

Research Article

The Ideological Factor Strengthens Political Identity for Increasing Vote in General Elections in Indonesia

Puguh Wiji Pamungkas*

Social Sciences Doctoral Program, University of Merdeka Malang, Malang, Indonesia

ORCIDPuguh Wiji Pamungkas: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3641-5019>**Abstract.**

Identity politics is a threat to democracy in many countries, including Indonesia. At the same time, in Indonesia, the number of Muslim voters reached 80%. Muslim voters are the majority group and are vulnerable to identity politics, given their character that is easily influenced to follow certain behaviors. This research has an urgency to reveal how big the threat of identity politics is to Muslim voters, especially in Malang Regency, East Java. The choice of Malang Regency, East Java, as the object of the research is attributed to the fact that the majority of the population in that location are traditional Muslims, and Muslim educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools and Muslim schools, are the most numerous in East Java. This research uses a qualitative analytical approach to reveal the phenomenon of identity politics among Muslim voters carried out by political parties. The findings of this research revealed that identity politics is strengthening among Muslim voters, driven by three factors: political elites, mass media, and institutions. This is relevant to the theory put forward by Theresia Kuhn. However, there are other factors that strengthen identity politics that are not put forward by Kuhn, namely, ideological factors. The ideology of the party is the same as the ideology of the majority of voters. This is a novelty in this study, which differs from Kuhn's research and other studies.

Keywords: Muslim voters, identity politics in Indonesia, political parties

Corresponding Author: Puguh Wiji Pamungkas; email: sayyafazzam2@gmail.com

Published: 8 October 2024

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 4th ICONISS Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Identity politics is a political issue that has been widely discussed in various parts of the world in the last 10 years. There are many political issues related to identity politics, identity politics is associated with many aspects of politics. Identity politics is associated with populism politics. Identity politics is also associated with a crisis of democracy. Identity politics is associated with excessive nationalism, racism and anti-intellectualism. Identity politics is associated with the stagnation and decline of democracy. Not only is it a setback in democracy, but identity politics is also related to humanitarian issues, because it does not give equal recognition to different groups. Identity politics has



relevance to negative sentiment towards a country's economy, especially in developing countries.

Political identity is sometimes used to fight increasingly expensive political campaigns in Indonesia [1]. Identity politics has been associated with populism politics, a negative political behavior. The phenomenon of identity politics and populism is not only experienced by developing countries, but also experienced by developed countries, as happened in Europe. Identity politics in several European countries carried out by political parties is triggered by economic and cultural factors [2]. In the United States, identity politics is used by Donald Trump's populist political interests [3]. In North America, identity politics is a new challenge for liberal politics that has been developed so far [4]. In Estonia, identity politics is used by the Estonian Conservative People's Party for political populism on the issue of immigrants and refugees [5]. In Brazil, identity politics and populism are separate challenges for liberal politics, which are characterized by racism and anti-intellectualism [6].

Identity politics also infects Muslim countries that adhere to a democratic political system, as happened in several Middle Eastern countries, which combine identity politics and authoritarianism [7]. The strengthening of identity politics also occurs in other Muslim countries, like Palestine. Identity politics in Palestine is strengthening, through online media networks [8]. As one of the largest democracies in the world, with a Muslim majority population, Indonesia also experiences identity politics. Identity politics in Indonesia is used by political elites to expand electoral competitiveness [9].

Identity politics has a negative impact on democracy. One of the negative impacts of identity politics is the emergence of new social conflicts in society [10]. In Europe, identity politics triggered two crises, the Euro crisis and political controversy/ polemic, especially with regard to refugees and immigrants [11]. Identity politics has a negative impact on the existence of central banks, especially in developing countries [12]. Identity politics has a direct impact on the lack of recognition of different groups [13]. Identity politics that occurs in various democratic countries is complained of by many groups, such as identity politics that occurred during the presidential election, when Hillary Clinton lost to her competitor Donald Trump [14]. Even though there have been many protests and rejections, the trend of identity politics continues to increase [15].

In Indonesia, identity politics is approached with religious issues and nationalism issues. Both religion and nationalism are issues used in identity politics. Nationalist groups raise the issue of nationalism in political campaigns. Meanwhile, Muslim groups

use religious issues to gain political support [16]. Identity politics in Indonesia has existed since the New Order government, until the Reformation Order. Even though they are not directly related to religion, the policies made by the New Order to the Reform Order governments had implications for religious life. This is also synonymous with identity politics [17]. The 2019 presidential election has also become an arena for identity politics for presidential candidates and their supporters. Both Islamic groups and nationalist groups use identity politics to gain the support of potential voters [18]. Identity politics in the 2019 presidential election was not only used in the presidential candidate's winning campaign, but was also used to bring down political opponents. This causes polarization in society between fellow supporters of presidential candidates [19]. Voter polarization in the presidential election is due to religious-based identity politics [20]. Identity politics in Indonesia also targets millennial voters [21]. Identity politics in Indonesia can go in a positive or negative direction. It can be negative, if it brings division between existing groups. However, it can be positive if different groups strengthen each other's bonds [22].

Identity politics carried out by political parties in Indonesia is an electoral political interest, or a political tool to win voters' votes. This was stated by Putu Sastra Wingarta, and friends [23]. As a strategy to gain political support, the use of identity politics in Indonesia has been carried out by legislative candidates and political parties to gain voter support through online media in the general election in West Java in 2014 [24]. In the 2019 general election, identity politics was used by many legislative candidates from various political parties, in the form of posters and stickers, as an effort to gain voter support and votes [25]. This effort was carried out by several religious-based political parties in Indonesia [26].

The difference between this research and previous research is that this research focuses on political identity as a strategy for two political parties, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), to increase their vote share in the 2019 general election in Malang Regency, East Java. This research reveals the impact of identity politics on the vote acquisition of religious-based political parties in Indonesia, specifically in Malang Regency, East Java. This research seeks to reveal the forms of identity politics practiced by religious-based political parties in Malang Regency, East Java. Research can also reveal the factor that reinforce the success of political parties in gaining voters' votes by using identity politics. From the research conducted, there are ideological factors that strengthen identity politics carried out by political parties. This ideological factor also succeeded in increasing the vote share in the 2019 general election.

2. Methods

The research uses descriptive qualitative methods, describing the phenomenon of identity politics carried out by political parties in Malang Regency, East Java to get votes in the 2019 general election. This research was conducted through a series of steps. First, mappings. Mapping research issues and problems. Researchers have an interest in political issues. From various literatures, there are many political issues that are existing in Indonesia. Currently, one of the most discussed issues and problems in Indonesia is identity politics. Furthermore, mapping is carried out on identity political activities carried out in Indonesia. Much has been discussed about identity politics in relation to identity politics in regional head elections. While the review of identity politics related to the activities of political parties in general elections is still very limited. Researchers found that research on identity politics conducted by political parties, especially religion-based political parties, has a novelty in Indonesia.

Second, tracking. Tracking is carried out on political parties that use the issue of identity politics. Tracking is done in existing online media. Tracking is also carried out by conducting non-formal dialogues and discussions with many groups, party activists, former commissioners of the general election commission, and others. From the search conducted, it was found that there were political parties carrying out identity politics in the 2019 general elections. Of the several parties identified as carrying out identity politics, it was decided to examine the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB) as a research object. Further tracing was carried out on the voter bases of the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party. The biggest base of the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party is in East Java Province, while the big base of the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party in East Java is in Malang Regency. The selection of Malang Regency was based on the condition that the majority of the population is Muslim, and the highest number of Islamic boarding schools and Muslim educational institutions is in Malang Regency, East Java.

Third, collecting data. The data collected in this study are primary and secondary data. Secondary data in this study is in the form of Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB) votes in Malang Regency, East Java. This data is primary data, because it was obtained from the official results of the General Election Commission of Malang Regency, East Java. The data obtained was matched or cross-checked with secondary data, in the form of news in various online media reporting the vote acquisition of political parties in the 2019 general election. When the data collected from primary and secondary sources matched, the researcher then entered the data into in research results. But it didn't stop

there, the researcher then conducted in-depth interviews with various informants who knew and were involved with the research topic in the 2019 general election at the research location.

The collection of research data was carried out using two techniques, document search and in-depth interviews. The documents collected are data relating to the vote acquisition of religious-based parties in Malang Regency, East Java, which have been identified as using identity politics. The data comes from the recapitulation of the General Election Commission of Malang Regency regarding the vote acquisition of political parties participating in the 2019 general election. Data tracking was also carried out by reporting the results of the vote count of political parties in Malang Regency in 2019 which were published in online media. In addition to tracing data documents, they were also collected through in-depth interviews with informants who were directly involved in the 2019 general election activities.

TABLE 1: In-depth interviewed informants.

| Nu | Initial | Attribution | Gender |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | A-S | Former election committee | Male |
| 2 | M-H | Former election committee | Male |
| 3 | I-R | Former election committee | Male |
| 4 | A-D | Former election supervisor | Male |
| 5 | F-K | Former election supervisor | Male |
| 6 | E-L | Former election supervisor | Male |
| 7 | A-H | Political party administrator | Male |
| 8 | U-A | Political party administrator | Male |
| 9 | A-D | Political party administrator | Female |
| 10 | A-H | Academics | Male |
| 11 | L-M | Academics | Male |
| 12 | D-Y | Academics | Female |
| 13 | W-T | Journalist | Male |
| 14 | F-A | Journalist | Male |
| 15 | N-H | Journalist | Female |

Data collection by document search and in-depth interviews is a process of triangulation of research techniques. Triangulation of research techniques is a process that needs to be carried out by social researchers so that there are mutual checks on the techniques used. Triangulation in social research is needed to reduce bias while increasing the validity of the data collected. This is confirmed by Martin Oppermann.

According to him, one technique used in collecting research data is more likely to cause bias, for example only using interviews. Triangulation of research techniques reduces the possibility of bias occurring [27]. According to Ashatu Husein, triangulation techniques are used in qualitative research to improve the accuracy of research data [28].

Fourth, data analysis. This research uses a qualitative analytical approach. Data analysis used in this study uses data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana [29]. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, data analysis is carried out in three stages, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is an activity of organizing data that has been collected, selecting and sorting data that is relevant to the research topic. Data that has been collected both through in-depth interviews and document searches, was sorted and selected according to the topic of identity politics in 2019 in Malang Regency, East Java. Relevant data is kept, and irrelevant data is discarded. Furthermore, the data is presented, according to the research focus which is described from the theory used in the research. Data is presented in text/narrative form. Apart from that, to strengthen and emphasize explanations, data presentation is also carried out in the form of pictures and tables. The last is drawing conclusions, including making research hypotheses that have been done. This research hypothesis was based on identity politics theory, which states that ideology is one of the factors that strengthens identity politics.

3. Result and Discussion

According to Jonatan Hill and Thomas Wilson, identity politics includes social processes that show a special identity that distinguishes it from other identities, such as cultural, ethnic, customary, territorial movements, and so on. The movement can emerge from below, from community groups, or it can also be from above, formed and formalized by the government and those in power [30]. Referring to Jonathan and Wilson, identity politics is very wide, covering cultural, social and other dimensions. Thus, identity politics can be interpreted as a social movement carried out by community groups or political elites that have the aim of creating or strengthening the special characteristics of one group or community, which can distinguish that group from other groups. So, political activities that use certain identities to gain power, in this concept, include identity politics.

The research that has been done shows that identity politics is found in general elections in Malang Regency, East Java. This finding is based on the theory of identity politics put forward by Theresia Kuhn in 2019. Kuhn said that identity politics is built and strengthened by three important elements, namely political elites, mass media, and institutions. When the indicators of political identity are found in the political activities carried out by the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB) in Malang Regency, East Java.

First, the political elite. Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB) places leaders of the Nahdlatul Ulama (largest Muslim religious mass organization in Indonesia), as candidates for legislative members in Malang Regency, such as Latifah Shohib. In her candidacy campaign, Lathifah Shohib always includes the title of being the granddaughter of the founder of the mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama. This pattern succeeded in getting him to win the most votes in the PKB, by winning 109,992 votes, and placing him as the people's representative in Senayan, Jakarta.

Second, the mass media. The political activities of the PKB which are in the public sphere, and published in the mass media and social media, often include the name of the Islamic mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama, and a photo of the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama KH. Hasyim Asy'ari on banners, backdrops, or billboards for party activities. This creates a political image for the public that identifies the PKB with the Islamic social organization Nahdlatul Ulama. Voters at the grassroots level are easily influenced by the image built through the mass media, including social media.

Third, institutions. Institutionally, the leaders and administrators of the PKB at various levels associate themselves with the Islamic mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama. Ahead of the 2019 general election, Muhaimin Iskandar, General Chair of the PKB who came to the 96th Nahdlatul Ulama Birthday Commemoration, event which was held at the Malang Regency Nahdlatul Ulama Malang office with Nahdlatul Ulama kiai, Malang Regency administrators, prospective members the legislature of the PKB. On that occasion, an oath reading was also held for all legislative candidates who departed from the PKB from Malang Regency. Likewise with the Islamic mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama, through the Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Branch of Malang Regency, Umar Usman attaches himself as an institutional part of the PKB. In front of Nahdlatul Ulama figures, the board of the PKB, and the 2019 legislative candidate, Umar Usman stated that Nahdlatul Ulama was not silent on the various problems experienced by PKB, because members of the PKB were 100 percent definitely Nahdlatul Ulama, therefore Nahdlatul Ulama and the PKB must work together to win in the 2019 election.



Figure 1: Political model of PKB identity in general elections in Malang Regency in 2019 (Pamungkas, 2023).

Identity politics practiced by the PKB in the 2019 general election succeeded in increasing the number of voters and seats in parliament. In Malang Regency, the PKB won 290 thousand votes. This number is the same with PDI Perjuangan’s 12 seats in the Regional People’s Legislative Council Malang Regency, and led to this party getting seats in the leadership of the Regional People’s Legislative Council. In 2014 the votes for the PKB were only 189,805, far under the PDI Perjuangan which won 302,764 votes. The PKB in the 2014 general election won only eight seats in the Regional People’s Representative Council of Malang Regency, East Java. In the 2019 general election, the PKB succeeded in dispatching two people’s representatives at the central level, namely Lathifah Shohib, who won 109,992 votes, and Ali Ahmad who won 47,507 votes. Whereas in the Regional People’s Legislative Council of East Java Province, the PKB managed to seat two people’s representatives, Hikmah Bafaqih and Khofidah. This was acknowledged by Ali Ahmad, Chairman of the Branch Leadership Council of the PKB of Malang Regency. According to him, the significant increase in the votes for the PKB from the 2014 election, which only won eight seats to 12 seats in the 2019 election, was due to the role of “Nahdlatul Ulama members”.

TABLE 2: The five most votes acquired by political parties in Malang Regency in the 2019 general election (Source: General Election Commission of Malang Regency 2019).

| General Election | PDI Perjuangan | Kebangkitan Bangsa Party | Golkar Party | Gerindra Party | Nasional Demokrat Party |
|------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 2019 | 330.977 | 290.045 | 199.163 | 168.707 | 152.504 |

According to Mary Bernstein, identity politics begins with identity status which has a relationship with power which is then institutionalized. The institutional relationship is

then perpetuated by organized political action. So that identity politics is closely related to mobilization, strategies and efforts to achieve the desired goals [31]. Identity politics is not the aim of religious-based political parties in Malang Regency, East Java, but rather a strategy to increase vote acquisition in general elections. The strategy worked and produced the expected results. The votes of religious-based political parties that carry out identity politics have increased significantly from the previous general election.

Identity politics carried out by political parties in Indonesia is an electoral political interest, or a political tool to win voters. This was stated by Putu Sastra Wingarta and friends [23]. As a strategy to gain political support, the use of identity politics in Indonesia has been carried out by candidates for members of the legislature and political parties to gain voter support through online media in the general elections in West Java [32]. In the 2019 general election, identity politics was used by many candidates for legislative members from various political parties, in the form of posters and stickers, as an effort to gain support and vote for voters [25]. This effort was carried out by several religious-based political parties in Indonesia [26]. Identity politics carried out by political parties in Indonesia is caused by the tight threshold that is applied to political parties competing in general elections, so that political parties need to carry out winning strategies, one of which is by carrying out identity politics [33]. Identity politics is then carried out to maintain the vote support that has been obtained in every general election [34].

Meanwhile, political identity carried out by political parties in other countries is based on hatred for minority groups outside the political party. Such as identity politics carried out by the Bharatiya Jannati Party (BJP) in India. Several riots in India were driven by BJP activists in India who sacrificed Muslim voters [35]. Likewise with political parties in Israel, the Likud Party also carries out identity politics based on hatred of Arab Muslims [36]. This is evidenced by the discriminatory actions committed by Israeli students against Arab and Muslim citizens, even those who work as teachers [37]. The Pakistan People's Party has carried out a similar thing, which has carried out violence and identity politics for quite a long time [38]. Identity politics is also fueled by a long history of ethnic grip and violence [39].

Identity politics carried out by religious-based political parties in Malang Regency, East Java has differences from identity politics in other countries. Identity politics carried out by political parties in India, is more of a political movement that seeks to marginalize other groups that are politically opposed to political parties that carry out identity politics. Identity politics carried out by the PKB in Malang Regency is not intended to belittle,

antagonize or marginalize different groups. But more in an effort to gain the sympathy of the majority vote holders, to provide political support in general elections.

As a strategy to get votes, political identity carried out by PKB is analyzed by Theresia Kuhn's theory of identity politics. According to Theresia Kuhn, identity politics is built and strengthened by political elites, mass media and institutions [40]. Referring to Kuhn's opinion regarding the factors that strengthen identity politics, the identity politics practiced by the PKB in Malang Regency, East Java includes, first, the political elite. The political elite is a symbol as well as a figure that strengthens political parties. Political elites have an important role in strengthening political ties, henceforth the political ties that have been established are used to strengthen political positions. The existence of political elites determines the black and white of political parties. Political elites start from administrators, candidates and public officials who are dispatched by political parties and political party cadres.

The theory of political elite refers to the opinion of Gaetano Mosca who calls political elites as small groups that control larger groups or groups with more members. According to Mosca, political elites can control large groups, because they have more capabilities morally, intellectually, including material superiority [41]. According to Vilfredo Pareto, political elites have the ability to control larger groups or society at large, because of their ability or proficiency in using existing power, either through persuasive means or by coercive means [42]. For Max Weber, political actions, political choices made by society are always determined by political elites, according to the interests of political elites [43].

Second, the mass media. Many of the political activities carried out by administrators, activists, figures and cadres of the PKB in Malang Regency have been published in the mass media. That way, people who are present and not present at the activities carried out know what the party's political elites are doing. Knowledge obtained by the public about party activities and activities does not necessarily make the public like or vote for parties that carry out published activities. But the media has addictive properties that can affect public memory. So that over time the parties who publish their activities are well embedded in the minds of the public [44]. The mass media has the function of sending messages at one time and reaching audiences at the same time. This is of course, effective enough to convey the message, to a fairly wide audience.

Third, institutions. Institutions and formal structures have the role of forming movements that are rooted within the organization, to further shape individual behavior and

organizational culture. This also happens in the organization of political parties. Political parties have a structure from the central, regional and regional levels, even down to the village level. This allows political parties to make policies and carry out massive activities that have an impact on a wider audience. The PKB, as one of the strong parties in the traditional Muslim voter base in East Java Province, including Malang, has a relatively complete organizational structure network compared to other political parties. This makes the party's infrastructure well-organized, so that every policy made by the Institution is formally guarded down to the lowest level.

There are other factors that strengthen identity politics in Malang Regency, East Java, which are not included in Kuhn's study. This factor is ideology. According to Willard A. Mullins, ideology is a cultural phenomenon colored by certain symbols, which are related to politics [45]. Webb Keane refers to ideology as a sign that is inherent in humans both in religious and ethical forms that are formed in social, cultural and political processes [46]. Ideology is a kind of human behavior that is formed from belief in one thought which then gives birth to actions and symbols in entrenched social and political life. In this context, the ideology adopted by the PKB with voters in Malang Regency forms certain social and political behaviors, including religious behavior.

According to John Jost, in politics, ideology has a strong influence on a person's interest in parties, figures, and party activities [47]. John Higley mentions that elites who unite on the basis of ideology, make it possible for movements to defeat, or even replace the forces that previously existed [48]. The existence of ideology for political parties is also an important instrument for obtaining votes. This is proven by research conducted by Hugo Marcos-Marne and his friends, on political parties in Spain [49]. The same thing also happened in Sweden, about one-third of political party voters identified their choice with the ideology of the party they chose [50]. Douglas Ahler has revealed that voters determine the choice to choose a political party based on the identification of the party chosen according to the suitability of the voters themselves. Ahler calls this a social stereotype [51].

The majority of voters in Malang Regency, East Java, identified ideologically and socially with the same ideology and behavior as the board members and members of the PKB. This is also supported by statistical data showing that Malang Regency is an area where the majority of the population is Muslim affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama religious organization. The ideology of Nahdlatul Ulama members is the same as the ideology of the administrators, cadres and sympathizers of the PKB, some of them even belong to the same community. Apart from that, in Malang Regency there are also

hundreds of Islamic boarding schools and the largest number of Muslim educational institutions in East Java.

4. Conclusion

The behavior of religious-based political parties is examined in relation to the use of identity politics in gaining voters in general elections. Identity politics carried out by religious-based political parties has succeeded in increasing the party's vote acquisition significantly, from the previous general election. There are four forms of identity politics carried out by religious-based parties in increasing vote acquisition during general elections, through the behavior and actions of political elites, through communication in the mass media, through formal institutions and institutions, as well as the ideology of political parties. The ideology of a religion-based party, which is the same as the ideology and religious teachings of the majority voters, is the factor that most strengthens the success of identity politics in gaining voters.

Even though have succeeded in increasing the party's vote acquisition in general elections, the use of identity politics is still not a wise choice in building democracy and good politics. Identity politics creates boxes and partitions as well as polarizes voters towards certain ideologies and teachings during politics and democracy. Further research needs in the next time, because this research was carried out only in the district scope, namely Malang Regency, East Java. Research can be expanded to the scope of the province, or even the country.

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