

# Identity and Programmatic Politics in a Javanese Village Chief Election: The Case of Temon Kulon, Yogyakarta

Irwan Harjanto<sup>1</sup>

Received: 24 July 2019 | Accepted: 11 November 2019 | Published: 11 December 2019

## Abstract

*This article explores the programmatic policies used by the incumbent in Temon Kulon Village, Kulon Progo Regency, Yogyakarta, during the village head election. It finds that, even as identity politics (particularly religion) have become an increasingly important part of Indonesian politics, some village chiefs attempted to apply programmatic politics. Although most commonly associated with higher levels of government (including municipal elections) and political parties, in this case programmatic politics was applied within a village where local traditions and culture remained strong. This article also shows that identity politics is used not only to mobilise support against non-Muslim incumbents; it is also used to contest elections through a cultural primordialism. Through analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, as well as a series of interviews and observations, this article shows that religious fundamentalism can be moderated through a combination of programmatic politics and local political identities.*

**Keywords:** *programmatic politics, identity politics, religious primordialism, village head elections, transformative leadership*

## Introduction

The rise of identity politics, particularly “political Islam”, has resulted in significant debate about the state of Indonesian democracy. The 411 and 212 protests against the former Governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as Ahok), who was accused of blasphemy, was an important moment in this process.<sup>2</sup> Political Islam has challenged religious minorities

<sup>1</sup> Irwan Harjanto is a research assistant at the Research Centre for Politics and Government (PolGov), Universitas Gadjah Mada. Email: irwanharjanto@hotmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> The 411 and 212 Movements were conservative Islamic movements that protested an act of perceived blasphemy by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as Ahok), the former governor of Jakarta. These protests were led by conservative groups such as the

and marginal groups, limiting groups' ability to express their own political interests through acts of intimidation and exclusion. At the same time, religious minorities have withdrawn from politics, fearing that they would face intolerance or be forced to defend themselves from religious fundamentalists.

The political tensions that have emerged in Indonesia have been exacerbated by the government's decision to disband and ban the Pan-Islamist conservative movement Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). As HTI had actively rejected democracy in Indonesia and promoted the establishment of an Islamic, it was perceived as a threat to national security (Thompson, 2017).<sup>3</sup> Responses, however, were sharply divided along ideological lines, underscoring the divide that has coloured Indonesia's political environment in recent years. Secular nationalists have promoted democracy and the democratisation process, while conservative religious groups have promoted the passage of fundamentalist Islamic laws and policies. These ideologies have clashed not only at the national level, but also at the provincial, municipal, and even village level.

Identity politics has been widely used to mobilise support since Indonesia began its political reform in 1998. Indeed, Aspinall (2011) argues that the democratisation process itself provided fertile ground for identity politics. In several areas, religion has been used to divide ethnic groups or create communal conflict. Democratisation has also provided space for fundamentalist Muslim groups to assert their interests and promote the establishment of an Islamic state. Tensions, rooted in identity politics, have resulted in political friction in several parts of the country.

Democratisation, which has resulted in political transformations from the grassroots through the national level, has

---

Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI).

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, Neil. 2017. Islam and Identity Politics in Indonesia. Downloaded from <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/islam-and-identity-politics-in-indonesia/> on 12 January 2019.

influenced voter behaviour (Aspinall, 2005). It has not only given primordialism stronger roots, but also created space for the practice of programmatic politics. A study of the Kulon Progo municipal elections by Mas'udi and Kurniawan (2017), for example, has shown that incumbents have used their track-record and leadership experiences to provide public services and develop local economies in order to attract voters (Mas'udi and Kurniawan, 2017); similar strategies were used by candidates during the regency's simultaneous village elections in 2018.

This article takes the case of Temon Kulon Village, Kulon Progo Regency, to explore how identity politics have been used at the village level, as well as how political programmes were utilised by candidates. As such, it examines the strategies used by candidates to attract voters' support, particularly their use of programmatic politics and local cultural identity to combat the influence of religious identity politics. It finds that, in Temon Kulon, the incumbent deliberately used a combination of these strategies to mitigate the effects of religious primordialism. It further argues that these strategies contributed significantly to the incumbent's electoral victory.

Such research is important to understand the practice of democracy at the village level, which is often understood as representative of national politics and as reflecting the ideological struggle between conservative Islam and secular nationalism. This study of programmatic politics in village elections is also unique as, generally, studies of the phenomenon have focused on political parties. Although several studies have examined the practice of clientelism in the 2017 Kulon Progo municipal election (Mas'udi and Kurniawan, 2017), this article provides further detail by understanding how local traditions and programmatic politics were used by the incumbent to win the Temon Kulon village election.

This study finds that, although candidates exploited religious issues to attack the incumbent, the incumbent was able to mitigate their effect by emphasising Javanese tradition and culture. He was

further buttressed by his performance and track record as village chief, and as such he had been able to resist his opponents' attacks.

This article is organised as follows. First, it discusses the landscape of identity politics in Indonesia, particularly how identity has been used as a political tool for reaching voters and its importance in candidates' campaigns. Second, it presents programmatic politics as an alternative strategy for campaigning, as well as a means of mitigating opponents' use of identity politics and clientelism. Third, it examines how the incumbent used a combination of programmatic politics and Javanese culture during the 2018 village chief elections to advance his platform as well as his progressive ideas. Finally, it shows that—even as opponents widely used religious issues and identity politics against him—the incumbent's personal track-record enabled him to gather the support of village residents, as did his use of programmatic politics and Javanese cultural symbols and traditions.

### **Identity and Local Politics in Indonesia**

Owing to Indonesia's multiculturalism, identity politics has long contributed to elections at the national and local level. However, recently cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity have contributed significantly to conflict during and after elections. In the world's largest Muslim majority country—some 87% of Indonesians are Muslim (Indonesia, 2016)—political Islam has become increasingly important and consistently influenced the behaviours of the Indonesian people. Gueorguiev, Ostwald, & Schuler (2018) argue that an ideological divide between conservative Muslims and secular nationalists has significantly affected not only candidates' political strategies, but also voters' behaviour and choices. They find that voters' political choices are determined by their own characteristics as well as those of their preferred political faction, citing the fact that religiously conservative areas were more likely to have supported Prabowo Subianto during Indonesia's 2014 presidential election,

while residents of poor rural areas tended to vote for Joko Widodo. Gueorguiev, Ostwald, & Schuler (2018) also find that conservative Islamic groups have often mobilised mass support in order to realise the desired electoral results.

Sudarto, a researcher with the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika National Alliance*, found that 1,554 (65%) of 2,392 reported cases of violence had religious causes (Fakhrana, 2014).<sup>4</sup> When the Governor of Jakarta, a Christian man of Chinese heritage named Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (better known as Ahok) was charged with blasphemy in 2017, conservative Muslims felt that it was necessary to use their political voices after years of neglect. As such, protest movements led by conservative groups provided new momentum to political Islam in Indonesia. Ultimately, these movements affected the local elections that were held across Indonesia in 2018, wherein candidates weaponised religious sentiments to mobilise opposition to minority candidates; echoes of this have remained through 2019. As argued by Lipset and Rokkan (Ufen, 2005), Indonesia's political divide resembles that of Malaysia, which adapted a European party system that perpetuated social gaps that had been created through the industrial and national revolution. Ideological conflicts between the central and peripheral, the religious and secular, the rural and urban, and labour and capitalism have configured Indonesia's party system, wherein parties embody nationalist and Islamic ideologies to varying degrees.

Indonesia, while experiencing religious conflict, has also frequently seen conflict along ethnic lines. A survey by the National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia (Komnas HAM) and the Kompas Research Bureau found no fewer than 101 cases of racial and ethnic discrimination between 2011 and 2018. These included exclusion from public services, forced dissolution of traditional

---

<sup>4</sup> Downloaded from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20141115090933-20-11663/agama-jadi-faktor-utama-penyulut-kekerasan> on 30 September 2019.

rituals, and abrogation of land ownership rights (Bhaskara, 2018).<sup>5</sup> However, Aspinall (2011) argues that ethnic identity has not had a significant effect on Indonesian politics since 1998. Although Indonesia has experienced numerous cases of conflict wherein different ethnic groups have competed for power, and although polarisation remains evident, formal politics have generally offered a space for compromise. As Indonesia has democratised, ethnicity has had little political import, as evidenced by the fact that few candidates have used ethnic symbols to mobilise voters. Likewise, ethnic conflict has become less prevalent as politicians had established inter-ethnic coalitions and gained public support; nonetheless, as shown by the Komnas HAM and Kompas survey, there remains clear potential for ethnic conflict.

Aspinall identifies two factors as having contributed to ethnicity's limited effect on Indonesian politics since the beginning of political reform. *First*, Aspinall argues that Indonesia's democratic institutions have been designed to promote direct elections from the local through the national level, and thus offer spaces in which political actors from different ethnic backgrounds can work together to gain power and control resources. As such, it may be argued that the democratic institutions have accommodated ethnic groups to promote their own political ambitions. Regional autonomy, in which political and fiscal authority has been granted to local governments, has shifted the locus of political contestation to a lower level, thereby enabling ethnic groups to assert their political groups and establish coalitions at the local level.

*Second*, patronage—involving not only political elites and their followers, but also specific groups—has been widely practiced at the local level. Predatory elites, long identified by researchers as the root cause of corruption and non-democratic practices, have applied a range of strategies to access or disrupt local power. These

---

<sup>5</sup> Downloaded from <https://tirto.id/survei-komnas-ham-diskriminasi-etnis-ras-masih-terus-ditolerir-dahP> on 30 September 2019.

patronage networks have crossed ethnic boundaries as elites have sought to strengthen their own positions while weakening those of their opponents.

In his study of voter behaviour, Fuad (2014) identified three contributing factors: sociological, psychological, and economic-political. These factors drive individuals to become politically involved, to become party members, campaign staff, donors, or candidates, or even to hold demonstrations. Voters first consider psychological factors (candidates' kindness and populism), then economic-political ones (candidates' policies), and only then sociological ones (candidates' race and religion). As such, voter behaviour is not driven by a single factor, as implied through the idea of identity politics; it is a convergence of various factors.

The extant literature shows that identity is frequently incorporated into political strategies and understood as influencing electoral processes at the local and national level; religious primordialism has drawn particular public attention and created communal conflict. However, identity politics does not guarantee electoral victory. As such, this study takes Temon Kulon's 2018 village chief election, wherein religious, cultural, and ethnic sentiments—though used by both the incumbent Ari Sasongko Putra (henceforth Ari Sasongko) and his challenger Raden Hery Kristiyana (henceforth Hery)—did not significantly influence the outcome of the election.

### **Programmatic Politics, Clientelism, and Voter Behaviour**

In Indonesia's local political landscape, patronage has been closely linked to voter behaviour, thereby promoting clientelistic practices both amongst individual candidates and political parties. Candidates have also widely embraced vote buying as a fallback strategy for getting votes, with voters being positioned as little more than the objects of transactional politics. Money politics and patronage have thus become an integral part of Indonesian elections. Kitschelt & Witkinson (2007), studying the practice of clientelism,

have defined it as a practice in which candidates provide material goods—often gifts and money—to voters in exchange for their support during electoral campaigns. Often, when candidates already hold government office, they utilise public (government) resources to gather public support (Kitschelt & Witkinson, 2007; Schaffer, 2007). Other candidates may incorporate rent-seeking strategies, thereby creating mutualistic relationships with entrepreneurs and economic actors to facilitate their access to power. In these situations, voters serve as clients, while candidates act as patrons.

As an alternative to clientelism, several candidates have employed programmatic political strategies. Such strategies are most commonly employed by political parties, but may also be used by individual candidates. For example, the above-mentioned study by Mas'udi and Kurniawan (2017) discussed the use of programmatic politics by the incumbent Hasto Wardoyo in mobilising political support during the 2017 Kulon Progo election. Owing to the lack of competition, the candidate felt that it was unnecessary to use vote buying as a fallback strategy. He thus transformed the populism that he had employed during his first term into programmatic policies that promoted the fulfilment of basic rights such as healthcare, housing, and economic empowerment. Such a programmatic approach to politics positively affected public trust in Hasto Wardoyo and helped him win a second term.

In his study of Tamil Nadu, South India, Wyatt (2013) applied a different approach. He found that political parties in Tamil Nadu combined programmatic political strategies with clientelism and patronage (vote buying and the distribution of public resources) to reach voters. For example, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has employed clientelistic strategies since 1967; beginning with the 2006 election, it combined this clientelism with a universal welfare programme. Meanwhile, All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) has combined clientelistic strategies and programmatic policies since 1977. Both parties have found that a combination of paternalism and programmatic policies can reach

voters more efficiently than simple patronage.

From the above review, it can be seen that programmatic politics offers an effective alternative to patronage and clientelism. This was also found by the authors in the 2018 Temon Kulon village chief election, wherein the incumbent employed programmatic policies that had their own unique characteristics. *First*, programmatic policies were employed at the village level, wherein candidates are rarely backed by political parties, and thus not necessarily associated with parties' ideologies. In Temon Kulon, neither candidate was part of a political party, and as such both candidates relied on their own individual track records. *Second*, the incumbent successfully used programmatic politics—albeit in conjunction with cultural identity—to counter his opponent's attempts to exploit religious sentiments for electoral gain.

### **Villages and Local Democratic Practices**

At the macro level, Indonesia's democratisation has transformed the practice of power. Once solely the domain of the central government, power is now exercised at the local (provincial and municipal) level. Decentralisation has resulted in a new political narrative, wherein the central government is no longer the sole polity involved in democratic practice. Practices of democracy at the local level vary, informed by the diverse social and cultural characteristics of Indonesia's provinces and municipalities. Ethnicity and religion, thus, have inexorably become important factors in the practice of local democracy. Haryanto, Bayo, & Darmawan (2018), taking the case of Pontianak, have argued that local-level democratisation has indirectly promoted competition between ethnic groups seeking access to power. Fearing their futures, different ethnic groups—in Pontianak, the Dayaks, Malays, and Chinese—have worked to control the pulse of local society by gaining access to and controlling democratic spaces to promote their collective interests. Elections, thus, are heavily contested.

The implementation of regional autonomy may likewise be understood as signifying that the decentralisation of power is intended to promote effectiveness and efficiency, thereby creating a true democracy open to all members of society—no matter their culture, race, ethnicity, or religion. Numerous regulations, including Law No. 22 of 1999, Law No. 32 of 2004, and Law No. 23 of 2014, have provided a legal basis for provincial and municipal governments to exercise broader authority than they had enjoyed under the previous government. Similarly, village governments—though long framed as subordinate to national politics—have transformed significantly since the passage of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages. Article 1, Paragraph 1, of this law defines villages thusly:

*“Desa adalah desa dan desa adat atau yang disebut dengan nama lain, selanjutnya disebut Desa, adalah kesatuan masyarakat hukum yang memiliki batas wilayah yang berwenang untuk mengatur dan mengurus Urusan Pemerintahan, kepentingan masyarakat, hak asal-usul dan/atau hak tradisional yang diakui dan dihormati dalam sistem pemerintahan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia”* (A ‘village’, ‘traditional village’, or similar unit known by another name—hereinafter referred to as Village—is a community with specific boundaries that has the authority to regulate and manage the government affairs, local community interests, rights of origin, and/or traditional rights recognised and respected within the government system of the Republic of Indonesia).

Villages are thus understood as autonomous polities. Under the New Order, village governments were understood as serving to control village residents and legitimising power. In the current era of decentralisation, however, villages have enjoyed much more autonomy, including the ability to manage their own affairs.

There has thus been a significant transformation in village governments, with more flexible and dynamic regimes replacing those with unclear visions of the future. Populist leaders have offered visionary ideas for a better future, including adapting themselves to external influences such as capital expansion, developmentalism, and modernisation. No longer is the central government the sole maker of decisions that affect village development; through their chiefs, villages may make their own policies and determine their

own approaches to development.

Demos (2005) has explored the use of identity discourses in electoral contestations and the development of village-level democracy. It is feared that democratic agendas will be hijacked by political elites, thereby hindering the future development of modern democratic institutions and procedures. These elites had previously hidden behind the bureaucratic and authoritarian New Order government, enabling them to continuously access and exploit available resources, but lost this ability as political reform made it necessary for them to compete for influence at the local level (Hadiz & Robison, 2004).

Meanwhile, Antlov (2004) argues that political reform cannot occur when limited to national elections, which (in Indonesia) are held every five years. As such, it is important to re-politicise civil society in the current era of decentralisation, including by developing a bottom-up approach to political participation that begins at the village level. Although some elites from the previous regime continue to lead village governments, this approach has facilitated the rise of transformative leaders that are not associated with the previous elites. Such leaders can better promote the public welfare, thereby creating a new, more tangibly democratic village environment.

In the case of Temon Kulon, local democracy did not precisely reflect the dynamics of national politics. Even though elections have been implemented at the village level, there are variations. Formal democratic institutions such as political parties and representative bodies do not wholly serve as connecting agencies in the aggregation of interests. Instead, families, religious communities, youth groups, and even the market regime have become new forms of connecting agencies. Belu, for example, has provided a clear example of how clear external challenges can affect how state actors, economic communities, civil society communities, and intermediaries contest power (Arti & Cahyati, 2018)

The case of Temon Kulon provides an interesting example, as

(1) a non-Muslim candidate was capable of challenging the rise of identity politics by associating the village with a unique character; (2) the sub-urban characteristic of the village shows how capital expansion influences the creation of adaptive leaders capable of creating visionary political policies; and (3) patrimonial culture has existed at a crossroads, influenced by external factors such as the construction of the New Yogyakarta International Airport. All of these characteristics signify a transition from rurality to urbanity.

### **Village History and Leadership**

Before exploring the dynamics of village chief elections and the intrigues of village politics in Temon Kulon, it is important to first understand the history of the village and its leadership. Located along the main road between Yogyakarta and Purworejo, Temon Kulon is the seat of Temon District. During the Mataram Dynasty, Temon was part of Adikarta Regency, an administrative territory that consisted of four districts (Galur, Tawangharjo, Tawangsoaka, and Tawangerto). Over time, as Adikarta was incorporated into Kulon Progo Regency, becoming what is now Brosot, Galur, Panjatan, Bendungan, Wates, Sogan, and Temon Districts. Adikarta was under the authority of Kadipaten Pakualaman, a princship established by BPH Notokusuma (the first son of Sultan Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono I).<sup>6</sup>

Owing to its location on the edge of Kokap River, and the presence of major trade routes, Temon has long been open to new influences. According to local legend, the first Islamic missionaries to enter the region in the 16th century were accepted with open arms. The name “Temon” itself further underscores this openness.

Since Temon Kulon was created through the administrative division of Temon District in 1915, Temon Kulon has had seven village chiefs. At first, village chiefs served ten-year terms that were

---

<sup>6</sup> Cited from a Temon Kulon village document on the history of the village.

automatically renewed. Only in 2006 did village chiefs begin serving 6-year terms. As Indonesia began its decentralisation and villages were granted greater authority, the position of village chief has become more heatedly contested. The following people have served as Chief of Temon Kulon Village since 1915: (a) Atmo Sentono (1915–1937), (b) R. Pantjawerdaja (1937–1947), (c) Djojo Soekarto (1948–1974), (d) Wagiran Prapto Harsono (1975–1990), (e) Purwito Mangku Sanjoyo (1991–2001), (f) Drs Wahyuna (2002–2012) and (g) Ari Sasongko Putra (2012–present), the incumbent who contested the 2018 election.

Leadership of Temon Kulon has not been dominated by any specific families. However, hereditary leadership has occurred in sub-village units (*padukuhan*) and in non-leadership positions. In Kedungbanteng, the current *dukuh* Heri replaced his father in 2008. His choice as *dukuh* was understood as stemming from public belief in the family; Heri was appointed as his father's replacement following a discussion amongst local residents (Heri, interview, Oct 8, 2018).<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Siti Amirin—the village secretary (*carik*) since the 1990s—is the mother of the incumbent Ari Sasongko. Although they have both served in the Temon Kulon village government since 2012, this does not mean that local leadership has been characterised by dynasty politics. Ari Sasongko first ran for village chief in 2012, winning by a narrow margin of 47 votes (Ardina, Interview, Oct 7, 2018).<sup>8</sup> He was not known as a politician, but rather as a cattleman and variety store owner who contested the election as an outsider. The other two candidates, Isna Almasri and Nastiti, had a lengthy history of political involvement; the former was the leader of the local youth organisation, while the latter was the wife of the former village chief (Amirin, interview, Oct 6, 2018).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Heri, chief of the Kedungbanteng *Padukuhan*, 8 October 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Ardina, sister of Ari Sasongko, 7 October 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Ari Sasongko had initially been a member of Isna Almasri's campaign team. However,

After his election in 2012, and during his re-election campaign in 2018, Ari Sasongko distinguished himself from his predecessors. Where previously village politics had inexorably involved patronage networks, Ari Sasongko won the 2012 election as an outsider. While in the village, the researcher found that Ari Sasongko's leadership had enabled the village to become more participatory and autonomous. No longer drawing on the visions of previous elites, Temon Kulon became more inclusionary and had higher levels of public participation, both indicative of a village chief who was perceived as not only handling administrative and policy matters, but also understanding the village's socio-cultural symbols.

Among the people of Temon Kulon, the incumbent Ari Sasongko was seen as a responsive leader who was concerned with the needs of his people. He not only handled administrative matters, but also established close relationships with his constituents. For example, he attended prayer groups and funerals, repaired village roads, and improved irrigation. Owing to his leadership style, Ari Sasongko was positively perceived by his constituents as well as the village staff.

It may be said that local democracy in Temon Kulon was redefined through recent developments. New democratic practices resulted not only by the Village Law, which granted significant authority to village governments, but also by external factors such as capital expansion. As such, village chiefs are forced to adapt to social developments and transformations, no longer serving as extensions of the central government but as actors responsible for determining the trajectory of village development. Under the Village Law, village chiefs have received new authority and been tasked with managing significant financial resources—including grants from the central government. As such, electoral contestations have generally become

---

after Isna Almasri suddenly withdrew his candidacy, Ari Sasongko was urged to contest the 2012 election. A few days before registration closed, Isna Almasri suddenly re-registered himself as a candidate. The election was thus contested by three candidates. (Interview with Amirin, mother of Ari Sasongko, 4 October 2018).

more heated, with candidates often seeking to benefit themselves and their allies. However, the level of competition during elections varies depending on the social and political setting, and the personal characteristics of the candidates and the incumbent. As such, is important to investigate the use of programmatic politics in village chief elections and their use in bettering village communities.

### **Village Chief Elections: Identity Politics vs Programmatic Politics**

As stated above, Temon Kulon has had seven village chiefs since it was created in 1915. Its 2018 election was contested by two candidates, the challenger Hery Kristiyanta (Candidate 1 on the ballot) and the incumbent Ari Sasongko (Candidate 2). Prior to the election, Hery had served as the chairman of the Village Council.

Village elections are an important means of selecting new leadership, and as such necessary manifestations of democracy at the village level. Schumpeter (in Sorensen, 2014) defines democracy narrowly, with elections being key indicators of whether or not it is correctly implemented. At a glance, “All Politics is Local”, with the election of village leaders being paramount. Participatory democracy is created primarily through efforts at the local level, not at the national level. Efforts to empower voters, to create “people power”, will have more tangible results when they take a bottom-up approach. Only after participation is created at the grassroots can efforts to improve the quality of democratic structures, instruments, and institutions.

At a glance, Temon Kulon’s 2018 village election did not appear contentious. It was contested only by two candidates, the challenger Raden Hery and the incumbent Ari Sasongko. This distinguished the 2018 election from the 2012 election, which had been hotly contested by three candidates—none of whom were incumbent—and involved rampant money politics and even black magic. Friction between candidates’ campaign teams had been palpable, and in several cases led to physical conflict; such

physical conflict did not occur in the 2018 elections. Nonetheless, the elections proved contentious after the challenger (a Muslim, and thus part of the religious majority) attempted to utilise religious sentiments in his campaign against the incumbent (a Catholic, and thus a religious minority); in his use of religious identity politics, the challenger was supported by hard-line conservative Muslim groups.

As mentioned above, candidates have frequently relied on identity politics to gain office. This holds true for Raden Heri Kristiyana, who utilised religious issues to attack the incumbent Ari Sasongko. The incumbent's mother, a Muslim woman named Siti Amirin, had married a Catholic man. She and her first child, Ardina, were the only ones who continued to practice Islam; Ari Sasongko and his brother Bondan, meanwhile, were raised Catholic. In responding to these attacks, during his campaign Ari Sasongko focused on his track record as the chief of Temon Kulon as well as Javanese traditions and culture.

The candidates thus employed different strategies as they contested Temon Kulon's 2018 elections. However, Ari Sasongko was more sophisticated in his preparation and application of his strategies. For example, he organised his campaign committee more carefully than Hery, recruiting his staff (whom he termed 'cadres') from the village youth and elders. The team was structurally organised like a multi-level marketing system, with three to five cadres stationed in each *padukuhan* and tasked with campaigning for the incumbent (Ardina, interview, Oct 10, 2018).<sup>10</sup> Cadres were expected to reach five to ten constituents each, focusing particularly on swing voters.

These cadres were also expected to install banners, distribute leaflets, and hang posters around the village, as well as monitor the campaign and voting processes. According to Ardina, Ari Sasongko's sister and a member of his campaign team, each of the team's almost fifty cadres was given Rp 100,000 to cover the cost of

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Ardina, sister of incumbent, 10 October 2018.

transportation and labour.

In interviews with Ari Sasongko, he stated that he had relied predominantly on the public image he had created during his first term as village chief. For example, he emphasised the success of the programmes he had implemented and promised to further improve performance; of particular emphasis was his work on road repair, irrigation, and building renovation, as well as the training that he had provided to village women and youths. He also said that he would attempt to accommodate innovations that benefited the community. Through these strategies, the incumbent increased his electability and countered his opponent's use of identity politics.

During his first term, Ari Sasongko had developed a closeness with his constituents as well as a reputation for populism. He regularly met with his constituents and interacted, attended village ceremonies, visited residents at their homes, and sought the support of village elders and community leaders. To promote solidarity, Ari Sasongko often invited his campaign team and his supporters to gather at his mother's house, which doubled as the campaign's headquarters, and eat dinner together. The incumbent likened this strategy to 'opening a food stall' (*buka warung*), thereby providing him with a means to interact closely with constituents.

The solidarity of Ari Sasongko's team can be seen in members' willingness to attend campaign activities, particularly their enthusiasm with which they welcomed the candidates' public debate; campaign team members wore shirts emblazoned with the phrase *Nyambut Gawe Bareng Wargo* (Working Together with Residents) and the number two and raucously supported their candidate. Hery, meanwhile, tended to rely on older campaign staff, and thus his campaign activities were generally less energetic; this was also observed during the candidates' debate.

Over the course of the campaign, the researcher attempted to confirm the political strategies and management techniques employed by candidates and their teams. According to the incumbent, the provision of money and shirts to campaign team

members was an ordinary part of campaign operations, and thus unrelated to residents willingness to support him on election day. He felt that he would win the election solely by continuing to apply the same management techniques he had during his first term. Nonetheless, he recognised that it was necessary to cultivate public trust, as his opponent was using religious issues against him (Putra, interview, Oct 7, 2018).<sup>11</sup> Swing voters, he believed, could be convinced to support him based on his track record and the benefits he had brought the community.

Ari Sasongko employed a unique approach in countering his opponent's use of religious issues during the campaign. The incumbent incorporated Javanese culture and symbols into his campaign attributes and tactics. For instance, he chose a picture of himself wearing a *kawung* batik shirt as his campaign portrait, identifying this motif as a traditionally Yogyakartaan one. Such symbolism was also evident in his campaign's use of the Javanese-language phrase *Nyambut Gawe Bareng Wargo*, which invited residents to work together to build the village while simultaneously conveying a Yogyakartaan identity.

During interviews and field observations, it was evident that Ari Sasongko and his campaign team used the Javanese calendar when choosing 'good days' for activities and searched for *pulung* (signs) that he would win the election. It was believed that the election, held on a *pahing* Sunday (14 October 2018) would be won by a candidate from south of the Village Hall; although this applied to both candidates, Hery lived further south than Ari Sasongko. To rectify this situation, Ari Sasongko spent the night before the election in an area further south, then walked to the ballot booth. According to Ardina, a "ray of light"—a shooting star—was seen by one campaign team member over the incumbent's house, and understood as another sign that he would emerge victorious.

Hery, meanwhile, confessed that he had not had an organised

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview with incumbent Ari Sasongko, 7 October 2018.

campaign team. Many of those who supported him during the election were loyalists. His campaign staff were predominantly older residents, elders from his *padukuhan*. Field observations suggested that Hery had approximately ten to fifteen campaign staff, who were tasked with approaching voters and campaigning for their preferred candidate by distributing banners, posters, and leaflets around the village. During an interview with Suparji, a police officer, he stated that Hery had held a thanksgiving ceremony and distributed boxes of food to constituents. This was confirmed by Hery's wife, who stated that the family had a small gathering to get support for her husband. This had been permitted by the village election committee, who had ruled that it did not violate campaign rules (Mimin, interview, Oct 8, 2018).

While campaigning, Heri did not make many promises to constituents, believing that it was most important for him to eradicate poverty in and bring prosperity to Temon Kulon Village (Kristiyana, interview, Oct 8, 2018). Nonetheless, he did highlight several programmes, most of which were physical development projects:

- (a) The installation of an electric generator at the Village Hall, which he had proposed while serving on the village council but had yet to be realised.
- (b) The construction of an ornate gate to welcome guests to the village.
- (c) The creation of more modern administrative and management systems, including (in conjunction with the Civil Registrar) the facilitation of the process for receiving birth and death certificates.

The researcher asked Heri about his use of religious issues during his campaign. Although the challenger had not explicitly used religious sentiments to attack Ari Sasongko, he had implied it through speeches that asserted only a person who shared a community's faith could properly lead it; in other words, only a Muslim could

lead Muslims. Interviews with residents, as well as observations in the field, found that Heri presented himself as more pious. Where previously he had rarely attended congregational evening prayers, as he had been busy working as a used-car salesman, after announcing his candidacy he could frequently be seen at the mosque.

As with the incumbent, the challenger emphasised his Javanese identity by wearing a *blangkon* (type of traditional headgear) in his campaign portrait. However, he did not use the Javanese calendar, nor did he look for ‘signs’ of his victory. He believed that, by praying to God, he could ensure his electoral victory. At the same time, however, he did not establish close relationships with constituents. Although Hery did visit potential voters and interact with them, he was not as familiar with them as Ari Sasongko. This was exacerbated by his campaign team’s lack of proactiveness and limited energy.

### **Programmatic Politics as a Campaign Strategy**

The final results of the Temon Kulon village election, which was held on 14 October 2018, were as follows:

#### **Election Results**

Number of Registered Voters: 1,374

Number of Valid Votes: 1,082

Number of Invalid Votes: 17

Votes Received:

- **Candidate 1 (Raden Heri Kristiyana):** 388 votes
- **Candidate 2 (Ari Sasongko):** 694 votes

No	Candidate	Votes Received	Percentage (%)
1	Candidate 1 (Raden Heri Kristiyana)	388	35.31%
2	Candidate 2 (Ari Sasongko Putra)	694	63.19%
3	Valid Votes	1,082	98.45%

No	Candidate	Votes Received	Percentage (%)
4	Invalid Votes	17	1.55%
5	Total Votes	1,099	100%

The results of the 2018 Temon Kulon election can be understood as indicating that the incumbent's leadership had been positively received by the majority of village residents, and as such he retained their trust and used his track-record to his benefit. Of the 1,099 votes cast at the ballot booths, 694 (63.15%) were for Ari Sasongko. Furthermore, in the two weeks before election day, the incumbent organised and mobilised his campaign team well—at times utilising his kinship networks (including those of his wife).

Meanwhile, Hery lacked the track record to make a positive impression on village residents; indeed, he was publicly perceived as having made no progress during his time on the village council. This was exacerbated by his campaign team's lack of the necessary organisation to reach constituents and promote the candidate. His kinship networks were similarly of little import, as the challenger was not from Temon Kulon—having been born in Brosot Village, Galur District, Hery had migrated to the village after marrying a local woman. Nonetheless, he was able to receive a relatively large number of votes (388, or 35.31% of all votes cast). This suggests that his exploitation of religious sentiments and identity politics had affected voters.

The researcher found that Ari Sasongko had been able to establish public trust during his first term as village chief, and this contributed positively to his electability. He had successfully implemented several welfare programmes in Temon Kulon, thereby providing an example of adaptive and transformative leadership. At the same time, he showed a significant awareness of the challenges being faced by the people of Temon Kulon, particularly increased modernisation and urbanisation (as evident in the construction of

the New Yogyakarta International Airport).

Based on the results of the 2018 election, it may be argued that differences in social settings affect the character of democratic practice. In Temon Kulon, formal connecting agencies—political parties, members of parliament, and the sultanate—were not involved in the election; instead, the election involved informal connecting agencies such as kinship networks, youth groups, family welfare organisations, and religious communities. This informed the power relations within the village, as how the village dealt with challenges such as the emergent market regime. Village leaders have had to adapt, to implement new development policies that meet the needs of their constituents. For example, the construction of a new airport near Temon Kulon will pose significant challenges (but also offer important opportunities) for village development. A programmatic approach, complemented with visionary ideas, is thus necessary to ensure the village has the ability to adapt.

This is what characterised the politics of Temon Kulon. The incumbent was seen as having created a participatory government that responded proactively to challenges and remained involved in residents' everyday activities. They needed a leader with the ability to adapt to external changes and forces, including new development regimes, capital markets, and modernisation/urbanisation, in order to maintain control of their own resources. Furthermore, the incumbent promoted public participation in village governance and development projects. He also sought to prioritise the aspirations of his constituents when solving the problems and dealing with the issues faced by Temon Kulon. For example, during village development meetings he regularly asked constituents for their opinions and feedback regarding potential programmes. Solutions to problems such as road repair, irrigation, and dilapidated homes were all found through communal discussions.

At the same time, however, it was necessary for the government to accommodate outside influences such as developmentalism, capital investment, and modernisation. Pursuant to the Village Law,

the funds made available to villages must be used participatively to promote progress and development. Consequently, village officials have had access to significant authority, as well as political and financial support. The Temon Kulon village government had access to Rp 600 million (previous amounts ranged from Rp 800 million to Rp 1.1 billion),<sup>12</sup> most of which was allocated to physical development projects such as road, irrigation canal, and home repair/construction; skill development programmes were also made possible by these funds. Consequently, local residents benefited significantly. Youth activities were fully funded, while the family welfare organisation used the newly renovated Village Hall.

At the same time, the village government attempted to improve constituents' quality of life. For instance, through the '*Bedah Rumah*' programme—initiated in conjunction with the Kulon Progo Municipal Government—the Temon Kulon village government has subsidised efforts to help the poor repair their dilapidated houses. This project has used a combination of village and municipal funds, with Rp 15,000,000 coming from the municipal budget and Rp 10,000,000 from the village budget (Amirin, interview, Oct 6, 2018).<sup>13</sup> It can be argued that such welfare and development programmes are indicative of efforts to adapt to the changing times and address the challenges facing the village. These efforts were guided by Ari Sasongko Putra during his term.

As explained above, Ari Sasongko's populism and willingness to interact with his constituents was evident in how he carried out his duties. He supported constituents through a range of activities. For example, during *lelayu*—a period of grieving following the death of a resident—he would visit the home of the deceased and convey his sympathies to the family. At the same time, he was respected for being dedicated to his work and responsive to his residents' needs.

---

<sup>12</sup> Data received from the government of Temon District, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from an interview with Amirin, the Village Secretary, and Heri, the Chief of Banteng Hamlet, 6 October 2018.

For Ari Sasongko, being village chief meant being available all day; no matter when his constituents needed assistance, he had to be ready to help them.

During interviews, it became apparent that village residents viewed Ari Sasongko as being easy to meet if they needed to speak with him about upcoming activities; indeed, he would sometimes take the initiative and seek them out. Furthermore, despite his Catholic faith, the incumbent maintained close relationships with religious leaders—including not only priests, but also imams and mosque assistants. He also regularly attended religious gatherings in order to show his appreciation for his constituents.

From the practice of democracy in Temon Kulon, it can be seen that migration and urbanisation have been perceived as potential threats to the communitarianism that has traditionally been associated with village communities. As villages experience urbanisation, this communalism may be replaced by new cultural and social systems. As such, local leaders such as village chiefs have attempted to use their programmatic policies to guide their communities and prepare them for the future.

By applying programmatic politics, Ari Sasongko provided a means of re-politicising and reorganising Temon Kulon as an autonomous and participative political entity. As he urged constituents to participate in local government and promoted transformative public policies, he attempted to improve local democracy by:

1. Establishing trust in the village government as a means of increasing public participation. This participation has not been limited to the provision of feedback/criticism regarding the government and its performance, but also included participation in village elections. Through his leadership, Ari Sasongko created a new political atmosphere, one that was open to input, that was close to the people, and that was trusted by its constituents; all of these contributed to increased public participation.
2. Establishing a self-governing community that emphasises

order and balance. Residents of Temon Kulon, already known for their openness, have been willing to accept the dynamic transformations around them while still holding firmly to cultural and social traditions such as mutualism and communalism. This can be seen in the leadership of Ari Sasongko, who sought to welcome change into Temon Kulon by promoting infrastructure and human resource development, as well as by passing programmatic policies.

### **Conclusion**

Based on this study of the Temon Kulon village election, it may be concluded that programmatic politics may offer candidates an effective strategy for their electoral contestations. This strategy cannot only combat clientelism and patronage at the local level, but also provide a means of countering the identity politics that have plagued Indonesian politics in recent years. However, in the case of Temon Kulon, the incumbent's strategies differed significantly from those explored in studies of political parties' use of programmatic politics in local and national elections.

*First*, the programmatic politics used in Temon Kulon's election were activated at a level of government in which connecting agencies such as political parties were not needed to mobilise public support. Village politics are driven primarily individual candidates' charisma, as well as their leadership abilities. *Second*, although the exploitation of religious sentiments is widespread in Indonesia's national political landscape, such a strategy has not proven effective in village-level elections. Unlike in elections at the national, provincial, and municipal levels, religious tensions were relatively insignificant in Temon Kulon. This implies that, in more moderate areas, religious and ethnic identities cannot be effectively mobilised during political campaigns. Although Indonesia still experiences religious and ethnic tensions, it also offers spaces for ethnic and religious groups to promote their interests. As such, the

strategy used by Temon Kulon's incumbent in the 2018 election could productively be applied elsewhere if combined with a shared local identity.

To promote public interests and improve spaces for public deliberation at the village level, programmatic politics requires strong, responsive, and participative leadership. Such leadership can improve constituents' trust in village leaders and administrators. Capacity for leadership, thus, provides an important resource for individuals who seek to attain public office and help constituents negotiate the challenges and tensions they face through public policies and welfare. This capacity can be shown, for example, through their attention to the public interest, their willingness to expand public spaces, their ability to include various elements of society, and their ability to promote the aspirations of their constituents.

In the case of Temon Kulon, constituents sought a leader with integrity (i.e. honest) and the willingness to promote the interests of his community over his own, and as such expected candidates to fulfil these moral criteria. During his first term, the incumbent had shown himself to be *entengan* (helpful) and honest, unwaveringly doing his duties while remaining a man of the people. In village communities, which tend to closely adhere to traditional values, moral integrity is an important consideration. Leaders are expected to attend constituents' ceremonies, to celebrate with them when they are happy, to grieve with them when they are sad, and to join them in prayer. These criteria were fulfilled by the incumbent during his first term, even as he continued to handle village administration and promote his constituents' interests.

At the village level, populism enables village chiefs to use programmatic policies to help their constituents and to address the shortcomings of their predecessors; this is particularly prominent in areas where clientelism remains rampant. In Temon Kulon, Ari Sasongko's populist programmes provided him with strategic tools that benefitted him during the 2018 election. During his first term, the incumbent had created participative and visionary programmes

that promoted physical and social development, thereby helping Temon Kulon adapt to ongoing processes of urbanisation and modernisation. This track record thus provided him with a potent means of mitigating his opponent's attempts to exploit religious sentiments and gain electoral victory.

## References

- Antlov, H. (2004). *Citizen participation in local governance: Experiences from Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines*. Manila: IPD for Logolink Southeast Asia.
- Arti, W. C., & Cahyati, D. D. (2018). Dominasi pasar dalam rezim perbatasan di Belu. In L. N. Bayo, W. P. Samadhi, & P. Santoso (Ed), *Rezim lokal di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia in cooperation with PolGov Fisipol UGM and the University of Oslo.
- Aspinal, E. (2011). Democratization and ethnic politics in Indonesia: Nine theses. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 11(2), 289–319.
- Aspinall, E. (2005). Elections and the normalization of politics in Indonesia. *South East Asia Research*, 13(2), 117–156.
- Bhaskara, I. L. (2018, 21 November). Survei Komnas HAM: Diskriminasi etnis dan ras masih terus ditolerir. *Tirto.Id*. Retrieved from <https://tirto.id>
- Indonesia, negara berpenduduk Muslim terbesar di dunia (2016, Nov 11). *Kata Data*. Retrieved from Databoks: <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2016/11/11/indonesia-negara-berpenduduk-muslim-terbesar-dunia>
- Demos. (2005). *Menjadikan demokrasi bermakna: Masalah dan pilihan di Indonesia*. Jakarta.
- Gueorguiev, D., Ostwald, K., & Schuler, P. (2018). Rematch: Islamic politics, mobilisation, and the Indonesian presidential election. *Political Science*, 70(3), 240–252.
- Fakhrana, R. S. (2014, 15 November). *Agama jadi faktor utama penyulut kekerasan*. *CNN Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnnindonesia.com>
- Fuad, A. B. (2014). Political identity and election in Indonesian democracy: A case study in Karang Pandan village, Malang, Indonesia. *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, 20, 477–485.
- Hadiz, V., & Robison, R. (2004). *Reorganising power in Indonesia: The politics of oligarchy in an age of markets*. London: Routledge Curzon.
- Haryanto, Bayo, L. N., & Darmawan, A. D. (2018). Rezim lokal Pontianak: Upaya kelompok-kelompok etnis memperebutkan negara. In P. Santoso, L. N. Bayo, & Samadhi, W. P. (ed.), *Rezim lokal di Indonesia: Memaknai ulang demokrasi kita* (pp. 157–180). Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia in conjunction with PolGov

Fisipol UGM and the University of Oslo.

- Kitschelt, H., & Witkinson, S. (2007). Citizen–politician linkages: An introduction. In H. Kitschelt (Ed), *Patrons, clients, and policies: Pattern of democratic accountability and political competition* (pp. 1–49). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mas’udi, W., & Kurniawan, N. I. (2017). Programmatic politics and voter preferences. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 3(39), 449–469.
- Schaffer, F.C. (ed.). (2007). *Elections for Sale: The Causes and Consequences of Vote Buying*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Sorensen, G. (2014). *Demokrasi dan demokratisasi (Proses dan prospek dalam sebuah dunia yang sedang berubah*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Thompson, N. (2017, 17 November). *Islam and identity politics in Indonesia. The Diplomat*. Retrieved from: <https://thediplomat.com>
- Ufen, A. (2005). Cleavages, electoral system and the politicization of Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. *IIAS Newsletter*, 12.
- Wyatt, A. (2013). Combining clientelist and programmatic politics in Tamil Nadu, South India. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51(1), 27–55.