

THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION IN INDONESIAN POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF *FRONT PEMBELA ISLAM* (THE ISLAMIC DEFENDERS FRONT) IN JAKARTA GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION 2017

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Non-State Actors in World Politics

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Introduction

鍾萬學 (Zhong Wanxue) or Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also well-known with his mononym Ahok) was the Vice Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta in 2012 – 2014 who rose into governorship after Joko Widodo was elected as the President of the Republic of Indonesia in 2014 – and hence became the Governor in 2014 – 2017. He was sentenced to two years of imprisonment because it was proven that he did an act of blasphemy to the Quran and Islamic scholars (Lubis, 2019).

At that time, he was also running for the gubernatorial election of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta in 2017 – competing with Anies Rasyid Baswedan and his running mate Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno, two prominent Muslim figures in Indonesia. The case of blasphemy involving him was taken advantage of by the Islamic Defenders Front to help the other candidate to win. The Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars, who is in charge of issuing a *fatwa* (an Islamic legal opinion which can only be issued by highly qualified religious leaders), also issued a statement reiterating their opposition to voting for Ahok in the election due to his blasphemous act and the commandment from the Quran (Kami, 2016).

The Islamic Defenders Front or *Front Pembela Islam* was first established on 17 August 1998 by Rizieq Shihab, one of the direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It holds the principle of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar* (an Arabic term which means enjoining people to do the good things while preventing them from doing the things prohibited by Islam). They routinely do

good things when they are needed but are also the most forceful when it comes to ensuring that Indonesian Muslims do not go astray from the sharia (PinterPolitik, 2017).

The nature of this paper is descriptive – which intends to “describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened” (Nassaji, 2015, p. 129). It seeks to analyse the role of non-governmental organisation, in this case, the Islamic Defenders Front – taking the gubernatorial election in Jakarta in 2017 as a case study. In order to help answering the research question, content analysis is employed as a research method. The data used in this study are journal articles, news, and reports from which the answer to the research question can be got.

This essay consists of 4 main parts, i.e., introduction, the blasphemy case, political manoeuvre by the Islamic Defenders Front, and conclusion. The first part introduces the reader to the issue. The second and the third part shall provide short yet thorough and interconnected explanations about the blasphemy case where the incumbent was involved and how the Islamic Defenders Front use it as a milestone for their political manoeuvre. Eventually, the fourth part shall wrap up the whole discussion by reiterating the main points while drawing a conclusion.

The Blasphemy Case

It was long before the election that the residents of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta knew that there would be two gubernatorial candidates for the election, i.e., Basuki Tjahaja Purnama & Djarot Saiful Hidayat (Ahok-Djarot) and Anies Rasyid Baswedan & Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno (Anies-Sandi). Some groups of people started feeling “uncomfortable” with the fact that Ahok (a Hakka Chinese & Christian) was running for the election to govern the overwhelmingly Muslim majority population. They started giving reminders to all Jakartan Muslims that Allah *subhaanahu wa ta’ala* (Glory to Him, the Exalted) said in the Quran (05:51):

“O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: they are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guideth not a people unjust.”

It was indeed a disadvantage for Ahok-Djarot candidate that many Jakartan Muslims started to sympathise with the “preaching” given by those groups. It then led to their discontent. In one of his official visits in Jakarta, as cited in Sasongko (2016), Ahok said that:

“Bapak Ibu ndak Bisa memilih Saya. dibohongi pake surah Al-Maidah 51 dan macem-macem itu. Itu hak bapak ibu. Ya, jika Bapak Ibu perasaan tidak bisa pilih nih karena saya takut masuk neraka, dibodohin gitu ya, ya enggak apa-apa?” (You cannot vote for me because you are being lied to using Al-Maidah 51 and anything else. It is your right. Yes, if you feel like you cannot vote for me because you are afraid that you will go to hell, and if you are okay knowing that you are being fooled to, it is okay)

The video became viral on social media and sparked outrage among many Indonesian Muslims. The wordings used by Ahok in his speech indicated that he believes that the Quran can be used as a tool for lying – something which is impossible according to the Islamic belief as it is the word of God and cannot contain something wrong. The accusation of having done a blasphemous act was supported by the Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars which issued a statement saying that indeed Ahok has conducted a blasphemous act (Kami, 2016).

Political Manoeuvre by the Islamic Defenders Front

Unfortunately, even after having been reported by many Muslim organisations – including the Islamic Defenders Front, the police had yet to process the case. The Grand Imam, who is also the founder of the Islamic Defenders Front, called for a mass demonstration called “*Aksi Bela Alquran*” or “An Action in Defence of the Quran” on 14 October 2016. However, there still was no action taken towards the case. The discontent of many people involved in the demonstration finally led to the 2nd and 3rd demonstration on 04 November and 02 December 2016 with even bigger number of people –

some sources say it that the final demonstration involved more than 1 million people. It indicates that the spirit of religiosity among Indonesians is still strong (Rahmadi, 2017; Harahap & Sardini, 2019; Prayogi, 2019).

After the series of actions, Ahok was finally sentenced into two years imprisonment by the Supreme Court of Indonesia – saying that he breached Indonesian Penal Code on Blasphemy, i.e., article 156a which stated that (as cited in Anggraeny, 2017, p. 284):

“barang siapa dengan sengaja dimuka umum mengeluarkan perasaan atau melakukan perbuatan:

a) yang pada pokoknya bersifat permusuhan, penyalah-gunaan atau penodaan terhadap suatu agama yang dianut di Indonesia;

b) dengan maksud agar supaya orang tidak menganut agama apapun juga, yang bersendikan ke-Tuhanan Yang Maha Esa.”

(Whoever deliberately expresses or does anything in public which: a) is mainly about hostility towards, misuse of, or blasphemy to any of the existing religions in Indonesia; b) with the intention for the people not to believe in any religion – which is based on the principle of “Believe in the One and Only God”).

After the verdict, many Indonesians in Indonesia and abroad felt that it was unfair for Ahok to be charged with 2 years of imprisonment. They thought that Ahok was wronged by the Islamic Defenders Front and it was a black campaign towards him for the benefit of the other candidate. However, the Supreme Court did not pay any attention to any of the comments and proceeded with the verdict (Anggraeny, 2017; Kompas, 2017).

Needless to say, the Islamic Defenders Front has played an important role in both the imprisonment of Ahok and the election of Anies-Sandi as the new Governor and Vice Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta in 2017 – 2021.

Conclusion

The Islamic Defenders Front, which was first established in 1998, carries the spirit to enjoin its fellow Indonesian Muslims in doing good deeds and also forcefully preventing the people from deviating from the sharia. It has gained more prominence since its establishment due to having many sympathisers in the country.

It has taken a very bold step of preventing a non-Muslim from becoming an elected leader among an overwhelmingly majority Muslim Jakarta by preaching to Jakartan Muslims that there is such commandment written in the Quran. It has also been historically able to gather more than 1 million people for peaceful protests named the “Action of Defending the Quran” and finally got Ahok to be imprisoned for his blasphemous act – which eventually led to the victory of Anies-Sandi in Jakarta gubernatorial Election in 2017.

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