

## Conference Paper

# The 2024 Presidential Election: Contestation of Religious Ideology in Electoral Politics

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**Abstract.**

This descriptive research examines the impact of using religious ideology in electoral politics on interfaith harmony and tolerance in Indonesia, focusing on the 2024 presidential election. This research aims to investigate how political candidates use social media to mobilize religious ideology and its effect on public opinion and electoral outcomes. Secondary data were collected through a comprehensive literature review, analyzing recent elections, content analysis of social media posts, patterns in social media engagement, the effectiveness of existing interfaith dialogue initiatives, and the role of misinformation, hate speech, and hoaxes related to religious ideology in electoral politics. The study found that the use of religious ideology in electoral politics has the potential to negatively impact harmony and tolerance among religious communities in Indonesia. Social media plays a crucial role in the mobilization of religious ideology by political candidates. The combination of religious ideology and social media usage may exacerbate existing interfaith tensions and further polarize the political landscape in Indonesia. The research concludes by recommending that citizens need to have a moderate understanding of religion, understand digital literacy, and always be wise in using social media with a filtering culture before sharing.

**Keywords:** electoral politics, Indonesia, interfaith harmony, religious ideology, social media

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a plural/diverse society. The diversity of the Indonesian nation is reflected in the motto Bhineka Tunggal Ika, "different but still one" (Aghababian, 2015). The motto shows that this nation is ethnically and culturally diverse in customs and religion (Fitriyah et al., 2022). A pluralistic society is a treasure for this nation and has great potential for working together, complementing one another to build the nation and state together (Benedict, 1962); therefore, the differences must be an advantage and

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a strength for the Indonesian people from Sabang to Merauke. However, the existing differences often lead to conflicts that disrupt harmony in people's lives (Langerak, 1994).

Religious diversity in Indonesia is often cited as a source of strength and potential conflict (Rosyada, 2017; Sintha Wahjusaputri, 2015). Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population but has significant Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian communities, among others (United States Department of State, 2021). While the Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, religious discrimination and conflict have occurred in the country's history (United States Department of State, 2021).

One particularly contentious issue has been the use of religion in political campaigns (Elving, 2022; Glass, 2019; McVeigh & Sikkink, 2001; Pew Research Center & Green, 2020). This has been reflected in the rising role of religion in certain political parties, such as the Republican Party (Elving, 2022), and has led to debates over whether states should financially support religion (Library of Congress Exhibition, n.d.). Additionally, religious beliefs have been at the center of contention on policy issues and political matters (McVeigh & Sikkink, 2001), with differences among religious groups occurring especially on evolution and energy issues (Glass, 2019).

Recently, there have been concerns that political candidates have sought to use religion to mobilise voters and win elections. This has led to fears of increased sectarianism and tensions between religious communities. For example, during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, which saw a Christian candidate pitted against a Muslim opponent, there were violent protests and allegations of blasphemy against the Christian candidate. To address these concerns, many Indonesian leaders have emphasised the importance of promoting tolerance and understanding between religious communities.

Recently, in Indonesia, using religious ideology for contestation in general elections has been chiefly carried out through social media as a new way of campaigning in digital public spaces; for example, during the 2017 DKI Jakarta regional head election, social media was a tool for mobilising mass demonstrations from various areas outside Jakarta to outside Java.

At that time, the demonstration protested Basuki Tjahja Purnama, who was called Ahok, when he was the governor of Jakarta, regarding his statement about sura al-Maidah verse 51 (Sari, 2016). In this case, religious ideology contestation was forceful. Moreover, it appears on the surface that "I am Muslim, I choose a Muslim leader," which influences public opinion, becomes a narrative discussed in various discussions, voiced in religious activities, and delivered every Friday sermon.

Furthermore, the 2019 Presidential Election was also marked by the contestation of religious ideology in absolute terms and digital public spaces. Issues of religious identity

mainly were playing to influence public opinion and boost the electability of candidate pairs rather than issues of ethnicity.

In the 2019 presidential election, Joko Widodo, a defence candidate running for president again, was widely rumoured to be an anti-Islam figure, a foreign stooge, and was accused of being a PKI. On the other hand, Prabowo Subianto is considered the president's choice of clergy and is pro-Islam. Issues were being narrative in such a way that each pair of candidates was a move to the contestation of religious ideology and contain identity politics. Using a particular identity, namely religion, for the interests of certain groups, and winning the majority vote, ignores and discriminates against minority groups.

From the case above, Indonesia is not a religious state. However, religious aspects are crucial for Indonesian people and as a form of practising the first precepts in Pancasila. Then, political cases in the name of religious ideology will set aside human values, harm democracy, and hurt Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika so that they can divide the nation and weaken unity and integrity. Therefore this research is urgent, considering that cases of religious ideology contestation in electoral politics often occur in Indonesia. Based on the existing data, this article describes the possibility of religious ideology contestation in social media during the 2024 Presidential Election. This research is expected as a reference to open insights into religious dangers and ideological contestation and can become a foothold in academic studies or further research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent study on the presidential election has found that there is a contestation of religious ideology in electoral politics (Kleinfeld, 2021; Manza & Brooks, 1997; Martínez & Smith, 2020; Smith & Boas, 2020; Widian et al., 2022). This is evidenced by the changing voting behavior of denominationally liberal Protestants, whose views on social issues have become increasingly liberal (Manza & Brooks, 1997). Catholics and conservative Protestants have remained largely stable in their political alignments relative to the electorate-wide mean over the past nine presidential elections (Manza & Brooks, 1997).

The 2016 presidential exit polling revealed little change in the political alignments of U.S. religious groups (Martínez & Smith, 2020), while the 2014 presidential election displayed the beginning of a rising trend of Islamic narratives within the political context in Indonesia (Smith & Boas, 2020). Populist leaders have used social identity and a

primordial approach to appeal to potential voters, often relying on religious notions as a populist strategy (Smith & Boas, 2020).

In addition, four factors have been identified as increasing the risk of election-related violence globally: a highly competitive election that could shift power dynamics; weak state capacity; high levels of inequality; and an increase in conspiracy theories linked to religion (Widian et al., 2022). These factors are particularly relevant in Sub-Saharan Africa, where violence has been used as a tool for political mobilization and manipulation during elections (Widian et al., 2022).

A research by Tepe (2012) and Scarrow et al., (2002) of religious ideology in electoral politics reveals that the choice of an electoral system in a culturally plural society can affect the potential for accommodation building between potentially hostile religious or linguistic groups. This is because the internal distribution of power within political parties can change over time, leading to different modes of moderation with different democratic outcomes (Tepe, 2012). For example, some modes of moderation bolster procedural democracy while others thwart the expansion of liberal democracy (Tepe, 2012).

The study by Sarkissian (2012) also found that restrictions on the religious practices of religious minorities can have a differential impact on political activity and community engagement. Additionally, it was observed that Islamic civil organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama have played a role in contesting Islamic religious ideas in Indonesian politics and society throughout the 20th century (Barton et al., 2021). Furthermore, it was noted that Islamic parties have enjoyed limited sustained political success due to authoritarianism and democracy, as well as other factors such as voting patterns depending more upon region than ethnicity (Barton et al., 2021; Reilly & Reynolds, 2000).

Religion has a significant impact in Indonesia, as evidenced by the first principle of Pancasila, which is Pancasila as the basis of the state, which states that Indonesia must believe in one God. The argument is supported by data showing that 238.09 million individuals, or 86.93% of Indonesia's population, will be Muslims by the end of 2021. As a result, Muslims constitute the vast majority of the country's people. Christians account for 20.45 million (7.47%) of Indonesia's population, while Catholics account for 8.43 million (3.08%), and Hindus account for 4.67 million (1.71%). The nation also has 2.03 million or 0.74 million Buddhists, 73.63 thousand (0.03%) Confucians, and 126.51 thousand (0.05%) people who follow the belief flow (Kusnandar, 2022).

A democratic state is how much the state involves the community in planning and implementing elections. This is because the citizens' political participation (voters) is

important in a democratic state. Concerning democracy, political participation affects the legitimacy of the community towards running a government. Elections can also be interpreted as the community's political participation in elections, which can be seen as an evaluation and control of the community towards the leader or government (Liando, 2016). The centrality of elections as the most democratic way to organise the circulation of leadership ultimately distinguishes elections from other means. Elections today aim to uphold the rights of political and civil society, which were less adequately accommodated during the previous three decades (Sardini, 2011).

The 2024 Presidential Election is expected to be one of the most hotly contested political events in Indonesia's recent history. As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, religious ideology has long been a key factor in electoral politics in Indonesia. In recent years, there have been growing concerns that political candidates have used religion to mobilise voters and win elections. This literature review examines the contestation of religious ideology in electoral politics in Indonesia, particularly in the 2024 Presidential Election.

Many observers have criticised the use of religion in electoral politics, claiming that it can lead to the marginalisation of minority groups and the politicisation of religious issues. Critics also argue that using religion in politics can cause divisions and intolerance and distract from more substantive policy issues. Furthermore, it can fuel religious-based conflicts, which can long-term impact the country's social stability.

Despite these concerns, there have been efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding in Indonesia. Civil society groups and religious leaders have been essential in promoting tolerance and building bridges between communities (Khotimah, 2017; Mawardi & Ruslan, 2019; Mibtadin, 2022). However, some critics remain sceptical about the effectiveness of these initiatives, arguing that they do not address the root causes of religious tensions and do not go far enough in promoting tolerance and understanding.

Former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has called for strengthening interfaith dialogue and cooperation, while current President Joko Widodo has made religious harmony a key part of his platform. In addition, civil society groups and religious leaders have played an important role in promoting interfaith dialogue and building bridges between communities (Zarghoni, 2022). In other words, while religious diversity has the potential to create conflict, it can also be a source of strength and cooperation in Indonesian society.

Careful attention must be paid to ensure that political campaigns do not exacerbate religious tensions, and efforts should be made to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding (Mibtadin, 2022). By embracing diversity and promoting tolerance, Indonesia can build a more peaceful and harmonious society. The issue of religious ideology in Indonesia echoes to influence public opinion, which will then impact the electability of specific candidate pairs. Hence, religion politicised obtaining winning votes in the electoral political arena, impacting interreligious relations' disharmony. Therefore, the politicisation of religion is far from religious values, such as the spread of hoaxes, hate speech in the name of religion, and many black campaigns using religious symbols.

The media has its own set of beliefs. Each press will produce material or journalistic work following the company's ideology. The online media *Republika*, for example, leans more toward religious doctrine. The content created is connected to Koranic verses. Not only does the media participate in political efforts that promote religion. Some of Anis Baswedan's Instagram posts show her visiting Islamic boarding schools, closely linked to Muslims as the dominant religion in Indonesia (Wijaya, 2022). Amid the 2024 presidential election campaign, Ridwan Kamil finished one of the Al-Jabr mosque projects (PRMN, 2023).

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this research, the problem formulation will be answered in the results and discussion section, namely:

1. What is the impact of using religious ideology in electoral politics on the harmony and tolerance among religious communities in Indonesia?
2. How do political candidates use social media as a tool for mobilizing religious ideology in the context of electoral politics in Indonesia, and how does this affect public opinion and electoral outcomes?

In this research, we expect to find that the use of religious ideology in electoral politics has the potential to negatively impact harmony and tolerance among religious communities in Indonesia. This is because when political candidates exploit religious sentiments, it may create divisions and tensions between different religious groups. Additionally, our findings are likely to reveal that social media plays a crucial role in the mobilization of religious ideology by political candidates. Through targeted messaging and online campaigns, candidates can amplify religious narratives and influence public opinion, potentially swaying electoral outcomes. This combination of religious ideology

and social media usage may exacerbate existing interfaith tensions and further polarize the political landscape in Indonesia.

## 4. METHOD

This descriptive research explains various problems carefully and in detail by connecting various data so that a clear, accurate, and factual picture is to obtain the research focus. In this study, secondary data will be collected through a comprehensive literature review on the use of religious ideology in electoral politics in Indonesia and its impact on interfaith harmony and tolerance (Smith & Boas, 2020; Widian et al., 2022). Data from recent elections, such as the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 Presidential Election, will be analyzed to examine correlations between the use of religious ideology in campaigns and any changes in religious harmony and tolerance (Khotimah, 2017; Mibtadin, 2022; Sari, 2016). Content analysis of social media posts from political candidates during these elections will be conducted, focusing on the use of religious ideology and its impact on public opinion and electoral outcomes ((Schmuck & Hameleers, 2020). Patterns in social media engagement, such as likes, shares, and comments, will be analyzed to understand how different types of content related to religious ideology resonate with the audience. The role of online media, such as *Republika*, in shaping public opinion and perceptions of religious ideology in electoral politics will also be examined (Schmuck & Hameleers, 2020).

Moreover, the effectiveness of existing interfaith dialogue and cooperation initiatives in promoting tolerance and understanding will be evaluated (Mawardi & Ruslan, 2019; Zarghoni, 2022). Lastly, the study will investigate the role of misinformation, hate speech, and hoaxes related to religious ideology in electoral politics, and explore potential measures to counter these issues (Mibtadin, 2022). By analyzing this secondary data, the research aims to better understand the use of religious ideology in Indonesian electoral politics and its implications for interfaith harmony and tolerance.

## 5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Religious Ideology

The word ideology was first introduced in 1796 by Antoine Destutt de Tracy, a French philosopher. Ideology is a combination of two words, namely ideas, which refers to the idea, and logic which refers to logos, the Greek word for explaining logic and reason.

Antoine Destutt de Tracy uses this word in its etymological sense as a science which includes the study of the origin and nature of ideas or ideas. The primary purpose behind an ideology is to offer change through a normative thought process (Edgar, 2018). According to Takwin, in the article, Setyowati (2016) explained that ideology has meaning as a set of ideas that guide a group of people in achieving specific goals. By deriving certain ideas in some frameworks of action and rules of action.

Ideology refers to a set of shared ideological elements belonging to each other (Gerring, 1997). In detail, ideology is defined based on assumptions of the following: 1) Ideology as an idea and a belief system; 2) Ideology as social representations defining a group's social identity; 3) Ideology as a fundamental yet abstract social belief; 4) Ideology as the socio-cognitive basis of social groups, ideology is gradually acquired and (sometimes) changed through life or lifetimes and must be relatively stable (van Dijk, 2006).

Religion is part of a group's ideology, while ritual is a non-discursive element of an ideology. Religious ideology can be a set of beliefs and attitudes that influence and regulate religious behaviour and practice (Edgar, 2018). Ideology and religion are interrelated; ideology can call as a religion because it can provide a path to the "ideal" for its adherents. Vice versa, religion is not merely a spiritual process but also provides an "ideal" picture and regulates social, political, and cultural life (Hartanto, 2016). From the definitions above, religious ideology can be understood as an idea or belief system held by individuals or groups that can regulate and influence behaviour in worship and daily life, the relationship between man and God, man and man, and man with the universe.

## 5.2. Cases of Religious Ideology Contestation in Electoral Politics in Indonesia

General elections are an essential part of the democratic process in Indonesia as well as determining the direction of the nation's future. The general election process is how the community chooses trustworthy leaders expected to create the welfare of the society and state. Over time, the climate of democracy in Indonesia has changed, especially regarding religious attitudes. Since the reforms hit Indonesia in 1998, many religious groups and organisations have emerged with a nuance of primordial identity. Their manifestations are often uncompromising and even seem to make truth claims, practice dehumanisation, and violate human rights. As in the election process, we often



encounter fraud, one of which is the politicisation of religion, which is very far from the principles of democracy itself.

### 5.3. Presidential Election 2024 and Its Possibility for Religious Ideology Contestation in Indonesia

In 2024, there will be a new history of simultaneous general elections from the regional to the central government. Political drums have begun to beat in 2022. All political parties prepare and form their coalition, namely the United Indonesia Coalition or KIB, which consists of the Golongan Karya Party (Golkar), the National Mandate Party (PAN), and the United Development Party (PPP). KIB was formed on 4 June 2022 at Hutan Kota by Plataran Jakarta.

Then, on June 18, 2022, the National Democratic Party (NasDem) nominated three names as presidential candidates for 2024, namely Anies Baswedan, who was still serving as Governor of DKI Jakarta, Ganjar Pranowo (Governor of Central Java), and Andika Perkasa (Commander of the TNI). But in the end, on October 3, 2022, the NasDem Party officially declared Anies Baswedan as a presidential candidate. Furthermore, on August 13, 2022, the National Awakening Party (PKB) and Gerindra Party officially announced a 2024 General Election (Election) coalition. Furthermore, the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), on October 4, 2022, carried Ganjar Pranowo and Yenni Wahid as Presidential Candidates. 2024.

Several party coalitions and the declaration of the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates in 2022 indicate that the political year will start from 2022 to 2024. This article focuses on the possibility of identity politics in the name of religion or contestation of political ideology in the upcoming 2024 electoral political stage, given the events of the event. In the previous presidential election and the candidates declared by the political parties mentioned above, some candidates have a track record or traces of religious identity politics in the past. So, it is crucial to research data that contains sentiments about the politicisation of religion after the declaration of the 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates by the political parties above.

Azzahra (2022) reported that Anies Baswedan has been declared as the presidential candidate by NasDem in 2024. Moreover, Novel Bamukmin stated that PA 212 "My Imam and my friends are High Priest Habib Rizieq Shihab, not Surya Paloh, *"so my friends and I support or not support Anies Baswedan depending on IB HRS' command, not Surya Paloh's command"*.

The information above shows that there is a possibility that PA 212 will support Anies Baswedan in 2024. Previously, PA 212 had a close relationship with Anies Baswedan and supported Anies' candidacy as Governor of DKI Jakarta in 2017 (Adam, 2022). Groups that were part of PA 212 echoed the narrative of religious identity politics during the 2017 governor election of Jakarta. PA 212 will return to support Anies Baswedan in the presidential election in 2024. Then religious identity politics will return to colour the contestation in the 2024 presidential election, where politics in the name of Islam is the spirit of the PA 212 movement.

Furthermore, a photo of Anies Baswedan's award as the Father of Religious Tolerance was claimed to be given by the Interfaith Brotherhood Forum (Forsai), and religious representatives signed the award charter dated October 16, 2022, circulated on social media. However, one of the religious representatives whose name and signature on the charter had protested because Christoforus Rea, as a Catholic, one member of FKUB Jakarta, admitted that he had never signed and came to Anies' award ceremony as the father of religious tolerance. Therefore he sent a letter and stated his objection. The information above shows that Anies, in his political movement, always uses religious identity to attract public sympathy for him. Anies' group did this because it was considered successful during the momentum of the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada.

PA 212, which previously supported Prabowo as a 2019 presidential candidate, has turned its back on Prabowo, as stated by Slamet Maarif as secretary of the PA 212 Syuro Council in response to Prabowo's statement praising NU in his speech after the Gerindra-PKB MoU. "NU has many voices; naturally, Prabowo Subianto praises NU for getting vote support," This statement tends to give Prabowo firmness in leaving PA 212 and beginning to seek support from NU through PKB. This phenomenon also shows the existence of Islamic identity politics among the Islamic boarding schools and the most prominent Islamic organisations in Indonesia.

PKB also echoes identity politics as a party that forms a coalition with Gerindra, as Muhaimin Iskandar, in his political socialisation journey, often claims that PKB represents NU. In contrast, KH Yahya Cholil Staquf, PBNU chairman, has repeatedly emphasised that NU will not want to become a political tool in 2024. NU does not want to be dragged into a political contestation that could escalate to an uncontrollable level and endanger the organisation. Based on history, the involvement that goes too far splits NU more concerned with the electoral process than the results. PBNU considers that NU's participation in political contestation will lead NU to division, so NU chooses to be neutral by not supporting anyone or political parties.

On the other hand, Ganjar Pranowo, the Presidential candidate with the highest electability in various survey institutions, has not yet received the blessing of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). However, the name Ganjar has been proposed by many political parties, as was done by NasDem before Anies' declaration as a presidential candidate and PSI announced Ganjar-Yenny as the 2024 candidate for vice president. However, volunteers and sympathisers of Ganjar Pranowo are grassroots in these areas. Suppose the PDI-P nominates Ganjar in the upcoming 2024 presidential election. In that case, the PKI issue will likely again attack the PDI-P, like the momentum of the last presidential election, which accused Joko Widodo of being a PKI (Kusno, 2019).

Based on the above data, the authors see the possibility of contesting religious ideology, as in the previous presidential election. Contestation of religious ideology in the upcoming 2024 presidential election will occur between right-wing Muslims and moderate Muslims. The counterwork to the Indonesian Communist party, which is under communist ideology, also will echo in 2024. there will not only be a battle for the vision and mission of the presidential and vice presidential candidates, and during the presidential and vice presidential debates, but also religious, ideological battles using religious issues echoed by the opposing sides in the 2024 Presidential Election. These issues will more dominantly spread through social media as new media and a new campaign tool in digital public spaces.

As was the case in the 2019 Presidential Election, issues of religious identity politics were produced and disseminated through image content or memes and videos and distributed via popular social media such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Tiktok. The competition for religious ideology on social media in 2019 was also marked by a hashtag war between #2019TetapJokowi and #2019GantiPresiden. Thus, it is necessary to understand the importance of behaving and thinking in moderation and digital literacy to filter news before sharing news.

## 6. CONCLUSION

There will likely be a contestation of religious ideology in the 2024 presidential election. Looking at the candidates who will fight in the upcoming presidential election, some candidates have traces of religious identity politics. Religious identity politics occurs because the religious issue is the most easily echoed to influence public sentiment; religion is an essential aspect of people's lives in Indonesia.

Religious issues will more easily influence public opinion and boost the electability of figures running for office. Religious ideology will be contested in the digital space, as happened in 2019. Religious issues are produced and disseminated through popular social media such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Tiktok, the most widely used media. Therefore, in welcoming the 2024 presidential election, it is necessary to have a moderate understanding, understand digital literacy, and always be wise in using social media with a filtering culture before sharing.

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