

Public Participation in Religious Political Discourse in the 2019 Indonesia Presidential Election

Mega Hidayati

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Bantul, Indonesia
E-mail: mega.hidayati@umy.ac.id

Tito Handoko

Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
E-mail: tito.handoko@lecturer.unri.ac.id

Abstract: *Recently, religious politics seems to be a trend in the public which is considered to have a significant impact on people's political choices on the democracy momentum. This research attempted to examine the relationship between religious political discourse and public participation in national political contestation in order to explain the relationship between public participation in religious political discourse in the 2019 Presidential Election. This research used an exploratory-oriented qualitative research method to analyze research problems from reading sources by applying content analysis. This research found that religious political discourse had dominated the 2019 presidential election as used by two pairs of candidates, Jokowi-Ma'ruf and Prabowo-Sandi in their religious narratives and symbols on the stage of the 2019 presidential election which then also influenced the increase in the number of voters participating in the 2019 presidential election, although it was not a major factor in attracting voters. Both Jokowi and Prabowo had always realized that highlighting the religious aspect followed by the implementation of the right political strategy had increased their chances of winning and increased public participation in the 2019 presidential election.*

Keywords: *Public Participation, Religious Politics, Presidential Election*

Abstrak : *Akhir-akhir ini, politik agama seakan menjadi tren di ruang publik yang dinilai berdampak signifikan terhadap pilihan politik masyarakat terhadap momentum demokrasi. Artikel ini mencoba mengkaji hubungan antara wacana politik agama dengan partisipasi publik dalam kontestasi politik nasional dalam rangka menjelaskan hubungan partisipasi publik dalam wacana politik keagamaan pada Pilpres 2019. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif berorientasi eksploratif yang berusaha menganalisis masalah penelitian dari sumber bacaan dengan menerapkan analisis isi. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa wacana politik agama telah mendominasi pilpres 2019 seperti yang digunakan oleh dua pasangan calon, yaitu Jokowi-Ma'ruf dan Prabowo-Sandi dalam narasi dan simbol keagamaannya di panggung pilpres 2019 yang kemudian juga mempengaruhi peningkatan jumlah pemilih yang mengikuti pilpres 2019, meskipun hal tersebut bukan faktor utama dalam menarik pemilih. Baik*

Jokowi maupun Prabowo selalu menyadari bahwa menyoroti aspek agama yang diikuti dengan penerapan strategi politik yang tepat telah meningkatkan peluang mereka untuk menang dan meningkatkan partisipasi publik dalam pemilihan presiden 2019.

Kata Kunci: *Partisipasi Publik, Politik Agama, Pemilihan Presiden*

INTRODUCTION

Although political and religious issue are sensitive topics but it always been interesting topics of study¹ It is because of the correlation between the two (politics and religion) which are difficult to separate from one another. Indonesian presidential election in 2019 had become a stage for religious politics and was believed to be a powerful strategy in attracting voters. In this case, both Jokowi and Prabowo realized that highlighting the religious aspect with the right political strategy will increase their chances of winning in political contestations².

Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world has succeeded in integrating Islam and democracy. However, in the process each religious group (Hinduism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, and Islam) has the right to public participation and the approaches used differ from one another³. In addition, the role of each religious figure has also increased public participation in the 2019 presidential election. It showed that the political

¹ Yuniartin. (2019). Framing Agama Dalam Politik Praktis. *Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, 2(Nomor 1), 59–70.

² Sihidi, I. T., Roziqin, A., & Suhermanto, D. F. (2020). Pertarungan Populisme Islam Dalam Pemilihan Presiden 2019. *Jiip: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 5(2), 174–189. <https://doi.org/10.14710/Jiip.V5i2.8516>

³ Elok Perwirawati, Prietsaweny Riris T Simamora, L. V. S. (2019). Pola Komunikasi Kelompok Agama Dalam Pencegahan Penyebaran Ujaran Kebencian Di Kecamatan Medan Polonia Pada Pemilihan Presiden Tahun 2019. *Jurnal Darma Agung*, 27(3), 1124–1134.

awareness of each stakeholder has developed for the better⁴. Fundamentally, religious politics in the 2019 presidential election could be seen from political sentiment issues where political preferences had influenced the polarization of society which has the potential to trigger conflict at the grassroots level⁵. Political sentiment also occurred against President Joko Widodo from Islamic populism groups extensively. Anti-Islam attitudes, foreign stooges, support for the PKI, and clerical discrimination issues have been carried out by a group of parties to trigger public hatred against them.⁶

Sahari (2021) asserted that an unethical behavior will be seen in national and local political contestations when religion is used for political purposes despite the fact that religion will have a significant impact on voter attitudes. Although this is fundamentally classified as an unethical act, the fact is that the 2019 presidential election was full of religious-based identity politics. Both pairs of candidates felt the most religious, thus forming certain symbols for social acceptance. This opportunity was open because the candidate pairs are aware that religious identity is a significant public concern. Several religious organizations in Indonesia which are very large and strong and supported by very large masses, it showed that religion, especially Islam is very close to the community, so it is believed that by taking advantage of these opportunities the potential to win political contestations is increasing. The dominance of the prominence of religious issues in political competition which is then supported by various parties including the presidential election participants has resulted in the political

⁴ Mahyuddin, Emilia Mustary, N. (2019). The Power Of Emak-Emak: Perempuan Dalam Pusaran Kampanye Politik Pemilihan Presiden 2019. *Al-Maiyyah: Media Transformasi Gender Dalam Paradigma Sosial Keagamaan*, 12(2), 1–15.

⁵ Alkawy, M. B. (2020). Legitimasi Legitimasi Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) Dalam Kontestasi Islam Politik Mutakhir. *Al Ma'arief: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Dan Budaya*, 1(2), 102–117. <https://doi.org/10.35905/Almaarief.V1i2.1046>

⁶ Afriadi, A., Prisant, G. F., Ernungtyas, N. F., Irwansyah, I., & Afriani, A. L. (2019). Komunikasi Politik “Rasa” Ala Jokowi Dalam Merespon Politik Sentimen. *Wacana: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi*, 18(2), 142–153. <https://doi.org/10.32509/Wacana.V18i2.928>

situation being vulnerable to political agendas by irresponsible parties aimed at dividing and destroying national unity⁷.

The phenomenon in Indonesia showed that people's involvement in politics is only limited to their participation in general elections. This participation is only classified in the definition of minimal participation obviously. Problems will arise when the representatives of the people they choose through the electoral process cannot be trusted, namely when they fail to fulfill their campaign promises and the political behavior of the elites is not in line with the aspirations of their constituents. In addition, the existence of socio-economic inequality that drives public discontent, will certainly have an impact on political polarization between Jokowi supporters and Prabowo supporters which further increases friction in cyberspace and also in the public sphere based on religious and ethnic identity politics.

Furthermore, according to Rif'an (2020), religious identity politics would have a significant impact on people's political choices in the 2019 presidential election. Then, it was also supported by Umar & Kahar's (2019) which explained that in the context of Indonesian voters, religion is still become the basis for the community in their involvement in choosing leaders. This research is important to do because various literatures have explained that the dominance of religious political issues in the 2019 presidential election has had an impact on increasing religious-based public participation Based on this, it is necessary to know more about the relevance of religious politics and public participation in the national

⁷ Ardipandanto, A. (2020). Dampak Politik Identitas Pada Pilpres 2019: Perspektif Populisme. *Jurnal Politika Dinamika Masalah Politik Dalam Negeri Dan Hubungan Internasional*, 11(1), 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.22212/Jp.V11i1.1582>

political contestation. Therefore, this research aimed to explain how public participation in religious political discourse in the 2019 Presidential Election in Indonesia is related

METHOD

This research used qualitative research methods with an exploratory literature study strategy⁸. Researcher used qualitative research to review the results of previous studies and to interpret a phenomenon scientifically. In addition, exploratory qualitative-based research could increase understanding by revealing new ideas about a phenomenon and by describing research problems in more detail⁹. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation techniques from various journals, proceedings, online news, and relevant books. In addition, to analyse the data collected, researcher used content analysis to discuss the contents of the document in order to provide a comprehensive explanation of public participation in religious politics during the 2019 Presidential Election systematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Participation in the Implementation of Democracy

Fundamentally, public participation in the government system is considered a pillar of democracy where the effectiveness of citizen participation in government programs is the basis of public participation in a democratic government system¹⁰. Besides, public participation is also a two-way interaction that occurs continuously, both in the form of recommendations for improving past and future processes¹¹. The existence of public participation in the process will

⁸ Hermawan, I. (2019). Metodologi Penelitian Pendidikan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan Mixed Method. Hidayatul Quran Kuningan

⁹ Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative Research Methodology In Social Sciences And Related Subjects. *Uc Journal Of Economic Development, Environment And People*, 7(1), 23–48. https://Mpra.Ub.Uni-Muenchen.De/85654/1/Mpra_Paper_85654.Pdf

¹⁰ Faturahman, B. M. (2018). Aktualisasi Nilai Demokrasi Dalam Perekrutan Dan Penjaringan Perangkat Desa. *Jurnal Sosial Politik*, 4(1), 132. <https://Doi.Org/10.22219/Sospol.V4i1.5557>

¹¹ Hamdani, R. S. (2020). Proyek Lintas Batas Administrasi: Analisis Partisipasi Publik Dalam Proses Perencanaan Ibu Kota Negara Republik Indonesia. *Journal Of Regional And Rural Development Planning*, 4(1), 43–62. <https://Doi.Org/10.29244/Jp2wd.2020.4.1.43-62>

also represent an increase in the quality of democracy. There are two types of public participation in the implementation of democracy, namely direct involvement and virtual involvement such as through online media and massive social media.

Furthermore, expression of freedom and the existence of public participation are important aspects of democracy that function for the effective implementation of their rights both in terms of participation in the formation of public policies and at the time of voting. Ruhana (2019) emphasized that collaborative participation and empowerment is more in line with efforts to democratize people's lives. Therefore, public participation will be realized if the government and the community agree on the importance of their involvement and the importance of increasing the capability of not only the government but also the capacity of the community¹².

The Politics of Religion in the Indonesian Political Contest

In Orde Baru era, the existence of politic and religion had become a phenomenon that often occurred after the reformation. In 2019, political contestation in Indonesia became very intense and was highlighted by the public because Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto againt ran for president in the presidential and vice-presidential elections. In the 2019 presidential election campaign, the issue of religion-based identity politics came to the fore. Politician often used religion-based identity to attract the interest and support of potential voters. The media, which should be impartial, are entangled in the issue of identity politics. Online media was often influenced by the ideology and interests

¹² Hasibuan, R. (2019). Partisipasi Publik Dalam Proses Kebijakan Di Masa Reformasi. *Jurnal Trias Politika*, 3(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.33373/Jtp.V3i1.2407>

of media owners, which was reflected in news framing. The 2019 presidential candidates (Jokowi and Prabowo) used religious instruments in their narratives and speech to gain support.¹³

Haris & Dardum found that religious politics would be seen from the involvement of religious leaders in practical politics which has been carried out in various ways, including: providing support through circulars and announcements, consolidation of fellow religious leaders, directing directly to the students, and their congregation. In addition, the political contestation in the 2019 Presidential Election, it was proven that there has been a phenomenon of politicization of religion, where each camp used various terms and legitimized the role of religious leaders as political magnets to attract more public attention and support. Thus, the religious politics that is developing in Indonesia today has become a threat to the integrity of the nation and state¹⁴.

Religious Political Discourse in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election

In this era, the correlation of politics and religion in the process is very close where there is an increase in the participation of religious institutions in political discourse in Indonesia and Islam is often described as an object in that discourse. According to Djuwita, the process of holding the 2019 presidential election was a political event that attracted public attention, while for some it also caused boredom. This is a challenge that must be overcome by the organizers of the presidential election because various opinions would always develop among the wider community regarding how they respond to the 2019 Election phenomenon which is expressed through oral conversations, dialogue on social media, and the spread of false news or information to support a particular candidate. In Indonesian context, the relationship between the Islamic populist movement and the oligarchic elite is very strong and has a reciprocal correlation.

¹³ Fata, M. K. (2019). Membaca Polarisasi Santri Dalam Kontestasi Pilpres 2019. *Jurnal Dinamika Penelitian: Media Komunikasi Sosial Keagamaan*, 18(November 2018), 325–344.

¹⁴ Sonny. (2019). Peta Politik Identitas Di Indonesia : Sebagai Bakal Cawapres Bakal Capres Inkumben Joko Widodo Pada Pilpres 2019. *Renaissance*, 4(01), 443–455.

The power of Islamic populism needs a political platform and financial support. In the other hand, the oligarchic elite needs voice support. This pragmatic bond causes populist support for political actors not to depend on the strength of the ideological basis of Islam by the actor but the extent to which the political agenda as a reflection of the political platform adopted can be fought for by the political elite. Therefore, Prabowo, who have full record of contradictions and his Islamic credentials are questioned, continues to gain support. Prabowo is seen as the most likely candidate to defeat Jokowi, who is seen as a common enemy because he is accused of being anti-Islam, close to China and the communists as enemy of Islam, and could get in the way of their other main goals. This type of adoption showed the pragmatic nature of Islamic populism which is not based on the same ideological line and is not motivated by a political mission. Then, political sentiment has never been absent from the Indonesian political scene in the 2019 presidential election contestation. This political sentiment in Indonesia is reflected by the existence of Islamic populism which consists of Islamic groups that mobilize Muslim voters for political purposes, especially to seize power and the economy. To fulfil political and economic interests, Islamic identity is used as an instrument of manipulative and mobilization. The political narrative that is built is associated with the populist concept of Islam. Islamic cultural idioms are designed to mobilize public support in the struggle for power and resources based on ummah-based political identity

In general, various groups considered that candidate number 2 (Prabowo-Sandi) has been dominant in implementing identity politics or populism to take advantage of SARA sentiments in society, especially those related to religious elements. But in fact, candidate number 1 (Jokowi-Amin) in the end also used identity politics or populism to counteract the political attacks of candidate

number 2 on religious sentiments. However, the candidates seem to have different motivations for using identity politics and populism. Populism that stands out in candidate no 2 is an invitation to launch a presidential replacement campaign in 2019. These patterns are an indication of political populism that invites based on doctrine and political campaigns that raise the issue that the power or government that existed at that time was bad power or government. that is bad because the power or government exercised by President Jokowi during his reign since 2014 is a government that the Indonesian people do not want. Then, Candidates Number 2 finally realized that the values of the majority of Indonesian people are religious values, especially Islam which is the majority religion adopted by the Indonesian people. In religion, Jokowi's presidential candidate was attacked by using religious values as a political tool by indoctrinating or campaigning to the public about the weaknesses of Jokowi's presidential candidate in an Islamic context, where this populist strategy is considered to be effective. In addition, the implementation of the grand campaign by Prabowo-Sandi during the 2019 presidential election is identical to the existence of dominant religious politics.

Merdeka > News

Kampanye Akbar Prabowo-Sandi Ditutup dengan 10 Pesan Habib Rizieq

Minggu, 7 April 2019 09:55

Reporter : Yunita Amalia



2.8k
SHARES



Figure 1: The Existence of Religious Politics by the Candidate Prabowo-Sandi
Source: Merdeka.com, 7 April 2019

Furthermore, the candidate number 1 was also engaged in populism based on an identity politics strategy. The populism of Candidate number 1 was different from candidate number 2 because it was more of a backlash against political attacks based on a religious approach to Jokowi in particular. Selection of K.H. Ma'ruf Amin as Vice President is a political defence measure designed to prepare him for political attacks based on religious issues. It seems that presidential candidate Jokowi has learned from the defeat of DKI Jakarta Governor Ahok by Anies Baswedan, in which religious issues played an important role. The hope is to elevate K.H. Ma'ruf Amin as Vice President in order to be able to represent some Muslims. It means that Jokowi's presidential candidate is not anti-Islam and does not suffer from "Islamophobia".

Merdeka > News

Jokowi Akhirnya Ungkap Alasan Pilih Ma'ruf Amin Jadi Cawapresnya

Minggu, 24 Maret 2019 19:30

Reporter : Hari Ariyanti, Merdeka



1.4k
SHARES



Figure 2: The existence of Religious Politics by the Candidate Jokowi-Amin
(source: merdeka.com, March 24, 2019)

The election of Ma'ruf Amin as vice presidents finally received appreciation from the Banten students. In addition, Banten society have also longed for a leader with a ulama' background. When the ulama' from Banten was sworn in as the vice president candidate, he was greeted enthusiastically by many people. It has reflected that religious political discourse in the 2019 presidential election was very dominant because it was used by the two pairs of candidates, namely Jokowi-Amin and Prabowo Sandi. In Indonesia, the history of religious politics has become a well-known phenomenon and fact. Before Indonesia's independence in 1945, religious politics, especially political Islamization, had become commonplace in Indonesian society. The struggle for the 2019 presidential and vice-presidential candidates is the impact of the use of religious symbols in the early stages of the 2019 presidential election.

Muslim identity became one of the determining factors for presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2019 election. This identity arises not only because Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, but also because of the socio-political religious situation in Indonesia which had implications for the emergence and transmission of Muslim identity. Various events in the name of "religion" are proof that identity politics is and has become a factor in the Indonesian political system¹⁵. A number of actions to defend Islam ranging from Action to Defend Islam I (Action 1410), Action to Defend Islam II (Action 411), Action to Defend Islam III (Action 212 Volume 1), Action to Defend Islam IV (Action 212), Action to Defend Islam V (Action 212 Volume II) and Action to Defend Islam VI (Action 313) became a representation space for the strengthening of identity politics that carried religious symbols (Islam). These actions were suspected by Islamic groups and mass organizations ranging from Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa-MUI (GNPF)-MUI and Forum Umat Islam (FUI).

¹⁵ Ronaldo, R., & Darmaiza, D. (2021). Politisasi Agama Dan Politik Kebencian Pada Pemilu Presiden Indonesia 2019. *Indonesian Journal Of Religion And Society*, 3(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.36256/Ijrs.V3i1.150>

Public Participation in Religious Politics Discourse in the 2019 Presidential Election

Public participation is a metric to assess the quality of citizens in terms of their perspectives and responsibilities for the development and survival of democracy in a country. In addition, the purpose of public participation is to determine the nature and political orientation of the democratic system that underlies such participation. The implementation of the 2019 Presidential Election has visualized a number of interesting phenomena to explore and one of them includes matters relating to an increase in the level of public participation in the implementation of democratic parties in Indonesia.

When compared to the previous election, the 2019 presidential election has shown a higher voter participation and showed an improvement in public involvement in political contestation on a national scale. The following is the number of public participations in the 2019 presidential election as shown in the following image:

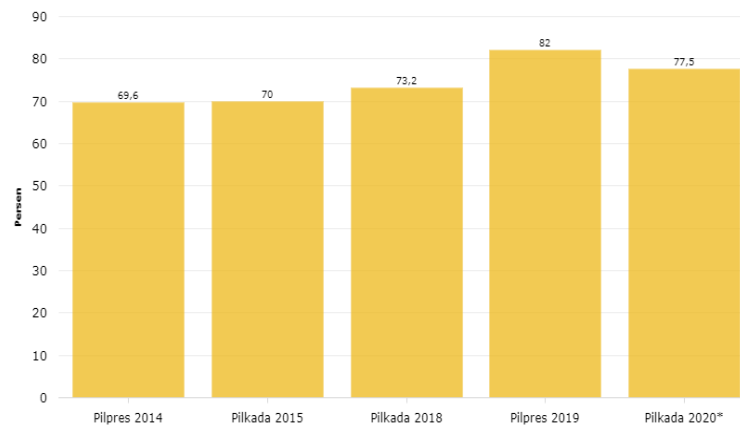


Figure 3: the amount of Public Participation in the 2019 Presidential Election
Source: (Katadata.co.id, 2020)



Figure 4: the Characters of the President Candidate considered by the Voters
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2019).

In Figure 4 above, it can be seen that the voting community in Indonesia has a number of considerations to give their voting rights to presidential candidates. These considerations are revealed from the results of a survey conducted by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) for the period 15-22 March 2019, where simplicity is still the dominant dimension (37.9%), while religious factors only have a percentage (3.4%). Nevertheless, in the process it cannot be denied that at the momentum of the 2019 presidential election, it has become an arena for religious politics as a means of attracting voters. Both Jokowi and Prabowo are aware that highlighting the religious aspect with the right political strategy will increase their chances of winning the election. Jokowi-Amin won the 2019 presidential election because of the strong support from Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and nationalist groups so that they had a landslide victory in Central and East Java as well as other non-Muslim majority areas such as Bali, Papua, West Papua, North Sulawesi, and NTT. Then, in areas based on strong Islam (puritanism) such as Aceh, West Sumatra, South Kalimantan, West Java, and Banten, Prabowo-Sandi also won a landslide victory. Thus, the 2019 presidential election showed that religious politics has contributed significantly to candidate wins and increased voter participation, so it is highly likely that this kind of religious-based identity sentiment will continue to be adopted in the future. This research is in line with Djuwita's research (2019) which confirmed

that community involvement or participation in the 2019 presidential election has reflected the public's desire to actively participate in determining the nation's leader candidates. In addition, public participation in the 2019 presidential election also depends on the interests of each individual, one of which is also influenced by the existence of religious political discourse.

CONCLUSION

This research concluded that religious political discourse was very dominant in the 2019 presidential election, because it was used by two pairs of candidates, Jokowi-Amin and Prabowo-Sandi in their religious narratives and symbols. Voter participation was 82.0% in the 2019 presidential election. It was in line with the results of the 2019 presidential election, both Jokowi-Ma'ruf and Prabowo-Sandi, which could not be separated from the religious political discourse used, although it was not a single variable because the struggles and actions of political parties and their volunteers also contribute to attracting voters. Both Jokowi and Prabowo realized that highlighting the religious aspect with the right political strategy had increased their chances of winning the election where public participation in the 2019 presidential election depends on individual interests, one of them was influenced by religious politics.

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