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Religious Identity: Demand from the Bottom to Overcome the Politization of Religion in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the development of democracy in Indonesia. For two decades, the journey of democracy in Indonesia has faced many obstacles. The obstacle that receives the most attention is the issue of religious identity. Large sums of money were disbursed by the Indonesian government to block the storm of religious politicization, so that it does not spread to the villages. This study was conducted using a qualitative research method with a case study approach and found an incident of religious politicization that negatively affected village democracy which was initially in a good situation and condition. In the village head election, despite the tight competition, the candidates used issues of religious sentiment to gain political support from followers of the same religion. A candidate who was Muslim urged the Muslim voters to vote for him because he had the same religion as them. They thought that this encouragement would be successful, as the majority of the village population were Muslims, and it would be easy to influence them to elect a Muslim leader. However, another candidate who was Christian did not use the method based on Christian sentiments because he felt that they were in the minority. This study found that other forms of religious politicization failed to gain the support of the majority population. The election of a Javanese Christian reverend undermined the politicization of religion itself. Programmatic politics was chosen by the people based on how they voted. Working earnestly accompanied by the sincerity and honesty of the candidate was the determining factor in winning the grassroots vote. This study presents the results of in-depth research into the election of a village head from different religious communities. A Christian reverend was elected as the village head for two periods with the support of the majority of the Muslim population.

Keywords: *Local Politics; Religious Politicization; Village Democracy; Identity Politics*

Introduction

The principle of democracy for society is the opening up of space for freedom in carrying out religious teachings covered by the constitution. For democratic countries, the most prominent characteristic is being “pluralistic”, both in culture and religion (Robert, 2020: 5). In general, religions in various parts of the world have their own standards in providing guidance to their followers. The perspectives of religious teachings in several countries varies greatly in assessing government policy regulations.

From a religious perspective, commands or prohibitions originating from religious teachings are all correct and moral. They apply not only to religious adherents but also are used for everyone, including people outside the religion. Prohibitions in religious teachings are sometimes justified and supported by democratic governments because they are in accordance with democratic principles, such as the prohibitions of killing, lying, and stealing. Likewise, religious orders that originate from religious teachings are sometimes counterproductive to democratic values themselves.

Religion and democracy at a certain point are like compounds that can be combined together to support each other, but at the same time they are like oil and water that cannot be reconciled because of the strong interests in religious dogma which cannot be negotiated for reasons of democracy. Religious actions take the form of commands that must be carried out or in the form of prohibitions that must not be done, both of which may or may not be supported by a democratic government, such as prohibitions on divorce or prohibitions on abortions for pregnant women. Divorce and abortions are clearly not permissible for religions because they are contrary to morality; but on the other hand, in the context of a democratic government, these practices are supported for the reason that every community has equal rights before the law.

When religion and democracy can be brought together and support each other really depends on the substance of the message or action. As long as the action is justified and does not pose a threat to the survival of citizens, then both religion and democracy can reach a meeting point. Otherwise, religion and democracy will stand alone based on their respective principles.

The public visibility of religion has also raised questions. In the spirit of "militant secularism", some authors consider religion and anti-democratic forces to have infiltrated the political sphere (Rorty, 1994). Such a perspective has been refuted by classical thinkers (e.g. Tocqueville, Maritain, and de Saint Exupéry), who considered religion as a necessary asset for democracy or even religion as the main spring in democracy. A more specific approach sees religious affiliation as an important determinant of democracy (Fukuyama, 2001; Huntington, 1991: 71–85; Lipset, 1994: 5).

In Indonesia, with the majority of the population following religions, normatively, the policy of religious tolerance has been formulated in law, but at a practical level, it seems that the ideal formulation cannot be fully implemented by some people in everyday life. This can be demonstrated by the enormity of religious conflicts and chaos after reformation (Zainudin, 2015: 159).

As is known, the birth of the reform era brought fresh air to the development of democracy which had stalled in the New Order era; but on the other hand, it gave rise to conflicts based on identity politics. For example, at the beginning of the reform era, in Central Kalimantan and West Kalimantan, ethnic-based identity conflicts emerged. This also happened in Maluku. According to Gerry van Klinken's records, the Maluku conflict was the most worrisome religion-based conflict. This conflict ensnared religious communities in this area and almost everyone was involved in this conflict (Klinken & Nordholt, 2007: 540).

Surprisingly, when identity conflicts begin to recede, identity politics often emerge in regional head elections. As part of democratic procedures, regional head elections are often characterized by identity politics and the politicization of ethnicity, religion, and race between communities. Starting from the gubernatorial election in Jakarta in 2017 and continuing to the simultaneous regional elections (*Pilkada*) in 2018. In several regions that held regional head elections, such as in West Java, West Kalimantan, and Papua, identity politics and the politicization of religion emerged as strategies to achieve victory (Romli, 2019 : 79). In a survey released by the Atma Jaya Institute of Public Policy, it showed that the issue of politicization of religion was at the top (45%), in the 2019 election. This was followed by issues about hoaxes (22%), corruption (17%), and radicalism (11%).

The politicization of religion that received the most public attention was the gubernatorial election in DKI Jakarta in 2017. This happened because there were several demonstrations demanding that the Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, or usually called Ahok, be tried because of his speech on Pulau Seribu which was deemed insulting to Islam. One of the biggest demonstrations was the "Defend Islam Action" from the 212 group (taken from the demonstration date, namely 2 December 2016). Learning from the experience of actions done in the name of Islamic identity, efforts by the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Religion gave birth to the idea of "Religious Moderation" with a fairly large budget of 3.2 trillion (republika.id, 2021).

On various occasions, the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, also urged religious figures to make religion a source of values to care for diversity. The President encouraged religious figures and religious communities to provide deeper and broader religious insights to their respective communities, because exclusivism, radicalism, and religious sentiments tend to be based on distorted religious teachings. It cannot be denied that religion is the main spirit of this nation, so that religious leaders play an important role in maintaining diversity as Indonesia's wealth and social capital (Tapingku, 2021).

This study aims to examine religion and democracy from various approaches and models. First, it will explore what the future of democracy is amidst the modernity of religious communities by capturing the causal relationship between religion and democracy in Indonesia. Second, it will measure the militarization of religious communities in the process of electoral democracy amidst the landscape of identity politics, more specifically how religious identity is used as a political tool to reach voters and their interests in candidate campaigns. Third, it will examine how religion is politicized in village democracy by specifically looking at the performance of the incumbent as a reverend. The research was conducted in Rogo Mulyo Village, Kaliwungu District, Semarang Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia.

After we had been in this village for a month, we discovered the bankruptcy of identity politics in the form of the politicization of religion in a village head election, where the minority religion led the majority religion. In this village, we found a Christian reverend who won the village head election in the majority Muslim population for two consecutive periods. Finally, by using qualitative methods in a case study approach, the theory of voting behavior became an option to answer questions about the restructuring of village democracy, especially regarding changes in the nature of the elite and the plurality of diversity of the village population which was built with awareness to elect a village head based on psychological choices with the consideration of the candidate's qualities.

During post-reformation, studies on identity politics determined the direction of democracy in Indonesia to become more open and healthy. These findings revealed that political awareness and religious tolerance in rural areas are determining factors. Religious sentiment became clouded by the spirit of tolerance and forced the village residents not to choose a candidate based on a certain religious identity but to make a political choice based on the spirit of the candidate's performance and the competence of the village leader who has high integrity in being dedicated to serve the villagers.

Village Democratization and Religious Identity Sentiment

The idea of democratic government once appeared in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, namely government of the people, by the people, and for the people (Epstein, 2011: 821). In the theory of a healthy democracy, the speech of America's 16th president emphasized the government's obligation to serve its people. In a broader sense, the people need special welfare from the government. The government's concern is proven by caring for the people's rights regarding people's welfare, ensuring adequate education and maintaining public spaces for the people. This concern does not apply specifically to the central government but also applies as a whole to village governments.

Unfortunately, the majority of scholars pay more attention to the central government by not paying attention to village governments, even though village governments have an important role in assisting the central government's work programs (Alfirdaus and Bria, 2020: 17). Around 80% of the population in Indonesia lives in rural areas. So, of course, they should pay more attention to the existence of village governments. Village governments are an instrument of central government institutions. Administratively, village governments have the lowest position in the government structure (Antlov, 2003: 195). As noted in this study, until 2021 the number of villages in Indonesia reached 83,843 spread throughout the archipelago (BPS, 2021).

It is important for us to explain in more detail in this study the existence of village and sub-district governments in Indonesia. In Law No. 5 of 1979, the differences between the two are based on differences in functions and obligations. Villages have the right to organize their own households, while sub-districts do not have the right to organize their own households. This is simply because the sub-district head and sub-district apparatus are civil servants who have been appointed by the district/city regional government, meaning that the sub-district head is not chosen through an election process but is directly appointed by the regent or mayor on behalf of the governor, while the village head is elected directly by the local community. The village head holds office for six years starting from the date of inauguration and can serve a maximum of three consecutive or non-consecutive terms. In contrast to this, sub-district heads do not have term limits as stated in Law No. 6 of 2014 in Article 39 concerning Villages.

Since the reform began, democratization in villages has faced various challenges. The strong demands for reform in 1998 have caused quite a few village residents to be immersed in the euphoria of reform. The village residents' expectations of getting a leader with high integrity were expressed by the villagers in a demonstration demanding the replacement of the village head. The residents considered that the village head had long been an accomplice of the central government regime. Demonstrations and demands to replace village heads were rife throughout the archipelago as a result of the flow of reforms that could not be controlled by the central government. Demands for the village heads to step down reverberated in various regions, with quite a few masses imposing their will using violent methods to oust the village heads. This phenomenon was an attempt to take revenge from civil society in the villages. After 32 years of Soeharto's leadership, the village communities lived without democracy. Soeharto implemented an authoritarian system in political structures at various levels, from the central government to the village government. The selection of village heads was strictly selected to ensure that the village heads who would later be elected did not become part of a threat to the security of the regime at the center.

The New Order regime collapsed and was replaced by a reform regime. The Indonesian nation entered a new political system, namely normative democracy, where democracy is ideally intended to be carried out by the State. Various leading politicians and intellectuals shared their thoughts and rationality. They had a lot of work to do in this transition period, starting from restructuring the bureaucratic system, restructuring the party system, as well as returning the military to be a neutral government institution. The process of improving the direction of reform is still undergoing various tests. Several scholars have highlighted the emergence of a new type of a reformist leader (Choi, 2015: 83), and quite a few scholars in Indonesia are disappointed. They note that many of the old faces continue to dominate national politics. Wealth resources and personal connections continue to be the main determinants of political success (See, 2004: 77). Apart from that, there is the rise of various political dynasties in various regions (Kenawas, 2015).

No less important than the various tests of democracy in Indonesia is the increasing identity sentiment of the democratic party in regional head elections and village head elections. Political identity has become a political instrument to seize power, and quite a few politicians even use it as part of a strategy to win. The emergence of narratives such as "vote for local people, vote for Muslims, don't vote

for female leaders" was built by the Candidate Winning Team which clearly contains ethnicity, religion, and inter-group elements (SARA). In Aceh, for example, the victory of a regional head can even be determined by referring to the formula: "The people of Aceh only support native fighters and not national fighters." The issue of SARA has not only emerged at the national level, but the concept of campaigning using this identity has also proven to influence local power struggles. With Indonesia's pluralistic society, identity politics is an attractive proposition for politicians in a country with a democratic system. "Primordial forces at the local level have transformed into political forces that continue to be reproduced by identity sentiments and manipulated by elites, so that they are able to influence political activities at the local level" (Ode, 2018: 83).

An example of the success of identity politics at the national level was when Anies Baswedan succeeded in defeating Basuki Tjahaja Purnama in the 2017 DKI gubernatorial election. Anies' position at that time was supported by most Islamic groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who is a Christian and comes from Chinese-Indonesian ethnicity, was in a disadvantageous position. Apart from accusations of blasphemy, Anies' group also used the issue that Muslims must elect leaders from the same religion, meaning that Muslims have the obligation to elect leaders who are Muslim. In the end, Islamic religious identity succeeded in becoming a political tool in this contestation. "Identity politics, especially religion, never dies in the political arena in this country. The momentum of the election for the Governor of Jakarta is a clear example of the justification for this argument. When religious identity emerges, it becomes a political force" (Sari, 2016: 153).

In 2019, during the presidential and vice-presidential elections, identity politics reverberated again in the narratives and statements made by supporters of Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno based on Ijtima Ulama. The scheme developed was the community had to follow the instructions of the ulama and *ustadz* who were members of Ijtima Ulama. However, this strategy was not successful because identity politics was also used by groups that were in conflict with Ijtima Ulama. Jokowi succeeded in warding off identity politics by making MUI official and Rais Am Nahdlatul Ulama, Ma'ruf Amin, his vice president.

The democratization process in Indonesia has never been devoid of issues of identity politics. It has provided the foundation for identity politics (Aspinal, 2011). In some areas, religion has been used to divide ethnic groups or create communal conflict. Democratization has also provided a place for fundamentalist Muslim groups to assert their interests and promote the creation of an Islamic state. Tensions rooted in identity politics have resulted in political friction in several parts of the country, including in Indonesia from the center to rural areas. A study by Firdaus and Bria (2020) on village head elections in Wederok Village, Weliman District, Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, found that political identity in village head elections was as strong as identity politics in legislative and presidential elections. The results of research from this case study revealed that the election of village heads has caused divisions in society into several parts, mostly due to ethnic differences. The village head election itself involved candidates from different ethnic identities, even though these two candidates were actually connected to each other through cross-ethnic marriage ties. However, tribal-based competition in village head elections has led to more serious conflicts and requires reconciliation efforts (Firdaus and Bria, 2020: 17).

From the records of Aspinal (2005), it was revealed that democratization has led to transformational politics from the grassroots at the national level. On the one hand, it has influenced voter behavior, while on the other hand, it has given primordialism stronger roots, but it has also created a place for programmatic political practices. A study by Harjanto (2019) on the programmed policies used by incumbents in Temon Kulon Village, Kulon Progo Regency, Yogyakarta, in village head elections found that identity politics (especially religion) has become an increasingly important part of Indonesian politics, but some village heads are trying to implement programmatic politics. Identity politics is not

only used to mobilize support for non-Muslim incumbents; but it is also used for election contests through a culture of primordialism (Harjanto, 2019: 225).

This study found symptoms of a decline in attitudes of political primordialism; narratives built with sentiments that emphasize ethnic, tribal, and religious similarities have collapsed. There are two important elements in realizing this effort; leadership as a guide in the struggle and an organization as an agent that directs and mobilizes the masses (Brown, 2004: 56–62). Implicitly shows that democratization has a role. According to Brown, the political change from an authoritarian to a democratic regime allowed ethnic groups the opportunity to regain their identity and then separate from the old political system. In addition, a weak transitional government structure and the emergence of diversity of interests and conflicts between political elites can encourage the creation of chaotic conditions that cause disintegration. However, Brown was not necessarily pessimistic about democratization. According to Brown (2004) and Nodia (1998), democratization can form a new identity that is tolerant of neglected ethnic communities and is able to form a collective identity that is the ideal of a civic identity, and which emphasizes tolerance, equality, and rationality.

Gayatri (2010) conducted research in Bali, Papua, Riau, and Aceh. She found that from this diversity of views, it can be concluded that there are several factors that cause ethnic revival in nation-states. Gayatri's first finding was that there is a primordial awareness of unity which has characteristics that are different from other public bodies; second, there is the existence of social and economic inequality; third, there is the emergence of awareness driven by leadership, by actors, or by certain organizations; fourth, opportunities are opened by democratization and regime change; and fifth, there are past government policies, including the influence of discriminatory colonial government structures and governance practices (Gayatri, 2010: 199-201).

Village Elections, Clientalism, and Village Elite Competition

The research was conducted in a village not far from the capital city of Central Java Province. We researched and stayed there for several weeks to study the village head election in 2018, and visited there again in 2019 to deepen the data after the village head election and visited there again in 2021 to see the development of the village after the COVID-19 pandemic began to dissipate. The location of the village studied has demographic conditions covering an area of 4.02 km2, with a population of 4,173 people consisting of 2,043 men and 2,130 women. This village consists of 6 hamlet areas, 13 community units (RW), and 35 neighborhood units (RT), which is inhabited by multi-cultural residents with various religious adherents and an assortment of professions. This village is inhabited by mostly Muslims. The average population works as farmers, while the rest work as traders, government employees, and private employees.

The research was conducted in 2018 and continued in 2019 and 2021. Some of us worked in the field, some carried out data and information collecting on the village head election process, and some also interviewed several sources consisting of main informants and key informants. The main informants are candidates while key informants are volunteers and residents who have no political interests. In addition, interviews were also conducted with their leading advisors, as well as village officials, religious figures, and other informal leaders, as well as ordinary citizens. Informal conversations with many residents and witnessing important events from the campaign process to the voting process were also done.

The locus of this research was in Rogomulyo Village, Kaliwungu District, Semarang Regency. Geographically, this village is located at 110° 00'30.00" to 110° 37'3" east longitude and 7° 27'0" to 7°28'30" south latitude. Administratively, the geographical location of this village is limited to 4 villages and 1 district on its sides. On the north side, it borders Tawang Village and Timpik Village, both of which are part of Susukan District, Semarang Regency; on the west side, it borders Badran Village, Susukan District, and Ngampon Village, Ampel District, Boyolali District; on the south side, it borders Jetis

Village and Kaliwungu Village; and on the east side, it borders Pentur Village in Simo District, Boyolali Regency. The following is a map of Rogomulyo Village:

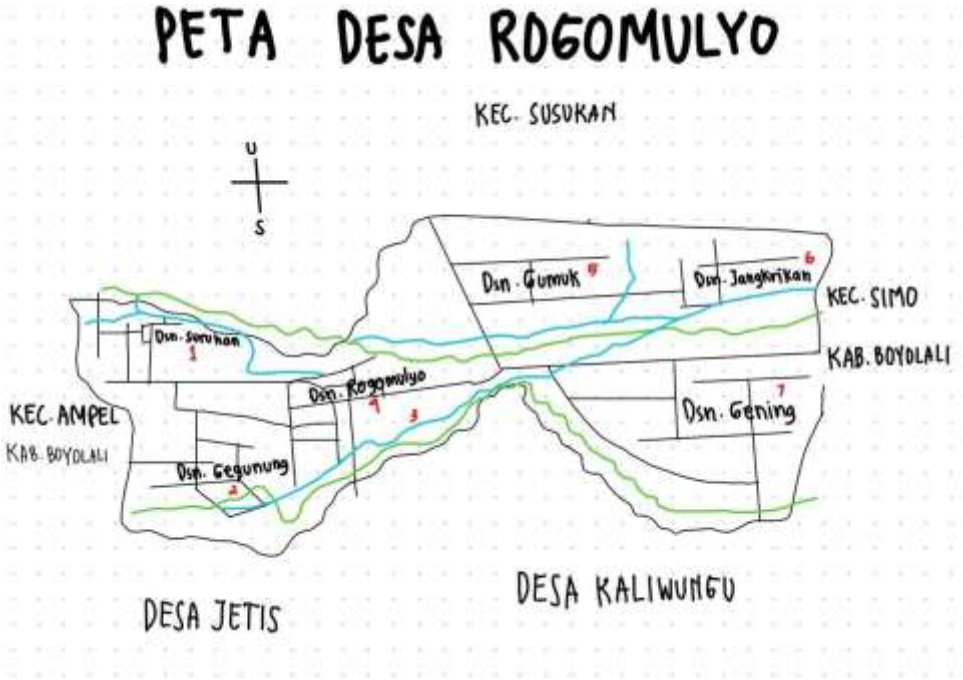

Figure 1. Map of Rogomulyo Village in Central Java

The 2018 village head election in Rogomulyo Village coincided with the election of village heads in other villages. In Semarang Regency, village head elections were held simultaneously on December 9, 2018, attended by 140 villages throughout Semarang Regency. The implementation of village head elections refers to Regional Regulation No. 3 of 2018 and Regent Decree No. 20 of 2018. Meanwhile, in Kaliwungu District, village head elections were held at the same time and day by 8 villages out of 11 villages. Of the eight villages that had village head elections in 2018, one village head election attracted our attention, namely the phenomenon of the election of a Christian reverend as the village head amidst the majority of the village population following the Muslim faith. There were 3,758 Muslims in this village, while there were only 398 Christians; the remaining 17 were Catholics, 2 were Buddhists, and 4 were native religious believers.

The victory of a Christian pastor became our entry point in conducting this research. We strove to know why the majority population chose the minority group and to see what the clientelistic practices are in this village. In a simple understanding, village clientelistics is defined as the practice of a political exchange, usually carried out by someone who has access and authority in making policies in exchange for votes for voters. We found that village clientalistic practices were carried out by the village head towards his people, where the village head provided protection in exchange for votes or support from "clients". In studies on clientelism, this practice is usually dominated by political parties. A study by Holand et al. (2015) on vote buying assumed that parties are the main actors in clientelist politics, and brokers are "agents of political parties" (Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015: 1187). In addition, much of the literature focuses on party machines that target geographically separated partisan voters and base areas, or as Gans Morse, Mazzuca, and Nichter (2014: 417) put it, in the clientelistic context of the villages, we examined that clientelistic actors. The village head is the incumbent and the *sabet* are his agents. In some political science literature, clientelism is work in exchange for votes (Robinson, 2013). Clientelism is a

particularistic exchange based on contingency. This contingent exchange method thrives in some autocracies and democracies. It appears in various cultural contexts.

From the clientelistic practices in the village studied, we found that the village head gave public works or special assistance in exchange for electoral support. Most of these political practices revolved around jobs or positions. For example, village officials are determined by the village head; and the village head delegates village work to village elites. In addition, village clientelism is a means of obtaining work for friends in the village head's circle and for relatives who wish to gain access to various services provided by the village government. Some literature never explains why clientelism practices take the form of employment, even though this practice implicitly emphasizes commitment issues. The fact that the reversibility of a job offer is part of its political appeal, the recipient cannot be sure that the "clientalistic deal" will be carried out as no enforcement mechanism can be created.

Several other studies on clientelism also explored the interactions of clientelism with other phenomena such as party systems (Allen, 2014; Tomsa, 2014), personal votes (Allen, 2015), or ethnic politics (Van Klinken, 2008). Studies examining electoral clientelism itself focused on topics such as the role of personal networks (Buehler 2009), intermediaries by community leaders (Clark and Palmer, 2008) or campaign teams (Aspinall, 2014b), the distribution of club goods, or collective benefits (Aspinall and As'ad, 2015). The latest study on clientelistics was conducted by Berenschot (2018), who said that clientalism appears in countries with low productivity such as African countries and developing countries including Indonesia, especially eastern Indonesia. Due to the effect of working with low aggregate productivity or productivity with an average income level, the level of inequality in a country increases. This is the origin of various factors that influence the occurrence of clientelism because it is caused by inefficiency (Berenschot, 2018: 3). For example, politicians' motivation to come to power is very strong, while the management of that power cannot be maximized, resulting in political instability in the country and the decline of ideological values.

This village clientelistic practice has been practiced by Trimin, the incumbent candidate, so that he has succeeded in driving the population's interest with an image of support for the incumbent who is considered still worthy of being re-elected. In the end, several of the incumbent's competitors felt less confident that they would be able to defeat the incumbent in the village head election contest. The image built by the incumbent who had been polished with various positive images as a strong candidate succeeded in silencing the population's mentality to compete as a candidate in the village head election event. The competitor who was known as a Muslim teacher could not influence the population's trust in the incumbent, despite various narratives about identity sentiment that had been built systemically.

Clientelistic practices in this village resulted in intense competition between the village elites. The candidates were competing for influence, both through the *Sabet* success team (Aspinall et al., 2017: 10) and through influential figures in this village. *Sabet* have their own strategies. Identity sentiment is the strategy of choice in winning the hearts of the population, and quite a few even carry out provocations with various narratives of identity sentiment, such as the cries of being regional sons and the campaign "Muslims must choose Muslims". Many even give a Fatwa according to Islamic religious beliefs that Muslims are not allowed to vote for infidels in an Islamic term, and those who give this fatwa do not hesitate to include religious dogma taken from verses of the holy Koran.

The election of village heads in Rogomulyo Village is different from other villages in Kaliwungu Sub-district, in that most village heads' winning strategies rely more on money politics. The elite compete to create their own volunteer team as a force that can connect to the masses who have a voice. Volunteer team members were given operational funds to approach village residents so that they would choose their candidate. Many village elites are tasked with carrying out roles as financiers for candidates, and some are also involved in gambling in the village head election. They bet a lot of money to make their candidate successful as the village head. The profits obtained by these *sabet* are double. First, the *sabet* gets the

advantage of getting convenience in accessing village government policies. On the other hand, these *sabet* will also gain benefits if their candidate is successful in becoming the village head. The following is a table of vote results for the village head election in Rogomulyo in 2012 and 2018.

Table 1. Votes Obtained for the 2012 Rogomulyo Village Head Election

Number Order	Name of the Candidate	Number of Votes	percentage	Number of Voters
1	T. Trimin	1,696	80,91 %	1,696
2	Empty Box	400	19,08 %	400
				2,096

Table 2. Votes Obtained for the 2018 Rogomulyo Village Head Election

Number Order	Name of the Candidate	Number of Votes	Percentage	Number of Voters
1	T. Trimin	1,761	70,66 %	1,761
2	Muh. Amin	731	29,33 %	731
				2,492

Source: Village Head Election Data of Rogomulyo Village in 2012 and 2018

Why Was a Javanese Christian Church Reverend Elected?

After conducting in-depth observations and interviews, we found that a Christian reverend named Timotius Trimin was elected as the village head in Rogomulyo Village, Kaliwungu District, Semarang Regency, Central Java, for two consecutive periods with the majority of the population being Muslim. Trimin does not come from the local area but is from a village outside the area. Trimin was born and raised in Tawangsari, Sukaharja Regency, about 60 km from the electoral area. Since 1998, he has lived in the village of Rogomulyo, officially a resident of Rogomulyo because of his duties as a reverend at the Javanese Christian Church (GKJ) in Salatiga, which is not far from where he lives.

In the first period of the 2012 village head election, Trimin competed against an empty box, even though against an empty box the issue of identity sentiment began to be felt. For example, there was the issue of him not being a native of the region which emerged during the campaign period, because Trimin himself was not a resident who was born in this area, and various issues were circulated throughout the period. During the selection of the candidates, Trimin was rumored to be going up against a candidate from his own native Muslim community. The village leaders gathered to discuss who was worthy to lead this village. Not a single name was put forward by a figure who had the same capacity as Trimin until the end of that time. It has been determined that no one had registered as a candidate except for Trimin. From the election regulations, Trimin had fulfilled the requirements that were implemented, namely 2 years of having an ID card, so the candidate was allowed. The committee determined that Trimin was the only person to register as a candidate for the village head position in Rogomulyo. To be precise, on December 16, 2012, the village head election was held, and Trimin won the election for the Rogomulyo Village head. He received 1,559 votes, while his opponent — symbolized by an empty box — got 424 votes. The number of registered voters was 2,600, but 2,096 participated in the polling stations, and some of the ballot papers were considered damaged.

Trimin was the 3rd head of Rogomulyo Village. Previously, in the first period this village was led by Suryadi who served 10 years. Then the second period was led by Salip Suhadi who served 14 years. However, in the first and second periods this village did not have much significant development. In fact, Rogomulyo Village was included in the category of being an underdeveloped village compared to other villages. As a reverend, Trimin was also active in other activities. For almost 10 years, he had been

actively involved in the Development Planning Conference - a public forum in the village consisting of the government and the community. Trimin was also the secretary of LKMD and was active in community study groups. His devotion to the village and his closeness to the community were important assets in gaining support. For Trimin, the activities in the village that he carried out while he was a trusted member of the village were a form of service, as Trimin's position as a reverend was just to serve the people. His closeness was proven by his responsibility to carry out the mandates given to him by the residents. He had carried out several village programs well and responsibly, so that over time Trimin had gained the trust of the residents to lead Rogomulyo Village. Support for Trimin initially came from village leaders. Most of the figures who supported him were influential Islamic religious figures in this village; the village people called them *Kiai Kampung*. The support was so strong that Trimin was elected as head of Rogomulya Village in 2012. According to one of the Islamic leaders, several of the residents we interviewed chose Trimin not because he was a reverend but because he had done a lot in this village.

In the second period of the 2018 village head election, Trimin as the incumbent had a competitor. The political dynamics were different from those in the first period. The competition was tighter. The atmosphere was not as he thought with the development of digital technology, so that the younger residents received information about the village from social media. The local figures and youth had WhatsApp groups where it was very easy to obtain information. Various issues were circulating on social media. The influence of the wave of identity politics in the election for the DKI Governor was very much felt in this village. Issues of regional identity were no longer a concern for the population, but the issue of religious sentiment was getting stronger. Moreover, Trimin's opponent as a candidate in the village head election was one of the most respected religious teachers (*ustdaz*) in the Rogomulyo Village area, Moh Amin, an Islamic religious scholar who graduated from Universitas Muhamadiyah in Surakarta.

With increasingly tight competition, each candidate, both Trimin as the incumbent and Amin as the challenger, created a team of volunteers (*sabet*) whose task was to make the candidacy of both parties a success. Even though Trimin was a Christian reverend, it was strange that the person chosen as the head of the volunteer team was a Muslim, while Amin was undoubtedly the team leader who was a Muslim. Various political frictions threatened the tolerant relationships between the residents of Aini village that they had built for decades. The residents were very comfortable with the differences in beliefs. They respected each other and even cooperated between religious communities for daily activities in Aini Village, as the Muslim residents helped the Christian residents. In various religious activities, they helped each other. For Islamic holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, Christians helped Muslims, and vice versa. On important Christian religious days, Muslims would also help such as before Christmas Day.

The village elite figures were also involved in intense competition on both sides. They raised various issues with each other. Places of worship such as prayer rooms were used as gathering places by Amin to gain the support of the majority of Muslims in this village. The village which was initially filled with an atmosphere of harmony was split into two with the Trimin camp and the Amin camp. Supporters of both of them raised issues with each other, even though the tension between the teams was very intense but several religious village figures were able to resolve it. Ratman was an NU figure. He was called a village *kiai* and became an *imam* at the *musholla*. He worked as a farmer on a daily basis. He was an Islamic boarding school alumnus and was very influential in this village. He also had the trust of the villagers regarding religious teachings. Seeing that the village was divided in such a way, he did not want his village to be divided because of politics. He tried to give an understanding to the residents that they were allowed to be different but did not want them to be pitted against each other. He also said that whoever won and was elected as the head of Rogomulyo Village, the individual should maintain a tolerant atmosphere.

Conclusion

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that village democracy was the focus of this research. First, this study had a different emphasis from most of the other previous studies regarding contestation and local political dynamics in a particular village which illustrates the strength of local elites in controlling village resources. By strangle holding the villagers in gaining votes, apart from the clientelistic political practices of village elites by providing things in the form of goods or services to get support, political clientelistic practices are increasingly rampant and very massive, especially the practice of vote buying as the final winning strategy in village head elections in various regions in Indonesia.

Second, the dominance of a particular religious identity cannot guarantee the support of a majority with the same identity. The support that is systemic or egocentric with various issues of a religious identity has been undermined by village traditions that have long bound habits of attitudes and behavior of tolerance between residents with one another. Programmatic campaigns gain more ground than campaigns that emphasize religious sentiments. The election of a Javanese Christian reverend by the majority Muslim population is proof that a political (religious) identity does not always receive support from the village population as voters. Third, awareness of implementing democratic values is an important factor in maintaining the quality of a contestation. This study has provided its own lessons as well as serves as a role model in traversing the dynamics of local politics in Indonesia.

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