

PERFORMATIVE POLITICS AND DIGITAL POPULISM IN INDONESIA

POLITIK PERFORMATIF DAN POPULISME DIGITAL DI INDONESIA

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Abstrak

Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, gerakan-gerakan populis telah menjadi salah satu kekuatan berpengaruh dalam politik Indonesia. Kemunculan cepat gerakan-gerakan ini tidak dapat dilepaskan dari integrasi media digital ke dalam politik, khususnya untuk memobilisasi dan menyebarkan gagasan – gagasan politik mereka. Meskipun demikian, kajian yang berupaya memahami hubungan antara populisme dan media digital masih relatif sedikit. Dalam konteks tersebut, artikel ini mengkaji pertautan antara teknologi dan perkembangan populisme di Indonesia. Berangkat dari perspektif populisme sebagai langgam politik, artikel ini berargumen bahwa media digital terpadu dalam terbentuknya gerakan-gerakan populis di Indonesia. Fitur-fitur spesifik dari media digital menyediakan ruang yang ideal bagi politik performatif yang menjadi landasan penting bagi populisme. Untuk mengelaborasi proposisi tersebut, artikel ini membandingkan dua gerakan populis di Indonesia: gerakan nasionalis dan Islamis. Kedua gerakan tersebut menggunakan media digital untuk memperluas pengaruh mereka dalam politik Indonesia. Meskipun demikian, pengaruh tersebut tetap dibatasi pada kemampuan mereka untuk mengontrol institusi politik yang telah mapan. Dalam konteks tersebut, populisme sulit untuk dapat dipisahkan dari institusi-institusi politik formal yang kemudian berpengaruh pada pelemahan demokrasi di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *digital, populisme, demokrasi, Indonesia, politik performatif*

Abstract

In recent years, populist movements have emerged to become a significant force in Indonesian politics. The meteoric rise of these movements could not be separated from the integration of digital media into politics, particularly to mobilize and propagate their political ideas. Despite the influence, the study that seeks to understand the relationship between populism and digital media in Indonesia is still nascent. In this regard, the article examines the entanglement between technology and the development of populism in Indonesia. Drawing from the notion of understanding populism as a political style, the article argues that digital media is integral to the formation of Indonesian populist movements. The specificities of digital media provide an ideal platform for performative politics that serves as the foundation of populism. To elaborate on the proposition, the article compares the role of digital media between the two dominant populist movements in Indonesia: the nationalistic and the Islamic movement. Both movements can utilise digital media to advance their influence on Indonesian politics. However, the influence is still contingent on the ability to control established political institutions. In this context, populism is no longer separated from formal political institutions, which contributes to the deterioration of Indonesian democracy.

Keywords: digital, populism, democracy, Indonesia, performative politics

Introduction

In December 2016, hundreds of thousands of people flooded Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The participants, who mostly wore white attributes, gathered and became the largest demonstration the Indonesian public has ever seen since the democratization around twenty years prior. The participants came from various economic and social backgrounds yet shared a similar cause: they felt the need to defend Islam from defamation and marginalization (IPAC, 2018). The protest was meant to mobilize pressure for the government to incriminate Ahok, the incumbent governor of Jakarta, for the allegation of religious blasphemy. Amidst the high tension of Jakarta's gubernatorial election, Ahok criticized other politicians who used Quran verses to delegitimize his political candidacy among Muslim voters. The short clip of his statement was circulated and used as a pretext for conservative Islamic organizations to mobilize the demonstrations, then known as *Aksi 212* (Ichwan, 2016). Beyond the street, social media was an important arena where the participants and the critics of this movement shared thousands of films, memes, and pictures about the rally. The circulation of visual representation on social media amplified the importance of this rally. The event marked a moment that scholars (Hadiz, 2018; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018) proposed as the manifestation of populism in Indonesia.

In democratic Indonesia, the allusion to 'the people', which is among the important trait of populist movement (Mudde, 2004), have been a prominent style in Indonesian politics. Scholar, for instance, has dubbed Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as populist politician for his ability to broaden his appeal among voters much beyond his party's capacity (Kenny, 2019). Subsequent to his presidential term, the Indonesian presidential election in 2014 was also portrayed as a competition between two populist candidates (Aspinall, 2015) because both Jokowi and Prabowo relied more on a network of supporters instead of the party's machinery. Nevertheless, *Aksi 212* still blindsided many people since there were not many precedents for street mobilization at this scale.

Among the critical key to such mobilization was the reliance on technologies. Just as hundreds of thousands of people marched toward Jakarta, the images of the event circulated on various Internet platforms. Pictures and memes were distributed from *Whatsapp*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and other platforms. Moreover, the algorithm on social media amplified the hatred against religious and minority ethnic groups represented by Ahok (Lim, 2017). The event thus indicates the entanglement between the rise of populism and digital technologies.

The affinity between populism and digital media is not only happening in Indonesia. Numerous studies have demonstrated the use of digital technologies among populist movements and leaders worldwide. The recent dramatic rise of Donald Trump in USA is due to his ability to use Twitter to differentiate his blatant persona from common politicians (Kissas, 2020). Narendra Modi in India is also actively engaged in his political campaign through social media that contributes to the majority win for his party, BJP, in the election (Sinha, 2017). Even the more egalitarian form of populist movement such as *#OccupyWallstreet* was known for their strategic use of digital technologies (Gerbaudo, 2017).

Since it is getting harder to separate the media and the rise of populism, Paolo Gerbaudo even suggested that there is an 'elective affinity' (Gerbaudo, 2018) between the two. It does not mean that digital technologies caused the development of populist movements. However, the technology, in particular social media platforms, seemed to resonate well with populist politics. The big question then is how social media use contributes to the development of populist politics? Moreover, how will the entanglement between social media and populism affect democracy?

The answers to these questions are bounded to the specific local contexts in which digital populism emerges. The elaboration is essential because many movements claimed to represent 'people' are expressed within the boundaries of nations (Gerbaudo, 2012). Moreover, the study on the relationship between digital technologies and populism is still dominated by Western

countries, which limits the understanding of the relationship between those two (Postill, 2018). Against the backdrops, the article will discuss the case of digital populism in Indonesia that would contribute to the body of knowledge of populism and digital technology.

There are two main propositions in this article: *First*, digital technologies are integral to the development of contemporary populism in Indonesia. It is demonstrated by the strategic use of digital media by populist figures such as Jokowi and Habib Rizieq Shihab to expand their influence beyond their early supporters. Despite representing two different ideological spectrums, the two figures are able to incorporate digital technologies as an important part of their movement. *Second*, the rising influence of digital populism is harmful to democracy, particularly when populist ideas are attached and reinforced through established political institutions. The article is structured as follows to elaborate the arguments: The next chapter discusses the current research regarding populism and digital technologies. At the end of the section, the article elaborates on the analytical tools presented by Moffit (2016) that understand populism as performative appeals. The framework helps to understand the importance of social media in contemporary populism. The following chapter demonstrates the importance of digital technologies to two dominant populist groups in Indonesia: the Islamic and the nationalistic movements. Finally, the fourth chapter will discuss the possible impacts of digital populism on the future of Indonesian democracy.

Performative Populism and Digital Technologies

The inquiry on digital technologies' connection with populist movements has been growing in the last couple of decades. The growing interest is partly because digital technologies have become almost inseparable from various aspects of society. The importance of digital technologies is no exception to the rise of populist movements, yet scholars differ in explaining the link between these two. One of the most important propositions comes from

Gerbaudo (2018) that suggested the 'elective affinity' between social media and the rise of populism. He argues that the specificities of social media enable the less represented groups in ordinary politics to voice their grievances.

On the other hand, while acknowledging the significance of digital technologies, Postill (2018) refuses the notion that social media has particular characteristics that are specifically aligned with the rise of populism. Instead, both populists and non-populist have well adapted the technologies to their political strategies. I would argue that both positions have their merits in understanding digital populism in Indonesia. Therefore, the article still departs from the assumption that the affordances of digital technologies are essential to the development of contemporary populist movements. However, as raised by Postill, there are need to elaborate on how the specificities of digital technologies resonate strongly with local populist politics.

First of all, it is crucial to clarify the conceptual standings of populism in this article. There are at least two mainstream camps in how scholars comprehend populism: the ideational and organizational approach (Kenny, 2019). The ideational approach (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004) comprehends populism as an idea or ideology. The approach proposes that in populism, the idea came first, only later to be taken by followers, politicians or movements. What kind of ideas constitute populism? Mudde posits that populism is an ideology that perceives society as a clash between 'the pure people' against 'the corrupt elite' and further argues that politics should represent the aspiration of the majority people (Mudde, 2017). While other scholars in this approach might articulate the definition differently, they shared similar standing that populism is better to be grasp as an ideology.

On the other hand, the organizational approach (Kenny, 2019; Weyland, 2001) understands populism as the way charismatic figures directly mobilize the mass. The scholars in this camp propose that the notion of populism as an ideology is very elusive. The organizational camp argues that ideational scholars often overlook the gap between

the rhetoric presented by populist leaders to their actual actions (Weyland, 2017). To overcome this problem, the scholars within this approach choose to understand populism as a political strategy leaders use to mobilize their followers. The proposition, in their argument, would be more applicable to justify how populist movements are developing in various ideological spectrums. Even more important, perceiving populism as a political strategy could also explain why populist leaders are commonly found to contradict their rhetoric with their actions. Drawing from his study in Latin America, Weyland posits populism as a “political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland, 2001). In contrast with the ideational approach, the definition thus does not bother with the Manichean frameworks but focuses on the relationship between political leaders and followers.

Aside from the two main camps, scholars also propose other frameworks that might borrow or combine from the two approaches to provide different lenses that help to understand populism. One of the most important frameworks comes from Benjamin Moffit, who perceives populism as a political style. Moffit defines political style as “the repertoires of embodied symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life” (Moffit, 2016). The emphasis on the mediation of performance as an integral part of populism is important to see how digital technologies play an important role in the development of contemporary populism, including in Indonesia. However, it is still essential to locate populism as a distinct political style that is separated from other political styles.

Moffit offers at least three elements that characterize populism as political style to limit the definition. The first trait is a characteristic which was also raised by scholars (Mudde, 2017), the populism is raised from the appeal to the conflicts between the ‘people’ and the ‘elite.’

The argument is developed from observations all around the world that populist movements tend to claim to represent the majoritarian group as a victim against the smaller minority elites. The situation is relevant for various expressions of populism, whether the ones represented by the Left or the Right political spectrums. The #OccupyWallstreet movements, for instance, claimed to voice the grievances of the majority of American citizens against the economic elites that produced economic inequalities (Gerbaudo, 2012). In India, Modi mobilized the Hindutva movement as the representation of the majority of Indian to blame the Muslim minority as a threat to the Indian nationhood (George, 2016). Similar binary opposition could also be found in other populist movements in various world regions.

The second trait of populism proposed by Moffit is the use of ‘bad manner.’ The rise of populist actors often shocks the public since these populists act and articulate political rhetoric that is usually considered unacceptable in ‘normal politics.’ When Donald Trump mocked his political opponents during the presidential election; many pundits considered him inappropriate. However, his harsh rhetoric is perceived to be more relatable by his followers since it is closer to the one used by the ordinary citizen, unlike the technocratic presentation used by mainstream politicians (Kayam, 2018). During the 2014 Indonesian election, Prabowo Subianto performed ‘bad manner’ rhetoric. Prabowo openly criticized Indonesian democratic institutions since they are corrupted by oligarchic politics (Mietzner, 2014). It is a topic that might resonate with the sentiments of large voters but is generally avoided by ordinary politicians. By presenting themselves with the ‘bad manners’, the populist actors could bridge their elite status to the ordinary supporters.

The third feature of populism is the existence of ‘crisis, breakdown, or threat.’ The trait originally proposed by Paul Taggart, which observed the existence of crisis as the catalyst for the rise of populism (Taggart, 2000). The surge of populist movements is often preceded by a crisis which is then utilized by populist actors to be propagated to a wider audience.

For instance, the #OccupyWallstreet movement was mobilized as a response to the previous 2008 financial crisis in the USA (Appel, 2014). The pervasive corruption in Spanish political institutions also enabled the rise of Podemos, which claims to represent the common people in Spain (Kioupkiolis, 2016). While political or economic crises do not always trigger the surge of populist movements, these cases demonstrate that the perception of crisis is crucial to populism. The crisis event is not just enabling people to subscribe to populist ideas, but as posited by Moffit, it sets the stage for populist actors to challenge traditional political institutions.

Now that I have conceptualised populism, how should the article locate the digital technologies within such a framework? Since the article understands populism as a performative political style, digital technologies thus become the arena where populist actors mediate their performance. The technologies themselves do not essentially produce populist politics since nowadays, almost any politicians or political movement embrace digital technologies as part of the mobilization (Postill, 2018). Nevertheless, populism resonates well with the affordances of digital technologies. To elaborate this argument, it is important to dissect the mediation and the performative aspects of populism. In this regard, three important aspects need to be discussed in populism which are: 'the performers' (leader), 'the audiences' (the followers), and 'the stage' (media). By looking at the dynamics between these three aspects, we could understand the importance of the Internet in contemporary populism in Indonesia.

The discussion on these aspects will compare the two dominant populist forces in Indonesia: the Islamic and nationalistic movements. I choose these two patterns of populism since both have been influential in the political arena in Indonesia, arguably, for the past ten years. Islamic populism has become the subject of debate primarily since the *Aksi 212* mobilization in 2016. Although the rise of Islamic populism itself had been observed by scholars even prior to the mobilization (Hadiz, 2016). Likewise, scholars have discussed the

development of populism with nationalist patterns from several years ago. The event considered a turning point was the 2014 presidential election, when both candidates presented nationalist populism, albeit with each twist (Hadiz & Robison, 2017). Based on the significance of the two forms of populism, the article then raised these cases to elaborate the role of digital technologies and contemporary populism in Indonesia.

Two Trajectories of Populism

Drawing from the discussion in the previous section, to understand how digital technologies operate in populism, it is necessary to examine the movements and specific populist figures that represent it. In this context, this section will look into the political trajectory of Joko Widodo and how he rose to represent nationalistic populism, and M. Rizieq Shihab as he paved the path to become the face of Islamic populism in Indonesia. While each populism might have other figures, Widodo and Shihab arguably represent the most influential figures in Nationalistic and Islamic populism, respectively. Joko Widodo have won presidential elections twice against Prabowo Subianto, another populist (Mietzner, 2014) candidate who also utilize nationalistic rhetoric. His followers anointed Rizieq Shihab as the "Great Imam of Indonesian Muslim during *Aksi 212*." Moreover, his figure and organization gained large support all over the country after the event (Muhtadi & Halida, 2021). To examine their political trajectories, thus will demonstrate how the populist mobilization is an on-going process that were contingent to the social political challenges surrounding these figures. At the same time, digital technologies are instrumental in shaping and scaling up their form of populism.

Jokowi and The Voice of Diversity

Jokowi started his political career as a Mayor of Solo (2005-2012), a small city located in Central Java. During his time in Solo, he was not particularly known as an articulate figure like one might expect from populist leaders. Instead,

he appears to be a relatively quiet person with an ordinary outlook. His ordinariness was his main appeal to the city's voters. Unlike many other politicians, Jokowi rarely spent his time in his office. While wearing traditional Javanese clothes, Jokowi often conduct *blusukan* (impromptu visits) around the town to check personally various problems faced by the citizen. With this kind of presentation, Jokowi positioned himself to be different from other politicians that are perceived to be formal and bureaucratic.

Such separation marks the early development of Jokowi as a populist figure. Many populists communicate within the framework of 'low culture' as opposed to 'high elitist culture', which is more common among politicians (Ostiguy, 2009). It is also exemplified by Donald Trump, who tends to disregard technical presentation and use more colloquial communication to relate to his audiences (Kayam, 2018). Among such presentations were harsh language against political opponents, racist slurs, and other actions that seemingly broke many unwritten rules of political campaign. Jokowi plays a similar role, albeit in a different form to fit Solo's socio-cultural context. Jokowi did not openly criticize his political rivals or use 'bad manners.' Nevertheless, he utilized his informal daily activities to form an unmediated relationship with his voters.

During his time in Solo, Jokowi recognized the importance of digital technologies in governance. Digital platforms, in Jokowi's opinion, is also vital to help understand the problems faced by Solo's citizen. Jokowi, at that time, was a member of Kaskus (the largest Indonesian Internet forum) group that specifically discussed various Solo issues. As a member, he was being secretive about his presence while very up-to-date with the discussion within the group (Seto, 2017). On his Facebook account, Jokowi also regularly conducts live interactions to respond to questions and problems raised by his viewers. It could be said that Jokowi used digital platforms to perform online *blusukan*. Moreover, he was known to be a fervent supporter of the use of digital technology in governance by actively

participating in various events related to the digital topics.

It would be inaccurate to portray that the use of digital technologies dominated Jokowi's politics in Solo. It is just a small part of his public representation as mayor. Jokowi's ascendancy to national politics was heavily supported by his coverage from traditional media such as magazines, newspapers, and television. Nonetheless, Jokowi had acknowledged the significance of digital technologies from his early political career. Moreover, it serves to be an essential foundation for next step in Jakarta and the national election.

The Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2012 was a highly contentious political arena. Six candidates aimed to become the governor of the Indonesian capital city. Jokowi was positioned as an outsider even among the cadres of PDIP that backed his nomination. The rivalries among various factions of his supporters also make his political campaign very decentralized (Saraswati, 2016). Realizing that fragmentation within his campaign would cost Jokowi an election, he set up his campaign team. The team consists of professionals from pollsters and companies that focus on social media campaigns and professionals from pollsters and companies that focus on social media campaigns. This was when the election regulations had not formulated specific rules to tackle the campaign on digital platforms.

In particular, to experts on social media, were not paid, which made them able to subsume the mantle of volunteerism. A brand of political support which was later known to be associated with Jokowi-Ahok in the DKI Election. The emphasis on volunteerism and campaign on social media thus differentiated Jokowi from other candidates. In comparison, most other candidates run a centralized political campaign that relies on traditional media such as TV or a banner advertisement (Saraswati, 2016). The political expediency thus shaped Jokowi's political approach to be even more direct and informal than his political opponents. His team's approach is shaped even further by

the characteristic of social media that provides direct connection between Jokowi and his supporters.

During the DKI gubernatorial election, other candidates could not compete with the two top running pairs Jokowi-Ahok and Nachrowi-Ramli. The two pairs thus presented themselves contrasting with each other. Jokowi took the persona he had established in Solo, as a down-to-earth leader that would not hesitate to mingle with the citizen. In contrast, Fauzi Bowo presented himself as a seasoned bureaucrat who has all the right credentials to lead Jakarta. The competition shaped Jokowi to embrace the populist rhetoric even more intense.

Jokowi runs his political mobilization under the pretext that he is a political outsider who was untainted by the corrupted practices of everyday politics. His supporters thus perceive his presence as an answer to the rampant corruption crisis in Indonesia, including Jakarta (Hamid, 2014). Moreover, he promises to deliver the new Jakarta that would finally deliver the services deserved by its citizen. Such perception partially contributed to how Jokowi gained a network of volunteers that became his mobilisation's backbone (Suaedy, 2014).

Digital technologies were crucial as a tool for mobilization and the creation of Jokowi as a populist figure who will not just save Jakarta but also at the national level. For instance, a campaign video on YouTube presented Jakarta's problem and Jokowi as the solution in a fun way. The clip used modified lyrics from a popular One Direction's song and was viewed by millions of people. On Twitter, Jokowi-Ahok Social Media Volunteers (JASMEV) are actively generating buzz and stories with positive tones regarding Jokowi. During the campaign period, this network could mobilize hundreds of thousands of Twitter accounts and generate millions of tweets (Utomo, 2013). These campaigns supported Jokowi's perception that he was the new breed of leader that brought hope to the stagnancy of the ordinary political system.

The persona of Jakarta's reformer is not the only strong image that were associated with Jokowi. Jokowi is perceived by many of

its followers as the defendant of Indonesian diversity. Such portrayal was primarily constructed due to the choice of Fauzi Bowo-Nachrowi Ramli to invoke ethnic and religious sentiments during the campaign period. On plenty of occasions, Fauzi Bowo, Nachrowi Ramli, and their team raised the sentiment of Betawi and Islam as the primary identity of Jakarta (Miichi, 2014). Their campaign was aimed to the fact that Jokowi is a Javanese that came from outside Jakarta, and he also ran the candidacy with Ahok, who is Chinese and Christian.

Jokowi's campaign then embraces the narrative that represents the core principal in Indonesia, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or Unity in Diversity. The success of Jokowi in Gubernatorial Election celebrated by his supporters as the victory of Indonesian diversity. Taufik Kiemas, one of PDIP's most important figures, stated that the success of Jokowi was the representation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika's* spirit (Mok, 2012). The narrative was also used in an even more significant role for his presidential candidacy in 2014.

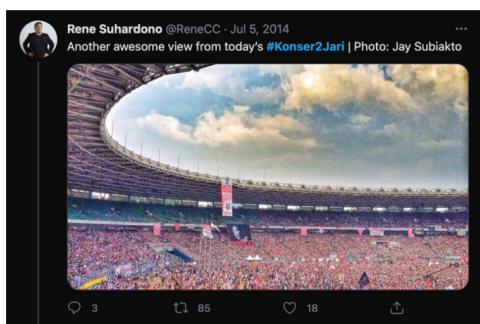
Scholars portray Indonesian presidential election in 2014 as the competition between the two populist figures. (Hadiz & Robison, 2017; Mietzner, 2014). Both Jokowi and Prabowo campaigned from the idea that they were political outsiders, albeit in a very different expression. Despite having a pedigree as one of the most influential and wealthy families in Indonesia, Prabowo claimed that he despised oligarchs and political elites in Indonesia. Jokowi, on the other hand, relied on the same narrative that his humble background allowed him to relate more with the ordinary citizen in Indonesia.

Both candidates relied very much on the nationalist rhetoric in their campaigns (Hadiz & Robison, 2017). While Prabowo blamed the Indonesian elites and foreign intervention as the source of Indonesian economic problems (Aspinall, 2015), Jokowi promised to bring a cultural renaissance to Indonesia (Aspinall, 2016). However, their position is very different regarding the role of conservative Islamic groups.

Comparable to the 2012 DKI Election situation, Prabowo gained most of the support among conservative Islamic groups. As a consequence, Jokowi is often framed to be a threat to the Islamic community among Prabowo's supporters. Jokowi campaign team then again took the stance that he is the nationalist figure that embodies the diversity in Indonesia. Such representation was produced and propagated, among which through the campaign on social media.

One of the most crucial events to illustrate this point was *Konser Salam Dua Jari* (Two Fingers Salute Concert). It was a public concert organized by volunteers (many of them were celebrities and public figures) as a showcase to demonstrate the scale of support for Jokowi just a few days before the election. In the concert, the participants were forbidden to bring political parties' attributes. Instead, they were encouraged to use the checkered shirt that became associated with Jokowi in the previous DKI gubernatorial election. This strong message shows the populist characteristic of Jokowi, in which he was represented as part of the people instead of the political party. The concert itself was attended by hundreds of thousand people and attended by many celebrities and Jokowi himself.

The spectacle of these concert were circulated both in mainstream media and social media. The concert and the circulation of pictures on social media show the growing importance of spectacle in Indonesian politics post-New Order (Strassler, 2020). This kind of performance was already realized by Jokowi's campaign team during the gubernatorial election in 2012 but then taken to the next level in presidential election.



Picture 1. Photo of the concert captured by Jay Subiako tweeted by @ReneCC

The propagation of pictures and videos on social media also becomes the contested arena for both Jokowi's and Prabowo's supporters. Among the participant, the act of taking a selfie (taking a picture by themselves) during the concert emboldened the sense that they were part of the larger collective that shared the same vision with Jokowi in regards to the future of Indonesia (Strassler, 2020).

The concert spectacle, however, has also become contested event among Jokowi's and Prabowo's supporters. For Jokowi's supporters, the concert was meant to unify the country from the rifts that happened during the presidential campaign in 2019 (Budilaksono, 2014). While not openly stated, the statement contrasts with Prabowo's campaign, which did not hesitate in using religious sentiments. On the other hand, the celebration of diversity did not take well by some of Prabowo's supporters. Among the raised sentiment, for instance, was whether the Muslim participants performed any prayer during the concert. On some website, the accusation was elaborated even further that the people on concert did not fast despite Ramadhan, and even smoked marijuana in the venue (Ahmed, 2014). Jokowi's supporter rebutted such accusation on social media, emphasizing that concert participants come from various religious backgrounds. These actions reinforced even further that Jokowi represents the nation's fundamental values that uphold unity in diversity.



Picture 2. Tweet from @nukman proclaiming the diverse nature of concert participants

As has been discussed in this section, the personification of Jokowi as a populist figure that was perceived as the guardian of Indonesian diversity was developed gradually. Despite always embracing the direct relationship with his supporters, his ascendancy to DKI Jakarta and national politics sharpened his populist rhetoric that infused nationalism with pluralism. Alongside these processes, which allows his campaign team to amplify his positioning as

political outsider. Moreover, it is also crucial in presenting that Jokowi's politics transcends traditional political institutions, such as political parties. Instead he belongs as a representation of collective individuals that mimics the kind of support that Jokowi gained on social media platforms like Twitter. These relationships also define how Jokowi organized his political support during his presidency.

Rizieq Shihab, FPI, and Sharia-based Indonesia

In the past few years, there are no religious clerics whose name holds the same magnitude as Habib Rizieq Shihab. As a leader of *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front), he was infamous for his harsh remarks against anything that he perceived as a threat to the Islamic community. His political stance often led him to direct opposition to the government and face criminal charges. Nevertheless, for many of his followers, Habib Rizieq Shihab embodies the ideal leader that would lead Islam to reclaim the much-deserved glory. In this aspect, Rizieq Shihab personified the classic description of a populist figure.

Habib Rizieq Shihab was born and raised within the family of *ahl al-bait* (Familial lineage that claims to be the direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad). In his early childhood, Habib Rizieq Shihab was educated in secular institutions. However, just like many others who are raised as part of the *ahl al-bait*, his family taught him the importance of Islamic teachings. While this experience might be relevant for most Muslims, tradition and expectation that those with the title *habib* would play a greater role in Islamic *da'wa* or propagation (Jahroni, 2004). This is the path that Rizieq Shihab took in his adulthood. He would then get married to another member of *ahl al-bait* family, take his degree in Saudi Arabia, and then later return to Indonesia and become a preacher and teacher at the same time.

During his activities as a preacher, Rizieq Shihab became dissatisfied with the social and political conditions of the Islamic community in Indonesia. The Islamic community, in his

view, is a pariah politically and economically in Indonesia. The situation, Rizieq believes, comes from moral crisis and sinful behaviour such as gambling, prostitution, and alcohol consumption in society. At the same time, the government failed not only to prevent these behavior, but instead to repress Islamic teachers that play an important role as the moral guardian (Jahroni, 2004). These anxieties would eventually led Habib Rizieq Shihab to participate in establishing FPI.

On 17 August 1998, Habib Rizieq Shihab and many other preachers in Jakarta's region held a meeting in *pesantren* (traditional Islamic school) Al-Um to establish a new organization (Facal, 2020). During the meeting, the participants shared the same concerns that the *ummah* (Islamic community) is facing various social and political problems (Jahroni, 2004). The government is not dependable to solve these issues, since many of the problems discussed were related to government policy. Therefore, Islamic community had to solve political and social matters by themselves. Under this pretext, these ulama agreed to establish a new organization named *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI).

It did not take too long before the new organization could implement their vision into action. In September 1998, FPI attacked and accused many activists from Christian Atmajaya University as leftist groups funded by American Jews (Wilson, 2006). In subsequent years, these public attacks would become the organisation's face. Since its establishment, FPI have been known for intimidation and attacks toward groups or individuals they perceive as enemies. The group has attacked nightclubs, human rights activists, to religious minority groups (Woodward et al., 2014). These events are recurring situations for the organization, among which through their justification that they were established in the first place to conduct *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (commanding good and preventing evil) (Wilson, 2008).

From early on, Habib Rizieq Shihab has already developed Manichean ways of thinking that is implemented in FPI as the organization. Even before the establishment of FPI, the obligation of Muslims to eradicate

sinful behaviour had been an essential element of his sermons (Jahroni, 2004). It is no surprise then that the same framework is implemented through the actions of FPI as an organization. The organization spend considerable energy to police social and political deviance that they considered threatening for *ummah*.

It is well known that both Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI often presented a black-white worldview about society. Since its establishment, the organization believes that the Islamic community is deprived socially and religiously, partly caused by the policy of injustice (Jahroni, 2004). The organization and its leaders also do not hesitate to demonize other groups that they perceive as a threat to the Islamic community. Some even manifested direct persecution that resulted in death, as shown in the case of Ahmadiyah attack in Cikeusik (Woodward et al., 2014). These actions are justified under the pretext that FPI is not just acting for the organisation's benefit, but rather representing the anxiety of Islamic ummah in Indonesia. The claim characterized Islamic populism that replaces the notion of 'people' with *ummah*, presumed to be the larger marginalized majority in Indonesia (Hadiz, 2016).

Habib Rizieq Shihab and plenty of figures associated with FPI also do not hesitate to perform 'bad manners' in public. In one public news broadcast, Munarman, one of FPI's leaders throw a cup of tea against his adversary during a debate (Sholeh, 2013). Habib Rizieq Shihab himself, on plenty of occasions, openly mocks politicians. During Yudhoyono's presidency, he called the president a loser for letting people conduct sinful behavior in public (Gil, 2013). On other occasions, Habib Rizieq Shihab also ridiculed the ethnic (Lazuardi, 2015) and religious (BBC, 2016) symbols. These actions separated his images from formal politicians who avoid these topics.

Populist expressions are often justified by the perception of crisis (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). As mentioned before, the FPI was initiated by Habib Rizieq Shihab on the foundation of the perceived crisis happening to the Islamic ummah in Indonesia. Despite being

the majority, the Islamic ummah have been socially, politically, and economically deprived. The situation is perceived as the consequence of how Islamic ummah do not perform sharia in their daily life. It is no coincidence that throughout the years, the preachers and FPI have been pushing the implementation of sharia in Indonesia. On numerous sermons, Rizieq pushed the revival of the Jakarta Charter, which is obliged for Muslims to perform sharia as an integral part of the constitution (Jahroni, 2004). Despite being consistent on crisis and its proposed solutions, for a long time, Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI remained on the fringe in terms of their influence on the Muslim community in general. The situation changed after the mass mobilization called *Aksi 212* against Ahok. The mobilization has enabled both FPI and Habib Rizieq Shihab to take a center stage among many conservative groups in Indonesia. After the mobilization, FPI gained the largest number of support from Islamic community since their existence as organization (Muhtadi & Halida, 2021). During such mobilization, both FPI members and FPI used digital technologies as part of their crucial tools.

Aksi 212 was tightly knit to a Facebook post showing a clip of Ahok (the incumbent governor) giving commentaries on Quran verses. Amidst the tension of the Jakarta Gubernatorial Election, Ahok commented that voters should not be swayed by those who quoted Quran verses against his religious background as a minority. The clip is a short clip taken from a more extended version that is then added with commentaries from the account owner, "Something big is happening." The clip was then circulated on various platforms of digital technologies. It could easily be found on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Whatsapp as the most popular messenger in Indonesia.

The propagation of those clips then led to more immense pressure from the public to persecute Ahok under the criminal charge of religious blasphemy. Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI took a central role in mobilizing the political pressure both offline and online. Just a few days after the circulation of the clip, several conservative Islamic groups, including FPI,

gathered in MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council) (Ichwan, 2016). They discussed the legal decisions of MUI regarding the clip of Ahok. On the same day, they held a press conference and stated how MUI regarded Ahok statement as blasphemous and thus needed to be punished. Soon afterwards, the representations of Islamic organizations created an alliance called National Movement to Defend MUI Fatwa (Gerakan Nasional Pengawal Fatwa)-MUI (Aida, 2020). The alliance was created to ensure that Ahok received his legal consequences. Habib Rizieq Shihab also became the Head of Adviser of this movement.

During the political campaign period, various Islamic sites produced content that harassed the ethnicity and religion of Ahok (Ichwan, 2016). Apart from the news, the supporters of Rizieq Shihab also utilized Facebook to propagate memes that endorse the idea of Rizieq Shihab punishing Ahok for his blasphemous act. One of the most important visual representations on this website portrays the picture of Rizieq that demands Jokowi as the president, not to let blasphemous action in Indonesia (IPAC, 2018). At the same time, the supporters of Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI volunteered to print large posters to be placed in strategic locations around many neighbourhoods in Jakarta (Duile, 2017). Many of these actions are funded by their own money, due to the strong belief that they participate in a noble cause in supporting Rizieq Shihab, FPI, and the Islamic community (Lim, 2017).

During the mobilization, Rizieq Shihab and several other preachers from GNPF rode on the top of the open car. Many preachers took turns for speeches that helped raise rally participants' morale. On his speech, Rizieq Shihab emphasized that the law of Islam is the highest, therefore, those who mock Quran must be punished accordingly (Seto, 2019). The message was clear that the mobilization was a part of a Manichean struggle to defend Islamic symbols from blasphemous actions, as exemplified by Ahok. The speech was broadcasted on national television. At the same time, the message was propagated through various mediums such as Islamic news outlets,

memes, and clips on streaming services such as Youtube. Such presentation was amplified in the following months during the legal investigation of Ahok as well as the gubernatorial elections.



Picture 3. A meme that depicts Rizieq emphasizes the obligation of Muslims not to vote for Ahok (Purnamasari, 2016)

The mobilization then resulted in the loss of Ahok despite having a large number of approval ratings in Jakarta (Jk, 2017). Moreover, Ahok was punished by the court for the same cases that were pushed by the mass mobilization during Aksi 212 (Katadata, 2017). Nonetheless, the achieved goals to imprison Ahok did not translate to formal power to either Habib Rizieq Shihab, FPI, or the alliances of conservative groups. If anything, since the short-term goal was reached, it opened the frictions between groups that was part of the alliances (Seto, 2019). It was inevitable since many of these groups have many differences in goals, principles and religious practices set aside during the Aksi 212. Now that Ahok is imprisoned, such differences have become the source of dispute.

Despite the frictions, Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI still gained much, more considerable influence on mainstream Muslims than before the mobilization of 212. Several months after the mobilization, FPI gained the most significant support from the Muslim population in Indonesia. It was estimated that 21.1% of Indonesian Muslim support the agenda of the organization, and no other conservative organizations came close to this number (IPAC, 2018). At that time, Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI as the organization seemed to gain the upper hand in national politics.

The unpredictable situation happened when Rizieq Shihab was entangled with a scandalous event that was also inseparable from digital technologies. In early 2017, there was gossip on blogs that the preacher had a sexual affair with one of his followers. These blogs published conversation and vulgar pictures that was allegedly taken from Rizieq Shihab's phones (Atriana, 2017). The police took the propagation of texts and pictures as a criminal case; thus, they investigated Rizieq Shihab and his alleged partner. Realizing the situation, Rizieq Shihab and his family refused the call from the police and chose to exile in Saudi Arabia.

During his exile, Rizieq Shihab met many visitors, usually political figures from Indonesia. Apart from that, he utilized YouTube to propagate his ideas and maintain the connection with his followers in Indonesia. From the account managed by FPI, Rizieq Shihab often contradicted the claim of the government in regard to social and political issues in Indonesia. The channels thus became the stage for Rizieq to maintain the political influence of FPI and himself beyond the borders of Indonesia. YouTube, the digital platform in this aspect, is utilized as the last straw to perform populism until his return to Indonesia.



Picture 4. Habib Rizieq Shihab in Front TV YouTube account conducted a speech during 212 Reunion in 2019

The Extent of Digital Populism in Indonesia

In the previous section, the article discussed how the development of contemporary populism in Indonesia is inseparable from the use of digital

technologies. While in both Islamic-based or nationalistic-based populism, the actors utilize digital technologies, influence of such populism on the Indonesian political arena is very different. And this is most likely the result of how each actors utilize the populism itself, rather than the differences between the use of digital technologies. To elaborate on these matters, it is important to see the general outcome of digital populism as exercised by Habib Rizieq Shihab and Jokowi.

Table 1. Comparison of nationalistic and Islamic digital populism

Ideology	Nationalistic	Islamic
Figure	Jokowi	Habib Rizieq Shihab
Perceived Crisis	Corruption and Islamic radicalism	Marginalization of Islamic ummah in Indonesia
People	Those who identify with the ideals of Indonesian diversity, minority groups	Those who identify as part of the 'ummah', supporters of sharia law
Offline-Online Mobilizations	Network of volunteers, personalized social media accounts, production of memes and pop contents	Network of volunteers, FPI's social media account, production of memes, propagation of speech
Outcome	Win the election, incorporation of the populist frameworks into governmental institutions	Rising popularity and approval in national level, Mobilized the largest public demonstration, disbanded by the government

The previous section has established how Jokowi realized the importance of digital technologies during his early political career. Such awareness does not mean that Jokowi had complete pictures of the incorporation of the Internet into either his campaign or governance. Instead, he was aware of the potential of the

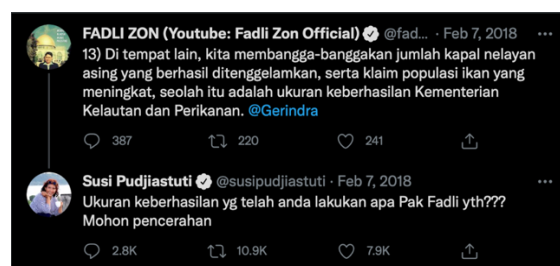
technologies and, to some extent, already sporadically used the Internet as part of his governance. As previously discussed, Jokowi's activities to lurk anonymously and observe the issues raised by its members about Solo on Kaskus (Seto, 2017) mimics his preferences to conduct *blusukan* in the city. While never publicly stated the ambitions to revamp the political system, Jokowi's presentations with traditional Javanese clothing and the informal interactions with Solo citizens presented Jokowi as the political outsider.

In contrast to the corrupted established political systems, the credentials as a simple man developed to the next level when Jokowi competed with senior bureaucrat, Fauzi Bowo for the gubernatorial position in 2012. The lack of resources and coordination among the parties forced Jokowi and his campaign team to rely on grassroots movement and online mobilization (Saraswati, 2016). The success of such a campaign led him to win the gubernatorial election and aimed for the presidential election in 2014. Thus, the similar mode of campaign that uses digital technologies was inevitably replicated during the presidential election. At this level, the Manichean frameworks that serve as one of the most important populist trait were amplified to a much greater scale. Competing another populist, Prabowo Subianto, Jokowi was portrayed by his supporter as the candidate representing diversity and common people against the oligarch whom many conservative religious groups supported. The online banter between each supporter have dominated the whole campaign process.

During the presidential election, Jokowi and his campaign team fully integrated digital mobilization with seemingly grassroots movements at least during the first term. The strategy contributed to the success of Jokowi in the first election. During his presidency, Jokowi never delivered his promises to be an outsider politician. If anything, his policies are aligned with the interests of established oligarchs in Indonesia (Putri, 2020). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Jokowi neglects using digital technologies to represent himself to his constituents. During his presidency, the use of

digital technologies is now institutionalized through formal government agencies.

Jokowi, as president, still has personalized outreach through social media accounts. On Facebook, with around 9.9 million followers, Jokowi is one of the most followed politicians in the world. Similarly, with around 40 million followers on Instagram, Jokowi is only second to Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, in terms of influence on this platform. The official government institutions and public officials are also urged to actively engage on social media. Several public officials even gained massive followers on digital platforms due to their engagements with these platforms.



Picture 5. Susi Pudjiastuti, the Minister of Maritime and Fisheries (2014-2019) responded to the criticism from a member of the oppositional party on Twitter

Apart from that, the president and his government also gained massive support from social media users. Almost on any issues, many social media users actively defend the policies or political stance of the government. The digital polarization that has been happening since the 2014 presidential election never loses its traction long after the political competition. Some critics have raised the concern that the polarization is the result of a deliberate action from the government that kept the army of the buzzer to defend their political position (Fukuoka & Djani, 2016).

Under the pretext of preventing disinformation, the government apparatus also do not hesitate to label the oppositional voices as the propagator of false news. The ITE Law, in this regard, is important tool that could be applied to many critics addressed to the government apparatus. While the situation might not be necessarily intentional from Jokowi, the legal instruments have been used in many instances

to silence dissenting opinions on public policies or political figures (Tst, 2020). The digital technologies in this regard are instrumental for Jokowi to maintain his political control during his presidency. At the same time, while he does not necessarily use populist rhetoric anymore, Jokowi maintains the performative appeal in his daily online and offline appearances.

The power of Jokowi as the president contrasts with the declining influence of Habib Rizieq Shihab since his central role during Aksi 212. The criminal case against his chat scandal led Habib Rizieq Shihab to seek exile in Saudi Arabia. During his time in Saudi, YouTube became his important platform to maintain his influence. On the one hand, these events demonstrated that Rizieq still has a large political influence as populist figure. On the other hand, digital technologies was also his last resort to be relevant in Indonesian politics since the government strictly controlled him and his organization. After his departure, the alliances of conservative groups and FPI faced the threat of fragmentation due to internal competition from within (IPAC, 2018).

Habib Rizieq Shihab returned to Indonesia only to deal with a criminal case again. On his return, he faced a criminal charge for creating crowds during the pandemic of Covid-19 in Indonesia (Ryn, 2021). Apart from that, FPI was also disbanded as an organization following HTI, which was previously already considered as a forbidden organization (Taheer, 2021). The criminal case and the disbandment of FPI were followed by the banning of their social media presence. Their YouTube, Twitter, and other social media accounts have disappeared or were banned by the platforms (Rdp, 2020).

Despite relying on digital technologies to amplify their populism, Jokowi and Habib Rizieq Shihab has a very different outcome in term of their influence in the political arena. I would argue that the difference is not so much the result of different use of digital technologies but instead how these figures shape their populism in relation to political establishments.

Based on his rhetoric, Habib Rizieq Shihab could be qualified as a textbook populist. Even

from his early political career, Habib Rizieq Shihab has always presented a Manichean framework that pits Islamic followers against the enemies of Islam. To some extent, Rizieq also does not hesitate to stir the conflict between what he called 'true Muslims' against those whose Islamic piety are questioned. The presentation of such a framework, whether offline or online, is presented in bad manners. Unlike ordinary politicians, Habib Rizieq Shihab does not hesitate to mock or ridicule his political adversaries. Rizieq has always consistently presented the narrative that the Islamic community is facing a social, political, economic, and moral crisis. The narrative enables Habib Rizieq Shihab to take center stage during Aksi 212. However, it is also important to remember that for most of his life, his status and FPI as the organization were fringes among other Islamic organizations. Despite the claim that FPI has millions of members (Fea, 2021), Habib Rizieq Shihab never decided to enter the formal political party. Consequently, his influence on established political structures is contingent on relevant momentum that he could mobilize.

In contrast, Jokowi is not easy to be classified as a textbook populist. Aside from minor occasions, Jokowi rarely expressed himself in verbal Manichean frameworks. His competition with other political figures later shaped him to position himself more in the Manichean narrative. Therefore, Jokowi is often categorized as a 'soft populist' regarding his ambiguous approach to populism. The ambivalent approach, however, allows Jokowi to exploit the strength of both positions. Like other populists, Jokowi can represent himself as an outsider and mobilize a large number of grassroots movements as the basis of his supporter. Concurrently, his reluctance to openly opposed political establishments also enables Jokowi to gain the support of political parties and many oligarchs.

This flexibility is not readily applicable to figures such as Habib Rizieq Shihab. While the preacher and FPI might have long established relationship with political elites in Indonesia, it is not easy to openly support political figures

that harshly attack political establishments. Even more so, since the presidential election, Jokowi's populism relies on the opposition between nationalist ideas against religious conservatism. In this regard, Habib Rizieq Shihab, the most influential 'face' of religious conservatism, could not gain many allies beyond the conservative camp.

The case of Jokowi and Habib Rizieq Shihab demonstrated the limitations of digital populism. Despite the importance of digital technologies in propagating and shaping populism, the continuity of the political style still depends on the ability to capture political establishments. The fact that Jokowi relies on soft populism (including on digital platforms) enables him to capture a large portion of voters. Moreover, Jokowi can also mediate his digital populism within the government's institutions during his presidency. The government, for instance, was criticized since they spent some budget on 'social media influencers' (Wilson, 2014). The president also uses his association with youth and technology to reinforce his form of digital populism. In contrast, M Rizieq Shihab is currently treated as a political pariah despite his past influence in offline and online settings.

Conclusion

The article is started with an enquiry regarding the role of digital technologies in the rise of populism in Indonesia. Drawing from previous research, the article proposes that digital technologies are integral to developing contemporary populism. To elaborate the argument, the early sections pick a rather different path from the binary camp in the debates of populism. In particular, the article used Benjamin Moffit's proposition that populism is the political style. The framework highlights the importance of mediation and performance as a trait that defines contemporary populism. In this regard, it is inevitable to separate digital technologies as one of the most essential tools in modern politics, including in Indonesia. Within this framework, the technologies do not necessarily produce populism but rather become an arena that resonates well with populist politics.

In Indonesia, the performance of populism could be mainly categorized within two camps: the nationalistic camps that raise the tropes of pluralism; and the Islamic camps which advocate the bigger role of religion in public politics. Following Moffit's framework, the article thus analyses; the rise of populist leaders on both camps to understand how digital technologies are utilized on two different patterns of populism. From the nationalist camps, the Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, has realized the importance of digital technologies since his early days as a mayor in Solo. The entanglement between his ideas of populism and Internet had become even more prominent during his candidacy as Jakarta Governor in 2012. In his campaign, Jokowi's team could use digital technologies to build the presentation that he was a political outsider that strives for governance reform. The use of digital media later served as a foundation of Jokowi's larger bid for presidential candidacy. Digital technologies played a crucial role both in the presidential campaign of 2014 and 2019. In his first period, the Internet was instrumental as Jokowi's tool to compete against his opponent that had more significant support from the political party establishments. In contrast, during the 2019 presidential election, the digital technologies were already well incorporated into the political machinery of Jokowi which further strengthen his power in Indonesia.

On the other side of politics, Habib Rizieq Shihab was the central figure of what scholars perceived as the Islamic populism in Indonesia. Unlike Jokowi, he was already well familiarized with organizing people long before the development of digital technologies. Nonetheless, Habib Rizieq Shihab and his organization, FPI, were adept at incorporating the Internet to disseminate their ideas. The organization was very active on various social media platforms and did not shy from confrontation against what they perceived as enemies. Comparable to Jokowi's grassroots politics, the basis of Habib Rizieq Shihab also comes from a large number of volunteers. The volunteers were prepared to invest their time, money, and energy both in the offline and online arena. The peak of their participation

was well documented during the *Aksi 212*, one of Indonesia's largest political mobilisations. The decline of Habib Rizieq Shihab's influence comes from the accusation regarding his sexual scandals that was spread all over the Internet. To counter this accusation, Habib Rizieq Shihab fled to Saudi Arabia while regularly presenting a speech to his followers that could be accessed on YouTube. The action was important to maintain his presence in Indonesian politics despite being separated geographically. However, the influence of Habib Rizieq Shihab and FPI came to an end after the government put legal solid measures against both the cleric and the organization.

The discussion on these two figures highlights the rising importance of digital technologies on contemporary populism in Indonesia. It is important to remember that the trend is also adopted by more conventional politicians that do not necessarily resort to populist politics. However, as discussed before, populist politics resonates well with features of digital platforms. It does not mean the savvy utilization of digital technologies will automatically enable the path to political dominance. As demonstrated from the comparison between Jokowi's and Habib Rizieq Shihab's trajectory, the influence of populism is still very much contingent on traditional political machinery. The ability of Jokowi to integrate digital populism into his day-to-day governance has helped him reinforce his power as the president. In stark contrast, since Habib Rizieq Shihab had not been able to capture the formal political positions, even when he was prominent in digital platforms, the government weakened his influence. Regardless of the outcomes, digital technologies have become integral to populism in Indonesia, a trend that most likely will stay for quite some time.

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