Study of Identity Politics in the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Head Election in Tarakan City, Indonesia

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Abstract

As an archipelagic country with the largest number of ethnic groups and religions in the world, Indonesia is a multicultural and multi-religious country which currently influences the democratic process in Indonesia, one of which is the Regional Head Election (Pilkada). Tarakan City is an ethnically and religiously diverse city which in its democratic process is still influenced by issues of religious and ethnic sentiment which are accommodated and used well by political elites as instruments in every regional head election. This research uses a qualitative approach with case studies. Data collection techniques use interviews, documentation and audio visuals. The theories used in this research are identity politics, multiculturalism, political participation, political elites, and simultaneous regional elections. The data analysis used in this research refers to a data analysis model which includes three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. Based on the research results, it shows that political elites and regional head candidates seem to deliberately maintain or play identity politics, for political interests and power hegemony. This had an impact on the political reality in the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Head Election in Tarakan City. With a certain identity, regional head candidates can hold a bargaining position, which shows that ethnic and religious factors are significant enough to gain support and influence people's choices in the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Tarakan City. This also proves that the people of Tarakan are voters who only care about figures and similar backgrounds rather than the skills and abilities of regional head candidate pairs.

Introduction

The implementation of democracy in Indonesia is still entangled and dynamic with the reality that this country is a country with high diversity, especially in terms of ethnic and religious diversity (Aisyah et al., 2022; Fuad, 2014; Lee & Min, 2021; Nguyen & Tran, 2022 ; Park, 2022). Differences based on diversity in Indonesia have made a lot of history as the main factor in the emergence of conflicts, such as conflicts between religions, between ethnicities, between tribes, and so on. Identity politicization carried out by those referred to as local political elites in various regions in Indonesia in the local political context has been changed in such a way and expressed in various forms (Acheampong et al., 2022; Kriyantono et al., 2022; Nasution, 2014) . Identity politics is often used as a basis for the struggle of local political elites in order to win themselves, increase the number of votes and strengthen the identity of regional political elites with the title "Son of the Region" (Droubi et al., 2022; Soedarwo, 2014).

When referring to the cultural and ethnic diversity that exists in various regions in Indonesia, of course the workings of identity politics in regions in Indonesia are expressed and put forward in various forms starting from comparisons between me and you, us and them, local people and non-natives, and even more extreme, natives and non-natives, tribe A and tribe B, even Islam and Christianity. General elections are an integral part of the democratic system in Indonesia. Apart from the presidential election, the regional head election (Pilkada) is also an important event in determining regional leaders at the provincial, district and city levels. The simultaneous regional elections held in 2019 were attended by all districts and cities in Indonesia, including Tarakan City.

Tarakan City is one of the cities in North Kalimantan Province which is located on the border with the neighboring country, Malaysia. In the 2019 simultaneous regional elections, there were two pairs of candidates fighting for the seat of regional head. However, during the campaign and voting period, there was a quite striking phenomenon of identity politics in Tarakan City. The city of Tarakan, as a political mecca in North Kalimantan Province, has various religions belonging to its people. The largest religion in Tarakan City is Islam, followed by Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and even Confucianism.

The phenomenon of identity politics in Tarakan City during the 2019 simultaneous regional elections can be seen from public debates regarding religion, ethnicity and regional origin of regional head candidates. This shows that identity factors are important in influencing voter preferences. This phenomenon needs to be researched further to understand identity politics in regional head elections in Tarakan City. Apart from that, Tarakan City is one of the regions in North Kalimantan Province and is the only municipal administrative area in this province. This is of course one of the goals or targets for local political elites to carry out a strategy to win the pair they are promoting using one strategy through identity politics. Apart from the diversity of religions and beliefs, Tarakan City, which was originally a stopover area, also has diversity in terms of ethnicity. Initially, Tarakan City was inhabited by an indigenous tribe, namely the Tidung tribe. However, in its development, like other areas, Tarakan City was also inhabited by other tribes such as Dayak, Banjar, Javanese, Bugis, Batak, Toraja, Chinese, and others.

In this context, the research aims to examine identity politics in the 2019 simultaneous regional elections in Tarakan City. It is hoped that this research will provide a deeper understanding of the identity factors that influence voter preferences in Tarakan City, as well as the implications of identity politics for the direction of political policy in the future.

Voter choices are significantly impacted by elements including religion, ethnicity, and regional background in regional elections, according to research by Amlani & Algara (2021). This is consistent with other studies that have shown the significance of identity in Indonesian politics (Aisyah et al., 2022; Nasution, 2014; Park, 2022). Moreover, Fuad (2014) found that identity politics significantly affects voter choices in Indonesian regional head elections. Future progress and political stability are further potential outcomes of identity politics.

North Kalimantan is only one example of an area in Indonesia where religion and ethnic diversity are significant factors in politics, according to study by Cintolesi (2022). Multiple studies (Amlani & Algara, 2021; Dorling et al., 1998; Hackenberger et al., 2021; Leromain & Vannoorenberghe, 2022) have shown that regional head elections are heavily influenced by non-identity criteria, such as candidate performance and integrity. This demonstrates that voters' choices for regional head candidates are impacted by more than just identification issues. The topic of identity politics gained significant attention during the campaign and voting period in the context of the regional elections in Tarakan City (Song, 2022). This demonstrates

that in Tarakan City, voters' choices are still heavily impacted by variables related to their identity.

Regional head candidates' performance criteria, in addition to identification factors, impact voter choices in regional elections, according to study by Arceneaux & Vander Wielen (2023). This study's findings suggest that voters may place a premium on candidates' track records of effective public service when making their selections for regional head positions. Additionally, studies conducted by Dorling et al. (1998) and Hanretty (2021) demonstrate that voters' choices are significantly impacted by the honesty and competence of regional head candidates when it comes to fulfilling their responsibilities as regional leaders. Voters select regional head candidates with a strong reputation and proven leadership skills, according to this study.

Religion, ethnicity, and regional background are all identified as key identification variables in Indonesian politics, according to the research. These factors are especially prominent in regional elections. On the other hand, voters' choices are impacted by issues other than identification, such the competence, honesty, and performance of regional head candidates. The remarkable occurrence of identity politics in the context of Tarakan City's regional elections demonstrates that, while non-identity issues must also be taken into account, identity factors remain an essential component in choosing regional head candidates. Religion, ethnicity, and regional origin are identified as major identification variables in Indonesian politics, according to studies in the literature. These characteristics are especially prominent in regional elections. Arceneaux & Vander Wielen (2023), Cintolesi (2022), Johnson & Middleton (2016), Rallings et al. (2011), and Song (2022) all point to non-identity criteria that impact voter choices, such as the performance, integrity, and capacity of regional head candidates.

Public discussions about the religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and geographical origins of candidates running for regional head positions in Tarakan City's upcoming elections highlight the stunning occurrence of identity politics (Siburian, 2022). Evidently, when choosing candidates for regional head positions in Tarakan City, the identity element is still a major role. The selection of regional head candidates in Tarakan City must take into account both identity criteria and non-identity elements, such as the candidates' performance, honesty, and abilities. Apart from that, the implications of identity politics on the direction of policy and political policies in the future also need to be considered (Nasution, 2014)

Methods

This study used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is a way to explore and understand the importance of individuals or groups of people to social or humanitarian problems. This qualitative research process requires important efforts, such as asking questions and procedures, collecting specific data from participants, analyzing data deductively from general topics to specific topics, and explaining the meaning of the data. All participants involved in this study are required to adopt an inductive research perspective, in which they modify the level of complexity of the problem by focusing on their individual interpretations. If one desires to ascertain public sentiment regarding the role of identity politics in regional head elections, this approach is recommended.

The utilization of regional election results reports and other pertinent government documents as data sources is deemed appropriate for the purpose of this study. Furthermore, valuable insights can be obtained through the implementation of comprehensive interviews with prominent community figures, political analysts, and electorate members. Potential informants for this study may include individuals who have participated in the regional elections, those

who closely monitor political developments in Tarakan City, and influential members of the local community.

The primary data source for this study consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with individuals who possess insider knowledge of Tarakan City and were directly involved in the planning and execution of the simultaneous regional elections. Individuals from the community, religious figures, political advocates, and actively involved citizens were among the informants who were subjected to questioning. The primary objective of conducting these comprehensive interviews was to gather empirical data pertaining to the subject of identity politics within the context of the 2019 simultaneous regional elections in Tarakan City. The utilization of in-depth interviews in this study aligns with the findings of Creswell and Creswell (2017), who assert that such interviews are efficacious in elucidating complex phenomena. Apart from that, this research also uses observation techniques to obtain information about the political situation in the city. Tarakan during the campaign and election period. The observation technique was carried out by observing campaign and election activities in the field as well as analyzing mass media related to the simultaneous regional elections in Tarakan City.

The data analysis method used in this research refers to the data analysis model of Miles et al., (2014) which includes three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. The data reduction stage was carried out by transcribing interviews and re-reading the documents that had been collected to identify the main themes that emerged related to identity politics in the regional elections in Tarakan City. Next, the data presentation stage is carried out by organizing the data in text form, as well as creating a short description to make it easier to understand the data that has been collected. The final stage is data verification, namely re-checking the data that has been processed to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data.

Results and Discussion

Tarakan, as the only municipality in North Kalimantan Province and regulated in Law Number 29 of 1997 concerning the Establishment of the Tarakan Level II Regional Municipality, has unique characteristics compared to other districts or cities. The complexity of Tarakan is always closely related to the meaning of Tarakan itself, namely as a stopover place so that the distribution of ethnicities and religions in Tarakan is diverse because many immigrants come not only to stop by but to stay and look for work and even start families in Tarakan. Limited area and high population density are also factors in this complexity.

Today's very complex, multi-dimensional crisis has an impact on the condition of the Tarakan community which is vulnerable to the emergence of social upheavals in society accompanied by violence, so that people tend to look for shortcuts in solving the various problems they face. These social conditions often result in violations outside the existing legal corridors, whether committed by individuals or community groups. Therefore, efforts to overcome this problem require handling it through appropriate and well-planned institutions. Tarakan City as an autonomous region is not only faced with social problems, but more provincial-scale problems arise due to Tarakan City being considered a political mecca carried out by political elites, individuals, groups or groups which of course influence the dynamics of Tarakan community life. So facilitation is needed to achieve harmony in realizing the unity and integrity of the Tarakan community.

The political temperature in Tarakan City increased further in 2019, because Tarakan City held simultaneous regional elections for the first time. If you use a survey theory approach which only takes samples from a certain population, then the attitudes and choices of Tarakan residents in the Tarakan Mayor election can also be a broad sample of the tendencies of voters'

attitudes in the Governor election in North Kalimantan Province. Judging from various aspects and the number of tribes in Indonesia, Tarakan indeed consists of many tribes so that Tarakan can represent election voters in North Kalimantan Province so that the issue of identity is one of the most effective instruments used by candidate pairs and candidate pair success teams to attract sympathy. Tarakan's society is so diverse.

As shown in the previous table, it shows that since the first mayoral election in 1999 in Tarakan City, most of those who ran for office came from a large number of community leaders and also only came from one religion. This identity issue also continued until the simultaneous regional elections in 2019 where the candidates who submitted themselves also only came from major ethnicities and religions so that these identity issues increasingly developed in society and seemed to be maintained by several political elites and became a culture passed down from generation to generation that must exist. in every regional head election in Tarakan City.

Identity Politics in the Implementation of Simultaneous Regional Elections

The formation of a person's identity cannot be separated from the sense (awareness) of collectivity ties. From this statement, when identity is formed as something that makes someone have a lot in common with other people, at the same time identity also forms differences or something other than similarities. Thus, these identities are shaped not only by collective constraints but also by different categories.

In this research, 3 approaches to identity formation are used, namely: a). Primordialism, in other words, identity is passed down from generation to generation, as are religion and ethnicity. In this approach, aspects of primordialism are used as the main source of information to approach someone to determine whether he or she is of the same religion or ethnicity. b). Constructivism, namely, identity as something that is formed and as a result of complex social processes. Identity can be formed through cultural constraints in society because the formation of national identity arises from such a complex social process that gives birth to a collective identity in society, in the process. In society itself, as is the case with Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, it is a shared national identity in an effort to unite groups in Indonesia, both religious and ethnic. c). Instrumentalism explains that identity is something that is built for the interests of elites and places more emphasis on the power aspect of identity formation. Usually, this identity formation is used in general elections to position candidates as the same people as the wider community, for example in the Tarakan regional elections where people who are members of the elite group tries to convince their group to choose a name that is similar to theirs so that they can increase their votes in the regional elections.

Of the three identity formations mentioned above, the researcher uses an instrumentalist identity approach because this approach explains that identity can be used as a strength in gaining a seat of power, the use of this approach is by taking advantage of the conditions that are happening and then creating them in various forms, so that can be an instrument of strength in seizing the seat of power, in the context of the Tarakan Pilkada the action of the #helppakdokter movement was able to gain the sympathy of people who incidentally have the same background as him regardless of their abilities. The emergence and establishment of associations that house certain ethnicities in Tarakan is also one of the causes of the fertility and development of identity politics which is very profitable for political elites to form instruments of community power which are then channeled in the form of practical politics.

Identity politics has become so effective in the election of regional leaders that it occurs in the form of symbolic interactions to mobilize popular support. Strengthening the individual identity of a handful of candidates is carried out by strengthening the development of self-identity in society. Identity politics, which refers to base on identity and base on interest, is

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used as a tool to win public sympathy. Furthermore, the current development of identity politics has seen a shift in the true meaning of identity, because identity is not used to identify or characterize individuals but rather because of the interests of the political class. This was clearly seen in the 2019 Tarakan City regional head election.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Identity Politics in the Implementation of Simultaneous Regional Elections

Identity politics can be positive or negative. Being positive means embracing, recognizing and accepting differences, even recognizing the predicate of privilege in one area more than in another, for historical and logical reasons. Negative if there is discrimination between one group and another, for example if the majority has an advantage over the minority. Domination can result from collective struggle and is more dangerous if sanctioned by the state. The state is to address each group with all its needs and interests and regulate and make regulations to create harmony in Bagir (2011).

There are several factors supporting the occurrence of identity politics as happened in the Tarakan City regional elections including; (1) government factors; (2) ethnic issues; (3) religious issues; (4) Political Elites.

Tarakan City Government Factors

Government factors can be a supporting factor for identity politics in the Tarakan City Pilkada. Government policies that are not yet fully able to guarantee equal rights and protection for all ethnicities and religions in Tarakan City can strengthen the formation of identity politics. This is because there are still social disparities felt by certain ethnicities and religions, so political elites can exploit these identity issues as a strategy to gain voter support.

This condition can allow discrimination or unfair treatment towards certain ethnicities or religions, thereby triggering identity politics. Also, when the government fails to provide enough security and equal rights, individuals may become more worried and feel the need to seek protection for their identity, which may encourage the establishment of political identity.

Consequently, the government should do more to educate the public and ensure that people of all faiths and races in Tarakan City are safe. In addition to raising people's political consciousness and educating them about democracy's foundational values, the goal is to forestall identity politics, which has negative societal effects.

Ethnic Issues

The Indonesian city of Tarakan is home to people of many different ethnic backgrounds. In Tarakan City, political elites use the ethnic problem as a weapon to get votes and support in their quest for power, making it an essential component of identity politics.

Because they have the potential to sow discord and hostility between different ethnic groups, ethnic problems are naturally delicate topics that should not be explored in great detail. The problem becomes more serious, however, when powerful people use ethnic tensions as a wedge issue.

It is imperative that Tarakan City's ruling class realizes that all residents, regardless of race, religion, or national origin, have the right to an equal chance at a happy and healthy life. Thus, political leaders in Tarakan City should propose employment initiatives that benefit all residents, irrespective of their religion or ethnic background, and refrain from using identity politics in the local political process.

Beyond that, the Tarakan City residents must know that candidates should not be chosen according to their identity but rather according to the credentials and job program they are advocating. With any luck, this will raise people's level of political consciousness and educate them on the fundamentals of democracy, therefore warding off harmful identity politics.

Religious Issues

One of the elements that contributes to the identity politics in Tarakan City Pilkada is the topic of religion. Politicians at the municipal level often appeal to religious identity in order to win over votes. A trend toward "identity politics," in which people support politicians more for their religious beliefs than their experience or platform, may emerge as a result. Beyond that, identity politics in Tarakan City may be shaped by the preponderance of one religion among city authorities. When only one religion succeeds in leading Tarakan City, this can strengthen the perception that only people of the same religion have the right to lead, thereby strengthening the practice of identity politics in the local political process.

Therefore, efforts need to be made to reduce the use of identity politics in the local political process, and prioritize work programs that benefit all the people of Tarakan City, regardless of religion or particular identity. Apart from that, it is important to increase political awareness and public knowledge about the true principles of democracy, so as to prevent identity politics that are detrimental to society and ensure fairness in the local political process.

Influence of Political Elites

The role of the political elite has never been separated from the birth of the practice of identity politics in any region, including Tarakan City. The political elite in Tarakan City joined based on their identity. Most of them gathered and formed associations based on their own ethnicity. Associations whose initial aim was to accommodate certain ethnic groups have in fact become political tools capable of promising large votes for candidate pairs who have similarities with the people in the association. The role of political elites is very influential in the formation of identity politics in Tarakan City. The political elite in Tarakan City has a tendency to join and form associations based on their identities, such as ethnicity and religion.

It is very unfortunate that these associations are often used by political elites as political tools to gain the support of voters with the same identity. This can strengthen the formation of identity politics, where voters prefer candidates based on certain identities, not based on qualifications or work programs they promote.

This can have negative impacts, such as divisions and conflicts between ethnicities and religions in Tarakan City. In addition, the use of identity politics in local political processes can disrupt the healthy and fair democratic process. Therefore, efforts need to be made to reduce the use of identity politics in the local political process, and prioritize work programs that benefit all the people of Tarakan City, regardless of particular identity. Apart from that, it is important to increase political awareness and public knowledge about the true principles of democracy, so as to prevent identity politics that are detrimental to society and ensure fairness in the local political process.

Tarakan City Government's Efforts to Overcome Identity Politics in Holding Simultaneous Regional Elections

In an attempt to keep the 2019 Tarakan City Simultaneous Regional Elections free of identity politics, the city government has taken some measures. Efforts are being made to educate the people about democracy and its fundamental values, increase political consciousness, and stress the significance of choosing politicians according to their platforms and credentials rather than their identities. In addition, the administration of Tarakan City has pushed for more

interfaith communication and collaboration in an attempt to lessen religious and ethnic tensions and promote tolerance in the city. There will be less use of identity politics at the local level and more communal cohesiveness as a result.

In addition, the Tarakan City Government has stressed that the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections must adhere to the ideals of fairness and equality. Everyone in Tarakan City should be able to participate equally in the city's democratic process, free from bias and prejudice, thanks to this. Further, in preparation for the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections, the Tarakan City administration has bolstered its monitoring and law enforcement systems to forestall community-harming political behaviors and guarantee fairness at the municipal level. Our objective is that these initiatives will help make the 2019 Tarakan City Simultaneous Regional Elections less tainted by identity politics and lead to a more democratic and equitable local political process.

A key message from the Tarakan City Government's community outreach efforts has been the need to keep religion and race out of municipal politics and to keep society together and strong. People will hopefully learn more about democracy and its ideals, as well as how important it is to stay away from identity politics in municipal elections, as a result of this. Also, by including connected parties in the process of monitoring and control, the Tarakan City administration has made sure that the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Tarakan City operate smoothly and openly. Money politics and identity politics are two examples of harmful political behaviors that this is meant to curb.

The goal of these initiatives is to promote a more equitable and democratic local political process in Tarakan City and to lessen the impact of identity politics on the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections. The inhabitants of Tarakan City are hoping that this would bring them closer together and increase their understanding of democracy and its ideals.

It is still not uncommon for identity politics to have a role in the execution of simultaneous regional elections in Indonesia. This happens when powerful people in a community use people's race, religion, or gender to win over voters. In addition to interfering with a free and fair democratic process, this may exacerbate social divides and conflicts.

Soedarwo (2014) found that the government, ethnic and religious groups, and political elites all have a role in the Simultaneous Pilkada's prevalence of identity politics. When it comes to municipal politics, political elites may take advantage of identity concerns when government considerations provide room for them to do so. Voters choose politicians according to certain identities rather than their credentials or policies, and ethnic and religious factors may amplify this trend. Elites in politics may win over those who share their identities by playing on their fears and misconceptions.

Dorling et al. (1998) found that there are positive aspects to the characteristics that favor identity politics in the Simultaneous Regional Elections. In addition to strengthening community political engagement in local political processes, these enabling conditions may foster cohesion among social groupings. Hence, it's important to put more emphasis on the credentials and policies of the candidates being advocated and less on identity politics in municipal politics. Beyond that, it is critical for those in power to increase public understanding of democracy and political issues in order to curb harmful identity politics and promote equity in local elections.

Several interconnected variables might lead to the emergence of identity politics in Tarakan City Pilkada. Issues with the government, ethnicities, religions, and political elites all play a role in the persistence of identity politics in Tarakan City Pilkada. Identity politics in Tarakan

City Pilkada are impacted by the government element. Identity politics has taken place in Tarakan City as a result of government policies that have failed to adequately provide equal rights and protection for all races and faiths. As a result, powerful people may be able to use concerns about people's identities as a wedge issue (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2023; Fossati et al., 2020; Johnson & Middleton, 2016; Rallings et al., 2011).

Tarakan City Pilkada identity politics are impacted by religious and ethnic concerns as well. In order to win over people who share their religion or ethnicity, political elites play on citizens' sense of identity. Voters may begin to favor politicians more for their shared identities than for their actual skills or the policies they advocate, a phenomenon known as "identity politics" (Lee & Min, 2021). Also, the Tarakan City Pilkada's political elites have a role in whether or not identity politics emerge. A small group of powerful people in politics may use concerns about someone's race or religion to rally support from the general public. According to Fossati et al. (2020), this has the potential to fortify identity politics inside local political processes. Efforts should be made to shift the local political process away from identity politics and toward a focus on candidates' credentials and policies. Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2023) argue that in order to avoid harmful identity politics and promote fairness in local elections, the government should work to increase political consciousness and educate the public about the true principles of democracy.

To provide a level playing field for local elections, the Tarakan City administration has taken measures to avoid using identity politics at the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections. To combat identity politics, the Tarakan City Government has done things like raise people's political consciousness and educate them on genuine democratic principles; they have also stressed the significance of choosing candidates according to their skills and plans for the future, rather than their identity.

In addition, the administration of Tarakan City has pushed for more interfaith communication and collaboration in an attempt to lessen religious and ethnic tensions and promote tolerance in the city. In preparation for the 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections, the Tarakan City Government has stepped up its surveillance and law enforcement efforts to curb corrupt political activities and guarantee fair elections at the municipal level.

The 2019 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Tarakan City were a success, and the city leadership deserves praise for its efforts to avoid identity politics. A more inclusive and democratic local political process can only be achieved through concerted, systemic efforts to raise people's political consciousness, educate them about the importance of politics, encourage them to get involved, and hold them accountable.

Conclusion

A significant part of Tarakan City's Regional Head Election (Pilkada) is devoted to identity politics. Religion, ethnicity, and geographical origin are some of the identity traits that are used to garner social support. The 2019 Tarakan City Pilkada's identity politics phenomena exemplify an instrumentalist strategy that uses these circumstances to gain power. Political elites and mass organizations play an important role in fostering identity political sentiment in Tarakan society. This allows them to build a sense of identity in elections, including the Pilkada in Tarakan City. However, the involvement of religious institutions in identity politics still needs further research. The government should be an element of political stability in Tarakan City but provide space for the practice of identity politics. The recognition dimension that is not experiencing growth is also the reason why identity politics is growing rapidly. Therefore, dialogue between groups is needed to develop the dimension of recognition, so that the politicization of identity cannot grow in society and maintain the integrity of national unity.

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