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Indonesia's Presidential Election 2019

Sarungan vs Cingkrangan: Elections & Contestations Within Indonesian Islam

By Adri Wanto and Leonard C. Sebastian

SYNOPSIS

The polarisation of Indonesia's Muslim society in the 2019 presidential election is a consequence of long-standing disputes between Sarungan and Cingkrangan Islamic groups. These have now shifted from the theological and cultural domains to the arena of political and electoral contestation.

COMMENTARY

DURING HIS first term of presidency, Joko Widodo ("Jokowi") was repeatedly accused for being anti-Islam. He faced protests from hard-line Islamic groups for his close relationship with Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the former governor of Jakarta who was sentenced to two years for religious blasphemy. Jokowi also banned Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a group that supported an Islamic caliphate. Jokowi's anti-Islam stigma resulted in a large number of conservative and hard-liner Islamic groups giving their support to Prabowo Subianto.

To counter accusations of being anti-Islam, Jokowi chose a traditionalist Muslim cleric, Ma'ruf Amin, as his running mate. Ma'ruf Amin's main contribution has been to negate the use of identity politics based on religion against Jokowi. Ma'ruf Amin is a spiritual leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organisation in Indonesia. The choice of Ma'ruf Amin has greater political ramifications.

Sarungan, Cingkrangan & Jokowi's Victory

A long-standing cultural and theological divergence between traditionalist Islamic groups (*Sarungan*), and hard-liner and conservative Islamic groups, *Cingkrangan*

(influenced by Wahhabi/Salafi interpretations) have now escalated into the electoral and political domain. The incumbent's camp associated itself with the *Sarungan* groups, while in contrast, *Cingkrangan* groups were, by default, drawn to Prabowo.

The official result released by the General Election Commission (KPU) on 21 May 2019 confirmed that President Jokowi won the Indonesian presidential election with 55.5 per cent of the votes against 44.5 per cent for Prabowo.

Jokowi's victory occurred because of his sweep of the *Sarungan* groups of the Muslim community in Central and East Java while Prabowo performed well in the regions of West Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi, where the Islamic discourses are dominated by the *Cingkrangan* groups.

Due to hostile acts by *Cingkrangan* groups toward minorities for the past two decades in provinces with significant Christian minorities like North Sumatra, North Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia as well as Hindu-dominated Bali, Jokowi gained the majority of the votes in these provinces.

Despite the double-digit landslide victory for Jokowi, Prabowo is claiming 'massive cheating and irregularities' and supporters are calling for a 'people power' movement. As a consequence, Prabowo supporters recently clashed with security forces in Jakarta. His supporters set fire to a police dormitory and vehicles, eight protestors were killed including three teenagers, while 737 were hurt in two nights of rioting from 21-22 May 2019.

The outbreak of violence after the release of the official election results have to be understood within the context of growing polarisation in Indonesia's Muslim society. Understanding the contestation between the *Sarungan* groups and the *Cingkrangan* groups is critical for our discernment of current and future trajectories of Islam in Indonesia.

Freelance *Mujtahid* and the Role of Technology

The Internet provides an unprecedented breath of knowledge and resources about Islam. The growth of the use of the Internet among Muslims throughout Indonesia has increased the scope of dissemination of Islamic knowledge.

Indonesian Muslims now have access to diverse opinions on Islamic thought from numerous sources. In the past, Muslims would observe fatwas from *Mujtahid* (authoritative scholars who exercise independent reasoning, *ijtihad*, in the interpretation of Islamic law from Nahdatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah. Now through Internet sources, any individual is able to become a freelance *Mujtahid*. The Internet has basically loosened the hierarchy in Islamic institutions in Indonesia.

Previously, NU and Muhammadiyah could dominate religious discourse in Indonesia. However, over the past two decades, the use of the Internet for religious preaching has been dominated by hard-line and conservative Islamic groups. The defining characteristic of these conservative groups is their literal interpretation of Islam. For example, according to the Hadith, Muslim men should wear their trousers slightly above their ankles (in Bahasa Indonesia: *Cingkrangan*).

By contrast, *Sarungan* groups emphasise “the process” of reaching the most fundamental understandings of the Qur'an. *Sarungan* groups use the method of *ta'wil* as the means to harmonise Qur'anic meaning with their own doctrines, contending that a core understanding of the text would prove them to be correct.

For *Sarungan* groups, *isbaal* (letting the garment come below the ankles) is a matter of *ijtihad* and scholars have differing opinions of this subject. The majority of scholars agree that it is not *haram* or forbidden, unless the motivation is borne of arrogance. These *Sarungan* groups are pesantren-based and are characterised by their wearing of sarongs in their daily lives, similar to the daily attire worn by Kyai Ma'ruf Amin.

Polarisation of Indonesian Muslim society

For the current political situation, these two groups dominate Islamic discourse in Indonesia. The *Sarungan* groups are known as ardent advocates of Islam Nusantara, a distinctive blend of Islam that has undergone interaction, contextualisation, indigenisation, interpretation and vernacularisation within Indonesia's socio-cultural milieu.

Islam Nusantara is a product of Islamic theology and *fiqh* promoting moderation, compassion, anti-radicalism, inclusiveness and tolerance. On the other spectrum are *Cingkrangan* groups that emphasise a theology inspired by Salafi and Wahabbi movements.

During the 2019 presidential election, Islam in Indonesia has experienced commodification where religion was exploited for political campaign purposes by both sides of the presidential race. The contestation between the *Sarungan* and *Cingkrangan* groups during the campaign has made religion a source of disunity for Muslim society in Indonesia.

The consequence of using religion for campaign purposes since the 2014 election now means that religious identity politics is here to stay with possible debilitating consequences for Indonesia's future.

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