



Leveraging religious identity: Anies Baswedan's political strategy in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election

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Abstract: This article investigates the dynamics of religious identity politics in Indonesia's 2024 presidential election, with a particular focus on the political communication strategy of Anies Rasyid Baswedan. The study aims to explore how religious narratives and symbols are constructed within Anies's campaign discourse and to examine the broader socio-political implications of such identity-based appeals in a pluralistic democracy. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research analyzes a range of data, including media coverage, campaign speeches, symbolic visual elements, and relevant literature. The findings reveal that religious identity politics has not vanished from Indonesia's electoral landscape but has undergone a strategic transformation. Rather than employing overt sectarian messaging, Anies leverages a symbolic, layered communication strategy that harmonizes his personal religious image with themes of national unity, moral leadership, and cultural pluralism. This enables him to appeal simultaneously to conservative Muslim constituencies and urban moderate voters. His approach reflects a shift from the confrontational identity politics of previous elections toward a more adaptive and communicative form of religious symbolism. In conclusion, this study shows that identity politics in contemporary Indonesian elections is increasingly mediated through symbolic discourse and nuanced messaging. The research contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of the evolving role of religious identity in electoral democracies and offers practical insights into the ethical and strategic dimensions of political communication in a culturally diverse society.

Keywords: Campaign strategy; democratic elections; identity politics; political communication; religious identity; symbolic discourse

1. Introduction

Identity politics has become an integral element in the dynamics of political life in Indonesia (Noor, 2024; Wibisono & Rahman, 2025). In various election moments, including the 2024 presidential election, identity politics is not only an instrument of mass mobilization, but also functions as a dominant narrative that shapes public opinion. From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon shows that even though Indonesia has entered an era of open democratization and digitalization, the character and mentality of its people are still overshadowed by strong sentiments of primordialism and sectarianism (Tabrani et al., 2020). These sentiments are rooted in the nation's socio-political history and continue to reproduce through the medium of culture, religion and ethnicity in the modern state system. Abdul Rasyid Masri's view, in this case, underlines that identity politics is inherent in every presidential and vice presidential candidate, including in the 2024 presidential election contest. Each candidate carries a complex political identity—from ethnicity, religion, culture, to political ideology—which cannot be separated from their persona and political strategy. So, in a plural democracy like Indonesia, the existence of identity politics is an inevitable necessity (Abd

Rasyid, 2022). On the other hand, Manuel Castells, in his theory of identity, mentions the construction of identity through three models, one of which is project identity. In this model, identity is formed by social actors from certain groups in order to create alternative social structures that enable social mobility and change. This model is relevant in understanding how certain identity groups form alternative narratives to structural domination in society (Castells, 2003).

The phenomenon of the emergence of Anies Rasyid Baswedan in the 2024 presidential election can be analyzed within this framework. Anies is often associated with the practice of identity politics, especially after his victory in the 2017 DKI Jakarta local election, which was considered to be full of SARA-based contradictions. Observers assess that this victory was not only due to technocratic capabilities but also due to its success in gathering support from groups based on religious identity. According to political observer Tony Rosyid, since his initial emergence as a presidential candidate, Anies has experienced various forms of pressure, including attempts to stifle and criminalize him by a regime controlled by political oligarchs (Rosyid, 2024). In such conditions, the narrative of 'change' that he promotes becomes a symbol of resistance to what is considered structural injustice, which indirectly strengthens the articulation of religious-based identity politics among his supporters.

Registration for presidential and vice presidential candidates, which was closed by the General Election Commission (KPU) on October 25 2023, resulted in three pairs passing verification: Anies Baswedan–Muhaimin Iskandar, Ganjar Pranowo–Mahfud MD, and Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka. All three fulfill the requirements as regulated in Articles 221 and 222 of Law no. 7 of 2017, namely support from political parties or combinations of political parties that obtained a minimum of 20% of DPR seats or 25% of valid national votes in the previous election (Nomor, 7 C.E.).

The Anies–Muhaimin pair was supported by the NasDem, PKB and PKS parties with a total of 167 DPR seats or 29.04% and 26.95% of the valid votes. Meanwhile, Ganjar-Mahfud was supported by PDI Perjuangan, PPP, Perindo and Hanura with 28.06% of the valid votes. Meanwhile, Prabowo-Gibran received support from a large coalition consisting of the Gerindra Party, Golkar, Democrat, PAN, PSI, PBB and the Garuda Party, with an accumulated vote of 42.67%. The process of forming these three pairs did not proceed linearly, but rather through complicated negotiations, full of tug-of-war and dramatic interests, along with the conditions presidential threshold which requires the nomination of presidential and vice presidential candidates by parties or combinations of parties with significant support in parliament.

The pair Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar (AMIN) face no small challenges in their candidacy for the 2024 presidential election. The obstacles they face do not only come from the internal dynamics of the supporting party coalition, but also from external pressure, which clearly shows resistance to Anies' candidacy as President. In his speech on the grounds of the General Election Commission (KPU) after the registration process, Anies gave a statement that implicitly satirized those parties that from the start doubted the solidity of the coalition and his suitability as a presidential candidate. He said: "We are sorry that we have disappointed... those who said that this ship would not sail... to them we say we are sorry that we have disappointed." This statement is not just a rhetorical response, but rather a symbol of the victory of the narrative of optimism over political pessimism, where various allegations about the coalition split, especially the potential shift in support for the NasDem Party and the possibility of PKB and PKS withdrawing, were factually refuted through a smooth and collective registration process (Priyasmoro, 2023).

In the context of contemporary electoral politics, electability is a key variable in the nomination process. Even though some people are starting to be sceptical about the credibility of survey institutions, which are accused of being full of interests and lacking in objectivity, the data produced still plays a role in shaping voter perceptions and the direction of elite support. For example, an Indopol survey in November 2022 placed Anies in the top position with 30.33%, followed by Ganjar Pranowo (25.53%) and Prabowo Subianto (15.37%). At that time, Anies was still serving as governor. Interestingly, in a CNBC poll released in May 2023—when Anies was no longer in office—Anies still led with 63.4% of the vote, far ahead of Ganjar (21%) and Prabowo (15.6%). These results refute the assumption that losing public office automatically means losing the electoral stage (Suherman, 2023).

However, not all survey results show the same trend. The Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI), which released its results in January 2023, placed Anies in second place (24.2%), below Ganjar (36.3%) and slightly above Prabowo (23.2%). This survey has a margin of error of $\pm 2.9\%$ at a 95% confidence level, with respondents selected randomly based on telephone number. This variation in results shows that electability is fluctuating and influenced by many factors, including existence on the public stage, political manoeuvring, and dynamic public perceptions (Redaksi, 2023c).

Nasdem's nomination of Anies was quite surprising considering the historical background of the relationship between the two parties. In the 2017 DKI Jakarta gubernatorial election, Nasdem was one of the parties that supported the incumbent Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), Anies' main rival. However, this change in position reflects the political reality that often relies on short-term strategic interests rather than ideological consistency. This shift justifies the classic adage in politics that there are no eternal enemies or friends, only eternal interests (Dodo, 2022).

One of the factors that attracted the attention of the Nasdem Party in nominating Anies Baswedan as a presidential candidate (Capres) was his relatively high electability, which largely came from his experience as Governor of DKI Jakarta. However, even though his term of office ends in October 2022, political observers, such as Ujang Komarudin, predict that Anies' electability will decline as news about him decreases. This then prompted efforts to tackle Anies politically, one of which was through the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) by investigating allegations of corruption related to the implementation of Formula E in Jakarta. Even though the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has not closed its investigation into the case, they are facing various obstacles in the investigation process, including difficulties in obtaining documents and information from the Formula E Operation (Tiara Aliya, 2021).

The Formula E case adds to the impression that there is an attempt by certain parties to suspect Anies, even though the event managed to record a significant profit of IDR 5.29 billion, according to the PT Jakarta Propertindo audit report. Political attacks on Anies also came from various parties, including the PDI Perjuangan and PSI DKI Jakarta factions, who applied for the right of interpellation to ask for information regarding the implementation of Formula E. However, despite facing pressure from various parties, Anies' electability actually increased after he declared his vice presidential candidate, Muhaimin Iskandar. Muhaimin, who has a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) background, has proven to have a significant electoral effect, as seen in the results of a survey conducted by TVOne and the general daily *Mind of the People*, which placed Anies as the winner with a vote range of 40 percent and 47 percent, respectively (Erwan, 2023).

Anies' victory in the survey shows an interesting phenomenon in Indonesian political contestation, especially considering his position as an opposition figure to President Joko Widodo's policies. As Governor of DKI Jakarta, Anies has faced central government policies, such as the reclamation issue, which received a positive response from people who were dissatisfied with government policies. This makes Anies perceived as a figure who is able to voice the aspirations of the opposition group. Apart from that, Anies is also appreciated for his skills in the international world, as evidenced by his appointment as a council member at Oxford University in January 2023, an achievement that strengthens his image as a highly educated and global-minded leader (Resha, 2023).

Furthermore, Anies grew up in a political process that was thick with elements of identity, especially in the DKI Jakarta gubernatorial election, which was full of nuances of religious identity politics. Anies' victory in the regional elections, although controversial for some parties, shows the strength of support from Islamic groups who see Anies as their representative. However, this has also become a weapon for his political enemies to portray Anies as a player in identity politics, which is considered to have the potential to damage Indonesia's political plurality. This research will analyze how identity politics, especially religious identity, was used by Anies Baswedan in winning the 2024 presidential election contest, as well as how this political communication strategy shapes public perception and influences election results.

2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand the experiences of the presidential candidate pair Anies Rasyid Baswedan and the vice presidential candidate Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar, as well as the success team and AMIN volunteers in the 2024 presidential election. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, including the presidential and vice presidential candidate pair, the head of the supporting party, and volunteers. Secondary data comes from documents, websites and relevant literature. Data collection techniques include literature studies to explore related theories, documentation studies to obtain data from official archives, in-depth interviews to capture subjective experiences, and participatory observation of campaign activities (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, presenting data in the form of thematic narratives, and drawing conclusions based on patterns found (Rahman, 2025). This process aims to understand the dynamics of identity politics and communication strategies used by the AMIN campaign team during the 2024 presidential election.

3. Research Results

3.1 Political identity of Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar

Each presidential and vice presidential candidate certainly has a unique political identity, including Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar. Anies Rasyid Baswedan is an Indonesian leader, intellectual and educator who is known for his integrity, vision of social justice and commitment to educational progress, community welfare and economic growth. Born in Kuningan, West Java, on May 7, 1969, Anies comes from a family of intellectuals and freedom fighters. His grandfather, A.R. Baswedan is a national figure and diplomat, while his parents are well-known academics. From a young age, Anies showed leadership—was elected as President of the Indonesian Student Council and became an exchange student in the US. He completed economics studies at UGM, then continued his master's and doctoral studies in the United States, with a focus on public policy and political science (Anies, 2024).

His career includes various strategic roles: researcher, Chancellor of Paramadina University (the youngest chancellor at that time), Minister of Education and Culture, to Governor of DKI Jakarta (2017–2022). As the governor, he was known for collaborative and innovative policies such as transportation integration, sustainable urban planning, and Jakarta as a global city. Anies is also known to be active internationally: serving as Deputy Chair of the C40 Cities Steering Committee with the Mayor of London and the Governor of Tokyo, as well as being a speaker at various global forums on urban sustainability and climate change (Irzal, 2018).

He founded various social movements such as *Indonesia Mengajar*, *Indonesia Lit*, and *Turun Tangan*. For his work, he won more than 30 awards, including Top 21 Transformative Urban Mobility Leaders, 500 Most Influential Muslims, and *100 World Intellectuals* Foreign Policy version (Basri, 2017). Anies often advocates the politics of unity and inclusion, rejects the exploitation of identity in politics, and is known for his principles: "Praised does not fly, scolded does not fall."

Anies is known for his strong academic background in the fields of political science and government, both at home and abroad. His bureaucratic experience as Minister of Education and Governor of DKI Jakarta also shaped his leadership orientation and approach to public policy. In his political practice, Anies displays an inclusive style, is communicative with various groups, and consistently raises issues of social justice—from equal distribution of education to poverty alleviation. He also emphasized the importance of Islamic values and local cultural wisdom as part of policy formulation. Anies' political identity is not only built from values, but also from strategy (Simanjuntak, 2018).

On various occasions, Anies stated that identity politics cannot be avoided in a democracy. Each candidate brings their own identity—be it ethnicity, religion, or gender—and this is an inseparable part of the election dynamics (Ardipandanto, 2020). However, Anies refuses to allow identity to be used as a political weapon to divide people. He invited all parties to ensure that after the election, both winners and losers are willing to meet in the middle to continue inclusive national development.

Controversy arose when Anies was linked to the Habib Rizieq Shihab group and the 212 Movement, which was seen by some parties as a form of religion-based identity politics (Theofany et al., 2019). Anies emphasized that all citizens, including these groups, have the same rights in a democracy. He rejected accusations of discrimination against certain groups and criticized the state for appearing unfair in treating some of its citizens. Anies also stated his commitment to remain inclusive and open to cross-group collaboration, despite receiving support from conservative Islamic circles (Aminudin et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar is an important figure in the Indonesian political landscape. Widely known as an activist and senior politician, he has dedicated his life to fighting for democratic values and community service through political parties and parliament (Asmarandika, 2024). Born in Jombang, East Java, on September 24 1966, Muhaimin comes from an Islamic boarding school family. His father, Muhammad Iskandar, is a teacher at the Mamba'ul Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School, while his mother, Muhasonah Iskandar, currently serves as the leader of the Islamic boarding school. In 1995, he married Rustini Murthadho and had three daughters.

Muhaimin, who is familiarly called *Uncle Imin*, is the great-grandson of KH Bisri Syansuri, a great cleric who founded Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). His formal education began at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) Jombang, and continued at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Yogyakarta. After graduating in 1985, he continued his studies at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University (UGM) and completed his bachelor's degree in 1991. He then continued his postgraduate education in Communication Sciences at the University of Indonesia and earned a master's degree in 2001. As a form of appreciation for his contribution to the field of politics, Muhaimin also received an Honorary Doctorate degree in Political Science from Airlangga University.

Since he was young, Muhaimin has been active in the world of organizations. He served as Chair of the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (PMII) Yogyakarta (1990–1997) and Chair of the PMII UGM Fisipol Corps (1988). He is also involved in the UGM Student Representative Body (BPM) and the Indonesian National Youth Committee (KNPI). His active involvement in various organizations was an important provision when he entered the world of practical politics.

In 1998, Muhaimin co-founded the National Awakening Party (PKB) together with a number of NU religious scholars. When the PKB was officially declared on July 23 1998, he was immediately trusted to serve as Secretary General. His political career continued to rise. In 2005, he was elected as General Chair of PKB, a strategic position he still holds today. At the PKB National Conference in Bali, he was again elected by acclamation as general chairman. Muhaimin's parliamentary career began at the age of 33, when he was elected as a member of the DPR RI in the 1999 elections. He then made history as the youngest Deputy Speaker of the DPR at that time. In the 2004 election, he was re-elected as a member of the DPR and retained his position as deputy chairman (Alvia, 2015).

During the second period of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration, Muhaimin was appointed Minister of Manpower and Transmigration (2009–2014). After completing his duties as minister, he was re-elected as a member of the DPR through the 2014 elections. During this period, he was trusted to serve as Deputy Chair of the Indonesian MPR from 26 March 2018 to 30 September 2019. Muhaimin was then re-elected in the 2019 Election and has since served as Deputy Chair of the Indonesian DPR (Admin, 2025). For more than two decades, Muhaimin Iskandar played an important role in national politics. His work not only reflects consistency in fighting for the aspirations of the people, but also shows his dedication to maintaining Islamic, democratic and Indonesian values in national and state life.

Muhaimin Iskandar—or Cak Imin—represents a political identity that is closely tied to the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tradition. As General Chair of PKB, the party that was born from the womb of NU, Cak Imin brings a moderate Islamic political style typical of Aswaja (Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah). Many of his political ideas are inspired by the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawasut* (moderate), *itidal* (fairness), and the spirit of *amar ma'ruf nahyi munkar*. He also inherited Abdurrahman Wahid's thoughts, which emphasized pluralism, humanism and the role of the people as holders of sovereignty. NU has historically had a different political track record from the Masyumi party. The tension between the two

began when NU left Masyumi in 1952 and formed its own party, which had great success in the 1955 elections. This legacy continues to this day, where NU's political position is often at odds with Islamic groups with a Masyumi pattern, such as the 212 Movement. Against this background, Muhaimin's political identity stands as the cultural and ideological antithesis of hardline Islamic groups (Admin, 2025).

These two figures—Anies and Muhaimin—even though they both have an Islamic basis, represent two different faces of Islamic politics: one more inclusive-cosmopolitan, the other traditional-nationalist. In the context of the 2024 presidential election, this pair is interesting because it reflects efforts to bridge the broad spectrum of Indonesian Muslim voters. However, they are also not free from challenges and criticism, including regarding the consistency of ideas, relations with controversial groups, as well as concerns over the reproduction of identity politics in new forms.

3.2 Identity politics issues in the Anies campaign

Anies can also be considered to be using elements of identity politics in the 2024 presidential election campaign, especially in the context of reaching out to voters based on religious and ethnic identities. Several things that support this assumption include:

First, religious support base. Anies is known to have strong support from Muslim voters, and his campaign emphasizes values relevant to this group. For example, those related to the results of the Ulama Ijtima. Anies also often emphasizes his background as a Muslim, which can attract support from Muslim voters, especially those who prioritize religious values in choosing leaders.

When confirmed by the author through an interview, Anies said:

Even in a democratic country, a person's identity cannot be eliminated, because it is given and inherent. Likewise, the religious aspect cannot be released. When someone determines their politics based on the similarity of their religion, they cannot be blamed. For example, the American people prefer their leaders to be Christians, so they cannot be blamed. Even though this is in a country that claims to be a champion of democracy. (Interview with Anies Rasyid Baswedan on August 19, 2023).

Second, Symbols and Narrative. In his political campaigns, Anies often uses symbols related to cultural and religious identity, which can attract the attention of certain groups. Anies is aware of the influence of popular culture, especially among the younger generation. He interacts with the K-Pop and Gen Z communities through platforms such as TikTok, even earning the nickname "A-nice Ahjussi" from fans (Khabibah & Gunawan, 2024). This step shows its inclusive approach in embracing various cultural elements developing in society.

Third, Historical Context: Given Anies' position as former Governor of Jakarta, he will likely refer to the experiences and challenges faced by the Muslim community in Jakarta, which could build an emotional connection with voters. *Fourth*, Social Issues: Anies discusses issues relevant to certain group identities, such as social policy and justice, to strengthen his support. In the event entitled "Democracy Lantern: Illuminating the Path to Social Justice", Anies emphasized that social justice must be the main agenda to maintain national unity. He stated, "It is important for us to mainstream social justice as the main agenda. We want our Indonesia to be a complete Indonesia... This can only happen if there is a feeling of equality, an element of justice (Redaktur, 2024)."

Fifth, Education and Social Policy: He puts forward issues relevant to the Muslim community, such as faith-based education, strengthening Islamic educational institutions, and social justice in line with Islamic values.

In an interview with the author, Anies stated:

I am committed to providing equality between religious-based educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, and public schools. He emphasized the importance of equality in support and opportunities for both types of education. I also consider it important to increase the capacity, competence and welfare of teachers and educational staff in madrasas, Islamic boarding schools and other religious-based educational institutions. This step is expected to meet national competency standards and improve the quality of religious education in Indonesia. (Interview with Anies Rasyid Baswedan on August 19, 2023).

Sixth, religious symbols. Anies uses religious symbols in his campaign, such as conveying messages related to worship and religious norms, which can increase emotional connections with voters. On December 2 2022, Anies Baswedan visited the Baiturrahman Mosque in Banda Aceh City. During this visit, he allegedly signed a petition supporting his candidacy for president in 2024. This action was considered by some parties to be a form of political campaign that took advantage of places of worship, thereby sparking debate regarding ethics and religious norms in politics.

Seventh, involvement in Religious Events. Anies often attends religious events and invites the Muslim community to get involved in his campaigns, strengthening ties with the community. Anies Baswedan often attends various religious events as a form of broadcasting his commitment to religious values. His presence at these events not only shows his obedience, but also serves as an effort to spread religious teachings and strengthen relations between religious communities.

Through this approach, Anies seeks to build support from the Muslim community and attract voters who are looking for leaders who reflect their religious values. However, the use of religious identity politics also carries risks, such as increasing polarization in society. Therefore, how Anies manages this approach will greatly determine the effectiveness of his campaign.

3.3 AMIN couple's political communication strategy

In the 2024 presidential election contest, the pair Anies Baswedan and Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar (AMIN) implemented various political communication strategies that reflect the complexity of Indonesia's electoral landscape. One of the prominent strategies used is identity politics, namely a communication approach that utilizes social categories such as religion, ethnicity and cultural values as instruments to build political affiliation and electoral loyalty (Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023). Identity politics in this context is not merely an instrument of voter segmentation, but is also an articulate effort to represent the collective anxiety of some groups of society who feel excluded from the center of political power.

The narrative of change promoted by the AMIN pair is closely framed by community identity. Anies Baswedan, especially since his controversial victory in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada, has been associated with the political Islam spectrum from moderate to conservative (Mudhoffir, 2020). Through various public rhetoric and religious performativity, he positions himself as a leadership figure who is not only familiar with urban Muslim communities, but is also willing to fight for the interests of those who feel marginalized by elitist development narratives. On the other hand, Muhaimin Iskandar brought the symbolic and structural strength of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) base, especially the cultural NU which has strong roots in rural areas of East Java and Central Java. His involvement strengthened the couple's appeal to traditionalist Islamic circles (Rahmat, 2008).

The presence of the AMIN couple in various religious forums, as well as their closeness to Islamic scholars and figures, is not only a form of image, but also a concrete expression of efforts to form a collective imagination about religious, just and popular leadership (Fansuri, 2023). Support from a number of charismatic *kiai* and religious actors has become significant symbolic capital in mobilizing voters based on religious values.

The narrative of "change" promoted by Anies also targets anti-status quo sentiment. In this framework, oligarchy and socio-economic inequality are used as the main antitheses of the vision of a more just and participatory government (Rachbini & Abdulah, 2020). This discourse easily found resonance among groups of society who experienced structural alienation, including the political Islam segment, who felt their role was reduced in the public sphere during the previous government. Thus, the identity politics used by AMIN is not merely sectarian exclusivism, but rather becomes a medium for expressing demands for social justice and more authentic representation (Riza, 2019).

In this case, Muhaimin's strength at the base of NU and traditional Islam played a strategic role. He is not just an electoral "sweetener", but a key actor who bridges the AMIN pair with the Nahdliyin constituents. The integration of NU symbols and networks into the AMIN campaign shows how identity politics functions not only as social identification, but also as a mechanism for institutionalizing

political support (Hastuti et al., 2025).

However, this strategy is not free from normative and political problems. Even though it is able to reach Muslim voters who want religious-based political representation, this approach has also raised concerns among those who emphasize the importance of secularism in the political space. In this context, the AMIN couple seems to be trying to manage this ambivalence by balancing an identity approach with an inclusive and pluralistic narrative, in order to embrace groups outside the political Islam segment (Ayoob & Lussier, 2020).

Thus, identity politics in the AMIN couple's communication strategy is a multidimensional phenomenon—both as a tool of mobilization, articulation of collective identity, and discourse of resistance to dominant power structures. However, the success of this approach will ultimately be determined by its ability to build social cohesion, not just electoral conversion.

3.3.1 *Creating an “Anies Urge” Program*

In the context of identity politics strategy, “*Desak Anies*” seems to be trying to put forward a different approach. Rather than emphasizing the identity of a particular group, this event is designed to reach various groups, especially young people from various backgrounds. This approach reflects an effort to reduce the use of exclusive identity politics and shift to a more inclusive politics of ideas (Redaksi, 2023b).

AMIN National Team youth spokesperson, Ais Shafiyah Asfar, when interviewed by telephone, said: Everyone involved in the *Desak Anies* event are young people, starting from the idea development process, to the committee in the field who are young people. Apart from emphasizing the involvement of young people, the *Desak Anies* event is a program initiated by the *Ubah Bareng* community, which is a consortium containing a node of young volunteers supporting AMIN. ... This program was also deliberately created to create a new campaign culture as an effort to return politics to an intellectual space full of substantial matters, not just noisy gimmicks. Through Anies' insistence, we want to show complete democracy, where people can have direct dialogue with Anies without distance and without filters. They can ask whatever they want and Anies will answer it. Apart from showing the essence of democracy, the *Desak Anies* program also has an electoral impact, namely increasing the electability of the AMIN candidate pair.” (Interview with Ais Shofiyah Asfar (AMIN National Team Youth Spokesperson), Jakarta, January 5, 2024).

Desak Anies is one of Anies' campaign programs in presenting the vision, mission and work program he initiated as a presidential candidate in the 2024 presidential election. *Desak Anies* is packaged in a relaxed atmosphere with the aim of absorbing voters' aspirations. This agenda is carried out using a pick-up and drop-off system. Anies and the team visit the locations or areas that will be the target of the campaign on a predetermined schedule. This event was held during the campaign period determined by the KPU, namely from 28 November 2023 to 10 February 2024. The political marketing segmentation in the *Desak Anies* event has several important objectives.

First, designing the substance of a political party and a candidate offers to different Segments. Through segmentation, *Desak Anies* can design messages that are relevant and attractive to various segments of society, including students, scholars and academics. These messages can be tailored to the needs and preferences of each segment. *Second*, analyzing voter preferences for candidate marketing. By understanding voter preferences through direct interaction at the *Desak Anies* event, the marketing team can evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies that have been implemented and identify areas that need to be improved.

Third, determines the chances of winning votes. Through segmentation and direct interaction with voters, the marketing team can estimate the potential support of each segment of society. This allows them to allocate resources more efficiently and effectively. Determining political communication strategies towards society. *Fourth*, determining political communication strategies towards society. Segmentation helps in designing the right communication strategy for each segment, whether through social media, live discussions or other face-to-face events. In this way, political messages can be delivered more effectively and can reach the desired target audience (Reno Eza, 2023).

According to the AMIN Winning National Team Expert Council, Hamdan Zoelva, one of the campaign programs carried out was Desak Anies, as an effort to educate the younger generation. What Anies did was extraordinary. From one place to another, meeting young people through Desak Anies, intelligence, and extraordinary contributions (Redaksi, 2023a).

During the 75-day campaign period, 23 Anies Urgent Dialogue Events were held. This event became a pioneer in a series of similar events such as *Slepet Imin*, *Gelar Tikar Ganjar*, and even *Gebrak Mahfud*. When asked about Anies' event, via telephone, political observer Gungun Heryanto said: Even though political marketing strategies do not guarantee victory, they can provide a good concept for candidates, supporting parties and the political programs they offer to the public. This is a form of moral responsibility for officials or candidates who succeed in achieving victory in the general election. The Urgent Anies Program initiated by Anies Baswedan has significant implications for the development of democracy in Indonesia. I highlight the importance of active citizen engagement and participatory governance, as well as the potential for renewing democracy in the long term and increasing citizen participation. However, I am concerned about the sustainability of these initiatives, as well as the challenges in institutionalizing these programs into existing political structures. As Indonesia continues its democratic journey, the long-term impact of Desak Anies and other grassroots movements will be critical to designing policies and practices that can maintain democratic values and promote inclusive governance in the future.

In the end, this event strengthens the essence of the mandate of the Indonesian constitution, which emphasizes that the state's duty is not only limited to protecting citizens, but also making the nation's life intelligent. "By opening various lines of dialogue to society, as is done by Desak Anies, creating an intelligent and intellectual society can become a reality." (Interview with Gungun Heryanto, observer and political communication expert, Jakarta, January 3, 2024).

In utilizing the campaign period, Anies appears to be carrying out a different campaign from other presidential candidates. He prioritizes discussion and calibration. He went around having casual discussions with various groups through the Anies Urge, Discussion and Calibration program. Anies delivered his political speech while attending a discussion and calibration with youth at Jatidiri GOR, Semarang, Central Java, Sunday (24/12/2023). The discussion event entitled "Discussing the Thoughts of the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates," which was attended by hundreds of students from Central Java and DIY, aimed to capture the aspirations of young people by discussing a number of topics about education, the economy, health, the environment and overcoming the problem of corruption in Indonesia.

Participants are welcome and even allowed to criticize Anies Baswedan's ideas, actions and policies with even the harshest criticism. This activity was carried out on several campuses spread across several big cities such as Bandar Lampung, Jakarta, Pontianak, Semarang and Banyuwangi. In the Anies event, the participants, who were mostly students, were more active. One of the students, for example, with his student style sued and questioned Anies about the wind problem. He doesn't want to have a leader who can only blame the wind. After getting this question, Anies gave a scientific explanation and used data so that all participants could understand the arguments presented (Sabrina, 2024).

3.3.2 *Participate in the Presidential Candidate Debate*

Anies uses the candidate debate arena to emphasize the identity politics he is playing. In the third debate for the 2024 presidential election, which took place on January 7 2024, Anies Baswedan took advantage of the moment to criticize Prabowo Subianto. Anies highlighted several issues, including Prabowo's ownership of large areas of land and the procurement of used main weapons system equipment (Ayu, 2024).

Apart from that, Anies questioned Prabowo's consistency in his position as the opposition, considering that Prabowo had previously been in the opposition but later joined the government. Responding to this, the National Winning Team Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar (AMIN) emphasized that Anies' statement in the debate was not a personal attack, but rather a presentation of facts that exist in society.

Anies himself stated that he only conveyed the reality and facts that existed in society, without the intention of attacking him personally. However, Prabowo considered that Anies' statement in the debate was personal and should not have occurred in a debate forum which was supposed to be an arena for presenting the vision and mission. Overall, the debate showed intense political dynamics between the candidates, with Anies taking the opportunity to criticize Prabowo on certain issues (Nadia Intan, 2023).

Anies participated in and underwent the First Presidential Candidate Debate, which was held on Tuesday, 12 December 2023. Chairman of the Indonesian General Election Commission (KPU), Hasyim Asy'ari, officially opened the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidate debate at the Indonesian KPU Office, Jakarta, on Tuesday, 12 December 2023. The first debate for the 2024 Presidential Election was a debate between presidential candidates, which raised themes about government, law, human rights (HAM), eradicating corruption, strengthening democracy, improving public services and citizen harmony.

Regarding IKN (Ibu Kota Negara –The Nation's Capital), Anies signalled his rejection of IKN. If there is a problem in Jakarta, it must be resolved, not abandoned. IKN is a legal product that has not gone through a complete public dialogue process. When it becomes law, anyone who is critical is considered opposition. Anyone who is pro is considered pro-government. Why? Because there is no comprehensive public dialogue process (Editor, 2023a). Anies assesses that people's trust is currently decreasing in the democratic process, not just in political parties. Political costs must be calculated correctly so that people see transparency and ultimately restore people's trust. According to Anies, the democracy index and freedom of speech are declining, and the government has minimal opposition. Based on data, Jokowi's government in the 2019-2024 era had minimal opposition. The government coalition filled 471 parliamentary seats or 81.9% of the total 575 seats in the DPR.

Meanwhile, The Economist Intelligence Unit's report released in February 2023 categorized Indonesia into the category of 'flawed democracy'. Indonesia is ranked 54th out of 167 countries in the democracy index. Regarding freedom of opinion, the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS) recorded that as many as 967 people were arrested for expressing their rights in public spaces from January 2022 to June 2023. Even articles that give authority to be used in a strict manner to critics, for example, the ITE Law or articles 14-15 of Law Number 1 of 1996. This disrupts freedom of speech (Suandri, 2023).

Regarding eradicating corruption, Anies offered four things that will be done in efforts to eradicate corruption. First, corruptors must be 'entrapped' with the Bill on Asset Confiscation and impoverishment. Second, the Corruption Eradication Committee Law will be revised so that it becomes a strong institution again. Third, provide rewards to people who help report corruption cases, so that it is hoped that there will be community participation as stated in the law. Fourth, the ethical standards of KPK leaders must be very high (Suandri, 2023).

The Papua problem, the root of the problem, is not violence but the lack of justice in the land of Papua. Problems in Papua should be resolved through dialogue. The main problem regarding the human rights crisis in Papua is not violence but injustice in Papua. The human rights conflict in Papua must be resolved completely and its recurrence prevented, although what must be presented is not violence but justice. Vulnerable groups need to receive priority services from government administrators. Service problems in government are not something new and continue to recur.

Anies criticized the situation of law enforcement in Indonesia, so he advocated 'Change'. Law enforcement carried out by the government currently is often not in accordance with legal principles because the law is not implemented by the state, but by power. In a power state, the laws are regulated by the ruler, and we don't want that. The law should be upright, but in reality, it is bent. He criticized the arrests and violence carried out by police officers when handling student demonstrations some time ago, such as the rejection of the KPK Bill and the Job Creation Omnibus Law. At that time, police officers fired tear gas.

Anies also gave examples of a number of unresolved cases, such as the case of Mega Suryani Dewi, a housewife who experienced domestic violence last September, and the case of the death of Harun Al-

Rasyid's child in May 2019. To deal with disinformation and civil harmony, Anies said that increasing tolerance is through law enforcement, and the state must be able to reach everyone. He promised free lawyer services for the people as legal aid through a program called Paris Hotline. He claims to be the former Governor of DKI Jakarta who gave the most permits to build places of worship (Giffar, 2023).

One of the slogans that was successfully raised in the debate was *"Wakanda no more, Indonesia forever."* This term went viral and became a topic of conversation among the public, both on social media and in the real world. This is because the presidential candidate Anies Baswedan used the term, which was turned into a slang slogan. It is known that Anies Baswedan coined this term during the 2024 Presidential Candidate Debate, which was held on Tuesday (12/12/2023). Anies said that there will no longer be Wakanda, but Indonesia forever; *"Wakanda no more Indonesia forever"* (Singgih, 2023). Since it was said by Anies, the term *"Wakanda no more, Indonesia forever"* started going viral on social media. In fact, several netizens used this term to support the number one candidate pair. The term itself was inspired by the popular superhero film *Black Panther*.

Black Panther is a superhero film which tells the story of a character named T'Challa who has powers and becomes a hero named Black Panther. He used this power to defend his family and his country, called Wakanda (Martin, 2024). The country is described as a place whose people value culture and whose cities are technologically advanced. In Indonesia, people often use the term *"Wakanda"* as another name for the country of Indonesia, especially when criticizing government policies. Meanwhile, the term *"Wakanda Forever"* itself is a term shouted by the main character in the film *Black Panther*. This term is to defend one's country and provide a fighting spirit (Craig, 2023).

Anies also said that ensuring freedom of opinion would not put people in a situation of fear. So the term emerged *"Wakanda no more, Indonesia forever"*. *"We no longer allow a situation where people are afraid, that's why I say Wakanda no more, Indonesia forever,"* So the meaning of this term means that Indonesian people can freely give their opinions, including criticism, to the Indonesian government without having to use the term *"Wakanda"* (Bimo, 2023).

3.3.3 Optimizing the Use of Social Media

The AMIN Winning Team made maximum use of the YouTube channel to promote themselves, build their image and establish political communication with the wider community. Anies has a personal YouTube account with 673 thousand followers. As the largest majority of voters, Anies must adapt the issues that will be raised to the preferences of issues that are being discussed by Generation Z and millennials. Anies' YouTube video content reflects an academic personal figure, namely with videos containing learning, motivational nuances and dealing with educational issues.

Apart from YouTube, Anies also has an Instagram social media account with 6.7 million followers. Anies is very active in sharing feed posts and Instagram stories related to his presidential candidate campaign activities. This is marked by his broadcasts (posts) which are always available every day along with the results of his supporters from various circles, including politicians, artists and civil society who embed their personal account names. From the naked eye, Anies' political communication strategy approach to generation Z and millennials is very clearly visible in the figure of Anies who continues to follow developments in media digitalization consistently and continuously (Saum, 2023).

3.3.4 Determine AMIN's Vision, Mission and Programs

In order to build a vision of a nation-state as big and vast as Indonesia, the couple Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar have traveled a long, tireless journey, from the western tip in Aceh to the east in Papua. They are not just going on a political safari, but are truly present among the people, hearing their voices directly, having dialogue with various levels of society, from farmers to intellectuals, from religious leaders to activists. This dialogue and interaction show that the reality of people's lives is still burdened by various structural problems. In this context, change is no longer just a discourse or choice, but a historical inevitability.

Table 1
Big vision "Indonesia is Fair and Prosperous for All "

No.	Strategic Mission	Main Focus/Key Agenda	Goals and Impact
1	Guaranteeing Basic Needs & Lowering Costs of Living	Food independence, housing access, energy security, water sovereignty	Affordable prices, resource sovereignty, farmer welfare, <u>anticipation</u> of the global crisis
2	Poverty Alleviation & Creation of Quality Jobs	Fiscal-monetary reform, industrialization, transformation of SOI/SMES, cooperatives, sharia economics	Inclusive and independent economy, increasing global competitiveness, distributing prosperity
3	<u>Realizing</u> Sustainable Ecological Justice	Renewable energy, waste management, pollution control, conservation, <u>climate</u> change adaptation	Sustainable environment, intergenerational responsibility, sustainable future
4	Fair and Inclusive Area-Based City & Village Development	Agrarian reform, coastal, island and interior development, equitable distribution of basic infrastructure	Spatial justice, reducing urban-rural disparities, mutually advancing development
5	Increasing Healthy, Smart, Productive and Cultured Human Resources	Equal health & education services, teacher/lecturer welfare, strengthening religious institutions, preserving national culture	Superior human resources, strong national character, strong national identity
6	Strengthening the Family as a Pillar of Society	Child nutrition, family education, child & elderly protection, family welfare	Resilient generation, social resilience, the state is present in domestic life
7	<u>Indonesia's National Defense</u> & Global Leadership	TNI <u>modernization</u> , economic & cultural diplomacy, strengthening soft power	Indonesia is an active global <u>actor</u> , <u>national security</u> is maintained
8	Substantive Democracy, Rule of Law, and Eradication of Corruption	Enforcement of law & human rights, eradication of corruption, bureaucratic reform, professionalism of the apparatus, <u>regional autonomy</u>	Democracy with dignity, justice without discrimination, clean government and integrity

Source: Extracted from multiple sources, 2024.

These eight missions are not just a technocratic agenda, but are the emanation of a national moral and ethical vision. In this context, the Anies–Muhaimin pair not only offers a program but also presents a new paradigm in viewing the country. The state is a tool of social justice, a public servant, and a guardian of a civilized future. The changes they offer are not cosmetic changes, but systemic changes that are supported by values, strategies and alignment with the people.

3.4 Criticism of Anies' political communication

In an era marked by *infodemi* (information pandemic), political communication is no longer just conveying messages from elites to the masses (Bitonti et al., 2023). It is an arena for contestation of meaning (*arena of meaning-making*), where messages are shaped, negotiated, and reinterpreted by an increasingly active and critical public (Chen & Newman, 2025). In this context, Anies Baswedan's political communication faces structural and cultural challenges typical of 21st century digital democracy.

First, related to the clarity of the message that can be read through the lens of *post-truth politics*, where meaning is often determined not by logical coherence or empirical truth, but by *emotional resonance*. In several of his speeches, Anies uses metaphors, symbolism and historical quotes that are aesthetically interesting but sometimes less functional in explaining concrete policies. When the message does not converge consistently with social reality and the pragmatic aspirations of society, what Habermas calls " *symbolic legitimacy crisis*. Ambiguous messages can mobilize short-term

sympathy, but risk losing traction when tested by government realities (Bächtiger & Dryzek, 2024).

Second, Modern political communication requires speed of reaction in responding to actual issues. In a world experiencing simultaneous information disruption, a leader is required “*not only to have a narrative, but also a narrative tempo.*” At several important moments - for example, when identity conflicts or national disasters arise - Anies' response sometimes appears too late or is too normative. This weakens the performative effect of political communication, which in John Austin's theory is called *speech act*, namely when a leader's words not only convey information, but *do something*: nurturing, moving, calming (Hannan, 2005). In crisis politics, the speed of conveying meaning can be more important than the content itself.

Third, Anies is often positioned as a political intellectual, a figure who articulates big ideas with lofty narratives. But herein lies the paradox: in a demanding democracy *proximity politics*—emotional closeness and symbolic presence among the people—Anies' communication sometimes feels top-down. The lack of authentic two-way dialogue has the potential to create a distance between national rhetoric and the concrete needs of society. In Chantal Mouffe's perspective, politics should not just be deliberative, but *from agonist*, meaning opening up a space for productive and dialogical conflict (Mouffe, 1999). Without strong emotional and interactive engagement, political communication risks becoming a moralistic monologue rather than a transformative conversation.

Fourth, handling sensitive issues is the truest test of a leader's ethical capacity. Identity politics, gender discrimination, minority rights, and religious conflict require *bold yet empathetic communication*. Anies is sometimes too careful or even elusive in dealing with controversial issues, which then gives room for speculative readings of his position. In ethical leadership philosophy, this touches on the concept *moral clarity* versus *strategic ambiguity* (Budiyono & Anitawati, 2023). When a leader fails to demonstrate a clear moral position on critical issues, public trust can be eroded, as the public judges not only the policy, but the moral integrity that underlies it.

Fifth, the political communications team is an orchestra of messaging—must be harmonious and coordinated. Narrative coherence is crucial, especially in a highly fragmented media ecosystem. Inconsistencies between Anies' statements and those of his spokesperson or a lack of synchronization between social media messages and public speeches could create noise instead of resonance. In strategic communication, narrative is not only content, but also message conductivity—namely, how it is understood across channels and audiences (Lee et al., 2023). Without a disciplined and repetitive narrative, the image of leadership that you want to build can experience cognitive dissonance in the eyes of the public.

These criticisms are not intended merely to undermine, but to suggest fundamental improvements. Anies has great potential as a narrator of change—but that potential will only be realized if political communication becomes a reality dialogic platform, not just tribune monologue. It needs to blend strategic intelligence with empathic sincerity, as well as strengthen the narrative with communication practices rooted in public reality, not just symbolic idealism. In the context of a world full of geopolitical uncertainty, ecological crisis, and social polarization, future leadership requires communication that is not only smart and fast, but also authentic, reflective and collaborative. So, if communication is a bridge between leaders and the people, Anies must ensure that the bridge is not only beautiful from a distance, but sturdy when crossed together.

4. Conclusion

Based on a phenomenological approach to Anies Baswedan's political narratives, symbols and communications during his candidacy, it can be concluded that religious identity politics was not articulated vulgarly or exclusively, but rather through symbolic strategies that were inclusive, layered and full of nuance. Anies adopted an adaptive approach to political communication, combining his personal religious image with a narrative of nationality, pluralism and public morality. This strategy allows him to reach conservative Muslim voters without generating resistance from moderates or non-Muslims. These findings show that religious identity politics in the post-2019 era is experiencing a transformation process: from previously exclusive and confrontational to symbolic and

communicative. Even though identity politics is still present, in more subtle forms, it is still effective in building electoral connections.

This research provides significant theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, he broadens the understanding of religious identity politics in Indonesian electoral democracy by showing that symbolic strategies and religious political communication are now carried out in a more subtle and adaptive format. This challenges long-held assumptions that equate identity politics with exclusivism or radicalism. Practically, this study provides strategic insight for political actors, election management institutions, and civil society organizations in reading new trends in religious politics and developing ethical, inclusive, and democratic approaches to political communication.

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