

## Defects of democracy: The continuity of identity politics in post-reform regional elections

### Kecacatan demokrasi: Lestarinya politik identitas dalam pilkada pasca reformasi

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#### Abstract

Identity politics in Indonesia is more closely related to issues of race, religion, ideology and local interests than other issues. This research aims to determine the impact of identity politics in every regional election (*pilkada*) in Indonesia. There are various ways in winning regional election (*pilkada*) strategies used by each candidate, one of which is the use of identity politics. Identity politics is a sign of the flaws in the nation's democracy that has been built since the reform was initiated. There are still many political elites who still preserve their political identity, hampering democratic development. This research is a qualitative descriptive study with arguments built from facts and supported by secondary sources. The results of this research found that in the regional elections (*pilkada*) in several regions, it was proven that political identities were still visible, such as politicizing religion and certain ethnic symbols, which were involved in the victory of one of the candidates. Apart from that, this research also explains the history of democracy that has occurred in regional elections (*pilkada*), showing the political identities that still exist in them. This study concludes that one of the impacts of identity politics is the erosion of national unity which results in the Indonesian nation's national resilience faltering.

**Keywords:** identity politics; defects of democracy; post-reformation; regional elections

#### Abstrak

*Politik identitas di Indonesia lebih erat kaitannya dengan isu-isu ras, agama, ideologi, dan kepentingan lokal, dibandingkan isu lainnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui dampak dari adanya politik identitas dalam setiap pilkada di Indonesia. Ada berbagai cara dalam strategi pemenangan pilkada yang digunakan setiap calon, salah satunya adalah penggunaan politik identitas. Politik identitas adalah salah satu penanda cacatnya demokrasi bangsa yang telah dibangun sejak reformasi digaungkan. Masih banyaknya para elit politik yang melestarikan politik identitas menjadikan pembangunan demokrasi terhambat. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan argumentasi yang dibangun dari fakta dan didukung dengan sumber sekunder. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan bahwa pada pilkada beberapa wilayah terbukti masih terlihat politik identitas seperti mempolitisasi agama dan symbol etnis tertentu yang berperan dalam pemenangan salah satu calon. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menjelaskan sejarah demokrasi yang sudah terjadi dalam pilkada memperlihatkan politik identitas masih tetap eksis di dalamnya. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa dampak dari politik identitas salah satunya adalah lunturnya kesatuan bangsa yang mengakibatkan ketahanan nasional bangsa Indonesia goyah.*

**Kata kunci:** politik identitas; kecacatan demokrasi; pasca reformasi; pilkada

#### Introduction

In Indonesia, issues of race, religion, ideology, and local interests are more closely related to identity politics than other issues. Elites often represent this problem through their different articulations (Abdilah 2002). One interpretation of identity politics is the regional expansion movement. Issues of justice and regional development are very important in their political discourse, but it is not always clear whether these concerns are real or whether they are driven by the aspirations of local elites to take over leadership. It makes perfect sense and is increasingly becoming evident in regular political practice that identity politics is a political resource and instrument in the struggle for political power.

Therefore, scientists who participate in the identity politics discourse try as much as possible to reframe it in a simpler and more practical logical framework; between identity politics and identity politics, a clear distinction is made (Kristiyanto et al. 2023). Identity politics refers to the political process of organising identity (both political identity and social identity) as a source and means of politics, while political identity is a construction that defines the place of the subject's interests in the bonds of the political community (Hogg & Abrams 1988). The process of directly and democratically electing regional heads in provinces and districts is known to a wide audience as regional head elections (*pilkada*). In accordance with relevant laws and regulations, general elections are carried out democratically based on the principles of direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair.

However, inter-group conflicts often arise during regional elections and are often related to issues of class, ethnicity, religion, race, and gender of regional head candidate pairs (Sanur 2017). There were several conflicts in the *pilkada*, one of which was the 2017 DKI *Pilkada*, which was the most prominent and received the most media attention (Lestari 2019). In the 2017 DKI Regional Election, identity politics was very visible. Identity development can occur partially or collaboratively. Changes in the socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural fields will result from this. Religion and ethnicity are two factors that influence the transformation of society. Social transformation will be influenced directly or indirectly by the political process of religious identity, and vice versa (Sukanto 2010).

Meanwhile, the politics of ethnic identification, whether overt or covert, directly or indirectly, gives rise to societal transformation. Not to mention the process of identity construction, naming, and use that triggers societal transformation (Danugroho et al. 2020). Identity is a very basic idea that we hear often. This is also the idea that serves as the basis for any introduction. If we know the identity of something, we can identify it. It also implies that if we can identify something, we will know who or what it is. Biopolitics and the politics of difference are sometimes known as identity politics (Setyaningrum 2005). Disparities based on physical differences are the foundation of biopolitics. Some examples of the two working together to fulfil their separate duties include the relations between states in political and religious scenarios. However, we realise that the role of religion and the state in politics is not always constructive.

For example, Indonesian politics was heavily influenced by religious themes in both the 2014 and 2019 elections. Religious disputes are regularly used as a frying pan to gain political power. We must continue to be vigilant about exposing the politicisation of religion and race as we prepare for the 2024 elections. It is vital to build good relations between religion and the state so that the 2024 elections run smoothly and maintain the nation's respect for democracy. Some people feel too lazy to talk about politics. Politics is seen by certain groups as unethical, full of lies and deceit, and even a kind of oppression. A person with this mentality falls under its influence and becomes apathetic or indifferent to the politics of his nation (Fuad 2014). Disillusionment with politics can be seen, for example, in white groups who are less involved in politics.

Research on The Flaws of Democracy: The Persistence of Identity Politics in Post-Reform Era Regional Elections highlights the increasingly dominant role of identity politics in the political process in Indonesia, particularly in the context of post-reform Regional Elections. This phenomenon reflects the complexity of democracy in Indonesia, where social identities such as religion, ethnicity, or culture often play a key role in determining political support. The use of identity politics in post-reform Regional Elections has resulted in several significant impacts (Tiwari 2017). Firstly, identity politics tends to obscure substantial issues such as economic development, social welfare, and human rights. This can lead to a decrease in the quality of public debate and less informed political decisions. Secondly, identity politics can also trigger societal polarization and intergroup conflicts, threatening social harmony and political stability. When identity politics dominates, the risk of social segregation and discrimination against minority groups increases.

However, it should be noted that identity politics can also have positive impacts, such as strengthening group identity and pride and increasing political participation. In this context, it is important for the government, political parties, and civil society to understand the dynamics of identity politics wisely.

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Therefore, further research on identity politics in post-reform Regional Elections is needed to develop effective strategies to address the flaws of democracy. Increasing awareness of the importance of inclusive, substance-based political development, and prioritizing the interests of the overall community are key to strengthening democracy in Indonesia.

### Research Method

Researchers used descriptive and qualitative research methods. Qualitative research aims to better understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects (Mohajan 2018). In this research, data was collected through a literature study including data from the Mass Media, and supporting secondary books in viewing the phenomenon of identity politics. The mass media used in this case ranges from 2010 to 2024. Data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions are the data analysis techniques used in this research. Data collection in this research used literature research.

The data analysis techniques and procedures in this research are data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Creswell 2016). The data used to illustrate identity politics in the Regional Elections (*Pilkada*) was collected during the campaign period of the 2019 Regional Elections and *Pilkada* DKI Jakarta 2017. The mass media used are sought with the category of national mass media and are certainly credible in their status. The media used as references in this research include news from Kompas, Media Indonesia, Jawa Pos, Koran Tempo. In the post-reform era in Indonesia, identity politics has become an increasingly interesting topic in the context of local elections or regional head elections (*Pilkada*).

The mass media plays a significant role in shaping the narrative surrounding this identity politics. Various narratives that emerge can reflect the political, social, and cultural dynamics in Indonesian society. Some narratives that may emerge are about how identity politics influences the dynamics of *pilkada* in various regions. For example, how religious, ethnic, or cultural identities affect support for certain candidates. Other narratives may discuss identity conflicts that arise in the context of *pilkada*, such as conflicts between ethnic or religious groups. Additionally, narratives can also discuss how the mass media covers these identity politics issues. Whether the mass media tends to reinforce polarization or seeks to reconcile identity differences in the context of *pilkada*.

Narratives about the role of the mass media in shaping public opinion can also be an interesting topic, considering the significant influence of the mass media in shaping public perceptions of political issues. Thus, narratives surrounding identity politics in post-reform *pilkada* in Indonesia reflect the complexity of political and social dynamics in the country. This research emphasises using libraries or secondary sources that have been criticised according to the suitability of the researcher’s focus. Apart from that, researchers also use literature to strengthen arguments. This research has not used primary sources or data processing due to the limited time it takes to write.

### Results and Discussion

Identity politics has become a prominent feature of the political landscape in Indonesia, particularly in the context of regional elections (*pilkada*) following the reform era. The post-reform era has witnessed a significant evolution in the way identity is used as a political tool, shaping electoral outcomes and influencing governance at the local level. This evolution reflects both the complexities and challenges of democracy in Indonesia, where issues of religion, ethnicity, and culture often intersect with political dynamics. The persistence of identity politics in *pilkada* has raised important questions about the nature of democracy and governance in Indonesia.

While identity-based mobilization can be a powerful tool for political engagement and empowerment, it also carries inherent risks. The instrumentalization of identity for political gain can lead to the marginalization of certain groups, the exacerbation of social divisions, and the erosion of democratic principles. Understanding the dynamics of identity politics in *pilkada* is essential for policymakers, political actors, and civil society to navigate the complexities of Indonesia’s democratic landscape. By

examining the role of identity in shaping electoral behavior, policy priorities, and governance practices, we can gain valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing democracy in Indonesia today.

### **Identity politics in the midst of regional elections before and during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Identity politics is a type of politics that aims to direct political aspirations to influence policy and the distribution of values that are considered essential for the most basic needs, namely self-determination based on basic principles (Nordholt & Klinken 2007). Identity politics is represented within an ethnic framework in a variety of ways, including efforts to divide government sectors, gain special autonomy, and form separatist movements. Meanwhile, identity politics in the realm of religion is represented in various efforts to incorporate religious values into the formulation of public policy, including legal implications, as well as initiatives to associate cities with certain beliefs. Since the introduction of direct regional head elections, ethnicity has also influenced regional political conflicts. Ethnicity is a marker of political identity, as racial equality and cultural identification are enhanced alongside markers of biological and cultural identity distinctions.

The social research setting for identity politics before and after the COVID-19 pandemic provides a deep understanding of the changing dynamics of identity politics. Before the pandemic, identity politics may have been more related to local issues, such as ethnicity, religion, or culture, affecting local elections or regional head elections (*Pilkada*). However, as the pandemic hit, identity politics became more complex with the emergence of new issues, such as health and safety identities. Strong arguments for examining the changes in identity politics before and after the COVID-19 pandemic include: (1) Shift in political priorities and issues. Before the pandemic, identity politics issues may have been more focused on specific aspects, but during the pandemic, political priorities and issues can change drastically. For example, there may have been more discussions about ethnic or religious identities in the context of *pilkada* before, but during the pandemic, health and safety identity issues became more dominant. (2) New polarization and solidarity, the pandemic has created new polarization in society, where some groups may feel more isolated or marginalized, while others feel more united in new forms of solidarity. This can be reflected in the dynamics of identity politics before and after the pandemic. (3) Influence of mass media and technology. The role of mass media and information technology in shaping identity politics may also change along with the changing social dynamics during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, mass media may have focused more on traditional identity politics reporting, but during the pandemic, mass media also became a platform for building new identities related to responses to the pandemic. By understanding the changes in identity politics before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we can see how the pandemic has reshaped the dynamics of identity politics and influenced how individuals and groups identify themselves in a broader social context.

This is closely related to the socio-economic situation of the environment, which is strongly influenced by the ancestral ethnic system, providing negotiating power in politics and within the executive branch. The influence of globalisation includes the strengthening of local identity, which is one of the causes of its existence. Not only does it affect countries, but globalisation has also spread to regions. Modernization and globalisation have also become vehicles for social and cultural change, radically changing the religious practices of individuals, especially in urban areas, to the point that their religious identity is threatened (Danugroho 2022c). In this context, religious identity is often used as a political term, which some people consider risky because it can damage the country's social cohesiveness.

In categorising its population, the state has made a significant contribution through ethnic politics. This labelling is crucial in regulating political issues or can also be used as a political tool by the state to determine who are enemies and who are friends among its population. Since political reform and decentralisation were adopted, ethnic politicisation has strengthened again. Ethnic consciousness has been revitalised and enhanced during the reform phase that brought the country towards openness, democratisation, regional autonomy, and decentralisation (Lay 2017). In addition, the desire to be free from the domination and exploitation of the federal government, as well as the outward ethnic consciousness that gave rise to ethno-nationalism.

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Understanding one's ethnic heritage inspires the desire to be liberated from oppression and exploitation. For example, Dayak and Malay elites have played a political role in ethnic rebirth since reforms were implemented in West Kalimantan. Malays are concerned about the rise and prosperity of the Dayak ethnic group (Rahman et al. 2021). They are worried that the Dayak people who are mobilising and demanding that local sons become regional heads will ignore them, act unfriendly towards them, and pass them by. Although the Dayak tribe made initial demands, the Malays also responded in the same way (Kompas 2012). All producers have the same point of view and intentions.

The political elite of the two ethnic groups ultimately chose to share power, especially the role of regent for each tribe. Therefore, there is some division of power. However, in reality, a Malay was chosen to represent the Dayak people, and vice versa. This happened in Ketapang and Sintang districts. The identity politics movement is easier to understand after Law No. 22/1999 was promulgated. In fact, many local and national political players rely heavily on this issue for power sharing. Political identity refers to the political process of organising identity (both political identity and social identity) as a source and means of politics, as well as a construction that defines the place of the subject's interests in the bonds of the political community (Robert & Walling 2023).

Despite similarities and a tendency to use different political tools, The ongoing implementation of the 2017 DKI regional elections provides an illustration of how identity politics often boils down to issues of ethnicity, religion, and race (Asyari 2017, Lestari 2019). Race, religion, and ethnicity all have a significant influence on voting behaviour and may even crystallise in ways that place voters under psychological pressure. Whether you understand it or not, such a political process will paralyse Indonesian democracy. Micro-political issues, namely relations of domination in everyday life that claim to be a regime of truth and are controlled in a structured and inclusive manner by arousing people's emotions so that marginalisation occurs and the emergence of other labels, such as religious differences, gender differences, and ethnic differences, cannot be denied. Again, this is another thing that needs to be looked at, considering this phenomenon.

In fact, the successful use of identity politics in DKI in the 2017 *Pilkada* has become a raw inspiration for other regions to embrace identity politics as the basis of each candidate's strategy in formal and unofficial political contests (Safutra 2017). The parties are no longer used as platforms, means of representation, or channels of communication. It seems that social media plays a role in the growing horizontal social isolation, so it is not appropriate to celebrate the domination of identity politics in the public arena, which occurs every day in huge waves (Miichi 2014). Because everything is done in an oligarchic democracy that is very familiar with the politicisation of SARA and the tendency to polarize, the democracy in Indonesia seems to have turned to competition that knows neither friend nor foe to win over the public.

Excessive identity politics risks fostering fascism or, worse, secession, and also makes it easier for groups with a political agenda to mobilise individuals who have been absorbed based on a particular identity. The goal of identity politics, as practiced by some organizations, is to build a single identity. The history of diversity possessed by Indonesian society seems to have escaped their attention. Studying the 2017 DKI Jakarta Province Regional Head Election is an interesting political development (Lestari 2019). The toughest and most terrifying competition for gubernatorial candidates is the democratic process. In this situation, there are a number of elements that need to be considered more carefully, including those related to economic considerations, which also influence how democracy is implemented in the nation's capital.

According to Indonesian history, the majority of the native population embraced Islam, which was introduced by Arab traders in the seventh century AD. Previously, this region was ruled by Hindu-Buddhist dynasties influenced by India. The influx of Indians and Arabs into the archipelago became the impetus for the mass migration of the Chinese Mongoloid race as well as the subsequent growth in the population of their descendants in Indonesia. Chinese traders, along with Arabs and Indians, were important players in Indonesian trade throughout the colonial era, particularly in Batavia. The Dutch raised the social standard of the Chinese to be on par with Indians and Arabs as trade intermediaries

between the Dutch and the local population after the Chinese initially came and settled in the archipelago as labourers and employees imported by the VOC and the British (Nordholt & Klinken 2007).

One approach to implementing democracy in Indonesia is simultaneous regional elections, which function as a channel for change. Under any conditions, including a pandemic, elections must continue to be held. *Pilkada*, a necessity for a democratic country, is the entry point for regional leadership rotation. Therefore, simultaneous regional head elections will still take place on December 9, 2020, even though the COVID-19 outbreak has hit Indonesia and the world. Initially, there were advantages and disadvantages to the government's choice to continue holding simultaneous regional elections. The simultaneous regional elections, which were scheduled to take place on September 23, 2020, were postponed to December 9, 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, which was still hitting Indonesia at the time (Mashabi 2020).

On December 9, 2020, general elections were held in a number of regions in Indonesia, both for provincial and district/city positions. Law Number 10 of 2016 Article 201, paragraph 6, essentially regulates the simultaneous regional elections in 2020, while the government regulation in lieu of Law Number 2 of 2020 concerning regional elections regulates the holding of simultaneous regional elections during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ristyawati 2020). Candidates competing for supporters will campaign in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections. Campaigns must be carried out in accordance with the rules set due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regency and city social limitations hampered large-scale campaigns. Articles 58 to 60 of General Election Commission Regulation 10/2020 state that campaign implementation is only carried out on a limited basis and must follow very strict health procedures (Danugroho 2022a).

In the end, media campaigns were imitated in many ways, including by utilising social media. Despite the obstacles, social media is considered a successful medium for media campaigns. A number of cyber crimes and the emergence of identity politics concerns aimed at many couples are influenced by the widespread use of campaigns and candidate recognition via social media. With simultaneous elections taking place in 2020, this problem has spread to other election-related situations. Since the enactment of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government, which mandates that regional residents have the right to directly elect their leaders, identity politics has become a widespread phenomenon (Lestari 2019). The creation of feelings based on the similarities that sympathisers have with the politicians they support is what gives this identity its foundation in society's collective perception (Dhani 2019). The development of these criteria allows classification based on the variations that several things contain. This reality is also called biopolitics, and politics is built on differences.

The sense of injustice felt by individuals or groups of people becomes a catalyst for identity construction, which in turn shapes the nation's political landscape (Machmudi 2023). The majority of injustice is caused by the polarisation of social status, including oligarchy, educational attainment, and a lack of equality (Jung & Mittal 2020). This attitude is usually influenced by the exclusion of certain people or groups, or more precisely, their marginalized social status. This effort is motivated by long-term emotions of marginalisation, oppression, and social, economic, and cultural marginalization (Mahpudin 2019). Seven regions, including Depok City, East Halmahera Regency, and Solok Regency, have a high level of diagnosis of SARA problems, 18 have a medium level of vulnerability, and 236 have a low level of vulnerability from various regions holding elections simultaneously (Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Hukum dan HAM 2020).

The level of vulnerability is determined by a number of factors, including the increasing politicisation of identity as well as intergroup and racial, religious, and ethnic concerns. The categorization of the level of vulnerability in each location is influenced by the tendency to politicize these issues. The discussion of identity politics has changed due to posts and tweets on social media containing hate speech and images of SARA (Kartika 2020). Indonesian society is increasingly immersed in the issue of identity, so it remains a strong issue in all shapes and sizes. Propaganda by more powerful individuals, such as presidents or other organisations, has the potential to influence social paradigm shifts (Hornsey et al. 2020). By eliminating the identity crisis, which is considered cheap and capable of influencing public emotions through fabricated narratives, the democratic recession is becoming increasingly visible (Yandwiputra 2023).

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Buying and selling identity politics is something that cannot be separated from the political constellation that emerged after the defeat of the previous election because it was considered a populist tactic. On the other hand, the public, both fans and detractors of marginalised identity issues, is often forced to follow suit (Drozdzewski & Matusz 2021). Therefore, the influence of mass elites who try to read this reality as a political opportunity and even explore economic, cultural, and other factors cannot be ruled out. The value of political ethics needs to be emphasised as a source of public political knowledge to legitimise emerging challenges (Gunanto 2020).

Political dynasties reproduce power by relying on the power of family or kinship, but dynastic politics is an oligarchic political strategy to do this. The story of Banten Governor Ratu Atut, who created a political dynasty consisting of her brother, partner, in-laws, stepmother, and children, is one of the political dynasty crises that emerged in the public eye several years ago (Effendi 2018). This is comparable to a lineage-based monarchical regime. The main difference is that elections must be held in a democratic system. However, political strategies are based on ties of family and kinship, which will very easily manipulate the people's votes.

### **The difficulty of erasing the culture of identity politics**

For democratic countries with diverse circumstances and social structures, the phenomenon of identity politics is a major problem. It is believed that the substantial presence of identity politics in local settings can result in ongoing segregation in social life (Dauly et al. 2019). Identity politics has developed into a problem that has the potential to penetrate the defences of political opponents in the implementation of general elections at both the national and city levels. Ethnicity, religion, race, and relations between groups are some of these factors. Identity politics can be used in various ways (Faridiany et al. 2019). Each candidate and participant can spread their ideas in their own unique way throughout the campaign. Almost all sectors, including presidential, parliamentary, and regional executive elections, use identity politics in general elections (Ardipandanto 2020).

Political unrest in this country always seems to be triggered by themes of violence and identity. The two seem to go hand in hand in the same breath, and it is practically guaranteed that questions of identity are present wherever there is political contention (Ufen 2010). Violence, however, usually comes when the owner of the identity is hunted down. In public places, criticism, intimidation, and even threats are often heard and seen and are considered tools to maintain the identity of the aggrieved individual. This country has a long history of the phenomenon of identity politics, which is increasingly finding space with the immediate enactment of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning regional government and regional head elections. Previously, the DPR had revoked this regulation because it was considered to have the potential to trigger conflict between communities and corruption, giving rise to the need for regional heads to be re-elected by the DPRD.

Identity politics first emerged after Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning regional government was passed, which regulates the direct election of regional heads in regional elections. The majority of community organisations in certain locations have a greater chance of winning their candidates through the regional elections. The development of identity politics is also supported by regional autonomy and decentralization programs. A real phenomenon related to the formation of new political groups and awareness that reflects a critical view of Indonesianness is the emergence of religious identity sentiment in Indonesia in all its manifestations. Biopolitics and the politics of difference are sometimes known as identity politics. Disparities based on physical differences are the foundation of biopolitics.

A multicultural and multiethnic country or society is very conducive to conditions for the spread of identities and entities of difference, politics of differences and entities of differences, and politics of difference. An ethical framework, in this case, tolerance, must be built within this framework through the interaction of various groups, especially diverse ethnic groups. Only in the political climate of a democratic country can political tolerance be imagined. Because the prevailing political system, structure,

and climate all have a significant impact on political tolerance, Different levels of intensity of tolerance were discovered by John Sullivan and his colleagues when they examined the ideas and practices of political tolerance in three different countries, namely the United States, New Zealand, and Israel.

The level of economic prosperity, political systems and structures, and political psychological variables all have an impact on this. Seeing the future political landscape, which is developing into a diversified political path by reconsidering the levels of humanity and ethics, the idea of identity politics is relevant to apply, at least in discourse (Hassink & Gong 2020). Political scientist Geoff Mulgan argues that ethical and moral warfare should be promoted. Because political parties now have a smaller role as mainstream narratives and ideologies fall apart, to end political unrest and promote moral and ethical political action, morality will also be necessary. As a manifestation of the national spirit (*volksgeits*), which is full of knowledge, elections are more about thinking activities to find reason or logic for it.

This explanation explains that the policies that are now labelled as the main results of the election must be implemented fairly and honestly. When it comes to meaningful political communication on our nation's political stage, this idea should be the elite's catchphrase. However, it is true that the rational way of thinking that should be used to discuss economic development or cultural development does not seem to be limited to material produced by political elites (Goodin 1993). This elite is characterised by a culture of personal attacks, money politics, and innuendo that often raises issues with racial or religious overtones. The low political communication skills of political elites, the low credibility of institutions, and the low level of political education in Indonesia are factors that contribute to the growth of identity politics.

Political communication literacy includes expertise and skills in conveying political messages and how communication is carried out to increase people's participation not only in national or local elections but also in their ability to take decisions voluntarily and without triggering conflict in their environment (Vakil 2018). When political parties are unable to create quality cadres and members, the legitimacy of the organisation is doubted. Without a cadre formation process, several political parties have innovated in recruiting candidates. Without previous political expertise, the process of recruiting cadres and members was completed quickly. So that the campaign process is considered to not have a clear vision and goals. As a result, many politicians use unconventional techniques to win over voters, one of which is running identity politics campaigns. Identity politics is also rooted in inadequate voter education.

Community groups that are considered very vulnerable to SARA issues can be mapped and prioritised in political education. Voters can benefit from extensive political education by increasing the participation of non-governmental groups, election activists, election observers, and election organizers. From the perspective of election participants themselves, political parties can encourage political education by expanding their cadre formation initiatives. The party's internal nomination process can optimise the cadre formation program (Danugroho 2022d). Political education is provided as part of the cadre formation programme, for example, on how to formulate plans to develop strong visions, goals, and programmes that can offer solutions to problems that society hopes to gain support from voters. Due to the lack of political communication training and education among party cadres, most political party candidates currently struggle to understand how best to win voter support. The electability of regional head candidate pairs is theoretically explained by various factors, including social, sociological, psychological, and rational choice.

### **The impact of identity politics on Indonesian democracy**

In the 1970s, American social scientists began to focus their research on the rhetoric surrounding identity politics. When minority groups, gender, feminism, racism, ethnicity, and other social groups feel excluded and persecuted, identity politics becomes a problem (Castells 2010). Justice is the basis for the study and practice of identity politics, although the identity of the creator of the term is still unknown. While identity politics can promote freedom and tolerance, it can also give rise to patterns of violent behaviour, verbal abuse, and inter-ethnic strife. These two currents, which have two different meanings, show that identity politics is not just a threat to the existence of democracy. It also influences social space, fosters tolerance and collaboration between individuals, and works for electoral contests.



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However, identity politics is more prominent and interpreted in the context of political contestation and dominance. The political elite is thus unable to actualize substantive democracy in this case, prosperity and justice because it is trapped in polarised communication that stagnates on the subject of identity (Goodin 1993). Local political patterns face a difficult path that must be traversed carefully. The presence of culture manifested as identity must be a unifying force and not be exploited in political victory pamphlets that do not raise the level of voter knowledge. Political parties are the next tool that must be used to bind and process identity politics.

The level of public trust in democratic institutions is decreasing, so a new type of branding is needed that is more substantive in terms of campaigns, programmes, and ideology in lectures and political communications so that the bad reputation of political parties can be reduced regularly. However, this movement must be mutually agreed upon and implemented seriously. This idea is very important because it will help regulate today's rising identity politics by stabilising local political polarization. Then, when cries of identity politics were raised in the public sphere, it was clear that it was impossible for revivalist groups to ride on people's emotions. Election violence, namely deviant acts that can endanger the election process and election actors, including voters, is believed to occur if identity politics continues from election to election (Astuti 2014).

Politics is communication, and taking part in politics means reaching agreements with other people, so violence goes against political ideals. The way to reach an agreement is through conversation and communication skills. The importance of communication skills in preventing communication breakdowns that can lead to the loss of information. Campaigns based on identity politics risk encouraging the formation of niche groups, which is a weakness. For example, in the DKI regional elections, there were indigenous factions that strongly opposed the emergence of non-natives as rulers. Things like this will cause significant social strife and nationalist polarization. Identity politics can be used as an effort to preserve the cultural values that are characteristic of the group concerned, so that the culture of that community group will be deeply rooted and not easily lost due to developments over time (Danugroho 2022b).

Even though identity politics has a negative side, there are positive things that can be taken from it. However, this is possible when considering that jargon identity can unite other groups, work for the greater good, and prevent conflict between groups. Identity politics, on the other hand, may be dangerous if certain people use it to demonise, demean, and defame their opponents while still believing that their group is the most correct. Many voters do not realise that identity politics endangers the continuity of the democratic system and eliminates their role as sovereign citizens when it becomes a powerful tool for candidate pairs in regional elections.

What about other regions in Indonesia if religion-based identity politics becomes a strong predictor in the Jakarta *Pilkada*? What about the role of ethnicity in understanding voting behaviour, considering that identity politics can result from factors that go beyond just shared religion or race? There are hundreds of tribes in Indonesia, but research shows that they are not enough to explain electoral politics. Many national experts claim that ethnicity has minimal influence on how legislative and presidential election results are explained. The minimal influence of religion on presidential elections after 2004 has been visible until now. The impact of primordial politics at the local level is poorly understood, even though identity politics is not an important element nationally. Identity politics has a bad impact on democratic life, especially because SARA problems still exist even though Indonesia is not an independent country.

In fact, the topic of identity politics still persisted during the 2018 simultaneous regional head elections, the 2019 presidential elections, and the 2020 simultaneous elections. Building familiarity is the spread of political identification by politicians through nonverbal cues such as taglines and likes. Voters' emotions are still raw (Slamet 2019). This tactic was carried out by Deddy Mizwar, Ridwan Kamil, Sudrajat, and Tubagus Hasanuddin in pairs as gubernatorial candidates. Because candidate pairs have similar religious beliefs, which are summarised in certain symbols, religious subjects are not reflected in political phenomena in West Java (Mahpudin 2019).

Identity politics that have emerged throughout Indonesia's electoral history, especially those that occurred during the regional elections, must be addressed carefully with historical justification and public education. It is necessary to find mechanisms to reduce the possibility of identity politics emerging in a multicultural country like Indonesia. There are still many people who lack perspective because they define identification in a way that only applies to one group, which leads to identity politics, which intensifies conflicts between ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and groups. Since Indonesia's independence, it has been accepted that the nation should not be divided by differences in ethnicity, race, religion, and other groups, but each community maintains it.

Building a democratic state in accordance with democratic principles is difficult for political actors because of identity politics. Opportunities for the growth of political understanding resulting from cultural diversity in Indonesia are provided by the democratic system. Therefore, identity politics must not include aspects of intimidation or violence against other groups and must operate within the parameters of democratic norms. Because identity politics continues to be fostered and maintained by campaign teams from election to election, it is poison for democracy. Candidates and their campaigns need to be alert to the dangers of identity politics. Improving political communication skills and political education is one way to spread this understanding, especially among party cadres who will be nominated by political parties but also among the general public as voters.

The state must take part in improving voter education for the wider community, for example, by increasing lessons about democracy and elections in the curriculum. This is done so that the public can see the concepts put forward by candidates without getting caught up in difficulties related to SARA. Programmes to improve the political communication skills of party cadres are also included in party political education. The communicator must be able to control the content of the message. Campaign messages must be in accordance with the needs of society, without the embellishment of equality of identity, which can cause conflict for people with various identities. Therefore, the skills and expertise of political communicators are very important in reducing societal disputes caused by differences of opinion.

Whatever is done or said must consider the consequences, including how it will affect institutions and the larger society (Greenberg 2017). The General Election Commission, as the election organiser in Indonesia, must make more detailed regulatory arrangements regarding campaign materials to address the issue of identity politics used in campaign slogans for election participants. To limit the negative impacts of excessive identity politics, this action is important. In general, identity politics has been a good thing since it was first used to defend the rights of oppressed and marginalised communities.

To rally the masses, dominant groups in Indonesia increasingly use identities such as race, religion, and ethnicity. Ironically, political elites often engage in this behaviour. In fact, they often use identity issues to subvert democracy in order to seize power. Therefore, it is certain that SARA will appear at every political event. The effects of this phenomenon of identity politicization are very pronounced, especially considering that Indonesian politics is still unstable and is strongly influenced by group sentiment and interests. People make decisions based on identification interests rather than logical reasoning. The use of religious symbols to marginalise certain groups has the potential to trigger cultural violence, so it is clearly dangerous.

Theoretical interpretation of identity politics in local elections (*Pilkada*) can be approached through the lens of identity politics theory. This theory emphasizes that an individual's political identity is not only based on individual factors but also influenced by social, cultural, and historical factors. In the context of *pilkada*, identity politics can be a significant factor influencing voters in choosing candidates. *Pilkada* is often a platform where ethnic, religious, or cultural identities can play a significant role in voters' choices. For example, voters may tend to choose candidates from the same ethnic or religious background because they feel more emotionally connected or share similar beliefs. The novelty of this study may lie in the approach taken to analyze identity politics in *pilkada*.

Some elements of novelty that can be brought into this study include: *First*, post-reform *pilkada* context, this study can provide an in-depth understanding of how identity politics has evolved in the post-reform

era of *pilkada* in Indonesia. This is important considering that the reform era has brought significant changes in the political and social dynamics of Indonesia. *Second*, comprehensive analysis, this study can conduct a comprehensive analysis of various factors influencing identity politics in *Pilkada*, including social, cultural, and historical factors. This can provide deeper insights into how identity politics operates in the context of *pilkada*. *Thrid*, policy implications, this study can provide relevant policy implications for political practitioners, stakeholders, and the general public in managing identity politics in the context of *pilkada*. This can help in designing more effective strategies in managing diversity of identities in the context of local politics.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that identity politics, which is a political source and instrument in the struggle for political power, still exists today. Various identity politics occur in general elections and regional elections in Indonesia. Ethnicity has minimal influence on the results of regional elections in each region of Indonesia. It is believed that the substantial presence of identity politics in local settings can result in ongoing segregation in social life. Identity politics has developed into a problem that has the potential to penetrate the defences of political opponents in the implementation of general elections at both the national and regional levels. A real phenomenon related to the formation of new political groups and awareness that reflects a critical view of Indonesianness is the emergence of religious identity sentiment in Indonesia in all its manifestations. Identity politics risks encouraging the formation of special groups. For example, in the 2017 DKI Regional Election, there were indigenous factions that strongly opposed the emergence of non-natives as rulers. Things like this will cause significant social strife and nationalist polarisation. Research on The Persistence of Identity Politics in Post-Reform Era Regional Elections makes a valuable contribution to analyzing political changes in Indonesia after the reform.

Research on identity politics in local elections (*Pilkada*) contributes significantly to the development of knowledge by deepening our understanding of how ethnic, religious, or cultural identities influence political behavior. Through this study, we can better understand the social and cultural dynamics in the context of local politics, as well as how group identities play a role in the political process. This research also provides valuable insights for policymakers and political practitioners in designing more effective strategies to manage identity diversity in the context of *pilkada*. Further research on identity politics in *pilkada* can provide deeper insights into the dynamics of local politics in Indonesia. Comparative studies between regions can help identify different patterns of identity politics and the factors that influence them. Additionally, media analysis of identity politics coverage in *pilkada* can provide an understanding of how political identity messages are conveyed to the public and how this affects public perception. Thus, further research in this field can make a significant contribution to the development of political science in Indonesia.

Moreover, this research also provides a strong foundation for identifying challenges and opportunities in strengthening democracy in Indonesia. By understanding the impact of identity politics in post-reform regional elections, we can develop more effective strategies to promote social inclusion and political stability. Preventing identity politics in regional head elections (*Pilkada*) in Indonesia involves several important steps, including strengthening law enforcement. Firm enforcement of laws against identity politics-related violations, such as campaigns that use identity issues to influence voters or create inter-group conflicts, is important to create a healthy and fair political environment. Additionally, inclusive political education is also essential. Political education that provides a better understanding of the importance of voting based on candidates' visions, missions, and work programs, rather than on ethnic, religious, or cultural identities, can help reduce polarization and identity conflicts in *pilkada*. Furthermore, educating the public about the importance of tolerance and diversity is necessary. By understanding and appreciating identity differences, the public can choose based on the substance and quality of candidates, rather than just based on group identities. Lastly, transparency and accountability in the *pilkada* process must be strengthened. Ensuring that the *pilkada* process is transparent and accountable will build public trust in the integrity and fairness of the election, reducing the potential for manipulation by identity politics.

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