

Identity Politics and the Muslim Voter Resistance Movement: Joko Widodo's Defeat in West Nusa Tenggara in the 2019 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This article examines the defeat of Joko Widodo in the 2019 Presidential Election in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) by focusing on identity politics and the resistance movement among Muslim voters. The defeat was not merely the result of formal electoral factors, but was strongly influenced by local socio religious dynamics that intensified prior to the election. This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in depth interviews with religious leaders, political volunteers, and community members, as well as document analysis and media coverage. The findings indicate that the mobilization of religious identity played a crucial role in shaping political resistance against Joko Widodo. Narratives of ulama criminalization, post-212 movement sentiments, and dissatisfaction with local political representation significantly reinforced voter opposition. This resistance movement was consolidated through networks of religious actors and volunteers who effectively produced and disseminated oppositional narratives at the local level. The study highlights that identity politics in the 2019 presidential election in NTB functioned as a powerful instrument of political mobilization capable of shifting voter preferences and influencing electoral outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Presidential Election was one of the most polarized political contests in the history of post-reform Indonesian democracy. This polarization was reflected not only in differences in political choices but also in the strengthening use of religious identity as an instrument of electoral mobilization [1]. This phenomenon was clearly visible in several regions with strong socio-religious characters, one of which was the Province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). Although Joko Widodo succeeded in winning the 2019 Presidential Election nationally, in NTB, he again suffered a significant defeat, especially in areas with a dominant Muslim voter base [2].

Several previous studies have shown that religion-based identity politics had a strong influence in shaping voter preferences in the 2019 Presidential Election. These studies emphasize the role of religious sentiment, the influence of religious elites, and the impact of Islamic social movements after the 212 demonstrations in building political polarization [3]. However, most studies still focus on the dynamics of national politics or urban areas in Java. As a result, understanding of how identity politics works in local contexts with distinctive religious authority structures, such as in NTB, is still relatively limited [4].

On the other hand, studies of voter behavior at the local level often emphasize development, welfare, and government performance as the main variables in determining political choices [5]. This rational economic approach has not been able to fully explain the electoral paradox in certain regions, where the success of development programs is not automatically proportional to political support for the incumbent. In the context of NTB, Joko Widodo's defeat occurred amidst the development narrative after the 2018 Lombok earthquake and efforts to consolidate local political elites, which indicates the presence of non-material factors that are more dominant in influencing voter preferences [6].

In addition to structural factors and development policies, the socio-religious context of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) society plays a significant role in shaping voters' political attitudes. NTB is known as a region with a strong Islamic base, where clerics and religious figures serve not only as spiritual leaders but also as social authorities with significant influence in public life. In the context of electoral politics, the position of clerics often serves as a moral and symbolic reference point for the public in determining political attitudes, particularly when political contests are perceived to be related to religious issues and public morality.

The influence of these religious actors grew stronger as the 2019 presidential election contest unfolded amid intense national polarization. Nationally emerging religious narratives, such as the criminalization of clerics, legal injustices against Islamic groups, and collective memories of the aftermath of the 212 movement, did not stop at the central level but underwent a process of localization in the regions. In West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), these narratives resonated with the community's social experiences and were then interpreted as a form of tension between the state and the aspirations of the people, bolstering sentiments of resistance against the incumbent candidate.

In this situation, the Muslim voter resistance movement in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) did not emerge spontaneously, but rather formed through an organized social process. A network of religious actors and political volunteers acted as mediators connecting national narratives with local realities, while also producing political meaning at the grassroots level. Through sermons, religious forums, social media, and informal communication, political resistance was framed as a defense of the identity and interests of the community. This process significantly contributed to shaping the political preferences of Muslim voters and contributed to Joko Widodo's defeat in West Nusa Tenggara in the 2019 presidential election.

This article starts from the argument that Joko Widodo's defeat in NTB in the 2019 Presidential Election cannot be understood solely through the approach of government performance or the economic rationality of voters. Religious identity politics serves as the basis for the formation of a political resistance movement of Muslim voters against state power. [7] This resistance is mediated by religious narratives, such as the issue of criminalization of clerics, post-212 movement sentiment, and dissatisfaction with local political representation, which is then consolidated through a network of religious actors and political volunteers at the local level. [8]

The 2019 Presidential Election was one of the most competitive political contests in Indonesia's post-reform democratic history, marked not only by debates over government performance and development programs, but also by the strengthening of identity-based political polarization. Issues of religion, the relationship between the state and the people, and the role of Islamic figures in the national political sphere were crucial factors in shaping public political attitudes, thus reflecting socio-political dynamics beyond mere electoral competition. In this context, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) holds a strategic position as a region with a Muslim majority population and the strong influence of religious figures in social life. Islamic identity in NTB serves as a moral and social reference point in political

decision-making, including in elections, making this region relevant for study in understanding how identity politics operates at the local level and contributed to the defeat of the incumbent candidate in the 2019 Presidential Election.

Several studies on the 2019 presidential election in Indonesia generally place identity politics within a national framework, focusing on political polarization, elite dynamics, and the role of the media in shaping public opinion. However, most of these studies remain macro-focused and pay little attention to how identity politics operates contextually at the local level, particularly in regions with strong socio-religious characteristics. Consequently, understanding of local variations in voter behavior and the social mechanisms that shape political resistance remains relatively limited.

Based on these conditions, this study fills a gap in research by positioning West Nusa Tenggara as the research locus to examine more deeply how identity politics and Muslim voter resistance movements are formed and operate in the local context. By combining field data and socio-religious analysis, this research not only enriches studies of voter behavior in the 2019 Presidential Election but also makes an empirical contribution to understanding the relationship between religious identity, social actors, and electoral dynamics in the region. This approach is expected to provide a more contextual perspective in understanding the dynamics of electoral democracy in Indonesia.

The scientific novelty of this article lies in its attempt to explain identity politics not merely as a strategy of political elites, but as a social process shaping Muslim voter resistance movements at the local level. Using the West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) as a case study, this article demonstrates that identity politics operates through the relationship between religious authority structures, volunteer networks, and community social experiences, resulting in political resistance that directly impacts electoral outcomes. This approach enriches the study of voter behavior by positioning religious identity as a dynamic variable integrated with the local context.

Based on the description, the purpose of this article is to analyze the role of identity politics in shaping the resistance movement of Muslim voters that contributed to Joko Widodo's defeat in West Nusa Tenggara Province in the 2019 Presidential Election. This article is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of electoral politics and identity politics, as well as empirical contributions in understanding the dynamics of local democracy in Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social and political phenomena in depth through the perspectives of actors directly involved in the events being studied [9][9]. The case study method is used to comprehensively explore the dynamics of identity politics and the resistance movement of Muslim voters in the context of Joko Widodo's defeat in West Nusa Tenggara Province (NTB) in the 2019 Presidential Election, by taking into account the surrounding social, cultural, and religious conditions [10].

The research location was determined in West Nusa Tenggara Province, considering that this region has a strong socio-religious character and shows a significant pattern of electoral resistance against the incumbent candidate in the 2019 Presidential Election. This research utilizes primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants, namely religious leaders, political volunteers, and community members who have involvement or understanding of the political dynamics of the 2019 Presidential Election in NTB. The purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the selected informants are relevant to the research focus [9].

Secondary data was obtained through a documentary study, including official election organizer documents, vote recapitulation results, and media coverage. Secondary data served as a complement to primary data and as a verification tool to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, documentation, and media searches. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing researchers to have a framework for their questions and the flexibility to explore emerging information during the interview process. This approach enabled researchers to capture informants' narratives, experiences, and interpretations regarding identity politics, the role of religious actors, and the process of developing political resistance among Muslim voters.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and concluding [9]. The data, which had been categorized based on main themes such as religious identity politics, resistance narratives, and the role of religious actors, were then analyzed interpretively to reveal the relationship between identity politics and the dynamics of voter behavior. To maintain data validity, this study applied source triangulation by comparing interview results, official documents, and media reports.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research result

This research results sub-chapter outlines empirical findings regarding the dynamics of Muslim voter behavior in West Nusa Tenggara during the 2019 presidential election, particularly regarding the strengthening of identity politics and the formation of resistance to the incumbent candidate. These findings are derived from field data that capture the views, experiences, and political attitudes of informants in responding to the electoral contest. The primary focus of this section is to describe the social and political patterns that emerged at the local level without first integrating them into a broader theoretical framework.

The results of the study show that Joko Widodo's defeat in the 2019 Presidential Election in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Province was significantly influenced by the strengthening of religion-based identity politics among Muslim voters. Religious identity is a dominant factor that shapes how society interprets electoral contests. In the view of most informants, elections are not understood solely as an arena for political competition between candidates, but as an arena for defending identity, the interests of the community, and religious values that are considered threatened by state power [11], [12].

Field data shows that identity politics operates through ongoing social processes before and during the 2019 presidential election campaign. Muslim voters in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) respond not only rationally to political issues, but also emotionally and symbolically. Religious identity serves as a primary interpretive framework for assessing candidate figures, government policies, and the relationship between the state and the people. This condition shapes voters' tendency to take political positions that oppose those of the incumbent candidate [13].

The research also shows that religious narratives play a central role in building and strengthening voters' resistance. Issues such as the criminalization of clerics, legal injustice against Islamic figures, and collective memory after the 212 movement have become key references in framing people's political attitudes. These narratives do not emerge sporadically, but are consistently reproduced in various socio-religious spaces, thus forming a collective perception of tension between the state and the people [4], [3].

The dissemination of these religious narratives occurs through various informal channels closely related to people's daily lives. Religious sermons, religious study forums, religious study groups, and interpersonal communication within communities are the primary means of conveying religiously nuanced political messages. Through these channels, national political issues are translated into moral and religious language that is easily understood by the public, thus strengthening resistance to the incumbent candidate. [14]

Further research demonstrates the central role of religious actors in influencing the political preferences of Muslim voters in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). Clerics and religious figures are viewed not only as spiritual leaders but also as moral and social references in determining political attitudes. The political views expressed by religious figures are highly legitimate because they are based on a strong relationship of trust between the cleric and the congregation. In this context, religious authority plays a crucial role in guiding people's political choices [1].

In addition to religious actors, political volunteers play a strategic role in consolidating Muslim voter resistance. Research shows that volunteers serve as a bridge between the religious narratives developing at the elite level and the political realities at the grassroots level. Volunteers play a role in simplifying political messages, adapting them to local contexts, and disseminating them through social media, community discussions, and interpersonal communication.[8]

Volunteers not only act as messengers, but also as producers of narratives of political resistance. They frame political choices [4] as a form of communal solidarity and symbolic resistance to power perceived as impartial. Through this strategy, political resistance is not understood as merely an act of opposition, but rather as a moral and religious obligation. This pattern strengthens social ties among Muslim voters and encourages consistency in political choices at the voting booth.

Overall, the research findings indicate that Muslim voter resistance in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is collective, structured, and socially organized. This resistance is not expressed in open rejection of the state, but rather through democratic mechanisms, namely political choices in elections. The 2019 presidential election became the primary medium for the public to channel critical attitudes and symbolic resistance against the incumbent candidate, ultimately contributing to Joko Widodo's defeat in West Nusa Tenggara Province.

The research also shows that the resistance of Muslim voters in NTB was formed through intense social interactions at the local community level. Informal discussions within families, mosque communities, and religious study groups became important avenues for strengthening shared perceptions of political positions deemed most in line with the interests of the community. Through these interactions, political preferences were no longer viewed as individual choices, but rather as collective decisions reflecting social and religious solidarity [13].

Furthermore, field data show that voters' political preferences are not significantly influenced by the incumbent candidate's official campaign, particularly those emphasizing development achievements and economic programs. Informants tend to view these issues as less relevant than religious narratives that touch on moral and identity aspects. This situation indicates that technocratic political messages lack traction amidst the strong sentiments of religious identity and solidarity growing in NTB society [3].

Further research revealed that the consistency of Muslim voters' political choices in NTB was relatively strong until election day. The resulting resistance was not fluctuating, but rather showed a stable pattern resulting from the internalization of

religious narratives and the ongoing strengthening of collective attitudes. In this context, the 2019 Presidential Election marked the culmination of a long-standing process of political attitude formation, so the incumbent's defeat reflected the accumulation of social, religious, and political dynamics developing at the local level [8].

Overall, the research findings demonstrate that political resistance among Muslim voters in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) was formed through a collective and ongoing social process. The interaction between religious narratives, the role of religious actors, and the involvement of political volunteers shaped relatively consistent patterns of political choice until election day. These empirical findings demonstrate that local political dynamics in West Nusa Tenggara cannot be separated from the socio-religious context deeply rooted in community life and serve as a crucial foundation for the analytical discussion in the following subchapter.

3.2. Discussion

The discussion in this sub-chapter focuses on interpreting empirical findings regarding identity politics and resistance among Muslim voters in West Nusa Tenggara within the framework of electoral democracy dynamics. The research findings are not understood as isolated phenomena, but rather as part of an intertwined social and political process involving religious identity, social authority, and political mobilization practices. Therefore, this discussion aims to explain how these factors interact to shape voters' political orientations and influence the outcome of the 2019 Presidential Election.

The findings of this study confirm that religion-based identity politics is a key factor in shaping the political resistance of Muslim voters in West Nusa Tenggara Province in the 2019 Presidential Election. Identity politics in this context not only functions as a cultural symbol, but has developed into an effective instrument of political mobilization in building collective awareness of the community. Religious identity becomes the main framework in assessing the relationship between the state, power, and the interests of Muslims, so that voters' political preferences are more influenced by identity considerations than rational evaluations of government performance [15], [3].

The resulting political resistance is inextricably linked to the construction of a religious narrative that has developed massively in public and social religious spaces. Issues such as the criminalization of clerics, the unequal enforcement of the law against Islamic figures, and the collective memory of the aftermath of the 212 movement serve as a basis for moral legitimacy in framing opposition to the incumbent candidate. This narrative creates the perception of structural tension between the state and the people, which is then translated into electoral political attitudes through the election mechanism [13], [4].

From a voter behavior perspective, these findings demonstrate that the political choices of Muslim voters in NTB cannot be understood solely through a rational approach. Voters consider more than just programs, policies, or economic achievements, but are more influenced by collective emotions, group solidarity, and a sense of religious identity. Identity politics works by linking people's social and religious experiences with electoral contests, making elections a means of expressing moral and symbolic attitudes toward power [3].

The role of religious actors in this context shows that clerics and religious figures function as agents of political legitimacy who have significant influence in shaping voters' political orientation. Religious authorities not only provide spiritual references but also play a role in translating national political issues into moral and

religious narratives that are relevant to the local context of NTB society. The high level of trust of the congregation in clerics makes the political views of religious figures have a strong and sustainable influence [1], [16].

In addition to religious actors, political volunteers have emerged as informal actors who play a strategic role in consolidating voter resistance. Volunteers function as producers and distributors of political narratives that bridge elite religious discourse with social realities at the grassroots level. Through social media, community discussions, and interpersonal communication, volunteers simplify complex issues into easily accepted messages that have strong emotional resonance among Muslim voters [8].

The involvement of volunteers demonstrates that electoral politics is not solely conducted through formal party structures, but also through flexible and adaptive informal networks. Volunteer networks enable the broader and faster dissemination of resistance narratives, while simultaneously strengthening social cohesion among voters. In this context, volunteers are not merely campaign tools but also actors who play a role in shaping political meaning and the orientation of voter choices [8].

Joko Widodo's defeat in West Nusa Tenggara in the 2019 presidential election was thus the result of a complex interaction between identity politics, religious narratives, the role of religious actors, and the work of political volunteers. This finding strengthens the argument that the dynamics of electoral democracy in Indonesia are heavily influenced by the specific socio-religious context. Identity politics in the NTB case is not incidental, but is part of an ongoing socio-political process and has a direct impact on electoral outcomes [15], [3].

The findings of this study also demonstrate that identity politics in NTB did not emerge suddenly in the lead-up to the election, but rather resulted from the accumulation of social and political processes that have been ongoing for a considerable period of time. The community's collective experience in addressing the relationship between the state and the people, particularly following previous national political contests, has formed a relatively established framework for assessing political actors. In this context, the 2019 Presidential Election represents a moment for the articulation of previously formed political attitudes, not merely a momentary reaction to the electoral campaign.

Furthermore, the identity politics developing in NTB exhibits a contextual and local character. The circulating religious narratives are not always conveyed as explicit political doctrines, but rather are packaged through moral language, ethics, and religious symbols familiar to the community's daily lives. This strategy makes political messages more easily accepted and perceived as part of the community's moral obligation, rather than simply an individual political choice. This pattern strengthens the mobilization power of identity politics at the grassroots level.

From an electoral democracy perspective, these findings indicate that the political participation of Muslim voters in NTB has not declined, but rather undergone a transformation in the form of political expression. Resistance to the incumbent candidate is not manifested through apathy or rejection of the democratic system, but rather through the use of electoral mechanisms as a means of expressing political attitudes. This demonstrates that Muslim voters remain within the framework of procedural democracy, even though their political choices are heavily influenced by considerations of religious identity and solidarity. [3]

Thus, identity politics, as reflected in Joko Widodo's defeat in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) in the 2019 presidential election, needs to be understood as a complex and multidimensional socio-political phenomenon. Identity politics serves not only as

a tool for electoral mobilization but also as a medium for articulating the dissatisfaction, collective anxiety, and moral aspirations of the Muslim community towards the state and power. These findings reinforce the argument that studies of voter behavior in Indonesia need to seriously consider the socio-religious dimension as a determining factor in the dynamics of electoral democracy.

Thus, this discussion confirms that identity politics in the NTB case is not merely a short-term electoral strategy, but rather a manifestation of long-standing socio-religious relations within society. Muslim voters' resistance to the incumbent candidate reflects the community's efforts to negotiate its position in power through available democratic mechanisms. These findings reinforce the argument that analysis of voter behavior in Indonesia requires a serious consideration of the local socio-religious context to more comprehensively understand the dynamics of electoral democracy.

3.3 Implications of Research Findings

The findings of this study have important implications for the study of identity politics and voter behavior in the context of electoral democracy in Indonesia. The results demonstrate that religion-based identity politics cannot be understood merely as a strategy of political elites or a fleeting campaign phenomenon, but rather as a social process deeply rooted in the socio-religious relations of society. Religious identity serves as a primary interpretive framework that shapes how voters understand power, political legitimacy, and the state's position in the lives of the people.

The theoretical implications of these findings emphasize the need for a more contextual approach to analyzing voter behavior, particularly in regions with strong socio-religious characteristics such as West Nusa Tenggara. A rational approach that emphasizes calculating interests and evaluating government performance has not fully explained the dynamics of Muslim voters' political choices. Therefore, the dimensions of identity, group solidarity, and socio-religious authority need to be positioned as key variables in local electoral political analysis.

Beyond theoretical implications, this research's findings also have practical implications for political actors and policymakers. The inability to understand local socio-religious dynamics has the potential to generate political resistance expressed through electoral mechanisms. These findings suggest that political strategies that ignore the sensitivity of identity and the relationship between the state and the people tend to be less effective in building sustainable electoral support, particularly in regions with a strong socio-religious base.

Furthermore, the findings of this study provide methodological implications for the study of electoral politics in Indonesia. Research on voter behavior in religious areas requires an approach capable of capturing the subjective meanings, perceptions, and experiences of the community. A qualitative approach is crucial for understanding how collective identity and emotions influence political choices, although at the same time, this approach has limitations in explaining the magnitude of the influence quantitatively.

In this context, this study has limitations that require consideration. The focus on the 2019 presidential election and a single region with relatively homogeneous socio-religious characteristics limits the generalizability of the findings to other election contexts and regions. Furthermore, the qualitative approach employed emphasized deepening the meaning rather than quantitatively measuring the influence of identity politics. Nevertheless, these limitations open up opportunities for further research, including cross-regional comparative studies, cross-election period analyses, and the use of mixed methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of identity politics and voter behavior in Indonesia's electoral democracy.

The findings of this study also have important implications for understanding the relationship between electoral democracy and identity expression at the local level. The NTB case demonstrates that identity politics does not always lead to the delegitimization of democracy but can instead serve as a means of articulating group interests and aspirations through legitimate mechanisms. Muslim voters channel their critical attitudes and resistance through elections, not through rejection of the democratic system itself. This indicates that procedural democracy still provides space for identity-based political expression as long as it is channeled through available institutional mechanisms.

Furthermore, the findings of this study imply the importance of public policy sensitivity to socio-religious dynamics in the regions. State policies perceived as inconsistent with the religious values, symbols, and aspirations of the community have the potential to trigger psychological distance between the state and its citizens. Therefore, the results of this study emphasize the need for a more dialogical and inclusive policy approach, particularly in regions with a strong socio-religious base. By understanding identity politics as a complex social phenomenon, the state and political actors are expected to be able to manage differences more constructively without deepening social polarization in the practice of electoral democracy.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Joko Widodo's defeat in the 2019 presidential election in West Nusa Tenggara Province cannot be separated from the strengthening of religion-based identity politics, which shaped political resistance among Muslim voters. Identity politics serves as the primary framework for interpreting electoral contestation, where political choices are understood as expressions of religious solidarity and moral attitudes toward the relationship between the state and the people. In this context, elections serve as a medium for the articulation of symbolic resistance channeled through procedural democratic mechanisms.

Political resistance among Muslim voters in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is shaped by the interaction between religious narratives, the authority of religious actors, and the role of political volunteers. Narratives emphasizing the criminalization of clerics, legal injustice, and collective memory after the 212 movement reinforce the perception of a distance between the state and the people. Clerics and religious figures serve as sources of moral legitimacy, while political volunteers serve as liaisons, distributing and consolidating narratives of resistance down to the grassroots level.

The findings of this study confirm that the dynamics of voter behavior in Indonesia, particularly in regions with strong socio-religious characteristics such as West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), cannot be analyzed solely through a rational approach. Identity politics is a determining factor that shapes voters' political orientation and directly influences electoral outcomes. Therefore, studies of voter behavior and electoral democracy in Indonesia need to pay greater attention to the socio-religious dimension as a key variable in understanding local and national political dynamics.

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