Research article

Young Citizens' Political Participation and Digital Society in Challenging Democracies: A Case Study from Indonesia's Movements

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Abstract.

This article explores the relationship between youth's political participation and digital media, and the development of their political identity by analyzing young people's engagements in some of the biggest political protests in Indonesia – #ReformasiDikorupsi and #TolakOmnibusLaw – between 2019 and 2020. With this study, the authors hope to contribute to the theory of youth participation and digital media for strengthening democracy. The authors collected quantitative data through data mining from Twitter and analyzed them using social network analysis. They also obtained qualitative data through interviews with certain Twitter account holders. While government, technologies, and forms of participation will change over time, this study aimed at identifying the fundamental features and implications of youthful politics in the context of increasingly mediated, networked, and participatory social life in countries where democracy has been challenged by illiberal practices of democracy such as Indonesia.

Keywords: youth, political participation, digital society, identity politics

1. Introduction

This project aims at exploring the relationship between youth political participation, digital media and the development of youth political identity by analyzing young people's experiences of participation in Indonesia, especially during the mass protest #ReformasiDikorupsi in 2019 and #TolakOmnibusLaw in 2020. Recent studies indicated that Indonesia's democracy has experienced ups and downs to a situation which some scholars call illiberal democracy (Hadiz, 2017; Diprose, McRae, Hadiz, 2019). This condition is characterized by the blockings of citizens from knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties even though elections took place. Closed processes of legislation against various laws that are considered detrimental to the common society have triggered massive demonstrations,

especially attended by workers, university students, high school students, and various elements of youth in general. The protests came in different waves. The first wave was in late 2019 when government and parliament revised the criminal code and passed law that reduces the independence of the country's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), an institution that has exposed many high-profile corruption cases. The second and much bigger wave was in October 2020, opposing the legislation on Omnibus Law on Jobs Creation.

In these events, the role of young citizens is not only as a participant but also as a core element that mobilizes this protest movement to become so large. We refer to young people as a diverse and heterogeneous societal group with a variety of complex identities – psycho-social, politico-economic and educational. Indeed, young people not a monolithic group whose members all feel the same, want the same things, or have convergent interests. In this study, we focus on young people aged 15 to 30 years old. The UN Secretariat uses the terms youth and young people interchangeable to mean age 15-24 with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions. For Indonesian context, legally the category of young people according to the 2009 Law of Youth defines 'youth' (pemuda) as 'Indonesian citizens who are enter an important period of growth and development and are aged between 16 and 30 years'. This includes

26.6 per cent of the population, or 62.3 million 'youth', according to the 2010 census, and their numbers have most likely increased since (Sastramidjaja, 2017).

Within the two movements discussed in this study, the main part of the young people's strategy is to take advantage of digital media platforms. While government, technologies and forms of participation will change over time, this study seeks to identify fundamental features and implications of youthful politics in the context of increasingly mediated, networked and participatory social life in countries where democracy have been challenged with illiberal practices of democracy. Some of the key questions we would like to ask are: What constitutes youth participation in a digital society? How are young people's political identities shaped by policies for youth participation? What are the implications of a shift in understandings and practices of participation for countries with varied levels of democracy such as Indonesia?

2. Methods

This research used quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially. We use the quantitative aspect to collect and identify pattern of the conversation in *Twitter*. We use mining

data method to collect data starting from October 2018 when the #ReformasiDikorupsi started, until end of November 2019 after the #TolakOmnibusLaw movement ended. Data mining is the process of searching large sets of data to look out for patterns and trends that can't be found using simple analysis techniques. It makes use of complex mathematical algorithms to study data and then evaluate the possibility of events happening in the future based on the findings. We cover the two movements to see their link and possible continuation. The data mining method involve these processes: (1) associating and identifying certain hashtags and accounts which involved in conversations related to the two events studied in this research; (2) clustering objects that share some similarities; (3) classifying items or variables in a data set into predefined groups. In order to analyze patterns resulted from the data, we use Social Network Analysis (SNA) method. SNA is the process of investigating social structures through the use of networks and graph theory. It characterizes networked structures in terms of nodes (individual actors, people, or things within the network) and the ties, edges, or links (relationships or interactions) that connect them.

Once we see the patterns, we apply qualitative data collection through interviewing accounts or informants involved in the movements. We seek to gather information in regards to motivation, actions, and other related information regarding informants' experience and perception especially for the aspect of identity.

3. Literature Review

Yatun Sastramidjaja (2020) studied the protest of #ReformasiDikorupsi and claim it as the opening gate of digital-based activism in Indonesia. The internet, especially social media, has broken down communication barriers so that the dissemination of information becomes so fast and inclusive. In Indonesia, there have been increased involvement of millennials and generation Z in digital activism that occurs in Indonesia because these two generations grew up with technological advances. The corrupted reform movement has succeeded in giving birth to a new 'generation' in activism in Indonesia, so that it can be said that conventional activism has succeeded in shifting into digital activism that brings new hope for democracy in Indonesia.

Another article by Yatun Sastramidjaja and Pradipa P. Rasidi (2021) discusses conflicts in the narrative conflict regarding the Omnibus Law or the Job Creation Act (#TolakOm-nibuLaw) , both in direct action and virtual action, between mainstream media and social media, and between physical repression and control over cyber space. Resistance to the Omnibus Law continues to roll in the public sphere, both with direct action against

it and with the trending hashtag #TolakOmnibusLaw on social media. The collective action against Omnibus Law succeeded in spreading the issue and several hashtags so that the discourse on Omnibus Law did not stop at social media netizens. Several mainstream media also reported the rejection of the Omnibus Law by using Twitter trending as an indicator of public opinion against the Omnibus Law. The swift rejection of the Omnibus Law in the community has made the government take counter action by trending several hashtags, one of which is #RUUCiptakerLindungiPekerja through buzzers and several influencers. Buzzers are not only buzzers on social media, they also persecute netizens who are vocal about the Omnibus Law issue. This causes the fear of netizens to voice their opinions on social media.

Furthermore, to understand political participation in social media, Caroline Paskarina (2020) explores digital activism and democracy in Indonesia in her article entitled Digital Activism and Democracy in Indonesia: Learning from the Foregoing Research Issues (2014-2020) in the Indonesian Journal of Political Research. (IJPR). This study found that there are six main points of discussion of digital activism practices commonly carried out in Indonesia, namely: 1. Strategies to mobilize support or to form social or political movements; 2. Public space to discuss marginalized issues; 3. Provide criticism and control of the government; 4. 'Hoaxtivism' and counter-hoaxtivism; 5. Hacktivism; 6. The process of building identity. According to the author, the six practices of digital activism are a reflection of how the use of technology shapes the variety of activism. This explains that advances in media technology are shaped by social, political, and economic needs and practices that drive digital activism.

4. Results

At this stage, the quantitative method has resulted to sets of interesting data and information in regards to dominant narratives used by the youth groups involved in both movements.

We divide the period of our data readings into : (1) the event of Reformasi, and (2) the event of Tolak Omnibus Law movements.

Our data reading on the Reformasi Dikorupsi movement found four most talked hashtags: #ReformasiDikorupsi (18.460 lines), #TolakRKUHP (53.922lines), #RKUHPNgawur (1.099 lines), and #MahasiswaBergerak (53.922 lines).

Hashtag #ReformasiDikorupsi shows that "Mahasiswa' (university students) dominated the conversation. This shows that most active elements of the youth groups involved in the movement were mainly performed by the students.

Similar pattern found with the hasthtag #TolakRKUHP, as shown below:

The movement more specifically mobilize the involvement of students with the hashtag #MahasiswaBergerak. The hashtag was first mentioned by the account rivaldi_soerga, on the 6th of September 2019 at 03:49:07 West Indonesia Time (WIB), involving 53.922 lines of conversations. The picture below shows these conversations in *Twitter*:

Within this period, the roles of students were very dominant, and the conversations involved were mainly related to the revision of Indonesian Criminal Law (KUHP) that have significant implications to the lives of the young people, including privacy, safety, and freedom of expression . The movement also resonate with the protest of revision of the Anti Corruption Law, and from the readings we can also see concerns raised on this issue in the movement. What links these two concerns are the student's assessment of declining or setbacks of Indonesian reform (reformasi) and democracy in general. The targets of the critics were clearly addressed to government, here represented by Jokowi as president and DPR as parliament, and state apparatus involved in legal reform such as police.

Our readings on the Tolak Omnibus Law shows some unique differences with the Reformasi Dikorupsi movement. Four most used hashtags in this movement are: #tolakomnibuslaw (425.461 lines), #GagalkanOmnibusLaw (120.537 lines), #JegalOmnibusLaw (21.516 lines), and #JegalSampaiGagal (36.848 lines).

In this movement, student was not dominating the conversation, as much more elements of society were involved, including—and mostly–labor groups.

The most used hastag, #TolakOmnibusLaw, was first mentioned on the 6th of October 2020 at midnight by the account 02JHYUN. The words student and mahasiswa were not much mentioned compare to other words such as liar (pembohong), traitor (penghianat), or omnibus.

The readings for #GagalkanOmnibusLaw was mentioned in 120,537 lines of conversation, initially mentioned on the 6th of October 2020 at 06:59:59 by 1365244ily. Similar to #tolakomnibuslaw, the lines were dominate with words such as liar, traitor, and omnibus.
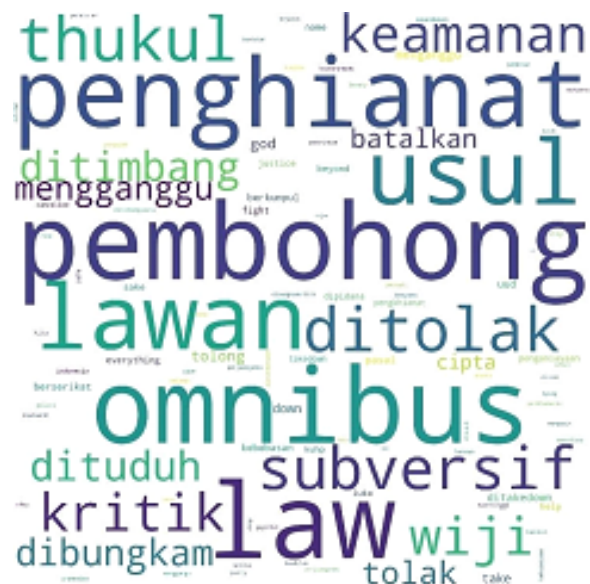
We found similar patter with #jegalomnibuslaw. The hashtag firstly mentioned also on the 6th of October 2020 at 21:59:57 by ddongyoungs.

Two days after the first mentioning of #jegalomnibuslaw, another hashtag #jegal-sampaigagal was first mentioned at 00:00:16 by xolovesuci. Conversations involving this hashtag were dominated by words 'fight' (lawan), a word often quoted from a poem by Widji Thukul, a pro-democracy activist who's enforcedly disappeared in 1997 for his 'subversive' and critical poems. The words Widji, Thukul, subversive, were mentioned many times and were also dominating conversations during the Tolak Omnibus Law movement.

What's interesting in these conversations is that these main hashtags are first mentioned by accounts that adopt KPop or Korean popular culture. KPopers is a community of young people, generally followed by Generation Z who were born between 1997 and the 2000s, and are the biggest fans of Korean popular products including movies and songs. The accounts used in the movements were not only use the names of Korean artists or popular Korean terms, but can also be seen in their stories and main pages that generally discuss various things related to KPop. In other words, we see the intense involvement of KPopers in this movement. This is also the finding of research conducted by Drone Emprit (Ismail Fahmi, 2020).

5. Conclusion

At the time of writing this paper, we have not yet conducted SNA, so we have not conducted a comprehensive enough analysis of the role of youth in these two movements. However, from searching using data mining techniques, some things that we can confirm are that youth groups, especially students and the millennial generation of KPopers are actively involved in participating in the movement as well as mobilizing by initiating hashtags and expanding conversations on twitter. The development of a digital society allows for mutual connection and expansion of the space for freedom of expression as well as a form of active participation in political developments at the national level. Thus, this youth group makes a valuable contribution to monitoring the development of democracy in Indonesia.

Acknowledgments

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