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Abstract. This article describes identity politics in the recently passed Pilgubsu [North Sumatra Gubernatorial Election] of 2018. Identity politics is based on the interests and perspectives of certain groups. It is experiencing a rising tide both at global and national levels because of: (1) the collapse of the utopian socialism or the so-called end of history; (2) democracy and capitalism gave birth to inequality and secularism; and (3) democracy was hijacked by the alliance of rulers and entrepreneurs (post-truth politics). This study used a qualitative paradigm by analyzing print and online media including social media, while in-depth interviews were not completed. Pilgubsu's political space was full of the sentiments of SARA (Tribal, Religious, Racial, and Inter-group). These basic identities mainly appear during the campaign period, although it has also been amplified since the declaration. Tribal identity appears in the declaration of support for clan associations and ethnic associations. Religious identity is more prominent in fiqh takfiri and theological basis of legitimacy in choosing same-religion leaders whereas inter-groups emphasize the issue of indigenous and non-indigenous locals, including Javanese and non-Javanese.

1. Introduction

European domination has long been criticized by Edward E Said through his famous book "Culture and Imperialism". Part of the elements of the culture, according to Said, is the famous European novels. Not only novels, but also poetry works are created by individual talents. It is obtained "through great work" which aims to support the empire of colonialism.

Tracing the past is the easiest way to understand the current era. Exploring the past is not just about what happened in the past, and what the past was, but more than whether the past has actually passed and ended, or the past continues, in the new formation [1].

One type of culture that is internalized through literary works is (culture) democracy. Western liberal democracy was then exported to Latin American, Africa, the Middle East, and Asian countries, but it neglects the diversity and complexity, especially in terms of ethnicity and religion. Western theorists predict that the wave of modernization and rational logic thinking will fade primordial bonds. However, modernization does not fuse sectarianism; even it increases resistance to democracy with the rise of identity politics (religion, ethnicity, and nationality).

Interethnic conflicts in former communist countries in Eastern Europe, rejection of immigrants in Europe, and separatist movements ranging from Quebec (Canada) to Catalonia (Spain) are some examples of the rise of identity politics [2]. Furthermore, William Blum and Perkins explained the conspiracy theories that the United States (US), superpowers and champions of democracy, impose democratic cultures in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia. If they refuse, the US will not hesitate to invade and overthrow the legally elected government because it is considered
undemocratic. The purpose of the invasion itself is to protect economic and political interests alone [3, 4].

Western theorists focus only on the relations of democratic countries in managing ethnocultural plurality. The state, in the view of Western intellectuals, always has a neutral principle towards all ethnic and religious groups. Individuals are free to express their ethnic and religious culture privately as long as they respect the rights of others. Western theorists liberal believers assume that there must be a strict separation between state and ethnicity (sharp divorce of state and ethnicity).

Liberalism distinguishes the liberal civic nations from illiberal ethnic nations. Ethnic nations reproduce certain ethnonational cultures and identities as one of their main goals. On the contrary, civic nations are neutral to all ethnocultural identities of the citizens (groups) and establish membership as citizens of the nation based on the principles of democracy and justice.

According to Kymlicka, this neutrality turned out to be just a myth and wrong both conceptually and from historical facts. He submitted at least three arguments. First is the obligation to learn English for children in school. Second is that the migrants over 50 years old are required to study English as a condition of being a US citizen. Third is that there is a prerequisite in terms of English capacity work in government. Even in the 18-19th century, France banned the use of Basque and Breton languages in schools and prohibited any political associations aimed at building minority nationalism.

Identity (ethnic and religious) politics is often used as a weapon of struggle in reaching limited resources (political and economic power). The politics of identity (identitarian politics) refers to political positions based on the interests and perspectives of certain social groups or organizations. Identity politics is the view of people formed by the elements of identity through the membership of the social organization they follow. Identity politics is generally used as an arena for fighting interests (political, economic and cultural) because people feel marginalized.

Ethnic group thugs from one particular village attacked and seized the cinema dominated by other village ethnic group thugs [5]. Identity politics has been studied by several experts in various spectrums of social life. The study of bureaucratic patronage affiliated with ethnic identity was revealed from Usman Pelly's research in several institutions (provincial and university) in Medan. He concluded the bureaucratic elite in the institution will change when there is a transition of leadership such as the governor or rector [6]. Syaf and Aragon show how ethnic and ethnoreligious ties are behind pemekaran (Regencies and Provinces) in Sulawesi [7, 8].

Identity politics also colored the world cinema battle which was described by Ariel Heryanto. Identity and enjoyment, especially in the world of cinema, are also a battle of religious identities as analyzed from the film Ayat-Ayat Cinta, Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, Ketika Cinta Bertasbih. According to Heryanto, it must be noted that there was no big conflict between capitalism and commitment of religious piety. Both can coexist for different reasons and sometimes clash with each other [9].

The purification and strengthening of Islamic identity were also revealed from the change of name from Javanese to Arabic. The change into Islamic name was put forward by Joel C. Kuipers and Askuri in "Islamization and identity in Indonesia: The Case of Arabic names in Java" by analyzing 3.7 million names of residents in Central Java. However, it is necessary to add note, that the name change is not entirely related to Arabic culture and identity, but the names of "hybrids" synthesis of Javanese, Arabic and European cultures [10].

Identity politics including fundamentalism are indeed experiencing a rising tide. The religious fundamentalism movement was initiated earlier by Christianity which criticized capitalism. Capitalism then built a world government like the IMF, WTO. This global government is considered as an anti-Christ, and the symbols of capitalism such as microchips (credit cards and so on) are signs of "End Times".

Furthermore, the French historian, Daniel Perret wrote that the archipelago appears as an "extraordinary laboratory for the study of ethnicity. Perret stated that everywhere in the world, there is no ethnic diversity, contrasting ideologies, and class differences that meet to form such a complex social environment. In Medan, the third largest city in Indonesia, the main basis of social differentiation is estimated based on ethnicity [11].
2. Research methods
This study used a qualitative paradigm by relying on sources of interviews and print/online media documents including social media. However, it should be noted, this study did not provide critical discourse analysis, but only formed a conceptualization of print and online media documents, including social media. This social media was only used as a comparison of print and online media sources that are considered more objective and trustworthy. However, this level of objectivity is also questionable, because local print/online media are also divided in supporting each candidate. While the interview process with key informants such as the Success Team and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), as well as religious leaders, was still not completed.

3. Result and discussion
This section describes sequentially (1) religious (2) ethnic identity and (3) intergroup tension. The race is not discussed because this concept is not so widely used both in the Indonesian intellectual world especially in ordinary political life.

Ethnic identity politics is evident in the declaration of support for each candidate pair. Clan associations (Toga Sirait, Nababan, Tamil, Nias, Toga Marbun) and voluntary associations of ethnic associations (Pudja Kesuma, Aceh Sepakat, Hikma, Mabmi, Merga Silima, Relawan Tionghou “Hati Emas,” Masyarakat Adat Karo-Melayu, Relawan Geutanyoe etnic Aceh) are some of the clan associations and clan declarations declaring to support each candidate.

"I was born from the womb of Nababan. I have a sacred promise with the Sitorus Pane clan. If there is a boru (female) Nababan falling, there is a Sitorus Pane falling. I must help Sitorus Pane first. Sihar must be the opposite," said Leo Nababan, a politician of Golkar Party representing the Nababan clan when declaring to support Djoss. Clan support seems to dominate the Djoss pair. It is because Sihar Sitorus is as a candidate from Batak ethnicity.

The politics of religious identity seems to dominate the discourse and contestation in the governor election of North Sumatra (Pilgubsu). It can be seen in public places, social media, and mainstream media both print and online. As far as we found, there were several events used to "delegitimize" each other. The first event was the traditional ritual of blessing for Djoss in Pilgubsu Election of 2018, by presenting food (rice and goldfish) to the couple at the "Parsaktian" house of the Sihar Sitorus family in Sibisa Balige. This goldfish later turned into pig's head and viral on social media.

The second event was when the Djoss banner was displayed on a traditional coffee shop (palm wine) well-known as lapo tuak, while in the banner Ka'aba (symbol of the PPP party, one of Djoss's supporters) was added. The viral banner on this social media reaped controversy and was considered as abuse," said Chairman of North Sumatra's National Awakening Party (PKNU), Ikhyar Velayati.

The third event was a video showing that Edy Rahmayadi was being prayed by some pastors. The video intended to change the public's perception about the faith (aqidah) of Edy Rahmayadi. According to North Sumatra Ulema Fatwa activist (GNPF) Dimas Pamungkas, there was no aqidah principle violated by Edy Rahmayadi at the time. "There was no principle of aqidah violated because the worship was not in the church and not in a series of services.

The National Movement of Fatwa Guards-Indonesia Ulema Council or Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa (GNPF)-Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) Sumut declared a commitment and support to the candidate pair of North Sumatra Governor/Deputy Governor number I Edy Rahmayadi-Musa Rajekshah (ERAMAS). This support was given with some considerations. First, ERAMAS is committed to defend Islamic interests and scholars. Second, it is committed to maintain and prosper mosques in North Sumatra gradually. Third, it builds an Islamic economy by creating Islamic banking. Fourth, it builds an Islamic Center. Fifth, it makes GNPF Ulema a strategic partner in the development of the people. The same support was also conveyed by a group of Medan urban youth activists who are members of the United Muslim organization. The politics of intergroup identity was revealed in two categories, namely (1) the army versus civilian class and (2) the regional son (North Sumatra) and the import leader (Java).

Identity politics is experiencing a rising tide. It is not new because the clash and contestation of civilization has always colored the history of the world. Stoddard argued that white supremacy will be challenged by the "colored race"[12]. Huntington predicted the occurrence of at least seven clashes (including Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Japanese, Latin American) civilization in the world.
Huntington further predicted that when the communist socialists collapsed in East Europe, this was the final sign of history and the democracy of capitalism would become a single ideology as a winner [13].

Islamism, including post-Islamism, according to Ariel Heryanto, occurs because the collapse of utopian socialism-communism and capitalism has ultimately resulted in economic inequality, hedonism, and secularism. It is getting worse because democracy is run by politicians who often lie. Their lies are packaged in public policy based on recommendations from consultants, lobby groups, and the pressure of greedy corporate elites [14].

Feelings of insecurity and injustice can lead to the totalization of ideology as happened in Rwanda where the ideologies of Hutu ethnic assert that Tutsi people should not have a place in the country and be repatriated to their place of origin from Ethiopia. This ideology was disseminated and crystallized in the "Ten Hutu Ten Commandments." The ten commandments stated that "the ideology of Hutu ethnic must be taught to all Hutu people. Every Hutu who harasses his brother, reads, disseminates, and teaches this ideology is a traitor [15].

Islamism with its various variations such as Wahabi is not new. Some experts argue that the Padri war by Prince Dipenogoro in West Sumatra was the starting point of Wahabi inspiration in Indonesia [16]. These religious fundamentalists are campaigning for theological legitimacy in choosing leaders (must be Islam-Islam) in political contestations such as the election of June 2018. In other words, both candidates for governors and their representatives must be fellow Muslims.

While the Djoss pair is Muslim (Djarot Syaiful Hidayat), and Christians (Sihar Sitorus) are considered not to comply with Islamic law. Moreover, Djarot, who was once partnered with Ahok (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, former Jakarta governor), was considered to be a supporter and close friend of Ahok. It is called the butterfly effect by Edward Norton Lorenz, the term in chaos theory that deals with "sensitive dependence on the initial conditions," where small changes in one place in a nonlinear system can lead to large differences in later circumstances.

The debate over choosing Islam leaders has long given birth to differences of thought. In the third period, the Abbasid caliphate of the role of non-Islamic groups (known as vizier) in the government office was quite significant. Al-Mawardi distinguished between two types of vizierate: the vizierate of delegation (wizāra al-tāfwiḍ) and execution (wizāra al-tanfiḍh). The former implies that full powers are entrusted to the holder; such a vizier-in-charge is practically independent, exercising full power and authority, guided by his ra'y (independent opinion) and ijtihād (judgment and decision), as long as he keeps the caliph fully informed of his actions [17].

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