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# The Recent Practice Of Identity Politics In The Contesting Of Democracy In Indonesia

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the practice of identity politics in the context of democracy in Indonesia. The method used is qualitative by using documentation data based on readings of relevant theories and research results and conducting interviews with political party figures, government officials from political parties, political observers, and various parties who are always in contact with practical politics in Indonesia. The research was conducted in Central Kalimantan as the research center point and Jakarta as the political epicenter in Indonesia. The research was conducted from June to October 2022. Based on the study results, it can be concluded that politics in Indonesia cannot be separated from identity politics because most parties are intentionally labeled as party identities. Democratic, nationalist, regional and religious political parties have their own identities so that identity politics is never separated from the democratic system in Indonesia.

Keywords: party, politics, identity, democracy, contestation

## Introduction

The practice of identity politics has permanently colored political practice in Indonesia since the first general election in 1955. Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), Majelis Syuro Indonesia (Masyumi), Nahdhlatur Ulama (NU), and Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) are identity party that represents the secular identity and Islamic political identity. These parties already have an identity and are not entirely neutral and inclusive. A religion-based party is a party that openly refers to itself as a party that carries identity politics (Landa, 2010).

The practice of identity politics will reduce the level of political accountability because people are elected as representatives who will fight for the aspirations of people who are identical to the identity of the voters, not because of competence, responsibility, consistency, integrity, and other positive aspects (Chandra, 2004).

This article will explore the role of identity politics in the democratization period in Indonesia. The starting point of this research lies in the strengths and weaknesses of identity politics in the democratic system in Indonesia. What advantages do leaders get when they raise or carry identity politics as a forum for channeling the political aspirations of voters (Lupia & McCubbins, 2000)?

Will an identity party, for example, an Islamic identity-based party, win in an area where the majority is Muslim, or will a Christian identity-based party win in the voices of Christian voters? Likewise, whether national parties will win in areas where the majority have a high national spirit, regardless of religious identity politics (Morton et al., 2011).

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In Indonesia, several local parties are only permitted in particular areas, such as in Nangroe Aceh Darussalam. The question is whether the identity party is winning in its area against the national party, which is also based on identity politics.

Voters must accept elected officials from identity-based political parties from different identities. Elected political officials must be able to unite the community after the political process takes place. Conflicts caused by the political process since the campaign, general elections, to the determination of the results by the General Election Commission (KPU) are soon forgotten by the democratic society, and they return to work synergistically in advancing the region and the country in a broad sense.

They argue that the political process is a political process that must be respected. In the process of developing a region or a nation, it must be carried out together. The opposition does not mean that absence does not help build the state and nation. However, the opposition is interpreted as a counterweight when the state does not carry out the essential mandate of the state and the constitution. The opposition still has to contribute to the state system in Indonesia. Their participation in democratic and nation and state development is very much needed in terms of thoughts, energy, and costs that must be shared.

The performance of opposition representatives is still very much needed in the democratic system in Indonesia. Their performance still has a positive and significant effect on the progress of a nation. Although the number of opposition to the democratic system in Indonesia is only a minority, they still color the democratic system in Indonesia, even though the intensity is not as striking as the coalition of political parties that join the rulers.

In the democratic system in Indonesia, identity politics can run well without being accompanied by significant conflicts. Conflicts are only limited to mobilization wars, the role of arguments, the role of opinions, and wars on social media. There is no physical conflict, physical threat, or conflict with weapons.

Previous literature that has examined identity politics and democracy has been widely carried out, including Devine et al. (2002). In identity politics, the direction of voters always follows their identity group. Green et al. (2007) state that group behavior depends on what the leader says. Bolton & Ockenfels's (2000) rationalization of group behavior becomes difficult because it is covered by psychological and emotional. Fehr & Gaechter's (2000) preferences are closely related to representing the same identity group.

This study has a different view, that identity politics can create a good democracy when the political learning process can be well internalized to the constituents. Efforts can be made to cover identity politics that are relatively blind, without being able to see the competence and performance of their representatives in the people's representative council.

The novelty of this research lies in the socialization, education, and internalization of party programs built from identity groups to all constituents so that political education goes well. Democratization can also occur, so identity politics is not paternalistic or conventional. However, it can be advanced, modern, and rational toward the national interest without leaving the group's interests.

### **Literature Review**

Social identity is considered as a person's self that comes from perceived membership in a group. Social identity from the perspective of identity politics has psychological implications (Beck et al., 2002). Voters in choosing their representatives no longer use common sense by paying attention to the competence and performance of the people's representatives, but because of the psychological influence that will benefit the candidates for representatives in the people's representatives in the people's representatives.

Voters will act and vote according to the group's choice. Representatives were chosen because they came from fellow group members (Akerlof & Kraton, 2010). This will benefit the inner group (McLeish & Oxoby, 2007). The outside group can only enter when the inside group does not have any persuasion (Goette et al., 2006). When there are people from within groups who are persuasive, identity politics from outside groups will not be able to enter (Chen & Li, 2009). This is what is called group favouritism. They tend to overestimate their representatives who have the same identity (Bernhard et al., 2006).

The inner group has absolutely no egalitarian nature, they are blind, and they do not want to correct their less productive representatives. (McLeish & Oxoby, 2007). Many theories of group behaviour have found considerable evidence that social preferences are only understood as blind,

no longer objective, less rational, and suffused with primitive assumptions because all of them are tightly bound by the identity politics that accompany them (Engelman & Strobe, 2004).

So far, identity politics is very significant in the amount of representation (Green et al., 2007). The intervention of identity politics has a significant effect on the amount of representation (Devine et al., 2002). The competence of candidates for representatives who sit in the representative council is not a major consideration (Dickson & Scheve, 2006). Voters are very happy when in parliament there is a representation of their identity (Landa, 2010). Most of the electorate subjects show a greater willingness to vote than their representatives who have a similar social identity (in group) (Ashworth et al., 2010). Those who choose to leave the in-group are more influenced by programs from the more attractive out-group (Woon, 2012). The level of favouritism of voters in the representatives to be elected may be because they have a higher dowry for the voters (Gerber & Hopskin, 2011).

The weakness of identity politics is the weakness of sanctions given by voters when the elected representatives are unable to channel their aspirations (Kaufmann, 2004). Those who have already been elected because of their representation because of identity, the constituents do not dare or even find it very difficult to sanction them during the next general election, because again they are still bound by identity politics (Ferreira & Gyourko, 2009). Constituent decisions are still given to representatives of those who have the same identity (Hopkins & McCabe, 2012). Constituents will sacrifice the competence and performance of their representatives while on the board.

Identity politics has advantages, namely, low political costs (Chandra, 2004). They sincerely choose their representatives to sit on the council without having to use large funds to win the hearts of voters, because they have the same social identity (Morton et al., 2011). Competence and performance bias will greatly colour the political process that occurs (Levine & Zheng, 2010).

### Method

This research is qualitative research that emphasizes secondary data from the literature, journals, books, official sources, and various valid sources that can be accounted for. Primary data were obtained from interviews with public officials who came from political parties, political party leaders, political party administrators, sympathizers and various parties who fully understand identity politics and democracy in Indonesia.

The research was conducted in Central Kalimantan, precisely in Palangka Raya City (Haridison & Sandi, 2019; Haridison, 2021a; 2021b; 2022), and Jakarta. The research was conducted from June to October 2022. To increase the validity of the data, interviews were conducted by snowballing, checking, checking, and cross-checking. Researchers also try to stay long in the field to get data until they are saturated. Data were analyzed using four qualitative research steps, namely data collection, data classification, data reduction, and conclusion. In the process of concluding, researchers try to do "bracketing" which is to draw temporary conclusions while in the field. The final conclusion is only determined after the data has been collected sufficiently.

### **Results and Discussion**

### **Identity Politics and the Democratization Process**

Identity politics can be built democratically without having to abandon the values and core of good democracy. The learning process can be improved through socialization, education, and internalization of constituents who are politically stuttering. The accountability of identity politics, which was initially doubted, is currently being sought to find a strategy to obtain identity politics with the character of the Indonesian people who love peace, are full of wisdom, and always uphold the values of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution.

The distribution of votes in identity politics, which is still very dependent on the words of the leadership, is no longer detrimental to the voters, but it is hoped that it can still favour the inner group because it is easy for constituents who are insiders to remind their representatives who are unable to channel their aspirations from within their group (Habyarimana et al., 2007). Data 1 shows:

"The interaction between voters and elected representatives is expected to motivate voters in doing political learning. The process of identity framing in political learning towards democratization can run with the hope that the performance of the elected representatives can be maximized. Artificially, the process of framing the elected representatives as a person who

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will channel their identity aspirations has become easier. Elected representatives can answer smoothly and can fulfil all voter requests."

When the elected representatives can fulfil most of the voters' requests, of course, voters will easily re-elect their elected representatives in the next general election round (Goette et al., 2012).

Voters will provide a strong argument as to why they choose their representation, and even when they do not vote for return, of course, there is a rationality reason. The paradigm owned by the voters is the paradigm of fit within the inner group. In other words, identity politics provides a very high bond and loyalty to their elected representatives, regardless of competence and performance so far (Gneezy et al., 2012). Data 2 shows that:

"Identity politics has succeeded in inducing the tendency of subjects to choose their representatives to sit on the representative council. They are unable to objectively control and correct their representatives. This is where the character of identity politics is that on the one hand it benefits the inner group, but on the other hand it becomes a weak point in the process of control, sanction, and punishment."

Excessive favouritism in their inner group identity will trigger objectivity and accountability bias. This has weakened the democratization process (Ferreira & Gyourko, 2009). However, with the process of education, literacy, and internalization of the identity values of high identity groups, they can reduce this bias, and even become a separate force for the integrity of the nation-building process through a polite, trustworthy, direct, public and confidential political process (Eckel & Grossman, 2005).

## The Role of the Election Oversight Body in Identity Politics

Theoretically, explicit communication between constituents and elected representatives because they are still in the same inner group, can continue to run intensively. Each voter views identity as a unifier that will be able to build democratization properly without having to go through the provision of rewards. Pre-election utilities in the form of campaigns, and program socialization for internal and external groups, become a tool to condition voters to remain in the politically identical inner group (Desteno et al., 2004). Data 3 shows:

"In identity politics, there are no high-priced signals demanded by insider voters. Those who give high-cost signals are outsiders who deliberately take advantage of the opportunity in the electoral process. It is true, the general election has been supervised by the election supervisory body, but their existence looks very weak, because they are not given broad authority, so their existence is very weak."

In identity politics, insiders do not need to be monitored, because the election costs are very low. However, in the recruitment process for those from outside groups, because it requires expensive fees for political dowries, this is where the role of the Election Supervisory Body becomes increasingly important (Chen & Chen, 2011). reducing the level of accountability in general elections can be maximally suppressed (Charness et al., 2007). Data 4 explains:

"The balance of the monitoring process only needs to be carried out by identity politics in persuading expensive outside groups. Political emotion to get the most votes is the trigger for the process of identity politics to be expensive. When identity politics does not have the ambition to seize outside groups to become inside groups, in fact, general elections do not have to be expensive."

Thus, identity politics, which was originally meant to be exclusive, will pay dearly if it wants identity politics to be inclusive (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2001). The role of election supervisory bodies is becoming increasingly difficult because identity politics is trying to spread its wings to become an identity politics that has dual power from both the inner group (one identity) and the outer group (outer group). which are trying to be integrated into the whole are included in the inner group (Abrajano et al., 2005).

### **Voter Behaviour in Identity Politics**

Voter behaviour in identity politics is a loyal voter. It is very difficult for them to switch to another political party. At the level of democracy, this is legal and does not conflict with democratic

values. It's just that the absence of sanctions on the elected leadership reduces the meaning of democracy in identity politics (Nosek et al., 2007). Data 5 shows that:

"Voters in behaving in identity politics use more emotion. They chose elected representatives because of the similarity of identity, not because the programs offered were pro-poor. Rational voters become secondary after emotional. Rational voters in choosing not because of similar identities, but because of capabilities and performance."

The data above can be understood that Voter behaviour in identity politics tends to follow their informal and formal leaders (Mendelberg, 2001). What is commanded by formal and informal leaders will be a role model in carrying out democracy. This is the cause of the low quality of democracy (Stanovich & West, 2000).

The role of the mass media as a counterweight to democracy is not playing a role. Publication, socialization, and internalization of messages in elections, either directly or indirectly, no longer function properly. This is where the identity politics process is weak when faced with the democratization process (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). Data 6 explains:

"Mass media, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), political parties, and general elections that are transparent, honest, objective, direct, general, are the pillars of democracy in Indonesia. A sign that there are all these pillars, the democratization process cannot run well. Concerning identity politics, all of these pillars are glue to unite them so that the democratization consolidation process can run well."

The description above is under the view of Conway (2000) that the role of identity politics can be divided into three major roles. The first is the sociological role. Voter behaviour in voting is determined by the sociological characteristics of voters, main social class, religion, ethnicity, region, and language. This model is also known as the civic voluntary model (Conway, 2000). This theory assumes that voter behaviour expects elected leaders to fulfil the wishes of voters. Without participating in elections they leave the elected to lead the way (Miller and Shanks, 1996).

The second is the psychological model. Democratic culture or civil culture. Voters conducting elections not only use social networks but are always oriented to party identity. The involvement of the general election actors is due to their psychological identity with the candidate they want to choose.

Third, voters in conducting elections always see their self-efficacy. Voter political efficacy is a form of voters' feelings in understanding and determining any conditions related to the public interest. Data 7 shows that:

"The identity politics of the general election process becomes cheaper, but democratic values become less meaningful because voters in making decisions to vote are not because rationality is prioritized, but rather emphasize emotionality because of the identity equation. Voters who only follow their informal leaders who always suggest using identity politics, without being able to vote using clear rationality, cause the weight of democracy to be less meaningful."

Regarding voter behaviour in identity politics, it reflects the logic of those who prioritize harmony in social, political, economic, and other life.

### The Role of Identity Politics in the Democratization Process

So far, in identity politics, the ethical values of elected representatives have never been the main consideration for voters to vote. The values of religious similarity, place of residence, and social and economic conditions of the community have thickened identity politics in the same. On the one hand, the heterogeneity of the identity of political parties greatly respects the differences in parties and their political choices. It is proven that there are no disputes or conflicts between supporters of different political parties. Data 8 shows that:

"The whole community even though they have their respective idol parties, still can choose candidates for leadership who have acceptability. Identity politics, which is mostly played by political parties, will certainly play a very good role in improving the quality of democracy."

Identity politics in Indonesia seems very strong, however, it does not reduce the meaning of democracy. Democracy becomes more developed and looks dignified. Democracy in Indonesia

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can be built on different identities. The theory says that high-value democracy can only be built by mono-entry identity politics. Data 9 shows that:

"Strong identity politics will weaken democracy. This research concludes that the more identity politics that is played by each party, it is still able to increase democratic values."

The explanation above provides an understanding that identity politics in Indonesia does not hinder the democratization process at all. The process of democratization can develop in the process of identity politics. Various identities that develop in Indonesia cannot be separated from the many cultures, ethnicities, and religions that developed in Indonesia. In other words, identity politics will be very difficult to eliminate in Indonesia. This is where a better understanding of identity politics is needed in a pluralistic country.

The description above can be understood that identity politics can provide a better development of the democratic process in a region (Ananta et al., 2005). Identity politics can increase the value of democracy when the government can reduce the intensity of conflicts that may occur in the pre, process, and post-election processes.

### Conclusion

This study finds that identity politics in Indonesia has been born at the same time as the birth of political parties at the beginning of independence. Identity politics is still developing in Indonesia. In Indonesia, there are still many political parties, although they are based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, the nature of these parties is exclusively for the inner group, whether based on religious, non-religious or regional identity. All of them are still very thick in colouring identity politics in Indonesia. However, in the process of its development, the electability of political parties is not as high as expected, they try to use high political costs to increase party electability to meet the minimum threshold of 2.5%, and they recruit from the outer group so that identity politics shifts to inclusive politics.

Of Course, the democratization that has occurred in Indonesia, everything can run well. Although there were many political conflicts before the general election, during the general election, and after the general election, the conflict did not last long. No physical conflict or use of dangerous weapons. Even though voters have different identities, they will soon unite into a single Indonesian nation that upholds democratic values.

Participants in the general election who declared themselves to be in opposition to the state did not fully become the opposition. Indeed, they did not join the government, but they still carried out political democracy well. They are still involved in the development process and become a balance when there are government policies that are not pro-community.

This is where the novelty of this research is, that the identity politics that occurs in Indonesia is only fictitious. Opposition democracy is also pseudo because it acts more as a counterweight rather than absolute as pure opposition.

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