



Political Identity and the Decline of Nationalism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Today, with the age of the Indonesian state, the nationalism of the Indonesian people is decreasing. The widespread practice of political identity is one of the declines of Indonesian nationalism today. This research analyzes the practice of political identity that is blooming in Indonesia and its relation to the decline in the sense of nationalism. The research method uses qualitative methods, collecting data through case studies from various literature studies. The results of the study indicate that there is a practice of political identity that occurs in Indonesia. The practice of political identity is strengthened ahead of elections and local elections. In addition, research shows that right now, the nationalism that the nation's founders initially has gradually faded away. These findings indicate that 1. political identity which is also driven by the political interests of certain groups is perilous for the integrity of the Indonesian people. 2. the current practice of political identity is not following the nature of the original creation of this practice. The author suggests that political identity can be used as it should be, without exaggerating, or even being ridden by a certain group's political interests. Furthermore, this study suggests that the practice of political identity that is rampant and is not by Indonesian nationalism should be abolished.

Keywords: political, identity, nationalism, Indonesia



INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss one of the phenomena in the dynamics of politics in Indonesia, namely political identity. Furthermore, this paper will also discuss the relationship between political identity and the decline of nationalism in Indonesia. This paper is considered important to be written because as a heterogeneous country, the existence of conflicts involving identities, will certainly affect nationalism in Indonesia. Whereas basically, the notion of nationalism is the reason and forerunner that unites the Indonesian nation. It can be that the existence of political identity is to form a unity, in addition to the resulting divisions. Based on observations of the dynamics and phenomena of politics in Indonesia, this paper will discuss further the practice of political identity and its relation to the declining sense of nationalism in Indonesia.

Looking at the situation in Indonesia, which will soon hold its biggest democratic party, namely, the 2024 election. The author thinks that this paper will have a role in looking at the problems that are likely to be caused to welcome the success of the candidates in the election. Because in practice, political identity in Indonesia strengthens ahead of the holding of general elections (Frenki, 2021). The practice of political identity is usually based on religion and ethnicity, which are mostly promoted by figures running for elections (Frenki, 2021). Political identity is considered one of the best strategies to gain mass support by utilizing certain identity similarities amid Indonesia's heterogeneity. The equation that is trying to stand made, on the other hand, is also possible to cause ongoing divisions in the State of Indonesia. In the end, the nationalism that the founding fathers of the nation fought for is also likely to be threatened due to this division of identities.

Previous research that is relevant to this paper is a study entitled, *Dampak Politik Identitas Pada Pilpres 2019: Perspektif Populisme* written by Aryojati Ardipandanto (Ardipandanto, 2020). The research focuses on the existence of populism by practicing political identity. Furthermore, this research only focuses on the practices of political identity that occurred during the 2024 presidential election campaign. Based on the previous research, this paper will narrow down the resulting impact, which is only in the scope of Indonesian nationalism. Other previous research is also found in an article entitled *Memahami Indonesia Melalui Perspektif Nasionalisme, Politik Identitas, Serta Solidaritas* written by Mifdal Zusron Alfaqi (Alfaqi, 2015). Through his writings, the author views nationalism, political



identity, and solidarity as elements that can unite Indonesia. Based on the previous research, this paper has a renewed view, which tries to place political identity as a practice that is likely to influence the decline of Indonesian nationalism and not the other way around.

Political identity exists to make bonds built on identity similarities stronger. Because in essence, the purpose of politics is to achieve the common good (Habibi, 2017). As long as a government that is built based on politics can practice politics as it should, then all political practices will also bring goodness (Habibi, 2017). However, what if the practice of political identity is implemented in the Indonesian state which consists of a diversity of ethnicities, and religions, ethnicities,- When the practice of political identity is not used to further strengthen national nationalism but is instead used by prospective rulers as the easiest way to gain power? So, this practice may harm Indonesian nationalism. As is well known, Indonesia was not built based on a common identity, but none other than a sense of shared destiny. Therefore, further through this paper, the author would like to discuss the practice of political identity, and how it impacts nationalism in Indonesia.

METHOD

This paper was made using a qualitative method. References are obtained through literature studies from trusted sources, both from journals, books, and other relevant sources. The data obtained through intensive library research are then analyzed and described in the discussion as findings in this study.

RESULT

Political Identity Practices in Indonesia

The practice of political identity in Indonesia is still decorated with various issues regarding the conflict between nationalists and religious people (Lestari Sri, 2018). In this case, ethnicity and religion, both are part of identity which is often used as a tool to be politicized by a group of people for their interests (Frenki, 2021). Indonesia, which is a country that places religious affairs as part of state affairs, often uses religion as a source of strength by a group in exerting pressure on different groups. The process of implementing politics in Indonesia has been colored by the practice of ministerial political identity which can even injure democratic reasoning. One case that is quite well known and can represent the practice of political identity in Indonesia is during the 2017 DKI Jakarta regional head



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election (Frenki, 2021). Ethnic and religious sentiments related to the case that ensnared the governor, who is familiarly called Ahok, were also played by certain parties for their political interests.

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok was accused of blasphemy against Islam when he made an official speech in the Pulau Seribu in September 2016 (Frenki, 2021). Moments after the video clip of the speech spread widely on social media, various Islamic groups staged demonstrations in various regions of Indonesia. The action was attended by hundreds of thousands to millions of participants and was carried out three times, namely on October 17, 2016, November 4, 2016, and December 2, 2016. The action was named Action to Defend Islam. Among the Islamic organizations demonstrating, are large organizations, namely, Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Forum Umat Islam (FUI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Gerakan Nasional Pembela Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia (PNFP-MUI), and dozens of organizations Other Islam (Frenki, 2021). The demands echoed by these organizations are for the government to immediately prosecute Ahok for the accusation of blasphemy. This shows that the practice of political identity increases and gains momentum when democratic parties occur, namely in the context of the DKI Jakarta regional elections in 2017.

The situation started to get out of control when the practice of political identity was no longer to fight for identity. The demonstrations that took place were not only aimed at Ahok but also at President Jokowi who was considered to be Ahok's main supporter (Frenki, 2021). Apart from that, the mass mobilization that took place during the 411 and 212 demonstrations in Jakarta had a strong nuance of the politicization of religion. Starting from demands for law enforcement against Ahok, this widened into a practical political field to convey invitations about the prohibition of non-Muslim leadership in Islam (Frenki, 2021). The case of religious blasphemy that ensnared Ahok was eventually used as a magnet for political interests as legitimacy for the practice of political identity carried out by his political opponents at that time. Sensitive issues such as ethnic and religious identity began to be used as capital to gain sympathy from the public. Even today, the practice of political identity is still very relevant to be used by stakeholders to gain mass sympathy and support to be able to realize these goals.

In addition, the practice of political identity in Indonesia also strengthened during the 2019 election campaign. During that campaign, the practice of political identity was very widespread. Political identity is considered to have strengthened again after the circulation of



narratives carrying the concept of populism circulated. This practice of political identity is associated with a religious identity which is always used by populist politicians to narrate that the government marginalizes Muslim groups (Ardipandanto, 2020). The "2019 Ganti Presiden" movement, "Partai Setan vs Partai Allah", etc., are examples of narratives related to the practice of political identity (Ardipandanto, 2020). If the narrative is used continuously, it will likely cause widespread polarization among the community and political elites (Ardipandanto, 2020). In delivering their campaigns, politicians should focus more on healthy political narratives that can unite and reconcile their supporters by prioritizing rationality, and not mere emotionality. Political elites should prioritize national issues that build progressively and substantively on their political narratives.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Political Identity and Nationalism

Political identity consists of two words, namely politics and identity. Etymologically, politics comes from the Greek word *Politeia* or *Polis* which means country or city. Meanwhile, identity means a characteristic attached to a person or group such as ethnicity, race, religion, and between groups that distinguish them from others (Alfaqi, 2015). While political identity is theoretically alive or exists in every ethnicity, where its existence is latent and has potential, and at any time it can surface as a dominant political force (Buchari, 2014). Empirically, political identity is the actualization of political participation that is formed from the cultural roots of the local community and undergoes a continuous internalization process in the culture of the community in a fabric of social interaction. It can be concluded that political identity is a political injustice that causes a political struggle for an ethnic group to achieve certain goals. The reason that causes the political struggle is the sense of shared destiny (Buchari, 2014).

Political identity is a new concept in the study of political science. Political identity or biopolitics is based on the differences that arise from differences in the body. Agnes Haller put forward the definition of political identity as a political concept and movement whose focus is on differences (Habibi, 2017). Basically, in situations of identity and different entities, political identity will thrive in a country or society that is multicultural or multiethnic. This difference and diversity must establish a framework called tolerance to live



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side by side and avoid ethnic or identity problems (Habibi, 2017). Meanwhile, political tolerance is only possible in a democratic country. Indonesia, as a country that adheres to a democratic system, which is also a multicultural country, must be able to apply this political tolerance to create good and friendly life, both in society and politics, for every ethnic group.

On a practical level, the definition of political identity will be very different. Due to this fact, political identity has begun to be used as a tool to manipulate or mobilize the masses for economic and political interests (Habibi, 2017). In short, political identity can be interpreted as a political tool (Lestari Sri, 2018). In practice, political identity will provide a large space for the creation of balance and opposition toward the democratization process of a country. as is the case with Indonesia, which is currently preparing for the biggest democratic party, the 2024 election. Until now, Indonesia is still dominated by two major powers, nationalists and the religious (Islam) (Lestari Sri, 2018). If these two forces are not managed properly and wisely, it will lead to the possibility of destroying the stability of the Indonesian state. In line with this fear, do not let the practice of political identity that previously occurred in the 2019 Election, repeat itself in the 2024 Election. Apart from causing the collapse of state stability, the practice of political identity also proves that the nationalism that originally united Indonesia is slowly starting to decline.

On the other hand, etymologically, nationalism comes from the words national and ism. It is a nationalism that contains the meaning of awareness and love for the motherland. Nationalism can be interpreted as an understanding of nationalism and love for the motherland that every citizen must have, as well as a sense of having the same history and ideals in the goals of the nation and state. Nationalism can also be interpreted as a sense of nationality or a willingness to be willing to unite based on historical dialectics and a common vision and future interests where the spirit of humanity is the foundation (Agung, 2017). Nationalism can emerge in various ways, starting from the similarity of history, culture, ideals, oppression, injustice, or even as a form of resistance to a group/nation. As for nationalism in Indonesia, it was formed based on the condition of Indonesia when nationalism was first coined.

Nationalism in Indonesia was born as a form or tool of the resistance movement against colonialism and colonial imperialism at that time. One proof of the development of nationalism in Indonesia is the proclamation of independence on August 19, 1945, by



President Soekarno (Alfaqi, 2016). Furthermore, the birth of Pancasila is also proof that unity and nationalism are experiencing development from before. The idea of unity conveyed by President Soekarno in his speech on the birth of Pancasila can be an effort to reinforce nationalism as a necessity for the Indonesian nation. And based on this, it can also be concluded that the Indonesian nation is composed of a series of heterogeneities that can stand based on equality, awareness, and the will to unite as a nation (Alfaqi, 2016). This fact should have become the identity of the Indonesian nation, where behind the existing diversity, nationalism senses that until now has been able to unite all differences to become one thing, Indonesia.

The Impact of Political Identity on Nationalism

Political identity is self-interested, that is, prioritizing the achievement of group interests only (Frenki, 2021). The practice of political identity is contrary to the spirit of unity because it places too much emphasis on diversity. Especially in the context leading up to the general election and regional head elections, political identity is only directed at achieving the goals of a handful of elites. Meanwhile, in essence, nationalism is very important for the unity of the Indonesian nation. The existence of the excessive practice of political identity accompanied by interest from certain irresponsible groups will pose a danger to Indonesian nationalism. The inaccuracy of policy directions in dealing with the practice of political identity can also lead to the death of democracy in Indonesia. Supposedly, the diversity that exists in Indonesia can be used as a forum for unity that has the value of constructive differences, not the other way around.

In essence, state sovereignty can only be achieved by prioritizing the interests of state nationalism in which there is a spirit of diversity, whether between religions, ethnicities, races, cultures, classes, etc. The interests of nationalism became the forerunner of the formation of the Indonesian state. The more widespread the practice of political identity that occurs in Indonesia, the lower the sense of nationalism held by each of its people. Supposedly, identity politics exists to accommodate the interests of an ethnic or identity to be able to fight for their rights. Instead of using it as a campaign strategy by using the masses for the benefit of the elite alone. Preferably, as Indonesia ages, the sense of nationalism must be strengthened, and not the other way around. The political identity that is practiced in the local and national spheres (elections) will certainly have an impact on the rise and fall of



nationalism. The fact, currently the practice of political identity is used only for the political purposes of an elite group, without thinking about what negative impacts might arise afterward.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that recently, the practice of political identity is very common. Usually, this practice strengthens in the run-up to general elections (pemilu) and regional head elections (pilkada). In essence, political identity is not present to form a chasm of division but to accommodate ethnic or identity interests to be able to fight for their rights. On the other hand, nowadays political identity is often accompanied by interest by certain elites, regardless of the aftermath. On the other hand, nationalism is an understanding of nationalism and a sense of love for the homeland that is inherent in a nation. Indonesia has an understanding of nationalism as a result of a sense of the same fate and struggle, and not based on a common identity. Therefore, differences should not be an obstacle to the unity of the Indonesian nation.

However, it is found that the practice of political identity at the national level harms the integrity and unity of the Indonesian nation. The existence of the practice of political identity ahead of the general election and local elections can eventually lead to a certain ethnicity or religion being marginalized. Through this research, the author can conclude that the practice of political identity will have an impact on the decline of nationalism in Indonesia. Because with this practice, the sense of nationality will be easily replaced by the interests of a group. However, these factors cannot necessarily erase the true function of creating identity politics. Therefore, the author suggests that political identity can be used properly, without being exaggerated, or even driven by a certain political interest. Furthermore, this study also suggests that the practice of political identity that is rampant and inconsistent with Indonesian nationalism should be abolished.



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