The Impact of the Indonesian Polarization Phenomenon on Javanese Voting Behavior in the 2024 Election

El impacto del fenómeno de polarización de Indonesia en el comportamiento electoral de Java en las elecciones de 2024

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Abstract: This research analyses the factors that affect people's preferences in their political decisions. In Indonesia, the people of Java Island account for 56.10% of the total population and lead to changing the contemporary political structure. Researchers held focus group discussions at several cities across Java Island to identify citizen knowledge of socio-political conditions and trace out characteristics of future leaders. One of the significant findings of this paper is that the ability to understand public interest in political issues is an essential factor for Javanese people to consider when selecting leaders in the future.

Keywords: Political behavior; political participation; public opinion.

Resumen: Esta investigación analiza los factores que inciden en las preferencias de las personas en sus decisiones políticas. En Indonesia, la gente de la isla de Java representa el 56,10% de la población total y está liderando el cambio de la estructura política contemporánea. Los investigadores realizaron discusiones de grupos focales en varias ciudades de la isla de Java para identificar el conocimiento de los ciudadanos sobre las condiciones sociopolíticas y rastrear las características de los futuros líderes. Uno de los principales hallazgos de este documento es que la capacidad de comprender el interés público en cuestiones políticas, siendo un factor importante que los javaneses deben tener en cuenta al seleccionar líderes en el futuro.

Palabras clave: Comportamiento político; participación política; opinión pública.

1. Introduction

Indonesia's 2024 election is nowhere in sight, but the buzzword has already been revolving around newspaper headlines. With President Widodo's tenure coming to an end, the next election is forecasted to be more heated and more competitive than the previous one. Within two years since the last election, Indonesia's political spectacle has served its audience with electoral maneuvers among "prospective" rising stars chasing the top polls.

Euphoria for the 2024 candidate arguably is an accumulation of public disappointment from the last two elections in 2014 & 2019, and its aftermath during political consolidation. A rematch between the 2014 election candidates, Joko Widodo – Prabowo Subianto, brought up personal

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sentiment between the two supporters in the 2019 race. As Mietzner (2017); Triwibowo (2019) reveal, the 2014 election is seen as a race between two contrasting identities in Indonesian politics that create chronic fanaticism among supporters. Both constituencies reflect an old socio-cultural divide between pluralists and Islamists that has long characterized Indonesian society as prone to provocacy and polarization (Fossati, 2019).

With both candidates running for the second time, the 2019 election was filled with nostalgic resentment among supporters that was exacerbated by the post-truth narrative. Populist discourse and identity politics became a "winning template" that offered a profound political gain for both candidates to lure in the already divided supporters (Ardipandanto, 2020). The 2019 election came as one of the most polarized elections in Indonesian history.

Polarization created by both candidates then compounded with dramatic and sentimental race. The defeated presidential candidate, Mr. Prabowo joined Widodo's coalition and left the angry supporters behind. The sudden companionship between Widodo's coalition and Subianto's Gerindra party also disappointed Mr. Joko's supporters. As stated by Firman Noor, Gerindra's decision to throw his support and move into the Jokowi-Maruf coalition reflect the absence of political party integrity (Firmansyah, 2019). Consequently, party members override their ideology and political ethic (Wardhana, 2019).

Amid the uncertainty of inter-party-political ideology, the absence of dominant political party power, as well as the absence of political figures who have political influence and capacity to consolidate the two bases of support for mass populism and the support of the existing political-economic elite, the national voter vote will still be divided and has not narrowed down to the names of the existing potential presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

This condition has implications for the lack of confidence in the political parties in parliament, forming a political coalition to reach the 20 percent presidential threshold, and proposing the upcoming 2024 presidential and vice-presidential candidates. So far, the composition of the nine political parties in the DPR RI has dominated the government camp, with a total of 427 seats or 74.26 percent, of which PDIP (128 seats), Golkar 85 seats, Gerindra, 78 seats, Nasdem (59 seats), PKB (58 seats) and PPP (19 seats). Meanwhile, political parties outside the government have 148 seats or 25.74 percent, consisting of the Democratic Party (54 seats), PKS (50 seats), and PAN (44 seats).

This study will discuss how the polarization that occurs shapes the behavior of voters in determining their choice in the 2024 Presidential Candidate. In addition, this study also seeks to understand the direction of the people's political preferences on the island of Java. Because Java Island is the island with the most population in Indonesia, it has a strategic value in the Legislative Elections and Presidential Elections.

The island of Java has a permanent voter list (DPT) which reaches around 60 percent of the total national population. This means, whoever can control Java, can certainly be a winner in the upcoming elections. This is because the electoral system in Indonesia does not use a district basis or electoral college model, but uses a popular votes system based on the equality of voter vote values, or One Person, One Vote, One Value (OPOVOV). So that towards the upcoming 2024 presidential election, the island of Java will still be the epicenter and the main battleground for the presidential candidates. Victory on the island of Java will determine success in the national presidential election.

Data on permanent voters on the island of Java amounted to 110,686,810 out of a total of 192,866,254 voters. This means that 57.29 percent of the voters are on the island of Java. This number is spread across six provinces with details of Jakarta's Permanent Voter List 7,761,598 people, West Java's Permanent Voter List 33,270,845 people, or the province with the highest Permanent Voter List in Indonesia, followed by Central Java's Permanent Voter List with 27,896,902 people, Special

Region of Yogyakarta's Permanent Voter List 2,731,874 people, East Java's Permanent Voter List 30,912,994 people, and Banten's Permanent Voter List 8,112,477 people. Therefore, it is essential and relevant for the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential candidates to understand the characteristics and political orientation of the Javanese people, as the key to winning the national political battle in the future.

1.1. Literature review

Based on the explanation above, this section outlines the theoretical context of this paper concerning current state of Indonesia political condition particularly at voting behavior amid the thick polarization and catch sight of the triggers of voting behavior on Javanese people as a largest community in Indonesia. Moreover, this paper forecasting the future leader criteria needs by Javanese people.

The first concept is about polarization. In understanding the dynamic of polarization in Indonesia, we quote the Jennifer Mccoy and Murat Somer understanding that the emergence of polarization has tendency with both democratic strengthening and democratic erosion (McCoy & Somer, 2018). Polarization can help to strengthen political parties and institutionalize party systems because it enables them to mobilize voters around identifiable differences. Offering voters clear choices and serving as heuristic cues can be helpful to democracy. Polarization is also potentially transformative in its capacity to address an imbalance in the popular vs. oligarchic versions of democracy (Slater & Wong, 2013; Stavrakakis, 2018). Democratic reform to enhance inclusion can be the goal of polarizing challengers to represent previously underrepresented groups. Polarization can thus serve democratization when used by political actors equipped with an inclusive agenda to contain polarization before it turns pernicious.

However, polarizing politics always carries the risk of taking on a life of its own, eviscerating cross-cutting ties and nonpartisan channels for compromise, and becoming pernicious. Polarizing challengers often provoke an elite backlash and counter-mobilization to stymie their transformative attempts, rather than recognizing their reformist and inclusionary potential in building a constructively agonistic and pluralist democracy (Stavrakakis 2018). This elite backlash, in turn, can motivate the polarizing challengers to double down and strive to protect themselves by changing the rules and creating hegemonic power. Thus, whether polarization serves a constructive or destructive purpose for democracy depends on the behavior of both incumbents and oppositions, new political actors and traditionally dominant groups.

McCoy et al. (2018) then calculated the outcomes of democracy ridden by polarization and found four clauses: first, government gridlock and governmental control that careens between the two camps. Second, democratic erosion or backsliding under the new elites who must come to power, as they gradually concentrate power and exclude prior dominant groups or dissenters. Third, democratic decline or even collapse as old power groups reassert control. Fourth, a more positive outcome of democratization.

The second concept is about voting behavior. Generally, political scientists state that individual voting behavior in election activities is referred to as the concept of voter behavior. According to Towns (2010), voting behavior is broadly defined as the act of participating in decision-making activities that they believe are the most suitable or preferred to be chosen. Furthermore, Bratton et al. (2012) stated that current policies and the implementation of previous election commitments become a motivation for people to vote. Surbakti (2010), on the other hand, defines voting behavior as a societal act that is consciously carried out to influence the public's decisions. The decision identified several cognitive functions, including social imagery, emotional feelings, candidate personalities, current events, personal events, and epidemic issues (Efriza, 2012).

The current diversity of perspectives in electoral research is due, in large part, to the absence of a dominant theory of (political) behavior or a dominant approach to its analysis in political science (Satriadi, 2021). Existing approaches differ in terms of underlying theories of human behavior, with the primary sources of such theories being economics, psychology, and sociology. It shows that vote decisions do not occur independently, yet are based on people's experiences. Three models or schools of thought are commonly used for interpreting voting behavior: the sociological model, the psychological model, and the rational choice model (Bartels, 2012). This paper will present a comprehensive overview of voters' behavior through a psychological model. It is aligned with current condition that emphasize parties and partisanship as the main project of establishing democracy (Van Biezen & Saward, 2008; Herman, 2017).

Psychological model based on the idea that a person's election decisions are influenced by social communities and cognitive motives (Campbell et al., 2010). Personal perceptions and judgments of candidates, personal perceptions and assessments of issues raised, and party identification or partisanship are some of the internal factors that shaped voter choices within this framework. Furthermore, there are three main "objects that voters see, evaluate, and respond to when making decisions: political parties, political issues, and political candidates (Antwi, 2018).

Partisanship or Party Identification

Party identification is defined as a psychological attachment towards the party that is permanent and gets through with their choices in every election. Although, people with these concerns would change their preferences only if there is a major personal change or extraordinary political situation (Budiarjo, 2008). In agreement, Greene (1999) defines party identification as the psychological relationship between individuals and the parties they support. Therefore, a party is organized by members with the same values and ideals.

Partisanship is not viewed as a variable that tells us directly and unambiguously which vote option an elector has. According to Campbell et al. (2010), partisanship is a perceptual filter through which voters appreciate what is favorable to their party's orientation while ignoring or devaluing what is unfavorable.

Haryanto (2014) researched the impact of political party identification on voter behavior. The study, titled The Awakening of Party ID: An Analysis of Voter Behavior in Indonesian Local Politics, attempts to understand voter behavior through a psychological lens. His study revealed that voters no longer vote based on sociological factors but are influenced by psychological factors, such as voters tending to identify with the party and then vote for candidates nominated by parties considered close to them.

Today's partisans frequently abandon inclusiveness in favor of strategies that disenfranchise opposition voters. Instead of providing a comprehensive account of the public good, they settle for activating their base. Instead of forming a legislative coalition through compromise, they obstruct and impede "on principle," as if they prefer symbolic stands to govern.

Candidate Identification

Candidate identification is similar to party identification, but the candidate's personality influences the support. According to Bone and Ranney (1981), identifying a candidate means selecting a leader candidate based on instrumental and symbolic qualities. The voter's belief in the candidate's personal ability to bring good to society to be led is an instrumental quality. Meanwhile, symbolic quality refers to a candidate's personality that a leader should have. According to Nursal (2004), the quality of figures often determines choice decisions rather than issues because people are more receptive to facts about humans than facts about issues.

The voters' assessment of the candidate's image can also be used to identify candidates. According to De Vries (2008), the image of a candidate can be seen from five perspectives: sympathy or the ability to understand the environment emotionally, the trustworthiness of candidates, leadership capacity or leadership qualities of candidates, physical attractiveness, or the candidate's physical condition and competitiveness.

Issue Identification

Identifying an issue is that the more voters believe specific issues are necessary, the more likely they will continue to participate in a more important election. In contrast, if a party's or candidate's solution is more appealing to the voter, he will be more likely to vote for that party. Roth also explains that specific issues can influence voter behavior if they meet three criteria: (1) the issue can be caught by voters; (2) the issue is considered necessary by voters; and (3) voters can classify their position on the issue as positive or negative.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into Javanese voters' preferences towards the 2024 presidential candidates. For this research, the qualitative method appears to be the most appropriate tool for gaining a broad range of perspectives among Javanese voters regarding their preferences about 2024 presidential candidates. The qualitative method allows researchers to generate a rich descriptive knowledge towards particular phenomena in the social sphere (Danemark et al., 2002). It also benefits researchers to listen, probe, respond and eventually explore a deeper understanding of how respondents give meaning to certain phenomena (Bryman, 2004).

Focus Group Discussion is chosen from the qualitative method. It enables researchers to gain a range of perspective and insights from participants in a single sitting (Fern, 1982), thus making research progress more efficient than other qualitative methods in covering the issue discussed. Furthermore, it also allows group interaction and discussion that prompts a variety of perspectives that would uncover various nuances from the issue discussed (Morgan, 1997). With a research topic that discussed Javanese voters' range of preferences on presidential candidates, Focus Group Discussion also helps researchers define patterns of meaning further as it can 'produce "collective narrative" on the research issue that goes beyond individual perspective' (Hennink, 2014).

Regarding the research objective, purposive sampling appears to be the most suitable approach to explore the unknown preferences of Javanese voters. Purposive sampling provides space for researchers to gain informative and sensitizing data set through identifying and selecting groups of individuals in the field (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Drawing from this line of thought, the sample groups were established from different socio-economic backgrounds: religious leader, academician, entrepreneur, worker, farmer, fisherman, homemakers, social media influencer, Generation Z and college students.

Focus Group Discussion, particularly in this research that involves certain political perspectives may raise several ethical issues, particularly for the safety of respondents involved in the study (Warren, 2002). Therefore, every group discussion is conducted only after all participants consent to be recorded, with participants' names and other personal identities remaining confidential. All participants are also informed about the purpose of the research, the risk and benefit from participating in this research, and the participant's rights during the discussion.

All of the discussions were fully transcribed by researchers. Considering the thick description from the transcribed data and the nature of the research, thematic analysis was chosen to analyze the data as it allows research to find emerging patterns from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was analyzed through thematic analysis, using grounded theory in the coding process. The manual coding was conducted by examining one passage to another; reading the data to create the main

category; and re-reading and re-checking the data whether to be included in the existing category or create another category.

3. Result and Discussion

Polarization in Indonesian politics is not a new phenomenon. Political polarization in the state's early days was centered on the relationship between religion and the state. Santri, abangan, and priyayi are the public and the elite (Geertz, 1960). However, during the New Order era, the ideological debate over the relationship between religion and the state faded away. By reforming the party system (including the simplification of political parties and the prohibition of branching parties below the district level), mandatory indoctrination of Pancasila (the five basic principles of the Indonesian state), and enacting a law establishing Pancasila as the sole ideology of the state, the Suharto regime carried out de-ideological and floating mass politics (Afrimadona, 2021).

Polarization in Indonesia then reached a new peak in the 2019 presidential election, when Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto faced off again. Prabowo's campaign paints Jokowi as an enemy of the Ummah (Muslim community) and a threat to Muslims and Islamic religious organizations. This time, however, Jokowi and his polarization went on the offensive. They used the same narrative about the opposing camp, claiming that Prabowo's victory would lead to an Islamic caliphate and would jeopardize the essence of Indonesia's pluralist national identity. NU was an essential ally for Jokowi in this election, and its leaders assisted in spreading anti-Prabowo and anti-Islam messages through their network of mosques and Islamic boarding schools (Atika, 2019).

Derived from thematic analysis in focus group discussion, there is a similar pattern of appraisal for both Prabowo and Jokowi from respondents that affects their preferences for the 2024 presidential candidates. Javanese voters relied heavily on their perception of Jokowi's current performance and persona in drawing their preferences for the next president. According to the respondents in almost all parts of Java, Jokowi's performance in his second term has been declining. The president's persona is perceived to be rather more distant than during his previous tenure. Government's lack of success in handling the pandemic and economy, repressive acts towards opposition and civil rights, legalization of several controversial laws including Omnibus Law and Corruption Eradication Commission Law have exacerbated public trust towards President Widodo. Furthermore, Jokowi's son and son in law became the head of local government also creates a negative presumption that Jokowi is trying to build up a political dynasty within his presidency. Although Javanese voters remain faithful to Jokowi's intention and modest persona, people started to question his assertiveness to withstand political power play in the palace circle.

From that appraisal, Javanese voters now wish for a rather bolder persona to lead the nation in the future. Jokowi's ambiguity between his modest appearances and his unpopular policy left voters with regrets and sought an assertive leader with less gimmick and lip service; who can listen to people's aspirations and possess adequate intelligence to handle the country's problems.

"The future president should be assertive. He should be able to give instruction and coordinate well with his subordinate. We are tired of poor policies that change overnight. A leader should have firm principles and consistency for his speech and his action" (Gen Z)

On the other hand, although Javanese voters show a lack of sympathy for President Widodo's performance, they still favor his "merakyat" traits -- a down-to-earth, modest persona. Voters still believe in the concept that modest appearance is the logical consequence from a modest personality, away from greedy and elitist traits that would reflect on a leader's policy and decision. However, the next president prefers to have a "merakyat" leader who can be seen from his appearance and policy and actions.

"The next leader should have both integrity and down-to-earth traits. On the one hand, it is not easy to think that leaders with hermes bags while people use plastic bags have a good intention to help people. But on the other hand, a leader who wears modest stuff should also prove that his appearance reflects his work. If he does not corrupt, then he should not protect anyone in his circle who is corrupt" (Religious leader).

Javanese voters now define "modest" persona not only from appearances and social media gimmick, but also one who proves to be accessible, listen to people's aspiration and translate it to policies and action that affects people's life.

As for Jokowi's ex-contender, Minister Prabowo, who still holds top positions in several polls also perceived negatively among Javanese voters. Resistance towards Prabowo emerges in almost all parts of Java, including West Java and Banten known as Prabowo's strongest base during the 2014 and 2019 elections. This resistance comes from several reasons: First, Prabowo's consistency to run in at least three presidential elections (2009, 2014, 2019) without winning any of them has made people tired of an old figure. Javanese voters now longing for a new personality that offers new hope for the nation. Second, Prabowo's approach towards identity politics in the 2019 election also prompts resistance among Javanese voters. Prabowo's campaign that involves religious bias is perceived as one of the most important factors for political polarization in Indonesia. Third, Prabowo's supporters' disappointment towards his decision to move to Jokowi's side has made his loyal supporters feel left behind. Javanese voters see Prabowo as a pragmatic politician who only cares for himself, as he is now also serving Jokowi's government and even allegedly involved in a corruption case. For that instance, many Javanese voters who once were Prabowo supporters fearlessly reveal that they no longer back the general.

"His political move is hurting us. He was the leader of our aspirations, the leader of the opposition. But now, he takes sides with the government. I've been his biggest supporter in 2014 and 2019, but not for now. He is done for me." (Local farmer).

"It's so tiring to see him in three consecutive elections. His first and second loss should be enough to teach him that he is not eligible for the seat if he wants to do it again. But for me, it's a big no. We have so many other choices" (College student).

From this perspective, we have seen that both central figures from the 2019 election have declining support in almost all parts of Java, the center of Indonesia's electoral vote. Javanese voters now prefer a new and fresh candidate to heal their disappointment to both 2019 candidates.

Desires among Javanese voters to look for fresh candidates from desperation and disappointment towards Prabowo and Jokowi reflect how Indonesian voters' behavior relies heavily on candidate identification. With the weakening of party identification and the obscurity of strong ideology among political parties in Indonesia's modern democracy, personality and policy from political candidates take a pivotal role in determining Javanese voters behavior. With polarization coming into place, and the aftermath of the 2019 election turned out to be unwanted consolidation, leaders' personality preferences among Javanese voters have also shifted.

On the other hand, Javanese voters now redefine the notion of "modest" in a leader's persona not only from appearances and gimmicks but also from impactful policy and action. The decline of Jokowi's performance in handling several critical issues and with Prabowo also on board in the cabinet make Javanese voters now put more weight in issue identification in defining their political judgment. Their negative perception towards Prabowo as a political candidate who exploits political identity also shed light on how Javanese voters' behavior is not based on blind candidate identification. After the 2019 polarized election, Indonesian political dynamics have somehow shifted Javanese voters' political preferences into a more substantive candidate identification.

4. Conclusions

The polarization in Indonesia's last two general elections harmed democracy and contributed to public dissatisfaction with the system. This phenomenon has stoked public fears of further polarization in the future and has shattered Indonesian society's unity. Nowadays, many Indonesians avoid political debate and limit their immediate surroundings. As a result, they polarized their thinking and failed to see the big picture. In this situation, the emergence of a new political figure as an alternative is required to raise people's awareness of politics and democracy in Indonesia, particularly among the Javanese.

In the future, the Javanese people's perceptions of the national leadership model in 2024 will be shaped by the public's assessment of President Jokowi's personality image and the quality of his performance, particularly as the second period begins. Currently, Javanese society defines candidate leaders as populist, approachable, having good integrity and capability, and producing policies or programs that respond to public complaints. It can also be interpreted that the Javanese political community wants the "antithesis" of the current leader in the future.

The decline in the prestige of President Joko Widodo and his old rival Prabowo Subianto will create opportunities for the formation of a coalition with a new-faced composition of presidential and vice-presidential candidates to entice voters in the upcoming 2024 presidential election. The recent polarization has caused society to divide and demand a unifying figure who is not in the same political camp as the divided political camps. Furthermore, the loss of public trust in Indonesia's two political solid figures has prompted the Javanese to seek a new figure as the presidential candidate in the 2024 Presidential Election.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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