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Religious Sentiments in Local Politics

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ABSTRAK

Penggunaan sentimen keagamaan dan politik identitas dalam konteks lokal politik di Indonesia semakin meningkat. Padahal, Indonesia bukanlah negara Islam dan juga bukan negara sekuler. Meskipun begitu, Indonesia mengakui kehadiran Tuhan di sila pertama Pancasila. Pendapat sementara penulis ialah bersama dengan isu korupsi dan Hak Asasi Manusia (HAM), isu agama merupakan isu penting untuk suksesnya kampanye politisi. Tiga hal tersebut di atas merupakan poin utama untuk menarik perhatian pemilih. Namun, sejak jatuhnya era Presiden Soeharto dan Orde Baru (ORBA), sentimen keagamaan tidak pernah digunakan untuk menyerang agama lain sampai di Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada) DKI Jakarta 2017. Penulis berpendapat bahwa maraknya sentimen keagamaan selama Pilkada DKI Jakarta 2017 berhasil membelah masyarakat Indonesia menjadi dua ideologi: nasionalis dan agama. Pemisahan dua ideologi ini, cepat atau lambat akan mampu menciptakan dua praktik berbahaya yang tumbuh di masyarakat, yaitu pengistimewaan Islam (*Islamic exceptionalism*) dan pemerintah yang berjalan dengan tangan besi. Indonesia telah berulang kali mengalami segregasi antara Islam sebagai ideologi agama dengan ideologi nasionalis dan hasil akhirnya fatal seperti pembantaian 1965 dan kerusuhan 1998. Artikel kualitatif ini menjelaskan bagaimana *Islamic exceptionalism* bekerja dan membingkai diri mereka di bawah praktik demokrasi di Indonesia dan mengapa ideologi keagamaan meningkat. Artikel ini membahas tentang argumen mengapa bangkitnya sentimen keagamaan dan politik identitas harus dianggap sebagai ujian kritis bagi sosio-politik Indonesia dan akan berperan untuk menentukan kemajuan demokrasi Indonesia. Akankah cara kampanye, mekanisme politik, dan pendekatan yang diterapkan sewaktu Pilkada DKI Jakarta 2017 menetapkan acuan bagi politik lokal di Indonesia? Sejauh mana segregasi dan polarisasi masyarakat pada Pilkada DKI Jakarta 2017 akan mempengaruhi pemerintah lokal di seluruh Indonesia, terutama bagi daerah yang telah mengalami konflik yang dikarenakan etnis dan agama?

Kata kunci: demokratisasi; otonomi daerah; politik identitas

ABSTRACT

The rise of religious sentiments and identity politics in Indonesia is currently in a critical phase. Indonesia is neither a Muslim nor a secular country, although it recognizes the existence of God in its first state theory principle. Together with corruption and human rights, religion is a fundamental issue in politicians' campaign materials, as these topics can be considered key for attracting voters. The fall of President Suharto's New Order should be considered the starting point of the sublime journey of political identity, which often implicates religions and ethnicity under the umbrella of democratic practices. However, after the fall of Suharto and the New Order era, religious

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sentiments were not used and did not attacks on other religions until the 2017 Jakarta election. As Indonesia is a diverse country, its politics should not exploit religious or ethnic differences as the basis for voting for certain candidates or turn them into campaign tools. The rise of religious sentiment during the 2017 Jakarta election successfully split Indonesia into two sides: those with a nationalist ideology and those with a religious ideology. It is hypothesized that this separation will sooner or later cause two dangerously practices to grow in the society: Islamic exceptionalism and a government that rules with an iron fist. This qualitative article examines how Islamic exceptionalists have portrayed and framed themselves within Indonesia's democratic practices and why the religious ideology is again on the rise. It explores arguments about why increases in religious sentiments and identity politics should be considered a critical test for Indonesia's socio-politics and decisive for the progress of Indonesia's democracy. Interestingly, the results show that in the context of local politics, most people are not attracted by and do not vote for candidates who exploit religious sentiments during their campaigns.

Keywords: democratization; local autonomy; political identity

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has been undergoing democratization for almost two decades, namely since the fall of President Soeharto in 1998. The collapse of President Soeharto's New Order was due to several factors, the most significant of which were massive corruption, a meltdown of the Indonesian economy as a result of enormous foreign debt, and an unstable security situation that stemmed from human rights violations during Soeharto's three-decade administration (Bertrand 2004; Barron & Sharpe 2010; Colombijn & Lindblad 2002; Honna 2003; Crouch 2010; Wessel 2005).

Indonesia is an exciting country for studying democratic reform and related developments, as it is the most populated country in the world to have undergone political change and reform for the past two decades. The fall of Soeharto's New Order was followed by the spread of riots and conflict across Indonesia. The country regularly experienced large-scale disputes and disturbances; Jakarta, Sambas, Sampit, Aceh, Poso, Maluku, and West Papua were areas strongly associated with riots that often-implicated religion, ethnicity, and race as the roots of violence.

Indonesia's democratic transition has not been as smooth as expected seeing as Soeharto left some problems behind when he departed his po-

sition. It has provoked some frictions and factions in influential political positions in local and national level, which has triggered instability in the socio-political context. In the three years after 1998, Indonesia had three sworn-in presidents. Soeharto's successors (i.e. Presidents Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati Soekarnoputri) led short-lived governments and proved unable to guarantee public order and security across Indonesia, let alone to solve the economic crisis[1] (Crouch 2010).

Indonesia can be considered a young democratic nation with nationalist outbursts that can have unpredictable consequences. In 1999, the Indonesian government decided to expand the role and responsibilities of local government by implementing regional autonomy. In the early years, this change resulted in an outbreak of conflict in many parts of Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Maluku, Sampit, Poso, and Sambas. Most of these conflicts emerged due to religious and ethnic sentiments.

Indonesia has been implementing many fundamental democratic practices since the fall of Soeharto. During this time, human rights have improved, multiple direct elections have been held, constitutional and legal provisions have allowed the freedom of speech, and press freedom has been legally written into the constitution. These practices were expected and predicted, as much literature on democracy routinely notes that they result from decentralized government and democracy. However, at the same time, decentralization and regionalism have also raised some important issues to be discussed, namely a politicization of ethno-religious and regional-based identities, the spread of regional and communal violence, and the evolution of local-level political actors into local 'kings' (Davidson 2005). These dynamics in regional politics have taken place as a result of a decentralized government (Baswedan 2007).

This paper mainly focuses on why regional violence is increasing in the post-Soeharto era. The central questions addressed are as follows: Does the regionalism of political and administrative power promote violence? How far does decentralization affect identity-based violence? Why should the rise of religious sentiments and identity politics be

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1 In 1997, many Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia suffered the worst financial crisis and affected the national economy.

considered a critical test for Indonesia's socio-politics and decisive for the progress of Indonesia's democracy? Will the approach taken during the 2017 Jakarta election set a new measure on local politics in Indonesia? How it will affect the local politics across the country, especially in regions that have had experiences with conflicts based on religion and ethnicity?

The article's first section relates to progress in Indonesia's democratic reform, with a focus on the challenges of regionalism in the post-Soeharto era. It also examines why religion and ethnicity have rapidly escalated as political issues during the implementation of local autonomy and decentralization. The second section focuses on the impact of religious and ethnic sentiments on local politics, mainly based on post-1998 election results in post-conflict districts (e.g., Poso, Sampit, Sambas, Maluku, and North Maluku). The article then discusses the approach that both religious groups and leaders and the government have taken to this matter. It concludes by exploring challenges and opportunities that Indonesia is facing in relation to these issues.

METHODOLOGY

This article attempts to answer the questions above by using qualitative methods to examine the wave of political identity in Indonesia, including the role of religious and ethnicity sentiments within the process of democratization, local autonomy, and decentralization. It mainly relies on primary data collected through interviews, although secondary data is also used to support the author's arguments. The secondary data mainly stems from the extensive work of Varshney *et al.* (2004), who identified patterns of collective violence in Indonesia between 1990 and 2003.This article uses Indonesia as a case study and focuses on regions that have experienced large-scale violence since 1998. It observes the effect of regional autonomy and democracy on an identity-based conflict that involves religious sentiments.

INDONESIAN DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Indonesia is considered a latecomer to democracy. Delin (2000) and Uhlin (1997) argue that Indonesia can be considered as the third wave of democratization since it started in the 1980s by Asian countries, on the contrary, Effendy (2017) considered Indonesia as the fourth wave of democratization. The Philippines underwent a democratic reform in 1986, South Korea in 1987, Taiwan in 1987, and Mongolia in 1990 (Diamond 2010). Indonesian democratic reform began after the fall of Soeharto in 1998. In general, people made five demands during the 1998 democratic reform: 1) execute constitutional amendments, 2) eradicate corruption, 3) punish or bring Soeharto and his cronies to justice, 4) decentralize, and 5) establish an independent institution focused on corruption eradication.

After the fall of the New Order era, the new administration focused on creating a transitional form of government, moving towards competitive elections, and deconcentrating and decentralizing state power. However, Antlov (2004), Liddle (2001), Prasetyo (2005), and Hidayat (2017) argue that while Indonesia showed confidence at the beginning of its democratic practices, the country's new democracy is still fragile. This has resulted in various disputes, mainly at the local level. This chapter explores regionalism in the post-Soeharto era and challenges related to religion and ethnicity being used as political issues during this period.

Regionalism in the Post-Soeharto Era

Crouch (2010) contends that Indonesia transformed its highly centralized structure into one that is highly decentralized rapidly, whereas most other countries have decentralized incrementally. Indonesia also arguably has the most daring decentralization policy among developing countries. However, the country's sudden change in political structure has had side effects that have led to confusion and controversy, which have in turn generated resistance inspired by ideological, pragmatic, and interest-based considerations (Crouch 2010, 88).

Moreover, facts indicate that many incidents of identity-based violence have occurred in Indonesia since 1998. Different explanations for these incidents exist, including that they are a side effect of the local autonomy and decentralization implemented by the post-Soeharto government. Some also claim that they have resulted from the prevailing sense of fear and insecurity that accompanies this transfer of authority and encourages new or established local thugs and militias (Davidson 2005; Kristiansen 2003; MacDougall 2007). Nordholt (2002) argues on different grounds and criticizes the military's role during the post-1998 riots. He asserts that the army has interests in maintaining an unstable political and security situation in Indonesia and arguably wants to discredit the non-military presidents[2] (seeing as Soeharto had a background as the army general).

This unstable situation increases polarization within the society. Religion, ethnicity, social class, and race have also been politicized, which has sparked riots in many places in Indonesia (including Sambas in 1999, Maluku in 1999, Jakarta in 1998, Poso in 1998, and Sampit in 2001) and separatist movements in Aceh and Papua. However, it is not limited to the reasons mentioned earlier. For example, many factors contributed to how the conflict in North Maluku spread and why related riots occurred. The battle among local elites is the most reliable explanation of why the conflict happened. Since the province had just been established in 2001, local elites were fighting to obtain power. Moreover, the advancement of local autonomy itself had altered local political constellations (Davidson 2005).

Indonesians had three decades of experience with autocratic government and were used to the central government holding power exclusively. The sudden change to local autonomy was a complete surprise, since the implementation of democratized government was much more difficult and complicated. Scepticism about local autonomy's ideas and

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2 After the fall of the Soeharto who previously was a general of army, Indonesia was led by non-military Presidents (i.e. Presidents Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati Soekarnoputri). Nordholt argues that the army has interests in maintaining an unstable political and security situation in Indonesia and arguably wants to discredit these non-military presidents which aims to bring the greatness back to the army.

reform capacities hit a high point in the first two years after its imple-
mentation (Pratikno 2005).

Moreover, Pratikno (2005) argues that decentralized government is
the most appropriate political arrangement for Indonesia given that it
is a genuinely massive country and is incredibly diverse in relation to
size, religion, ethnicity, and race. Decentralized government offers great
opportunities for many provinces in Indonesia but it was poorly imple-
mented (Hidayat 2017). Moreover, local autonomy enables political de-
cisions to be made at the local level. As such, the central government
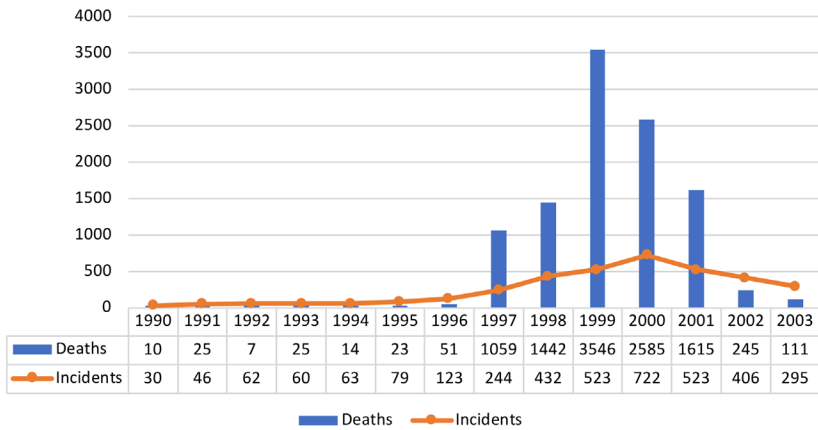needs to provide support to improve democratic practices at this level.

Reaction to Democratization in the Early Years

During its early years of implementation, democratization resulted in
chaos in many parts of Indonesia. Numerous incidents received im-
mense public attention and somehow incited similar events in many
other regions. Everything started in 1998, with the anti-Chinese senti-
ment in Jakarta. This hatred of the Indonesian Chinese ethnic group
spread across Indonesia (e.g., to Medan, Surabaya, and Sambas) until
at least 1999. In some parts of the country (such as Poso and Maluku),
the hatred was aimed at Indonesian Christians. To some extent, in
Maluku and Papua the hatred was associated to oppose the separatist
movements.

Varshney et al. (2004) calculated the number of collective violence
incidents in Indonesia. Their data reveals that the number increased
mainly between 1997 and 2001, when approximately 10.247 people
died in over 2.444 incidents. These deaths mainly occurred due to
religious and ethnic fights, which Varshney *et al.* (2004) describe as
ethno-communal violence.

Figure 1
Deaths and Incidents of Violence in Indonesia (1990-2003)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Deaths	10	25	7	25	14	23	51	1059	1442	3546	2585	1615	245	111
Incidents	30	46	62	60	63	79	123	244	432	523	722	523	406	295

Source: Varshney *et al.,* (2004).

Moreover, of the number of deaths presented in the figure above, nearly 9.612 Indonesians died due to ethno-communal fights that occurred in 599 incidents. Half of the victims (5.452 people in 433 incidents) were killed in religious fights between Muslims and Christians. Furthermore, 4.122 people died as a result of ethnic sentiments and hatred, with most victims (1.259 people in 32 incidents) killed as a result of violence towards Indonesian Chinese. The fights between Madurese and Dayak/Malay that occurred in Sambas and Sampit led to 2.764 deaths in a total of 70 incidents (see Table 1 below for details).

Table 1
Distribution of Ethno-communal Violence (1990-2003)

	Deaths	%	Incidents	%
Ethno-communal	9.612	100%	599	100%
Ethnic	4.122	43%	140	23%
Anti-Chinese	1.259	13%	32	5%
Madurese vs Dayak/Malay	2.764	29%	70	12%
Ethnic-others	99	1%	38	6%
Religious (Muslims vs Christians)	5.452	57%	433	72%
Sectarian	38	0%	26	4%
Intra Muslims	38	0%	22	4%
Intra Christians	-		3	1%

Source: Varshney *et al.,* (2004).

Varshney *et al.* (2004) also analysed the provincial distribution of the collective violence that occurred in Indonesia between 1990 and 2003. Seven provinces with the highest victims were coming from the province that had the ethno-communal violence (i.e., violence resulting from religious or ethnicity reasons such as the ones occurred in Maluku, Sambas, Sampit, Poso, and Jakarta). Table 2 below reveals that North Maluku had the most victims' due to ethno-communal violence: 2.794 deaths in a total of 72 incidents; Maluku is second, with 2.046 deaths in 332 incidents. These two provinces had to deal with fights between Muslims and Christians from 1999 to 2002. West Kalimantan, Jakarta, and Central Kalimantan followed these provinces (in that order) with regard to the provincial distribution of the collective violence that occurred in Indonesia between 1990 and 2003.

Table 2
Provincial Distribution on Collective Violence in Indonesia (1990-2003)

Province	Database II			
	Deaths	%	Incidents	%
North Maluku	2.794	25,0%	72	1,7%
Maluku	2.046	18,3%	332	7,8%
West Kalimantan	1.515	13,6%	78	1,8%
Jakarta	1.322	11,8%	178	4,2%
Central Kalimantan	1.284	11,5%	62	1,5%
Central Sulawesi	669	6,0%	101	2,4%
West Java	256	2,3%	871	20,4%
East Java	254	2,3%	655	15,3%
Central Java	165	1,5%	506	11,9%
South Sulawesi	118	1,1%	223	5,2%
West Nusa Tenggara	109	1,0%	198	4,6%
Riau	100	0,9%	165	3,9%
East Nusa Tenggara	89	0,8%	55	1,3%
Banten	37	0,3%	112	2,6%
Total 14 Provinces	10.758	96,4%	3.608	84,5%
Other 14 Provinces	402	3,6%	662	15,5%
Indonesia	11.160	100,0%	4.270	100,0%

Source: Varshney *et al.* (2004).

The number of deaths, especially of those that occurred during the democratization process and in the early years of decentralization, is very surprising. Numerous scholars hoped that the democratization and decentralization policy would result in peaceful outcomes for many Indonesians, who had been living in fear under an authoritarian and

dictatorial regime for 32 years. Jusuf Kalla claimed.[3] that many factors resulted in the post-1998 conflicts. For example, he asserts that most Indonesians are still adapting to democratic practices and that the violence that occurred in many parts of Indonesia was just a side effect of and reaction towards the democratization process.

RELIGION AND ETHNICITY AS POLITICAL ISSUES

The riots that involved religion and ethnicity as the roots of violence (namely in Sambas in 1999, in Poso in 1998, in Jakarta in 1998, in Moluccas in 1999, and in Sampit in 2001; for Europe case see Soeseno 2012) occurred during the democratic transition period in Indonesia. Although these conflicts did not stem from one thing in particular, ethnicity and religious sentiments played the most significant role. Local politics has somehow shaped religion and ethnicity into political issues following decentralization.

Discussions about religion and ethnicity in the era of decentralization are complicated seeing as the Indonesian people are diverse. Moreover, religion can be viewed as a boundary marker of ethnic identity in many local contexts in Indonesia, given that many religious and ethnic boundaries were crossed during the violent conflicts that occurred in Indonesia (mainly after Soeharto's fall in 1998) (Miichi 2014). However, the disputes mainly took place during the beginning of the democratization process and arguably declined after decentralization was implemented. Furthermore, the practice of democracy, local autonomy, and decentralization creates competition for power and patronage among political actors. Most political contestation at the local level is based on religious affiliations and identities; it only occasionally touches on ideas, concepts, and education levels.

Moreover, Sidel (2006) argues that local constellations of religious authority and political economy combined with the 1999 elections, decentralization, and redrawing of administrative boundaries (pemekaran) created uncertainty and anxiety at local levels. Such issues of

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3 Interview with Jusuf Kalla, 9 November 2017.

ambiguity set the same pattern in the violent conflicts that occurred in Poso and Ambon between 1998 and 2001. Collective violence among religions involved armed groups attacking neighbourhoods and villages populated by believers of an opposing religious faith.

Miichi (2014) claims that the politicization and mobilization of ethnicity have declined since the implementation of decentralization. However, he also asserts that soft non-violent conflict has been prevalent instead, especially following the implementation of direct elections. He also contends that the soft non-violent conflict was due to local-level political actors' tendency to use and exploit *adat* (local custom) and the sentiments of indigenous people. At some point, candidates also used religions as their primary symbols.

It is also interesting to observe that before the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, candidates in local elections used religious and ethnic sentiments against candidates who shared their own beliefs (mostly Islamic). These Muslim candidates self-proclaimed and practiced an 'I am more pious than you' attitude and never attacked opponents with beliefs different from their own. In Jakarta's 2017 gubernatorial election, the religious and ethnic sentiments were used by the supporters of Muslim candidates against a candidate with different beliefs and ethnicities. The election had three candidates: two Muslims—Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY) and Anies Baswedan (ABW)—and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok). Even though the two Muslim candidates never attacked Ahok personally, the author argues that they never defended Ahok or stood up to their supporters who attacked him based on his ethnicity and beliefs. It is difficult to deny that both AHY and ABW gained from their supporters' attacks on Ahok. Indeed, a political survey conducted by Lingkaran Survei Indonesia from late October to early November 2016 revealed that ABW gained the most from the attacks on Ahok's belief. Aside from the issue of blasphemy (which makes Ahok an enemy of a few Muslim communities), plenty of unhealthy attacks on Ahok allegedly came from the other two candidates' supporters.

Moreover, as noted previously the rise of religious sentiments during the 2017 Jakarta election split the nation into two camps: nationalist

ideology and religious ideology. It is arguable that this separation will sooner or later give rise to two dangerous practices in the society: Islamic exceptionalism and a government that rules with an iron fist. In this article, Islamic exceptionalism is defined by author as a privilege that is automatically earned by Muslims in a Muslim-majority nation. This privilege leads to destruction and disputes if used unwisely. As such, the government must manage and oversee the dynamics and development of Islamic exceptionalism so that everyone in the society can live in peace. Islamic exceptionalism does not occur in a homogeneous nation, but it can create trouble in a vast and diverse state such as Indonesia. The dispute between nationalist and religious ideologies must be handled by developing more space for discussion and creating room for people to get to know each other.

Diagram 1
Consequences of the Conflict Violence

Source: Yanuarti *et al.,* (2005).

Conflicts due to religion and ethnicity cause plenty of trouble, as the below diagram demonstrates. Every conflict creates psychological pressure among the involved parties. In this phase, the conflicting parties (especially the victims among them) feel hopeless, helpless, bitter, guilty, and depressed. The second phase is social disruption, which is usually characterized by social problems (e.g., increased unemployment and refugees, an excessive number of orphans and widows, and social

disruptions to daily life). The third phase, material damage and loss, is characterized by large-scale destruction of public and private property, especially places of worship.

Local Politics

Hadiz (2004) argues that the politics of money and political violence are essential tools for securing political positions at the local level. Most political violence after 1998 and during the era of decentralization regularly used religious and ethnic and initially began through harassment and violent intimidation. However, although the impact of using religious and ethnic sentiments in local politics is terrifying, do such sentiments really affect election results at the local level? This section focuses on the regions of Poso, Sambas, Sampit, and Maluku, which experienced post-1998 disputes that had religion and ethnicity as the roots of associated violence.

Moreover, as the data presented in the previous section explains (see figure 1, table 1, and table 2), ethno-communal violence that was rooted in religion and ethnicity occurred in certain provinces and regions in Indonesia. This notably included the areas of North Maluku; Maluku; Sambas, West Kalimantan; Sampit, Central Kalimantan; and Poso, Central Sulawesi. This section discusses the impacts that fights over religion and ethnicity have had on local elections and examines whether fights over religion influence voters' decisions during elections.

This section explores voters' tendencies in post-conflict regions, specifically whether they vote based on their religion. The results of post-1998 legislative elections in Poso, Moluccas, Sampit, and Sambas are presented in the tables below. These results indicate the total seats that each party won in each election. Long established parties such as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* – PDIP) and the party of the Functional Groups (*Partai Golongan Karya* – Golkar) were consistent in each election, although, United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* – PPP) did not get enough votes consistently. However, the parties established after 1998 such as the the National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional*

– PAN) and the National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* – PKB) were collected unsteady voters. New parties were established after the 1999 election, including the Democratic Party (Demokrat); the Great Indonesia Movement Party (*Gerakan Indonesia Raya* - Gerindra); the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* - PKS), which separated from the Justice Party (PK); the People's Conscience Party (*Hati Nurani Rakyat* - Hanura); and the National Democracy Party (*Nasional Demokrat* - Nasdem). Numerous other political parties participated in elections between 1999 and 2014, but most of them did not obtain sufficient votes in the calculation of votes in the national level. As such, they are combined in an 'Others' column below.

Table 3
The Result of Local Elections in Poso from 2004-2014

	1999	2004	2009	2014
PDI-P	5	2	2	3
Golkar	19	4	4	5
PKB	-	-	-	-
PPP	5	1	1	1
PAN	-	1	1	2
Demokrat	-	8	8	8
Gerindra	-	1	1	4
PKS	-	2	1	2
Hanura	-	1	1	2
Nasdem	-	-	-	2
PDS	-	3	3	-
United Faction	7	-	-	-
ABRI Faction	4	-	-	-
Others	-	7	8	1

Source: Author's compilation. Total seats are 30.

Table 4
The Result of Local Elections in Maluku from 2004- 2014

	1999	2004	2009	2014
PDI-P		10	8	7
Golkar		11	8	6
PKB		-	1	3
PPP		4	2	1
PAN		2	2	1
Demokrat		3	7	6
Gerindra	-	-	1	5
PKS		5	6	6
Hanura	-	-	3	4
Nasdem	-	-	-	4
Others		10	7	2

Source: Author's compilation. Total seats are 45. Limited
data available on the election in 1999.

Table 5
The Result of Local Elections in North Maluku

	1999	2009	2014
PDI-P	-	5	7
Golkar	-	10	8
PKB	-	-	1
PPP	-	2	1
PAN	-	4	3
Demokrat	-	5	3
Gerindra	-	1	3
PKS	-	4	5
Hanura	-	2	4
Nasdem	-	-	5
Others	-	12	5

Source: Author's compilation. In 1999, North Maluku was part of Maluku.
The new province of North Maluku was established in 2001. Limited data are
available on the election in 2004. From 2004- 2014, total seats are 45.

Table 6
The Result of Local Elections in Sambas

	2009	2014
PDI-P	6	6
Golkar	9	7
PKB	-	-
PPP	2	4
PAN	4	6
Demokrat	4	4
Gerindra	1	5
PKS	3	4
Hanura	4	3
Nasdem	-	4
Others	12	2

Source: KPU. From election in 2009 and 2014. Limited data are available
on the election in 1999 and 2004. The total seats are 45.

Table 7
The Result of Local Elections in Sampit

	2009	2014
PDI-P	8	8
Golkar	7	6
PKB	3	3
PPP	-	3
PAN	3	3
Demokrat	5	6
Gerindra	4	5
PKS	-	1
Hanura	-	2
Nasdem	4	3

Source: KPU. From election in 2009 and 2014. Limited data are available
on the election in 1999 and 2004. The total seats are 35.

The above tables illustrate the local politics situation in districts that had conflicts with religion and ethnicity as the roots of their violence. Even though these conflicts were based on beliefs and ethnicity, local voters did not trust representatives from parties with a religious background. Among the above-mentioned parties, PPP, PKB, and PKS reflect predominantly Islamic values, while PDIP, Golkar, Demokrat, Gerindra, Hanura, PAN, and Nasdem lean more towards nationalist values. However, it is interesting that Prosperous Peace Party (*Partai Damai Sejahtera* - PDS) voters were consistent between 2004 and 2014. This party is known for their Christian-democratic values.

The same phenomenon occurred in relation to the leadership of each region. Poso, Maluku, North Maluku, Sampit, and Sambas have all had at least three terms of leadership since the conflicts. Poso has had two leaders from Golkar and one from Demokrat. In Maluku, both Golkar and PDI-P have had the governorship. In North Maluku, the head of Demokrat led the province for 10 years and the current governor is from PKS. In Sambas, a non-partisan leader headed the district for 10 years. Sampit was led by a retired army general, followed by a non-partisan leader who headed the district from 2000 to 2010.

Reaction Towards Religious Sentiments

Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, most Indonesians (including the country's founding fathers) have fallen into one of two main ideologies: nationalist or religious (Feith 1962; Feith & Castles 2007; Hosen 2005; Elson 2009).[4] However, the ideological differences between religious Islamists and nationalists have recently become blurred. It is arguably correct to assume that both the nationalist and religious ideologies have the chance to manage their ideology, as long as each side recognizes the legitimacy of the other within the umbrella of democracy. In

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4 Please see the Indonesian political thinking 1945-1965 and the decline of constitutional democracy in Indonesia. There was also a plenty of discussion on the debate on Jakarta Charter 1945 controversy which resulted seven words were removed. These seven words translated to English as 'with the obligation for adherents of Islam to follow *syari'ah* or Islamic law. This removal of *syari'ah* from Indonesian constitution become the basis action for many Islamic groups and Islamic ideology in Indonesia to modify the national constitution.

democratic practices, an opportunity exists to promote prospects for reconciliation between these two conflicting sides.

The first principle in Indonesia's constitution is known as *Pancasila*, which asserts that believes in one and only one god. This principle recognizes that Indonesians are religious; however, it also clearly states that Indonesia is not a country based on a particular religion. All Indonesians can practice their beliefs freely and guaranteed by the constitution. However, Indonesia is also a Muslim-majority nation; indeed, it is the largest democratic Muslim country in the world. Being in the majority somehow places Indonesian Muslims in a favourable position within the country, especially in terms of political opportunities.

Moreover, the government manages the progress of democratization by ensuring freedom of the press and regulating freedom of speech under a law on electronic information and transaction that is known as *Undang-Undang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik* (UU ITE) or Law No. 11 of 2008. This law specifically mentions the regulation of freedom of speech, with the exception of hate speech, slander, defamation, and blasphemy. In particular, it explicitly forbids any form of hate speech regarding ethnicity, religion, race, or intergroup relations (*Suku Agama Ras Antar golongan* – SARA) (Fadhli 2015). The government also established Law No. 40 of 2008, which manages the abolishment of racial and ethnic discrimination.

These two regulations have been criticized for having double standards that allow them to be used against anyone, especially those who continuously critique the government. Some articles in these laws are considered draconian, as they can even be used against people who have done no harm and just aim to voice their concern over certain issues. For example, a worker told a story about how he was being treated by his company on social media (including Facebook); after the post went viral, the company sued the worker under the UU ITE. Cases have also resulted from the misuse of certain articles of the UU ITE. For example, Fadli Rahim, a civil servant from Gowa, was sentenced eight months in prison for ostensibly insulting the Regent of Gowa in

a post to a group in the Line application;[5] however, his post was just a critique of the government. The Rahim case was preceded by the Prita Mulyasari case. Mulyasari wrote a private email about service at the Omni Hospital that noted she was being misdiagnosed and mistreated. Her complaint went viral, and she was eventually jailed following a civil defamation suit (Dhani 2016). It may be correct to argue that the two regulations are suppressing freedom of speech in the society and have plenty of loopholes that can be used to attack anyone: 'Once the government is in possession of a hammer, it will treat everything as if it were a nail' (The Jakarta Post 2017).

Moreover, one issue that should be of concern is that local autonomy results in the central and local governments not seeing eye to eye with each other. Both parties have their own interpretations of the laws and the regulations, which often leads to ambiguity at the grassroots level. Regulations and decisions by the central government can lead to violent conflict to some extent, due to local elites fighting to obtain influential political positions in society. An example is the creation of a new province in Maluku. North Maluku and Maluku were originally one province, but in 1999 then-President Habibie wanted to create a new province to separate Maluku's two main groups of islands (Pieris 2004). The northern islands became the new province of North Maluku, while the southern islands remained the Maluku province. The creation of the new northern province caused local elites to fight over the capital and several influential positions at provincial and district levels. These local elites' ambitions for key administrative posts resulted in the use of religious and ethnic sentiments and thus made violent conflicts unavoidable.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The challenges related to preventing a wave of religious sentiments in local politics are complicated. Ever since local autonomy has been implemented, religious and ethnic sentiments have been inevitable in

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5 Line is a freeware application for communication.

local politics. Indonesians, especially at the provincial level, have had high expectations that local autonomy will actively contribute to solving local issues. Indeed, they once considered local autonomy as a means to help their regions prosper—especially those regions with promising natural resources.

However, the implementation of local autonomy has been accompanied by some challenges. The main problem of local autonomy is that it creates an opportunity for new local 'kings' to be established within a region. Moreover, decentralization and local autonomy have provided more political space for local people to participate. Local leaders tend to be corrupt, and statistics show that the practice of money politics is increasing (Pratikno 2005). Scholars of democracy often use three elements when they evaluate democracy: openness, fairness, and competitiveness (Mietzner & Aspinall 2010; Diamond & Morlino 2005). Moreover, Mietzner and Aspinall (2010) argue that political participation remains low at local levels in Indonesia because many transactions related to money politics still occur and candidates manipulate voters' religious and ethnic loyalties during elections.

Furthermore, Indonesia requires decentralization to cede authority to regional governments in all fields except foreign policy, defence, security, monetary policy, the legal system, and religious affairs (Aspinall & Fealy 2003, 3). Moreover, this exception of power leaving out provincial leaders' authority in strategic policy because their power will be prosecuted by mayors and regents at their levels. At the provincial level, leaders' roles will be to mediate disputes between districts and represent the central government locally. As such, local autonomy focuses on district and municipality levels rather than on provincial government (Rasyid 2003).

Furthermore, to gain voters local leaders will use all instruments present in local autonomy and decentralization, including money politics and political identity in local politics (which contains religious, ethnic, and racial sentiments). It has been almost two decades since local autonomy and decentralization were first implemented in Indo-

nesia. What have we been learned so far? Moreover, how influential is Jakarta on local politics in Indonesia?

Facts show that in the past seven years, Jakarta has still played an essential role in politics in Indonesia. Jakarta has been the miniature and an example of how local politics operate. The practice of decentralization is still examined on the basis of Jakarta's perspective. Rasyid (2003) argues that the weakness of local autonomy is that it lacks neutral mediation to provide an independent judgment of the quality of local regulations.

Moreover, local autonomy increases the costs of politics. As a result, political actors will do anything to get into power. This involves using any instruments they have, including religious sentiments. Indonesians are still primarily driven by their religious, ethnic, social, and regional affiliations (Jones 2010; King 2003; Baswedan 2007).

CONCLUSION

Indonesia started its democratic reform after Soeharto's fall in 1998, and new democratic practices were followed by the implementation of local autonomy and decentralization. The democratic practices focus on a transitional reform of government, route competitive elections and, the expansion of local government powers related to political decisions and financial ability. However, since Indonesians live in a vast diversity, local autonomy and decentralization have numerous challenges and direct impacts. One such challenge is the struggle over crucial political positions, which results in an accelerated use of political identity in local politics—including religious and ethnic sentiments.

Local autonomy and decentralization create opportunities, but at the same time they also create anxiety. This anxiety and the above-described power struggles have together resulted in collective violence involving ethno-communal fights between religion communities in which armed groups have attacked neighbourhoods and destroyed villages populated by believers of another religious faith.

Indonesia experienced violent conflicts after the fall of Soeharto, namely in Jakarta and Poso in 1998, Moluccas and Sambas in 1999,

and Sampit in 2001. Even though these conflicts did not have a single element as the roots of their violence, religious and ethnic sentiments played the most significant role. Candidates previously used religious sentiments to attack candidates with the same beliefs. Unfortunately, in Jakarta's 2017 gubernatorial election they were instead used against someone who a different belief and ethnicity. The polarization of Indonesia's society—mainly its majority and minority populations—can thus not be avoided. This polarization creates problems in society, including psychological pressure, social disruption, material damage and loss, and victims from the violent conflicts which occurred as a result of polarization.

The results of using religious sentiments in national and local politics have been immense after Soeharto's fall. A total of 9,612 deaths have resulted from ethno-communal fights that occurred over 599 incidents (as explained earlier in table 1). Moreover, each presidential election after 1998 has involved religious sentiments. Nonetheless, this article determined that the high levels of religious sentiments used during elections did not affect voters. Since 1998, political parties that have religious values as their core principles have not won an election. Indonesians instead tend to choose nationalist or close to religious-nationalist parties. Moreover, voters in districts that have experienced violent conflicts due to religious and ethnic sentiments (e.g., Poso, Maluku, North Maluku, Sambas, and Sampit) have not elected either religious parties or religious leaders.

One of the primary critiques of decentralization is that the central government only provides a false autonomy to each province. This is because in practice, Jakarta as the central government can abolish local regulations. This authority is such a false hope to the local autonomy since the local leaders in the local levels cannot maturely decide what to do in their regions. The decentralization in Indonesia is required to cede authority to regional governments in all fields apart from foreign policy, defence, security, monetary policy, the legal system, and religious affairs.

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