

## Identity Politics and Inter-Religious Relations: Analysing the 2020 Election in Manado City

### Politik Identitas dan Relasi Antar Agama: Analisis pada Pilkada di Kota Manado Tahun 2020

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#### ABSTRAK

Pilkada di Kota Manado tahun 2020 memberi banyak pengaruh dalam dinamika di masyarakat, salah satunya karena hadir politik identitas berbasis agama. Kontestasi politik dengan memanfaatkan identitas agama terjadi karena agama bisa menjadi basis suara. Tetapi dampaknya pada relasi antar agama kurang diperhatikan atau dilupakan. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk menganalisis dampak dari politik identitas berbasis agama yang terjadi di Pilkada Kota Manado pada relasi antar agama Kristen dan Islam. Dengan adanya penelitian ini memberikan cara pandang lain terkait politik di Kota Manado dalam dunia akademik dan secara praktis kepada pemerintah juga lembaga terkait. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan studi literatur, di dalamnya dilakukan observasi dan kajian kepustakaan. Pada studi literatur ini peneliti memakai berbagai tulisan ilmiah, artikel jurnal, buku, koran dan berita online yang memiliki keterkaitan dengan penelitian. Ketika pertarungan politik dimulai, para peserta pilkada mulai menampilkan identitas keagamaannya di ruang publik. Hal ini mengundang reaksi dari masyarakat untuk melihat para peserta dari identitas agama. Relasi di masyarakat mulai terganggu ketika pembicaraan politik selalu berdampingan dengan agama. Maka yang terjadi masyarakat mendukung calonnya karena agama. Situasi ini dinilai mengganggu kerukunan antar agama di Kota Manado, khususnya Kristen dan Islam.

**Kata Kunci:** Politik Identitas, Relasi antar Agama, Pilkada di Kota Manado.

#### ABSTRACT

The 2020 Pilkada (pemilihan kepala daerah) in Manado City has had a lot of influence on the dynamics of society, one of which is the presence of religion-based identity politics. Political contestation by utilizing religious identity occurs because religion can become the basis of voice. But its impact on interfaith relations has been lack of attention or neglected. The purpose of this

study is to analyze the impact of religion-based identity politics that occurred in the Pilkada of Manado City on the relationship between Christianity and Islam. This research provides another perspective on politics in Manado City in the academic world and practically for the government and related institutions. This study used a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study, in which observations and literature studies were carried out. In this literature study, researchers used a variety of scientific writings, journal articles, books, newspapers and online news that are related to research. When the political battle began, the pilkada participants began to reveal their religious identity in the public sphere. This invites various reaction from the society to see the participants from their religious identity. Relations in society began to be disturbed when political talks were always side by side with religion. So what happens is that people support their candidates because of religion. This situation is considered to disturb inter-religious harmony in Manado City, especially Christianity and Islam.

**Keywords:** Identity Politics, Relations between Religions, Pilkada in Manado City.

## INTRODUCTION

When speaking of Indonesia, several things come to the mind of every society, ranging from the diversity that exists in each region such as the diversity of languages, cultures, and values of life, to the separation of each region due to islands, democratic countries, and religious differences as well as believers. In simple terms, some of the things presented above represent the general view of Indonesia and all of them are included in the formation of an identity. The existence of differences in the identity of each member/individual of the society or as a group often results in two major divisions, such as gains or losses. Based on this difference in identity, when viewed as an advantage, being open to each other and being able to build good relations makes people with different identities able to complement each other from various sides of life. On the other hand, when these different identities are present in one environment and there is no openness and mutual respect, then the conflict can occur quickly and the emergence of prejudice from each group can continue to grow. It cannot be separated that identity is one of the causes of conflict. Theoretically, it is said that there is an identity threat caused

by the past, such as having experienced unresolved loss or suffering and resulting in conflict (Rosana, 2015).

Previous studies, including Hasse Jubba, et al, see that the identity politics in Riau Malay can maintain its culture. Three points are closely related to Malay identity, namely: a). the existence of a Malay identity that continues to be maintained, one of which is the role of cultural legitimacy within the Malay Customary Institution (LAM) through partnership with the government; b). the existence of a stigma on the Malay identity that seeks to evoke that identity as a whole which is carried out in various symbols; c). Malay identity is often identified with Islam, this is an attempt to show that Malay identity is not only a cultural identity but also a religious identity. The religious and cultural identities in the meaning of Malay identity are difficult to separate because there is a strong relationship between the two (Jubba et al., 2021). Apart from that, identity politics also revolves around political contestation. This can be seen in the research of Anifatuh Kiftiyah, who found a polarization in society as a result of identity politics used in the general election process. In 2019, during the election, identity politics became an unavoidable phenomenon. Various dynamics and debates related to identity backgrounds such as religion, ethnicity, and race have an impact on acts of discrimination, the formation of exclusive attitudes, and the spread of racial issues. Identity politics resulting in polarization and division in society thus demand a necessary reconciliation effort. The main actors in reconciliation include: election participants, religious leaders, and public figures (Kiftiyah, 2019). The issue of identity politics also strengthened in Manado City, especially during the 2020 mayoral election. Syamsul Bahri Abd, et al in their research found interesting things in the Pilkada in Manado City. Departing from the previous local elections in Manado City, where the winners were always not from minority communities (religious, cultural, ethnic, etc.). But the Manado City Election in 2020 was won by a candidate who came from a minority group in terms of religion. Research by Syamsul Bahri Abd, et al,

focused on analyzing strategies that enable Andrei Angouw winning the election as mayor of Manado City though having a Confucian religious background. There are three capitals owned by Andrei Angouw, such as political capital (had served in a strategic position from member to the chairman of the North Sulawesi DPRD), social capital (able to blend in with the community), economic capital (as a ruler), cultural capital and symbolic capital used as a strategy in political contestation in Manado City in 2020. Theoretically, the capital owned by Andrei Angouw is analyzed with the theory of social practice from Bourdieu (Qodir, 2021).

This is what gives the space for its interest because apart from identity politics being read as about strengthening local culture like in Malay (Jubba et al., 2021), it also warmly occurs during the political year, one of which is during the simultaneous elections in 2019. The politicization of religious and ethnic identities is an issue used in political contestation in 2019 which results in polarization in society. Manado is no exception during the 2020 election. In particular, the research conducted by Rasyid and Qodir in the 2020 Manado City Election by looking at the capital background that encouraged the election of a candidate from the Confucian religion, namely Andrei Angouw. However, in the political contestation in Manado City in 2020, there is identity politics which also affects inter-religious relations. This section has not been seen in previous research, so it is considered important to be discussed in a scientific paper.

Furthermore, in Lestari's view, he understands that democracy in Indonesia continues to be dynamic with the issue of diversity which often triggers disharmony between groups. Differences based on diversity in Indonesia have many historical records as a major factor in the emergence of conflicts, such as conflicts between religions, ethnicities, tribes, etc. These conflicts are growing not only as conflicts between identities but have entered a new phase as conflicts between identities. We often encounter the expansion of conflicts between identities as part of the democratization process, which is

more accurately described as "wild democracy" (Lestari, 2018). As Lestari thinks, I see that different identities are often seen in a circle of conflict, extending to democracy. It is not uncommon for identity games to be played on the stage of democracy in the country, and it is no longer something that can be hidden from the public eye. The identity used on the political stage is not far from conflict as a result and not the end but the conflict will continue.

Regarding the wild democracy that was conveyed by Lestari, in the context of today's life it can also be seen as identity politics and this has been widely used in battles in the political world. Long before this identity politics had begun to show itself, the focus of this identity politics was seen in the DKI Jakarta election. With the identity politics used in the election in DKI, two things stand out, namely: narratives related to natives and non-natives, to the majority and minorities based on religion, ethnicity, also ethnicity, with participants or candidates between Anis Baswedan and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok). The two candidates for regional heads have different identity backgrounds, namely Islam and Christianity. The dynamics that occurred during the 2017 DKI election were colored with discourses related to the identities of the two candidates and reached the level of the majority and minority citizens from the presentation of religious identity and this spread to most regions in Indonesia. Departing from the identity played in politics in the 2017 DKI election, they are divided into, Christians in DKI Jakarta according to 2016 data amounting to 887,628 people and this is categorized as Ahok's religious identity. Then there are adherents of Islam with a total of 8,589,252 people or 83% of the population in DKI Jakarta, based on this number, there are three candidates, namely: Djarot S. Hidayat who is Ahok's partner, then there are Anies R. Baswedan, and Sandiaga S. Uno. The politics of religious identity also strengthened between Christianity and Islam in the 2017 DKI Jakarta election (Mali, 2021). It does not stop at the polemic of the religious identity of each candidate that raises issues of majority and minority, but also concerns about indigenous and non-indigenous issues which are used as

political weapons by certain individuals. For example, it can be seen that there is a dichotomy, such as the indigenous population being considered the “majority” and the immigrants being the “minority” group. Indigenous and non-native issues in political contestation in DKI Jakarta cannot be separated from the identity attached to Ahok. Besides being Christian, Ahok is also of Chinese ethnic descent and is often seen as a non-native/immigrant to a minority group (Laksana et al., 2020).

Furthermore, it can be seen from Nasrudin's opinion, that the successful application of identity politics in DKI in the 2017 election has become a role model in several regions for using identity politics as the main foundation for each contestant to win formal and informal political battles. The parties are no longer a representation and a forum as well as a tool for the process of consolidation and communication. The dominance of identity politics in the public sphere which is happening every day with such large waves on social media is not something to be celebrated, because it seems that social media also contributes to the widening horizontal social segregation. The practice of democracy in Indonesia seems to have turned into a competition that knows neither friend nor foe, everything is carried out in an oligarchic democracy which is very familiar with the politicization of SARA and divisive tendencies. Sentiments against ethnic minorities that have occurred up to now could be a social engineering concept conceived by certain groups to attract public sympathy (Nasrudin, 2019). The situation of the DKI election also shows the pattern of identity politics among Muslims such as *ukhuwah Islamiyah* which cannot be separated from religious encouragement as part of identity. This is also seen in the view of Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) (Fautanu et al., 2020).

Identity politics can also be seen in the local election process in Manado. Amid the many narratives conveyed through the media as well as various articles and research related to diversity and harmony in North Sulawesi (North Sulawesi), especially in Manado City, this will look different when it is

entered into the election process. When entering the political year or local elections in Manado City, the pattern of identity politics in DKI Jakarta can also be seen in this city. In Manado City, there are several very visible identities, such as religion and ethnicity or regionalism, for example, Christian and Muslim groups as well as groups with Minahasa, North Nusa, and Bolaang Mongondow ethnic groups. In general, some of these identities are visible in Manado City, but when viewed more specifically, several identities are used when entering the political year, namely denomination. Several denominations often come from Christian groups, namely the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa (GMIM), Kerapatan Minahasa Protestant Church (KGPM), and the Pentecostal Church in Indonesia (GPdI). In the bureaucratic system in Manado City, it is very clear that there will be domination of people from the GMIM group, in addition to several other denominations and religions. During the Pilkada process, several candidates came from religious identities and denominations (in Christianity), this was very influential in getting vote support because these candidates were considered representatives of that identity. Among supporting arguments for this view can be seen in the research of Muhammad I. Syahudi, which shows the existence of identity politics in Manado City which is played more than denomination groups in Christianity (Syuhudi, 2018).

From the above notes regarding identity politics in Indonesia, it can be seen from the DKI Jakarta election and its impact on politics in Manado City, which also plays a similar role in identity. Based on that, I will focus from this article on the process of the 2020 local election in Manado City, which is also inseparable from identity politics, and see its influence on inter-religious relations in Manado City.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study. In the literature study, various articles related to the



topic under study will be collected in the form of books, newspapers, scientific journals, and relevant documents. A literature study is also an activity with the method of collecting library data, reading and taking notes to the stage of managing research materials (Zed, 2004). Thus, various articles related to this research will be read according to the context of Manado City. The data obtained based on scientific literature is part of secondary data. In addition, there is also information obtained from online media and newspapers as supporting data. After collecting the data, it will be analyzed based on the theoretical framework being used. In the discourse on identity politics, Agnes Heller, for example, argues that identity politics is a political movement that emphasizes differences which will later become a major part of politics (Heller dalam Haboddin 2012). Nowadays it is very clear that identity has been politicized based on extreme interpretations to get support from individuals and groups who share the identities of religion, ethnicity, gender, nationality, up to to beliefs (A. Abdullah, 2017; Syudi 2017 dalam Jubba et al. 2021).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Political Identity-Based Religion in Manado City.**

Before going deeper to look at identity politics in Manado City, I would like to give the views of experts regarding the concept of identity politics itself. One of them according to Sri Astuti Buchari, is that identity politics can be seen as a means of struggle in the political contestation of religion, ethnicity, and tribe to try to achieve their goals, some factors are considered a threat such as the injustice they will feel. From there, together in one group/religious, ethnic, and tribal identity, they began to try to gain political power (Dr. Sri Astuti Buchari, 2014). It is also necessary to pay attention and practice to the civility of identity politics amid the democratic process, such as good, bad, ugly. Identity politics often leads to bad and ugly when you don't understand the boundaries, besides that it can also have an impact on the spread of hatred between different groups and ultimately discrimination and even violence



(Ahnaf 2018 dalam Widjaja, Wibowo, and Geovasky 2021).

The discourse on identity politics in North Sulawesi, especially in the city of Manado, has been mentioned at least at the beginning of this paper. But in this section, I will describe more broadly and openly the identity politics that is happening in Manado City. We can start from the political year 2010 when the election of the Governor of North Sulawesi and one of the candidates was Sinyo H. Sarundajang (SHS). At that time, SHS ran for the second time as a candidate for Governor of North Sulawesi from the KGPM denomination and his deputy candidate Djouhari Kansil (DJ) from the GMIM denomination, besides that DJ also came from the ethnicity of North Nusa. There are also other candidates, Stefanus V. Runtu (SVR) from the GMIM denomination and Marlina M. Siahaan from the Bolaang-Mongondow ethnic group who is also a Muslim. At that time also began to appear and various groups were formed whose members were from certain religions, ethnicities, and denominations. One of them, Brigade Manguni (BM) is part of Minahasa customs and Christianity. Denni Pinontoan saw that from this political process there were also various mass organizations representing religious, customary, ethnic, and denomination groups that could be used in various moments and interests, one of which were often used during the election process at the city/district and provincial levels of North Sulawesi (Eni Puji Utami, 2018).

The political process in 2010 which was won by SHS provided many notes for identity political actors. Because, after SHS officially became the Governor of North Sulawesi, the GMIM denomination group still does not have satisfaction because of the thoughts that dominate them such as "we are a large and majority group, then the leaders of this area should be members of our group" or it can be said as ethnocentrism. Although for Pinontoan, he sees it not only as ethnocentrism and primordialism, because of the influence of history, politics, and economics in the context of the people of Manado City. However, the dynamics of the identity politics movement in Manado City can be seen as ethnocentrism at an early stage. In line with Pinontoan, it can also

be seen in the research of Muhammad I Syuhudi, which shows the formation of identity-based groups used in the election process in Manado City. One of the identity-based groups cannot be separated from BMI that represents the Christian community and is followed by several other organizations such as Legium Christum, Makapetor, Laskar Manguni, and the Waraney Militia.

Some of these groups are often used as a means of getting votes from the community with a Christian religious identity. For example, it can be seen when the BMI group supported a candidate for the regional head in Manado City who had a Christian identity as well as from the GMIM denomination, and at that time the one they supported became the winner or was elected mayor in 2015 (Muhammad Irfan Syuhudi, 2016). Some of the writings above show that there is identity politics in Manado City and one of the means is a group or organization that contains members of a certain religion.

It doesn't stop there, but we can see again the political dynamics that used religious identity in 2020. In the election of previous period, identity politics has emerged and was dynamic by taking on a very important role. Entering 2020, which is a political year in Manado City, is not much different from what happened in the previous period, namely the presence of candidates for regional elections from certain religions and denominations. When it was conveyed regarding the election of the regional head/mayor of Manado, one of the issues that were in the spotlight was related to identity politics. In 2019, which is the year of preparation for political contestation, many parties and politicians have begun to collect votes as well as strategies. At that time, many saw the potential for identity politics. One of them, Michael Mamentu, who is an academic at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Unsrat, argues that there are candidates from cross-identity (religious) who are different to be made into one pair, this is an effort to get support or votes. Furthermore, emotional issues will be presented that lead to the strengthening of ethnocentrism as a way to win elections (Mamentu, 2019).

It can be seen that at the beginning of the election process in Manado

City, the issue of identity politics had been prepared by certain groups or individuals as a way to gain support and achieve victory. Further details can be seen when the election process begins, through registration and the campaign period. It is undeniable that the presence of identity politics in the local elections of Manado City, as highlighted by the North Sulawesi Bawaslu and Manado City Bawaslu, is evidenced by an appeal from Bawaslu regarding Identity Politics. According to Herwyn Malonda, the phenomenon of identity politics that often places ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group (SARA) as a reference for choice has been highlighted by the General Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) of North Sulawesi (North Sulawesi). The movement of education to the community is sharpened through socialization. Malonda hopes that people can exercise their right to vote with their conscience. Without any coercion from the other party (Tompodung, 2020). Identity politics is also in the spotlight of Steven Liow, who is the Head of the North Sulawesi Kesbangpol Agency, firmly speaking about identity politics in the ASN environment. There are still many elements within the ASN environment who carry out campaigns using identity politics (Lumintang, 2020). Based on some of the opinions above, it shows the rise of identity politics in the 2020 Manado City Election.

### **Inter-religious Relations Amid the Regional Election Situation in Manado City.**

It is known that there is resistance from religion to politics but politics also carries out resistance, intimidation, and destroys religion. This view wants to show the relationship between religion and politics, this is where the determination of who will win or influence is determined by the most powerful authority (Habibi, 2018). Before entering into inter-religious relations in Manado City during the election situation, we can re-read the same thing in the case in the DKI Jakarta election. This case shows how strong ethnic and religious identities influenced the victory of Anies Baswedan and Sandiaga

Uno. From this, it has been proven that religious identity is a strong factor in winning candidates for regional heads, but there is no small loss behind it. It can be seen how the issue of SARA caused many conflicts during the election process in DKI Jakarta (Gani 2018 dalam Fernandes 2019). In addition to the issue of SARA, the issue of blasphemy was strengthened, which involved one of the candidates in the 2017 DKI election, namely Ahok, who at that time was still the Governor of Jakarta. Izak Lattu wrote,

“In 2017, the fundamentalist groups have forced government to employ the blasphemy law against Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the Chinese-Indonesian Christian Governor of Jakarta. Although 87% of Indonesian citizens are Muslims, the country holds significant numbers of Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians and followers of local religions” (Lattu, 2019).

A similar polemic to the one that occurred in the 2017 DKI Jakarta election regarding issues based on the identities of the candidates (Waty, 2021) also occurred in Manado City, where the existence of religion-based identity politics had an unfavorable impact on inter-religious relations. M. Fajar Shodiq Ramadlan and Romel Masykuri noted that the election in Manado City which showed the religious background of each candidate was an important note in entering political contestations. In his research, 45.5% of respondents thought that the Mayor of Manado should be Protestant and 4.1% did not feel that the mayor should be Christian (Moch. Nurhasim, 2018). It is necessary to be aware of the political dynamics in Manado City which cannot be separated from the connection with religion which brings anxiety to society.

The development of society in the city of Manado is inseparable from the dynamics of religion that started from the colonial period as the main door in opening access to the spread of Christianity in Minahasa. Furthermore, followed by the development of other religions, besides the strengthening of various religious symbols. The impact of the development of religions in Manado City can also be seen in the education system which encourages changes in the social sphere. In the years 1945 to 1971, there were various

upheavals in the city of Manado, but the religious process in the community continued to experience developments that brought significant changes to institutional religious life, inter-religious relations, and religious activities in society (Makkelo, 2010). A harmonious and peaceful religious life continues to be maintained by the people in Manado City, despite various frictions in the social space that cause potential conflicts, but all of them can be resolved together. This is also seen when inter-religious solidarity in the city of Manado becomes a common force for the community to face the Covid-19 pandemic. As for what is done by every religion, namely helping residents affected by the Covid-19 pandemic regardless of their religious, ethnic, and cultural background. Not only limited materially, but also the community feels togetherness that can support resilience in the face of the Covid-19 Pandemic (Nelwan, 2021). Solidarity between religions has become a social system that was born in ancient times in Indonesia or referred to as a religious-based system (Zahrotin, 2021).

Martin Lukito Sinaga wrote his response to Ahmad Syafii Maarif's analysis, in his opinion that identity politics which is often associated with religion needs to be more open, fluid, and enrich oneself through various discourses in people's lives. Thus, identity politics will be able to provide creative growth and can mobilize resistance in the social space (Ahmad Syafii Maarif, 2012). This is in contrast to what happened in Manado City, in the 2020 election many narratives of identity politics were misinterpreted, causing discrimination and friction, especially in the religious sphere. During the campaign process in Manado City, each of his supporters campaigned for candidates with religious, ethnic, etc. identities. This method is carried out starting from virtual spaces or social media to public spaces such as markets, coffee houses, etc. Passively the impact of religion-based identity politics in Manado City in the 2020 election process, has created tension between religions, especially Christianity and Islam. The previous section has described how religious-based political contestation in Manado City, the model is not

much different from what happened in the 2020 election.

## CONCLUSION

Manado City in the 2020 election was still colored by religion-based identity politics. The political series from year to year or period, when analyzed more deeply, shows that there is a political color of religious identity in the contestation process. The identity politics that was played in the 2020 election in Manado City influenced inter-religious relations, such as sentiment to political arguments based on religion from their supporters. This pattern can be read on social media/Facebook groups of candidates for election in Manado City in 2020. The campaign by linking the religious identities of the candidates as a way to introduce them to the public to discriminate against other candidates with that religious identity. There is still a lack of research or writing that raises the impact or influence of identity politics on inter-religious relations in Manado City during the 2020 election. In addition, broader insights regarding identity politics are needed, so that they can be used properly and positively.

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