

POLITICAL DISTRUST AND ISLAMIC POPULISM: STUDY ON TARBIYAH COMMUNITY IN PEMILU 2019

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Abstract

This article aims to describe the extent to which Tarbiyah community distrust to the General Elections Committee (KPU) and the Indonesian government as well as factors causing this political distrust. Massive movements protesting and rejecting the result of the Pemilu (General Election) 2019 by supporters of one of the presidential candidates, Prabowo Subianto, were launch when the General Elections Committee (KPU) announced the victory of the incumbent, Joko Widodo. One of the most dominant groups involved in these protests was Tarbiyah community. The method used in this study is qualitative research method by conducting in-depth interviews of Tarbiyah members. The study found that political distrust among them is a symptom of Islamic populism. The Islamic populism imagines itself as the movement that can save Indonesian Muslims from corrupt elites.

Keywords: Islamic populism, Political distrust, Tarbiyah community, Pemilu 2019.

Abstrak

Artikel ini berupaya menjelaskan sejauh mana ketidakpercayaan politik di kalangan komunitas Tarbiyah terhadap Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) dan pemerintah serta faktor-faktor yang menyebabkannya. Gerakan masif yang memprotes dan menolak hasil Pemilu 2019 muncul di kalangan pendukung Prabowo Subianto (salah satu calon Presiden) ketika Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) mengumumkan hasil Pemilu yang menegaskan kemenangan petahana, Joko Widodo (Presiden Indonesia pada periode 2014-2019). Salah satu kelompok yang paling dominan terlibat dalam protes ini adalah komunitas Tarbiyah. Studi yang menggunakan metode kualitatif ini mewawancarai secara mendalam anggota Tarbiyah. Studi ini menjelaskan bahwa ketidakpercayaan politik di kalangan komunitas Tarbiyah merupakan gejala populisme Islam. Populisme Islam mengimajinasikan dirinya sebagai gerakan yang berusaha menyelamatkan Muslim Indonesia dari para elit yang korup.

Kata Kunci: Populisme Islam, Ketidakpercayaan politik, Komunitas tarbiyah, Pemilu 2019.

Background

Political tensions rose following the General Elections Committee's (KPU) announcement of the result of the 2019 General Election (Pemilu 2019) on May 21, 2019. The National Victory Body (BPN), which is the campaign committee of Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno ticket (candidates for the presidency and vice presidency respectively), declared that they rejected the official results. Protests against alleged fraud in the elections appeared in many places. The protests were not only expressed by

political elites, but also by a broader intersection of the population. They mobilized large numbers of people to march to the KPU office to reject the election result. They believed that there was a systematic, structured, and massive fraud committed by the KPU and the government. This protest is an indication of political distrust.¹

¹ For further discussion about political distrust can be found in Robert D. Putnam and Kristin A. Goss, 'Introduction', *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York: Oxford

One of the social elements voicing the disapproval of the 2019 election result was the Tarbiyah community. This community are activists and constituents of an Islamist political party named the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).² The extent to which political distrust emerged among the Tarbiyah community, as well as how and why the political distrust developed among this community are some of the questions investigated in this article.

This study is based on a case study approach that examines actors, events, and organizations that are commonly used in qualitative research.³ Primary data collection was carried out from May to September 2021 in Jakarta, West Java, and Bali. During this period, data collection was focused on investigating the extent to which political distrust was exhibited by Tarbiyah members towards state institutions in the 2019 General Election and the factors causing this political distrust. The Tarbiyah community was chosen based on the consideration that this group represents an Islamist or political Islam

movement and has played a significant role in organizing the protests. The Tarbiyah's ideology is often associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and most of its supporters come from well-educated middle-class Muslims.⁴

Many studies on the Tarbiyah movement have been conducted by other scholars. Most of these focus on how members of the movement deal with its official ideology,⁵ utilize social media to shape the Islamic identity and sentiments of Indonesian Muslims,⁶ conceptualize their rights and role as female Muslims,⁷ strengthen and expand their movement through marriage.⁸ My study complements the study on the Tarbiyah movement by investigating how it dealt with political contestation in the Pemilu 2019, especially the Presidential Election. Even though the movement voices support for democracy,⁹ the way they behave might potentially be a threat to democratic values. Therefore, this study seeks to reveal the extent to which their political distrust as well as factors making it.

Polarization in Pemilu 2019

The 2019 Presidential Election (Pilpres) brought back the contestation between two

University Press, 2004; see also Saiful Mujani, *Religious Democrats: Democratic Culture and Muslim Political Participation in Post-Subarto Indonesia* (unpublished dissertation, Ohio: Ohio State University, 2003); Dmytro Volodin, 'Deliberative Democracy and Trust in Political Institutions at the Local Level: Evidence from Participatory Budgeting Experiment in Ukraine', *Contemporary Politics*, 25.1 (2019), 78–93; Bram Geurkink et al, 'Populist Attitudes, Political Trust, and External Political Efficacy: Old Wine in New Bottles?', *Political Studies*, 68.1 (2020); Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies*, 47.1 (1999), 2–16.

² Ai Fatimah Nur Fuad, 'Da'wa and Politics: Lived Experiences of the Female Islamists in Indonesia', *Contemporary Islam*, 14.1 (2020), 19–47; Noorhaidi Hasan, 'Islamist Party, Electoral Politics and Da'wah Mobilization among Youth: The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia', *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 6.1 (2012), 17–47; Ahmad Ali Nurdin, 'PKS' Democratic Experiences in Recruiting Members and Leaders', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 49.2 (2011), 329–60.

³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); G Thomas, *How to Do Your Case Study: A Guide for Students and Researchers* (Cambridge: Sage, 2011).

⁴ Yon Machmudi, 'The Emergence of New Santri in Indonesia', *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 2.1 (2008), 69–102; Kikue Hamayotsu, 'The Political Rise of the Prosperous Justice Party in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: Examining the Political Economy of Islamist Mobilization in a Muslim Democracy', *Asian Survey*, 51.5 (2011), 971–92; Salman, 'The Tarbiyah Movement: Why People Join This Indonesian Contemporary Islamic Movement', *Studia Islamika*, 13.2 (2006); Fuad; Hasan; Nurdin.

⁵ See Fuad.

⁶ Eva F. Nisa, 'Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 46.134 (2018), 24–43.

⁷ Diah Ariani Arimbi, 'Politicizing Piety: Women's Rights and Roles in the Tarbiyah Movement in Indonesia', *Religious Studies and Theology*, 36.2 (2017), 228–44.

⁸ Suaidi Asyari and M. Husnul Abid, 'Expanding the Indonesian Tarbiyah Movement through Ta'aruf and Marriage', *Al-Jami'ah*, 54.2 (2016), 337–68.

⁹ Nurdin.

major national figures, Prabowo and Joko Widodo. In the previous Presidential Election, 2014, Joko Widodo and Prabowo received the largest votes among the other presidential candidates. Since the beginning of the 2019 election, the support of political parties has converged to these two names. Apart from being an incumbent who usually has a high chance of being re-elected, support for Prabowo is a realistic consideration, because based on data from survey institutions Prabowo is the only figure with electability rate that can match Joko Widodo's.

Joko Widodo, who is commonly referred to as Jokowi, was elected President for the 2014-2019 period. His popularity gained ground after participating in the 2012 DKI Jakarta Regional Head Election (Pilkada). At that time, Jokowi was imagined as a figure who was close to the people, especially the lower class.¹⁰ Moreover, he was also perceived as an honest figure and brave in cracking down on bureaucracy that is often seen as lacking integrity when serving the people.¹¹ This image was obtained from his leadership as Mayor of Solo in the period of 2008-2012. His leadership of Solo attracted the attention of the people of Jakarta, both from the middle and lower classes, until finally Jokowi was elected in 2012 as the Governor of DKI Jakarta defeating the incumbent, Fauzi Bowo. The same image has also allowed him to receive the mandate of being the President of Indonesia since 2014.¹²

Meanwhile, Prabowo Subianto is the general chairman of the Gerindra (the Great Indonesia Movement) party. Gerindra has a "secular" nationalist ideology. "Secular" in this

¹⁰ Abdul Hamid, 'Jokowi's Populism in the 2012 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 33.1 (2014), 85-109.

¹¹ Marcus Mietzner, *Reinventing Asian Populism: Jokowi's Rise, Democracy, and Political Contestation in Indonesia* (Hawaii: East-West Center, 2015).

¹² Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, 'Indonesian Politics in 2014: Democracy's Close Call', *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 50.3 (2014), 347-69.

case does not mean anti-religion; it simply means that the party does not use religion as a reference in formulating party policies and programs. Prabowo became a strong candidate to face Jokowi in the 2014 presidential election. He was a former Kopasus (Special Forces Command) commander in the late New Order era (1995-1998). However, he was dismissed in 1998 because of Kopasus' involvement in the kidnapping and the torture of several activists who were critical of President Suharto (reigned 1966-1998). Although his career as a member of the military ended in 1998, his career in politics began to take off in the late 2000s.¹³ His status as a military official appealed to many Indonesians, who tend to trust military figures as being uniquely capable of managing the country, especially as the highest leader in managing the government. This can be seen in the fact that in the two previous presidential periods (2004-2009 and 2009-2014), Indonesia was led by a former top military official, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Many surveys conducted in the 2000s also showed the electability of military figures. It is only in the last two years since the Jokowi leadership era that surveys show that civilian figures are gaining high electability in the national level, with figures such as Ganjar Pranowo, Anies Baswedan, and Ridwan Kamil.

Compared to the previous election, the constellation of support in the 2019 elections has not changed much. Jokowi, as the incumbent, is supported by a major party, namely PDIP (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), which is based on a secular nationalist ideology. The masses of PDIP supporters are those who support the state's religious neutrality, and most of them are hail from the lower class, especially those who live in rural areas.

¹³ Mietzner, *Reinventing Asian Populism: Jokowi's Rise, Democracy, and Political Contestation in Indonesia*.

Prabowo's supporters, on the other hand, come from the lower class who live in urban areas, as well as educated and middle-class Muslims who feel disappointed with Jokowi government's policies which they consider to be unfavorable to the indigenous Muslim middle class. Prabowo's populist rhetoric that voiced issues of social injustice and the government's inability to improve welfare attracted these social classes.¹⁴

Continuing from the tension in the previous election, the polemic in the 2019 election was colored by the issue of the government's lack of alignment with the national interest and the Indonesian people. The Jokowi government has been described by his opponents as a political elite working for the advantage of its own group and foreign interests, especially China, which under Jokowi's administration invested heavily in infrastructure development in Indonesia. The investment was interpreted by the opponents as a covert effort to take advantage of Indonesia. The benefits gained by foreigners in this case are perceived as a new form of colonialism (neo-colonialism) in which the colonized do not feel that they are being colonized and exploited by the colonizers.¹⁵ Although the accusation that Jokowi is a covert communist no longer dominates as it did in the previous elections, the discourse about the Chinese state is still tied to the issue of communism which is the official ideology of that country. In other words, the close relationship of the Jokowi government to China has led to the perception that the Indonesian state will eventually be controlled and "colonized" by a communist state.

¹⁴ Edward Aspinall, 'Oligarchic Populism: Prabowo Subianto's Challenge to Indonesian Democracy', *Indonesia*, 99.1 (2015), 1–28.

¹⁵ There was suspicious views seeing oligarchic tendency in the rise of Jokowi as described by Yuki Fukuoka and Luky Djani, 'Revisiting the Rise of Jokowi: The Triumph of Reformasi or an Oligarchic Adaptation of Postclientelist Initiatives?', *South East Asia Research*, 24.2 (2016), 204–11.

The polemic between the two groups of supporters of the presidential candidates in the 2019 general election also inevitably occurred in social media. In this decade the use of social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp (WA), is increasing. The ease of publishing and distributing writings or messages and the very wide reach of readers have caused these two social media platforms to be inundated by messages in support for or in opposition to the candidates. Anton (pseudonym) recounted his feud with a member of his wife's extended family in the WA group regarding their different choice of presidential candidate. Anton feels that the criticism of wife's family against Jokowi is based on subjective considerations, rather than being based on facts.¹⁶ This feud has caused a strain between Anton and his wife's family; they now feel uncomfortable with each other. In another case, Afif (pseudonym), who is a Prabowo supporter, expressed his frustration at the WA group of his extended family, who seem to turn a blind eye to Jokowi's alleged closeness to communism. The conflict in the WA group has even led to a physical clash, although it was finally resolved by the intervention of other family members.¹⁷

This kind of polemic and feud happens to many people and groups on social media. Groups on social media, which were originally formed to strengthen relationships and communication between their members, became tense and full of conflict during the 2019 General Election. These tensions are indicative of a sharp polarization. These two groups of supporters are not only different in their political choices. One group see themselves as supporters of "the truth" while

¹⁶ Anton, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {25 September 2021}.

¹⁷ Afif, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {7 September 2021}.

seeing the opposing group as supporters of corrupt political elites.¹⁸

The circulation of fake news or hoaxes on social media that tends to discredit presidential candidates has also exacerbated the tension and polarization.¹⁹ One of them claimed that President Jokowi has asked for the legalization of adultery and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) in Indonesia through legislation (UU PKS). This fake news was used to show that President Jokowi is actively acting against the norms and values of Indonesian people, especially those supported by religion. In addition, News also spread about the Chinese government requesting the island of Kalimantan as debt guarantee in its investment project. This news was accompanied by a video of a speech by the Chinese President, which was edited and made to appear to confirm this. This video was used to discredit President Jokowi's policy of bringing investment from China. The investment is seen as proof that Jokowi's government do not act for national interests, because it has opened the door for the colonization of Indonesia. Another fake news reported the "invasion" of 10 million Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia. The number and arrival of these workers are associated with the Chinese government's alleged strategy to gradually control certain areas in Indonesia. Although there was no definite data on who the producers of the news are, the motivation driving the emergence of these fake news is the political interests related to the elections of 2019. The circulation of fake news has

¹⁸ Sergio Martini and Mariano Torcal, 'Trust across Political Conflicts: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Divided Societies', *Party Politics*, 25.2 (2019), 126–39.

¹⁹ Further description about the circulation of fake news during 2019 election can be seen in Nururrianti Jalli, Nuurrianti Jalli, and Ika Idris, 'Fake News and Elections in Two Southeast Asian Nations: A Comparative Study of Malaysia General Election 2018 and Indonesia Presidential Election 2019', *ICDeSA* (2019), 138–48.

increased the tension and polarization in Indonesian society.

The criticism of the Jokowi government as being non-nationalist, because of its perceived facilitation of neo-colonialism, indicates the emergence of a populist movement during the 2019 election.²⁰ In contrast to populism in European and North American countries, which voices anti-immigrant sentiments, populism in Indonesia displays a more diverse concern. There are at least two kind of populism that grew out of the 2019 election, populism developed by Prabowo and Islamic populism. Marcus Mietzner calls the first type as Maverick populism.²¹ This type emphasizes the behavior and policies of state leaders who are corrupt and not oriented towards the welfare of the people, especially the lower class. The second type displays a populism based on religious identity. This movement is united by the same religious identity, namely Islam. The discourse on corrupt political elites is associated with their role in marginalizing the political and economic interests of Muslims in Indonesia.²²

Political distrust among the Tarbiyah community

One of the groups which was strongly in support of the Prabowo-Sandiaga presidential ticket is the Tarbiyah community. This community is the cultural wing of PKS. The Tarbiyah community is a very important part of the Prabowo-Sandiaga movement. Since

²⁰ The emergence of Islamic populism, to some extent, is in line with the strengthen of Islamic identity during the 2019 election as described by Alexander R. Arifianto, 'What the 2019 Election Says about Indonesian Democracy', *Asia Policy*, 14.4 (2019), 46–53.

²¹ Marcus Mietzner, 'Fighting Illiberalism with Illiberalism: Islamist Populism and Democratic Deconsolidation in Indonesia', *Pacific Affairs*, 91.2 (2018), 261–82.

²² Vedi R. Hadiz, 'A New Islamic Populism and the Contradictions of Development', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44.1 (2014), 125–43; Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

this community consists of small groups that are continually being fostered and mentored by leaders of the movement, it exhibits a high level of solidity in action and perspective. They also consist mainly of educated people and the middle class who actively propagate their opinion regarding the 2019 elections.

The Tarbiyah community considered the General Election Commission (KPU) to be a biased body that did not have the neutrality to carry out the tasks of organizing the 2019 Election. One member of Tarbiyah explained:

I think that in the KPU there are several groups of people who want to fight for one candidate. It could be that one of them is the highest person in the KPU. Maybe not everyone in the KPU is like that, but surely because of this group, fraud can escape. I believe that basically no one can be neutral, and neither can the KPU. Even if they try to appear neutral, they must have a tactic to make the group they support win. Specifically, I can't explain examples of KPU's partiality, but the election results can be an illustration of how the KPU is actually leaning towards certain candidates.²³

Members of the Tarbiyah community believe that the implementation of the General Election was marked by unusual policies that indicated an attempt to win the incumbent. One of such a policy was the use of ballot boxes made of cardboard, as one Tarbiyah member put it: "At that time it was clear that there was cheating, for example the KPU made ballot boxes out of cardboard".²⁴ Another Tarbiyah member stated the same thing:

The ballot box uses cardboard instead of iron or aluminum. Whereas cardboard boxes are more susceptible to damage and prone to fraud. Ordinary people also feel

that there is something odd and feel that the KPU is playing a game.²⁵

According to them, this kind of ballot box is very vulnerable to be opened and manipulated by people who have access to it, especially those in the committee and of course the government. The criticism regarding the use of ballot boxes made of cardboard was voiced by many community groups, not only the Tarbiyah community. The criticism shows the public's concern about the potential for fraud that could arise due to inadequate ballot box materials. The KPU responded to this criticism with the argument that the use of cardboard materials as ballot boxes for the 2019 Election was based on considerations of budget efficiency. In addition, according to the KPU, the material is environmentally friendly, because it can be recycled for other purposes. According to the KPU's assessment, ballot boxes made of aluminum material used in previous elections cost much more and could not be reused in the next General Election. In addition, the material is not easily recyclable.

The announcement of the results of the 2019 General Election conducted by the KPU at midnight was also perceived to be another indication of the KPU's alignment with one of the Presidential Candidates. Siti, a member of Tarbiyah emphasized:

The 2019 election in my opinion did not run well and it was suspicious. It was indicated from the side of the announcement of the winner which was done at midnight. In the middle of the night many people have started to rest and sleep. In addition, there are various kinds of assistance coupled with promises to the people. Even though the aid is good for the community, it seems that it is trying to win the hearts of the people.²⁶

²³ Farahana, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {3 September 2021}

²⁴ Agung, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {23 September 2021}.

²⁵ Rendi, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {20 September 2021}.

²⁶ Siti, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {10 September 2021}.

The announcement of the election results carried out at that late hour was perceived by them in anticipation of mass protests and mobilizations of those disappointed with the results. According to some experts, this kind of assessment was not very appropriate, because whenever the election results were announced, whether at night, morning, or afternoon, people who felt dissatisfied should still be able to protest and demonstrate to express their dissatisfaction. Indeed, soon after the announcement of the 2019 election results, many community groups came to the KPU building to protest. The perception of the partiality of the KPU by reference to the time of the announcement in the middle of the night indicates political distrust among the Tarbiyah community. They looked with suspicion the policies made by the KPU.

Furthermore, some of them said that some KPU leaders were connected to the government or political parties supporting the government. According to the Tarbiyah community, these leaders tend to make policies that potentially support the government's political interests, as explained by Rendi:

From the KPU side, they seem to be more in favor of the incumbent camp. So, there are indeed a lot of incumbent supporters in the KPU, because some of them are people chosen by the government.²⁷

This perception seems to be quite strong among the Tarbiyah members. It is important to note that the election process for the KPU leadership does involve the government and political parties in the DPR. This process might be interpreted by the Tarbiyah community as a window of opportunity for the government to intervene in determining the KPU leadership to accommodate its interests.

In the perception of the Tarbiyah community members, fraud in the 2019 Election occurred in many places. However,

²⁷ Rendi.

none of the national and local mass media reported it, as stated by one Tarbiyah member:

There was fraud in the election at that time, but the media did not show it. So, even though in reality the people involved know that fraud was taking place, ordinary people who only see through the media are not too sure because the media has never shown it all.²⁸

These frauds were witnessed and experienced by members or friends of the Tarbiyah community, especially those in the "field", both as witnesses and voters, as explained by Siti:

From my experience in the past, there was indeed fraud in the 2019 Presidential Election. At that time, I had time to go down with my friends to guard the election.²⁹

The forms of fraud include invalid voter turnout, as explained by Mamas:

At that time there were many people who should have been on the voter list but were not there, as well as those who were not actually residents of the area but had their names on the voter list. It happened in many areas.³⁰

The opinion that there were names of voters who are not living around the polling station (TPS) is quite dominant in the allegations of fraud. Another form of cheating is the writing of the number of votes in the Official Report that did not match the real count at the polling station. The writing error is considered to be very detrimental to the votes of the presidential candidate they support.

The death of many election committee members (KPPS) is also perceived as an indication that certain groups were silencing workers to prevent the disclosure of systematic fraud to the public. One member of Tarbiyah

²⁸ Rendi.

²⁹ Siti.

³⁰ Mamas, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {7 September 2021}

said, “there is an oddity with the number of KPSS members who died suddenly.”³¹ The discrepancy referred to is the possibility of a link between election fraud and the deaths of the election officials. However, according to medical reports, the death of the election committee was caused by exhaustion from having to work long hours. The tendency of the Tarbiyah community to still view that the deaths of the committees implied irregularities indicates that there is distrust of the KPU and the government.

The arrest of several KPU leaders both at the central and regional levels due to alleged involvement in corruption strengthened the Tarbiyah community’s perception that the KPU leadership did not have the integrity to carry out the 2019 elections in an honest, fair, and transparent manner. One member emphasized: “Based on the facts, several KPU people have been caught committing corruption”.³² Although the corruption case is not directly related to the implementation of the 2019 Election, in the opinion of the Tarbiyah community, it can be used to measure whether or not they conducted fraud in the 2019 Election.

This political distrust is also shown in the Tarbiyah community’s suspicion of the neutrality of the Constitutional Court (MK). The Constitutional Court is a high state institution that adjudicate issues related to the constitution, laws, and the organization of elections. One Tarbiyah member said:

The Constitutional Court’s attitude towards the existence of a fraud lawsuit in the 2019 election was very disappointing. The people’s hope for Prabowo’s victory is so high that the atmosphere of waiting for a decision became dramatic. It could be that the Constitutional Court is also inhabited by people who conspired in the 2019 election fraud. This is because the Constitutional Court has a big influence in

³¹ Agung}.

³² Agung.

the decision to win the election. So, if there is no plot to cheat in the Constitutional Court then the cheating plan will not be perfect. Because of that, there could be a group of them in the Constitutional Court as well. In my opinion, the Constitutional Court cannot be neutral, just like the KPU. It seems that they used their influence in making policies to pass the Jokowi-Ma’ruf pair.³³

According to the Tarbiyah community’s assessment, instead of opening the trial and discussing the lawsuit from the Prabowo-Sandiaga team, the Constitutional Court immediately appointed Jokowi-Ma’ruf Amin as President-Vice President for the 2019-2024 period. In fact, according to them, the Prabowo team submitted a lot of evidence about fraud in the election, but the Court seemed to turn a blind eye to the evidence of fraud, as stated by Agung: “The Court is not neutral because the fraud lawsuit was not accepted even though there were hundreds to thousands of evidences submitted to the court.”³⁴ The perception that there are several members of the Constitutional Court who are the “entrusted people” of the government also inhabit the minds of members of the Tarbiyah community.

This distrust is expressed by the Tarbiyah members through their respective social media and demonstrations. Rendi and Farahana, for example, narrated:

I am myself quite active on social media WA, IG, and Twitter. Whenever there is evidence of fraud, I will upload it to social media so that people can know too.³⁵

I often use Whatsapp and Instagram to write my personal opinion in reacting to things. But for political cases, I usually repost other people’s writings rather than writing my own.³⁶

³³ Farahana, (Pseudonym) *Interview*, {3 September 2021}.

³⁴ Agung.

³⁵ Rendi.

³⁶ Farahana.

They feel that the use of social media is quite effective in informing and voicing the existence of the fraud. After the KPU announced the results of the 2019 election recapitulation which was won by Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin, they also together with other Prabowo-Sandiaga supporters expressed their rejection of the 2019 election results.

This expression of rejection of the 2019 election results has further exacerbated tensions and polarization in society. Some members of the Tarbiyah community, together with other elements of society, took to the streets to protest the performance of the KPU which they consider to be partial towards the incumbent. This mass demonstration even caused a physical clash with the security forces who were trying to secure the KPU from attacks.

Islamic Populism and Political Distrust

I argue that the political distrust of the Tarbiyah community towards the implementation and results of the 2019 General Election, as explained in the previous section, is an indication of the strengthening of Islamic populism. Similar to the populist movement in general which sees itself as fighting a corrupt government, whose policies are considered detrimental to the people (majority group) and benefit their own group (minority),³⁷ Islamic populism views that the government is not in favor of Muslims, and is even inimical to the political and economic

interests of Muslims in Indonesia.³⁸ This kind of view is common in the Tarbiyah community as can be seen in the explanations of two Tarbiyah members:

Muslims feel angry with the government's alignment with China which negatively impacts Muslims' political and economic interests. This is why demonstrations emerged as a protest against government policies.³⁹

The government's economic policy in the Jokowi era is more inclined towards China, when viewed from the large number of imports of Chinese goods in Indonesia. This economic policy that is more inclined towards China is very detrimental to Muslims. Actually, this does not only impact to Muslims, but also wider Indonesian people. Local products or small traders (UMKM) are experiencing more difficulties in running their businesses because they cannot compete with Chinese products.⁴⁰

The 2019 election became a momentum for the Islamic populist movement. Since the beginning of the campaign, Islamic populist groups have designated Jokowi and his supporting parties, especially the PDIP (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), as the political elites that must be fought against, because they are considered to be against the interests of the people and the aspirations of Muslims. It is important to note that since the early days of the democratic transition after the fall of the New Order regime, PDIP was considered the main competitor of Islamic parties. Even when Megawati Soekarnoputri, the general chairman of the PDIP, became President in 2002-2004, her political policies were considered to have hindered the efforts of Islamic parties to reinsert "the seven words"

³⁷ Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism in Europe and the America: Threat or Corrective for Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonald, 'Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre', in *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, ed. by Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonald (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 1–11; Matthijs Rooduijn and Tjitske Akkerman, 'Flank Attacks: Populism and Left-Right Radicalism in Western Europe', *Party Politics*, 23.3 (2017), 193–204; Dubravka Zarkov, 'Populism, Polarization and Social Justice Activism', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 24.3 (2017), 197–201.

³⁸ Hadiz, 'A New Islamic Populism and the Contradictions of Development'; Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*.

³⁹ Rendi.

⁴⁰ Mamas.

of the Jakarta charter in the state constitution.⁴¹ These seven words would have introduced a distinctly Islamic bent to the constitution. Jokowi's leadership as President during the 2014-2019 period is also considered to be a continuation of Megawati's reign as president. Jokowi is considered to be indifferent to Muslims' interests, as stated by one member of Tarbiyah:

I think it is true that Jokowi's government does not take sides with Muslims. Although the government itself is occupied by Muslims, the main supporters of the government are non-Muslims. The government itself shows its indifference towards Muslims so that Muslims themselves can feel it.⁴²

In some cases, the Jokowi administration has even been seen as repressive towards Muslims, as explained by two Tarbiyah members:

Jokowi's government is repressive and tough, especially towards Muslims. An example of a policy that discredits Muslims is the disbandment of HTI and FPI because they are considered as radical groups.⁴³

Muslims feel for themselves how Jokowi's government is blocking their movement. They didn't move a little when suddenly the government slandered them to do something evil, and even punished them.⁴⁴

Jokowi is considered very different from the attitude of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (period 2004-2009 and 2009-2014) who provided financial assistance, albeit informally, to hardline Islamic organizations and allowed these mass organizations to discredit minority Islamic groups such as the Ahmadiyah and Shiah.

Now, the consolidation of Islamic populism had occurred several years before, namely in the 2014 General Election and the 2016-2017 DKI Jakarta Regional Head Election. In the 2014 election, Prabowo Subianto was promoted by Islamic populist groups to run against Jokowi. Prabowo is considered a figure who can accommodate the interests of Muslims. From the polemic between the two supporters on social media, it can be seen that Jokowi and his political supporters were described as being indifferent towards Muslims, as being secular Muslims, and even as infidels (non-Muslims), who want to marginalize the role of Muslims in politics and the economy.

Meanwhile, the 2016-2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada became the culmination of the Islamic populist movement. Protests centered at Monas (National Monument) involving hundreds of thousands of people were carried out several times (among them on the 4th of November 2016 and the 2nd of December 2016). The action was triggered by a statement of the Governor of DKI Jakarta at the time, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, known as Ahok, that offended the feelings of Muslims. Ahok is a Christian and comes from ethnic Chinese descent. Previously, Ahok was Deputy Governor who was later appointed as Governor to replace Jokowi (elected Governor for the period 2012-2017), who in 2014 was elected as President of the Republic of Indonesia for the 2014-2019 period. In 2016 Ahok ran for the DKI Jakarta Regional Head Election. Although this Islamic populist group had prepared from the start to block Ahok's candidacy, many observers thought that Ahok would win the election because his electability was very high. However, the blasphemy case carried out against Ahok invigorated Islamic populist sentiments leading up to the regional elections. The Muslim community in Jakarta at that time was mobilized to take to the streets, urging the Indonesian National Police to bring

⁴¹ Mietzner, 'Fighting Illiberalism with Illiberalism: Islamist Populism and Democratic Deconsolidation in Indonesia'.

⁴² Farahana.

⁴³ Mamas.

⁴⁴ Farahana.

Ahok to justice. In general, the people of Jakarta at that time were polarized between those who were perceived as “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims”, including non-Muslims. Politics of identity, which uses religious identity as a measure to identify political friends and foes, was used very clearly and massively in the Jakarta Pilkada. Ahok’s defeat in the Pilkada and the use of identity politics are an indication of the strengthening power of Islamic populism.

Although the emergence or strengthening of Islamic populism requires certain situations and conditions, the role of charismatic figures, actors or leaders has a major influence on the consolidation of this movement. There are at least two prerequisites, namely: (1) increasing feelings of frustration among the poor who live in urban areas; and (2) growing concerns among the educated middle class urban community regarding the lack of available jobs and their low income, despite their higher social class and higher levels of education. In relation to Islamic populism in the 2019 elections, these two factors met with the emergence of certain actors including several charismatic leaders such as Prabowo, Habib Rizieq Shihab, and several other conservative-Islamist-oriented clerics.

The narrative that Prabowo often voices in his speeches justifies the concern of the educated Muslim middle class—including the Tarbiyah community—that there is something wrong with government policies. Meanwhile, Habib Rizieq Shihab’s lectures have strengthened their awareness of their identity as a Muslim community. They feel that they have been marginalized and treated badly compared to non-Muslims, despite belonging to the majority religion (89 percent of the population).

During the 2019 elections, issues that emerged in the discourse of Islamic populism included state sovereignty vis-à-vis foreign

debt, especially debt to the Chinese government; the “invasion” of Chinese citizens who work in Indonesia; and the re-emergence of the ideology of communism as a result of debt dependence with China and the large number of Chinese working in Indonesia. This perception of siding with Chinese interests and the alleged covert role of the long defunct Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) is reflected in the explanation of a Tarbiyah member:

Indonesia’s economic condition during Jokowi’s tenure was devastated. The economic policies under Jokowi clearly benefited certain ethnicities, because the economic direction moved from America to China, so China benefited. This partisanship has an impact on Muslims. Muslims are lacking in their role. In general, the general public can judge that there is a motive behind it all. They want to bring down Muslims and have no intention of advancing the Indonesian nation. Jokowi’s government is far from thinking about the interests of Muslims, for example the election of a cabinet, the government chooses cabinets that are against Muslims. There were many issues or cases at that time, one of which was blasphemy, and there were even parties that claimed to control the government. The government behaved like that because within the government there is the PKI and it had been regulated by them.⁴⁵

The supporters of Islamic populism believe that China is a representation of communist power in the world, apart from Russia. On that basis, President Jokowi and PDIP are considered to have made policies that endanger national sovereignty, national ideology, and national identity.

As a result, political distrust of the government has strengthened among supporters of Islamic populism. They not only emphasize the existence of misguided

⁴⁵ Agung.

economic policies, but also suspect a malicious attempt to win the 2019 Presidential Election. The emergence of this distrust is one of the impacts of Islamic populism.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the extent to which political distrust developed among Tarbiyah community members in the 2019 elections, and how and why such a distrust developed in the public. I argue that the political distrust is an expression of Islamic populism.

Islamic populism views the government, as being against the Muslim community, harming their political and economic interests, even though most people in the government are Muslims. Moreover, the movement believes that state elites conspire to undermine and eliminate Muslims' role from politics and the economy. Therefore, the agenda of Islamic populism is to increase political and economic roles of Muslims in their respective countries.

In the Indonesian context, the Jokowi government and its supporting parties, especially the PDIP (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), are considered to have neglected Muslims. These political elites are considered to be hostile to the interests and aspirations of Muslims and therefore must be resisted and defeated in the 2019 elections. The discourse promoted by this movement is that government policies are misguided and have the potential to endanger national sovereignty and the position of the Muslim community (ummah).

Furthermore, the belief that they (supporters of Islamic populism) are fighting against bad governance was expressed during the 2019 elections. This was articulated mainly in their concerns regarding the alleged capitulation of the country's sovereignty vis-à-vis foreign debt, which mostly comes from China. According to them, these debts are too large and can cause the loss of the sovereignty.

The increase migration of the Chinese labor force in Indonesia is also one of the dominating issues. These foreign workers are suspected of being agents that intend to destroy Indonesia from within. Furthermore, proximity to the Chinese government and investors is perceived as an indication of the Indonesian government's desire to foster the ideology of communism in the country.

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