

# Strategy of Prabowo Populism in 2019 General Elections

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**Abstract**—Populism is currently on the rise as many people talk. Both in the Western world and the Asian region. Today many political figures use populism strategies as their political ammunition on the political stage. In Indonesia itself, there was once a populist leader who was charismatic and close to the people, namely Mr. Indonesian Proclaimer, Ir. Sukarno. Now the phenomenon of populism reappeared during the 2014 and presidential election contestants, Jokowi against Prabowo were both showing a populist character, but the political contest was won by Jokowi. In this 2019 General Election, the political stage was again attended by the same two presidential candidates as the previous period. This paper will discuss Prabowo in his campaigns ahead of the General Election. This paper argues that Prabowo relied on his skills to improve the state order that needed reliable leadership abilities and brought Indonesia towards a better direction.

**Keywords:** *populism, general election, Prabowo*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The General Election of the President and Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia on April 17 for the period 2019-2024 which was followed by two pairs of candidates namely Joko Widodo-KH. Ma'ruf Amin and Prabowo Subianto - Sandiaga Salahudin Uno has just finished. The KPU (General Election Commission) calculation results stated that Prabowo-Sandi got 44.70% of votes, while his rival Jokowi-Ma'ruf got 55.30% of the votes. Prabowo's defeat this time repeats the previous General Election periods. But even though Prabowo finally failed again to occupy the presidency, the Prabowo-Sandi pair still received consistent and full support from most Muslims and Indonesian scholars. An interesting thing, because of KH. Ma'ruf Amin himself is the Chairperson of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and Rais Aam PB Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). If you look at the track record of Ma'ruf Amin's leadership and experience, the Ulama should unite the voice will divert support to the incumbent stronghold of Jokowi-Ma'ruf. The fact that occurred after the action of "Defending Islam" which was driven by the GNPf-MUI (National Movement for Guarding the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council) at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 in Jakarta which later turned into the GNPf-Ulama (National Movement for Guarding the Fatwa-Ulama) held an Ijtima ' The Ulema and declared their support for Prabowo-Sandi and appealed to all Indonesian Muslims to support the pair chosen for the consensus of the Ulama [1].

The decision of Islamic religious leaders through Ijtima 'Ulama to vote for Prabowo-Sandi has been predictable since the contestation of the DKI Jakarta Regional Head Election in 2017. Defamation of Surah Al-Maidah: 51 in the Qur'an involving Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) thus became the momentum of various Islamic Organizations united in influencing the political stage in Indonesia [1]. Because of the relationship between Jokowi and Ahok who was considered to have closeness both emotionally and politically when Jokowi-Ahok was elected as Governor-Deputy Governor of DKI Jakarta in 2012 was one of the factors of zero support for Jokowi's nomination [2].

This fatwa of the GNPf-Ulama certainly strengthens Prabowo's struggle in the effort to win the hearts of the Indonesian people. The former Kopassus General Commander has made efforts to occupy the presidency four times during the General Election period [3]. In each period, Prabowo actively represented himself as a person capable of prospering the people and the marginalized people, raising and glorifying Islam and Muslims who during the administration of President Jokowi were considered excluded, and saved Indonesia from all kinds of threats from within and outside the country. The strategy used by Prabowo has been considered to have similarities with the strategy of political mobilization of politicians in democratic countries, namely using the strategy of populism [4]. Seems like Jair Bolsonaro in the General Elections in Brazil, Donald Trump in the United States, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Marine Le Pen in France. The political figures gave rise to political narratives into the public sphere with religious discourses, protectionism, anti-immigrants and rejecting the status quo.

The emergence of Prabowo as a populist politician and especially someone who can bring the interests of Muslims in Indonesia is worth studying. Because his political opponent, namely Jokowi is considered a populist leader labeled the slogan "populist" [5]. Based on these facts, this paper will specifically explore Prabowo's political strategy in the 2019 General Elections in Indonesia.

## II. PRABOWO TRACK RECORD

Prabowo Subianto is a figure who appears with a military background and a businessman heading to the national political stage. Prabowo stressed a lot in his speeches, campaigns and other promotional materials

that he came from a family of prominent politicians, also a Javanese priyayi, a descendant of a Javanese warfighter when fighting the Dutch (1825-1830). Prabowo's grandfather, Margono Djojohadikoesoemo, is the founder of Bank Indonesia. While his father, Sumitro Djojohadikoesoemo, was one of the great economies in Indonesia who received education in the Sorbonne and the Netherlands [6].

At the beginning of his involvement in politics was the impact of his career decline in the military world. In 1970, Prabowo joined the National Military Academy in Magelang and completed his education in 1974. He spent his military career in elite army units, the Special Forces Command (Kopassus) and the Army Strategic Reserves Command (Kostrad). He gained much experience in intelligence and counter-insurgency operations, including in East Timor, where indirect evidence shows his involvement in the massacre of civilians in the early 1980s, as well as various other black operations. He was also in command of the forces responsible for violations against civilians in Aceh. In 1995 Prabowo became the Kopassus commander and expanded his influence among the intelligence apparatus. Prabowo who is on the rise is getting a good response in the Army. Prabowo continued to use his position and ability to find a safe place during the 1998 crisis. Building emotional closeness with Islamic groups and developing anti-foreign sentiment became one of his efforts at that time. Prabowo is also believed to be the brain behind the Jakarta riots and masterminded the Trisakti incident on May 12, 1998. Although no direct evidence was provided to support the claim [6]. After President Suharto resigned and was replaced by B.J. Habibie on May 21, 1998, Prabowo had significant difficulties because Habibie was considered to have interfered with Prabowo's efforts to get a promotion. That dark period of Prabowo at that time continued to be the reason and discussion of many parties who felt Prabowo was not worthy of power as the leader of the country because of the nature of the dictator he had.

After the confrontation with B.J. Habibie, Prabowo left for Jordan and lived there for several years. He pursued business with his younger brother, Hasyim Djojohadikoesoemo, who had already become a businessman. About seven years after leaving Indonesia, he returned to his homeland by appearing in public in 2004 and tried to propose himself as a presidential candidate through the Golkar Party convention but failed. Then he built a farmer network and was elected as General Chair of the Indonesian Farmers Association (HKTI) 2004. Because he failed at the Golkar Party convention, Prabowo approached Megawati Sukarnoputri and volunteered as a vice presidential candidate paired with presidential candidate Megawati. Again, it hasn't worked. In 2008, he founded the Gerindra Party as well as Chair of the Board of Trustees. In the 2009 and 2014 General Elections, he ran as a presidential candidate. Prabowo wants Indonesia to be a master in his own country and respected by the world [7].

### III. PRABOWO SUPPORT COALITION

To reach power, Prabowo used the political party to go to the political stage. Gerindra Party as its vehicle. At the 2019 General Election, Prabowo received support from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the National Mandate Party (PAN), the Work Party, and was followed by the Democratic Party (PD). The Prabowo Supporting coalition is called the Adil Makmur Coalition with the composition of the Campaign Team named the National Pemadam Agency (BPN) totaling 800 people [8]. The results of the vote calculation of the Fair Coalition Makmur, namely: Gerindra 12.57%, PKS 8.21%, Democratic Party 7.77%, PAN 6.84%. These parties are included in the parliamentary threshold. While the Party of Work did not meet the provisions because it only received 2.09% of the votes [9]. However, as stated earlier, not only from political parties, Prabowo received full sympathy from Islamic groups incorporated in the GNPf-Ulama.

### IV. PRABOWO'S POPULISM

According to Azyumardi Azra political populism refers to political approaches and or movements that claim to speak on behalf of or represent ordinary people in dealing with established political elites and/or political authorities. From this point of view, political populism is a kind of partiality or defense of the masses that is always sacrificed by political elites and/or ruling regimes. With this ideology, leaders of political populism are usually driven by charismatic figures who are eloquent with their rhetoric attacking certain political elites and/or ruling regimes. Historically the term political populism was first used in the United States in 1892 when the 'Populist Movement' emerged which resulted in the formation of the Populist or People's Party [10].

In Indonesia, populism is an understanding that emphasizes the politics of "the people" with the politics of "elite" which is described as greedy and cunning. This can be seen during the new style of colonialism which has given rise to variants of the diverse Muslim community struggle movements. The purpose of the existence of the community is the same, namely expressing criticism of injustice that was born from a series of economic activities, politics, globalization, and neoliberalism. The marginal in a global political system makes Muslim communities have a commonality that is oppressed. So that the feeling gave birth to a new model of Islamic populism as now [11]. But now, the meaning of developing populism has many variants but still as a response to the current democratic situation. He expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions and distrust which was getting stronger against the government agency [12]. As is known, public trust in democracy has been loosening due to institutional malpractice, giving birth to many biases that have led to the emergence of new oligarchies. While on the other hand, aspirations from the grassroots often faltered because regeneration and political communication did not run optimally. Such a

situation raises public disappointment throughout democracy and results in finding alternatives to build a representation of people's power against the elite [15].

Many phenomena of populism lately, the label most attached to the people is religious and racial fundamentalism. Both are a scourge for democracy because of their exclusive character. First, familiar religions are viewed as a means of achieving political positions favorable to certain people; second, for most people, religion is an inherent identity in everyone. This sacred and permanent identity is enough to represent resistance to their socio-economic situation against the official authorities [16].

Speaking of Islamic populism, according to Vedi Hadiz in Jayanto, the phenomenon of the rise of Islamic populism is inseparable from a prolonged rage over the promises of development and the prosperity of global capitalism that never materializes. So that Islamic populism frames a movement based on common sense, the similarity in religious identity as a manifestation of reaction as well as a solution to the solution of the problem of ongoing economic injustice by trying to seize resources and power in the State [17]. The phenomenon of populism that can be witnessed within the reach of the eye is in our own country. In the aftermath of the 411 and 212 Islamic Defendant Action in Jakarta, it became a political alternative for Prabowo in showing the figure of "Umar Bin Khattab" to protect and absorb the aspirations of Muslims who during the Jokowi's government were often marginalized. Since the 1990s, he has talked about the people of Indonesia who are not masters in their own country. After the reformation, Prabowo often said that the case was caused by corrupt elites who conspired with foreign nations. In this 2019 General Election, Prabowo was flexible in interacting with prominent figures in Islamic politics. Which is Prabowo's movements are also due to his competitor, namely Jokowi chose KH. Ma'ruf Amin, who is, in fact, a respected figure of Nadhlatul Ulama as his Vice-President's pair, is part of an effort to counter the voice of the people who are increasingly seen to side with the Jokowi-Ma'ruf pair.

The election of the President and Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia in 2019 is the fourth time Prabowo has proposed himself as an incumbent competitor to fight for the next seat of power. Davis and Newstrom (1995) state that leadership style is the overall action of a leader as perceived or referred to by his subordinates or those who support him. The discussion regarding leadership style is analyzed by observing the leader's behavior. The primary characteristic of leadership is that it serves to strengthen and be able to channel the emotions of the leader to his subordinates or supporters [18].

During the grand campaigns leading up to the presidential and vice-presidential elections, Prabowo took steps to align himself with Muslim groups. According to Prabowo's spiritual teacher, Ustadz Ansufr Idrus Sambo, Prabowo's commitment to Islam

has been shown since he became Commander General of Kopassus. This was seen in Prabowo's discussions with several prominent Islamic movements, such as Ahmad Sumargono from the Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity (KISDI) and KH. A. Kholil Ridwan from the Islamic Da'wah Council. Ustadz Sambo stressed that for Prabowo, Islam in Indonesia was like the backbone of the country. Prabowo's commitment to Islam was also demonstrated by protecting many Muslim leaders. That was the reason for being in the line of supporters of Prabowo [18].

Prabowo showed that although he was not raised in a religious environment, his network was able to reach out to activists and conservative Islamic groups who had supported his candidacy. As a result, Prabowo received support from conservative activists such as Habib Rizieq Shihab, founder of the Islamic Classification Front (FPI), and Amien Rais, a respected Muhammadiyah figure and founder of the National Mandate Party (PAN). Muslims with conservative tendencies strongly support Prabowo and his vice-presidential candidate, Sandiaga Uno as ideal candidates for Muslim leaders. Even the 212 Movement mobilized by Muslims is not only phenomenal on Java. Outside Java, such as the provinces of West Sumatra, North Sumatra, South Sumatra, West Nusa Tenggara, the great narrative 212 influenced local Muslim voters in making their choices [18].

According to Andar Nubowo, a researcher in the Indonesia Program at RSIS, during a field visit in the provinces of West Sumatra, North Sumatra, South Sulawesi, and North Sulawesi, conservative Muslims were found who portrayed Prabowo as being closer to what conservatives believed to be aspirations, they. This is due to their dissatisfaction with Jokowi's policies which are considered ineffective when faced with an economic crisis, massive debt, and socio-political injustice where poor Muslims suffer. They also saw Jokowi's policy as being too intimate with foreign investors. They believed that choosing Prabowo was a spiritual and religious duty because it was under the ulama's political fatwa based on the consensus of the Second Ulema Ijtima.

Prabowo-Sandi's nomination as a presidential and vice-presidential candidate is not only seen as the best combination that can overcome the challenges of Indonesia's development, but also paves the way for deeper Islamization. To help that, they attach great importance to Islamic teachings such as Ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic solidarity) and dakwah (religious appeals) to motivate all Muslims to support Prabowo-Sandi [22]. Indeed, Islamic populism has an influence on the political choices of Muslim societies who long for the presence of a leader who can be firm against any threats that are considered to endanger the position of Islam, because during Jokowi's reign, the president was considered unable to act decisively in responding to blasphemy by Ahok.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper concludes that during the 1998 crisis and dismissed from his military career, Prabowo built his business empire with his younger brother, Hasyim Djojohadikoesoemo. About seven years later, precisely at the momentum of the Presidential Election after the reformation Prabowo appeared as a Golkar Party politician and then founded the Gerindra Party and served as the party's supervisor. In the 2019 General Election, Prabowo ran as a presidential candidate along with his partner Sandiaga Uno. Prabowo received support from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the National Mandate Party (PAN), the Works Party, and was followed by the Democratic Party (PD). The Prabowo Supporting coalition is called the Adil Makmur Coalition with the composition of the Campaign Team named the National Pemadam Agency (BPN). In his campaign strategy, Prabowo often puts forward discussions on crucial issues that must be borne by the Indonesian people caused by the inability of the government. The oppression of Muslims, elites who deviated and did corruption and the invasion of foreign nations which became a frightening specter of the destruction of this country. Based on the strategy used by Prabowo, this paper categorizes Prabowo as a populist leader.

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