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**The Politicization of Religion on Facebook Social Media in Elections  
Governor of North Sumatra in 2018**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the politicization of religion through social media Facebook that occurred during the election campaign for the Governor and Deputy Governor of North Sumatra from January to June 2018. This was followed by two pairs of candidates, namely Eramas and Djoss. There are three research questions posed: 1) How is the politicization of religion on Facebook social media in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, 2) How is the candidate pair politicizing religion through Facebook social media, 3) the relationship between the politicization of religion and Facebook social media. By using qualitative research methods the researchers traced and collected data through in-depth interviews, as well as observation and documentation. The results of this study reveal that: *first*, the construction of issues that link religious issues in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election is interactive. Where there are two or more Facebook users who are involved in the interaction of exchanging messages and the role as communicators and interacting communicants are in full control of the timing, content, actions of communication and the text to be disseminated. *Second*, departing from the public opinion that was built, each candidate in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, both the Eramas couple and the Djoss pair used buzzers in their campaign activities. In further battles, there was a crystallization of issues that linked everything related to religion on Facebook. *Third*, the game of religious symbols cannot be separated from the hope of gaining support from a specific mass base. The construction of these symbols is deliberately presented to inspire potential voters with the form of pride and fanaticism of religion, ethnicity, and race on social media Facebook.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Facebook social media has offered opportunities for political actors to be able to attract voters, interact directly with the public as well as form opinions in the public sphere. Differently, social media has also made political actors a

laughing stock or even insults from the public, mainly related to practical politics.

Social media *facebook* is further described as an ideal means and information base to find out public opinion about policies and political positions, in addition to building community support for politicians who are campaigning. The ability to create a space for dialogue between politicians and the public as well as attract the interest of novice voters/young voters makes social media increasingly important for politicians to attract the hearts of the main voters related to the issue of primordialism (Chavez, 2012).

In the context of Islamic political history, political behavior that leads to the issue of SARA has occurred since the beginning of the development of Islam (*Sadrul Islam*). The kings (*imamah*) and caliphs tried to maintain their power in various ways. One way that is often used is to interpret the verses of the Newspaper and Hadith politically according to their political interests. Among them is the verse which reads "*obey Allah and the rulers among you*". The commentators say that whatever ruler or leader must be obeyed no matter how they lead. This verse was later called by the critics of the interpretation of the "*ayat al-umara*" (the verse of the rulers). In addition to the politicization of the interpretation of the *al-Umara* verse, there was also ethnic sentiment (tribe or bani) between the *Banu Quraysh*, *Bani Kalb*, *Bani Hanifah*, and *Bani Amir bin Sha'sha'ah* or between the tribes of muhajirin and Ansar in the economic field (*tijarah* or *ghanimah*). , political and socio-cultural (Yusuf, 1963).

From there arose divisions between groups ( *tribes* ) with one. This interest is only to maintain the political interests of each tribe. The political elites in the realm of the caliphate no longer consider the socio-political reality, that Islam is a *multi-interpretative religion*, by giving space to other interpretations to provide a broad interpretation of a problem that occurs (Nadir, 2005).

Moreover, the percentage of religion in North Sumatra is :

**Table. 1.**  
**Percentage of Religion in North Sumatra**

No	Religion	Percentage
1.	Islam	66.09%
2.	Protestant Christian	27.03%
3.	Catholic	6.97%
4.	Hindu	6.11%
5.	Buddha	2.34%
6.	Kong Hu Chu	0.01%

Djarot is a former deputy governor of DKI Jakarta who later paired with Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in the 2016 DKI Jakarta gubernatorial election. This situation has automatically had a lot of impact or influence on the people of North Sumatra. How about the 212 peaceful demonstrations that raised the issue of Islam and hate speech, which in the end wanted Ahok to lose in the DKI Jakarta Pilkada because they were considered to have insulted the Newspaper. This means that Djarot's presence in North Sumatra as a person who had formed a coalition with Ahok made it easy for some people to take advantage of and spread religious issues.

This situation was also used by the winning team of Edi Rahmayadi and Musa Rajeckshah in their campaign strategy to gain votes from the people in North Sumatra. Utilizing the issue of religious identity which is still warm and still embedded in the public's memory of the events that occurred in the capital city of Indonesia. Take advantage of the moment of action of the 212 movements that just happened and learn and adopt the victory of the Anies-Sandi pair in the DKI Jakarta Pilkada.

The use of religious issues for the Edy Rahmayadi-Musa Rajeckshah team was quite obvious. This argument is strengthened by the presence of Ustad Abdul Somad who regularly attends lectures in North Sumatra ahead of the election, showing that religious issues are very strong in the 2018 Gubernatorial Election. The implementation of the morning prayer in the congregation leads to voting, even on voting day is part of an effort to awaken identity politics in North Sumatra.



Picture 1.

From Subuh Congregation to TPS, source from facebook account @Syamsul Huda Johan

Religious issues that occurred in the gubernatorial election were very strong ahead of the election day. Mainly related to the movement for the morning prayer in the congregation before leaving for the polling station (*Ustadz Somad Imbau Shola Subuh Berjamaah Sebelum Ketps*, 2019). almost the same as the Fajr Congregation Movement that occurred in the 2016 DKI Jakarta Pilkada.

Meanwhile, the Djarot Saiful Hidayat-Sihar Sitorus pair also played with religious issues combined with ethnicity issues. Don't miss it before Eid Al-Fitr 1439 in 2018 when the invitation for Takbir Keliling circulated which was held by the Djarot-Sihar couple team.



Picture 2.

Call for Takbir to Go Around Djarot Saiful Hidayat, source from the @Relawan Yasona Laoly facebook account

Furthermore, after the disqualification of JR Saragih from his candidacy for the 2018 Gubernatorial Election, practically only Sihar Sitorus himself is a Christian candidate. This situation was exploited by the Djarot-Sihar Pair Team by meeting with church officials, especially the Huria Kristen Batak Toba (HKBP) church in Pearaja, North Tapanuli.



Picture 3.

**Sihar Sitorus meeting with HKBP officials at his office in Pearaja Tarutung, North Tapanuli. Source facebook account @Anwar Saragih**

The 2018 North Sumatra election cannot be separated from the issue of politicization of religion that is spread on *Facebook social media*, both from the Eramas couple and the Djoss couple. In the political context of a multi-ethnic area such as North Sumatra during the Pilkada, the identification of ethnic and religious identities becomes very interesting because both pairs of candidates openly use both ethnic and religious identities to support them. Based on this background, the author wants to research: " *The politicization of religion on Facebook Social Media in the 2018 North Sumatra Governor election*".

## RESEARCH METHODE

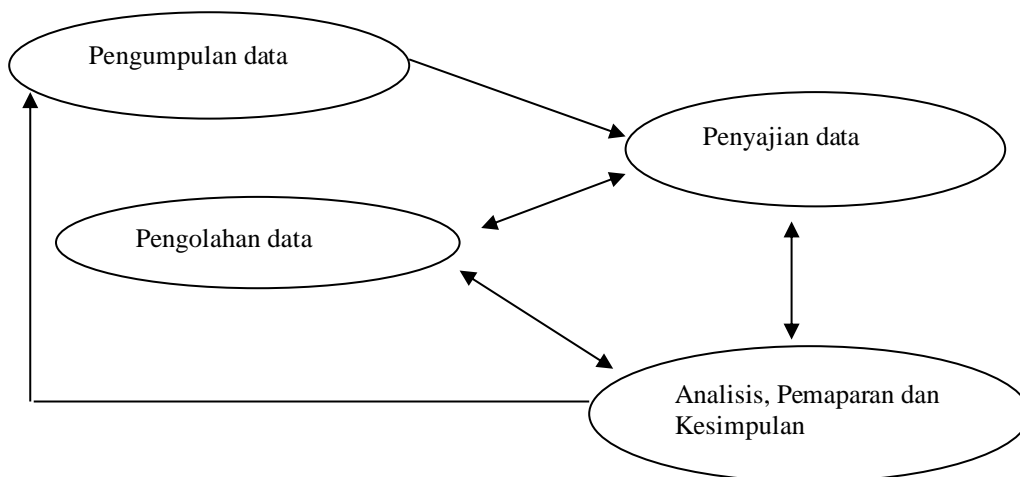
This type of research is qualitative, namely research that is not carried out by using statistical formulas and symbols. Study This is also a goal to explain the phenomenon with deep through data collection. So in the study, this more emphasized the problem of (quality) data, not the amount (quantity) of data. Referring to Strauss and Corbin qualitative research is a type of research in which the discovery procedure is not carried out using statistical or quantification procedures. In this case, qualitative research is research about a person's life, stories, and behavior and also about organizational functions, social movements, or reciprocal relationships (Hadari, 1996).

As for the approach study, this is a *descriptive analysis*. According to Isaac and Michael as quoted by Jalaluddin Grace the approach *descriptive* aims to describe by systematic fact or characteristics population certain or field certainly by factual and accurate. Words other, approach *descriptive* is something method research that sees the object, image by systematic, factual and accurate about investigated facts and results could use for taking future

decisions (Jalaludin Rahmat, 1995). Approach *descriptive* also aims to get description deep about speech, writing, and behavior that can be observed from something individual group Public nor organization in certain *settings* under study from corner comprehensive view (R. Ruslan, 2004).

Data collection techniques are carried out with Interviews, Documentation, and Observation. Whereas data analysis can see in the picture following this.

**Picture 3.**  
**Huberman and Miles. interactive model data analysis**



If it is associated with a problem, the researcher will collect primary data and secondary data obtained from ( *data collecting* ) then the data is processed and organized ( *data reduction* ). At this stage, the researcher classifies the data that can be displayed and which ones do not need to be displayed. After that, the data can be presented and used or made in a short description sentence based on the data obtained. It is continued to provide an overview so that in the end a conclusion is drawn, even though conclusions have been obtained from the beginning, their nature can still change according to the evidence found and supported during the research period and subsequent data collection.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Politicization of Religion on Facebook Social Media in the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election

The phenomenon of politicization of religion can be explained using the theory of populism, Islamic populism for example. Islamic populism, in turn, is changing direction into a new model of Islamic populism used by a group of populists who are members of inter-class alliances to gain power. The definition of populism has not been clearly defined by scientists, but there are at least

three variations in defining populism, namely populism as an ideology, populism style, and populism as a strategy. The populism that occurred in the 2018 gubernatorial election is populism which is interpreted as a strategy, namely populist issues are played by political actors to bring down their political opponents and to win the competition in the Pilkada.

The fight that uses the issue of SARA in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, provides benefits for both pairs of candidates, both pairs of candidates have differences in ethnicity or religion. These differences are considered as entry points for approaches to voters. During the campaign, Eramas highlighted the Islamic side of the image. For example, when Eramas continued the movement for the morning prayer in the congregation before voting day. Then came the Islamic People's Congress (KUI) which was held in Medan from late March to early April 2018 and was attended by many figures such as Amien Rais, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, to Gatot Nurmantyo. Likewise, the Djoss pair defined themselves as a coalition of Javanese and Batak representing Javanese Islam and Batak Christianity as the majority population in North Sumatra which when combined amounted to approximately 74 percent. candidate pairs Edy Rahmayadi and Musa Rajekshah (Eramas) as well as Djarot and Sihar Sitorus both carried out the politicization of religion.

Form formation of the politicization of religion such as :

1. Formation of Religious Issues on Facebook
1. Distortion Information
2. Manipulation Information
3. Sentiment Against the Party Political bearer Djarot-Sihar

#### **Practice The Politicization of Religion by the Candidate Pair for the Governor of North Sumatra in 2018.**

The construction of the politicization of religion in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election cannot be separated from how each candidate ultimately uses religious symbols to mobilize the masses, stir up religious emotions, build power in parliament, and so on, but the goal is for political interests and to restore each other's image. each candidate pair to be considered part of that religious group.

The campaign by politicizing religion, of course, does not emphasize the politics of ideas, ideas, understanding, and so on regarding the 2018 North Sumatra governor election, but becomes pragmatic politics with only electoral interests as output. Where actors or interested parties will make religious issues an object that is understood and published for something related to politics in the fight over who will win the election.

There are many questions about why in the end the issue of religion became the dominant issue in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, even though there are many issues related to elections that are more substantial for their good. However, for voters in the 2018 North Sumatra Pilgub, there is almost no sphere of life that is absent from the influence of religion, including the world of politics such as the implementation of leadership succession both at the legislative and executive levels, from the center to the regions in the provinces, districts and cities in North Sumatra.

Where this is increasingly felt in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election when you see various accounts on Facebook social media are also actively involved in broadcasting advertisements from figures promoted by the success team. Not to forget the candidates for Governor and Deputy Governor from Eramas or Djoss also tried to gain sympathy by spreading charm which ultimately linked that they were very close to Islam or Protestant/Catholic Christianity so that they were chosen by the people of North Sumatra.

In general, the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election also emphasizes that outside of religious issues, online production also takes place offline with candidates attending recitations or services to gain sympathy from mosque congregations or church congregations that emphasize obedience. In the concept of Islam or Christianity, of course, obedience to the leader is taught. The politicization of religion that occurred in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election became a phenomenon following the development of internet technology advances. Even on Facebook today, religious and political issues have become commonplace to be discussed and debated.

Impact in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, each candidate is almost certain to use religious symbols to gain sympathy and support from potential voters. Apart from that, candidates are also required to have integrity, dedication, loyalty to the citizens, and even the capability to lead an area following the teachings of their religion. The assumption that the majority religion is being targeted for politicization is also inevitable. For the community, the practice of politicizing religion seems legitimate because some of them believe that religion and politics are two inseparable things.

The politicization of religion by manipulating the information of each candidate, both the Eramas and the Djoss pairs regarding religious understanding and knowledge, beliefs using propaganda, indoctrination, campaigns, dissemination, socialization in the public domain, reported or interpreted so that there is a migration of understanding, problems and making it appear as if If it is religious knowledge, it becomes a subject that must be understood in order not to violate the campaign rules that led to the ITE Law.



Furthermore, there is a psychological pressure on voters to influence the religious consensus of voters in the 2018 North Sumatra Pilgub to accommodate the interests of something into a political agenda. Seeing the understanding of the politicization of religion in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, in the end, had a negative connotation because of the ways that occurred outside the limits with the manipulation of information and the many *hoaxes* that occurred.

Indeed, the concept of religion and politics can not be separated because politics is an integral part of the teachings of Islam. However, in Islam, there is no justification for the politicization of religion. The politicization of religion, such as using religious symbols in politics, is forbidden. Moreover, his political goals and activities are not at all related to religious political guidance. However, what is forbidden in Islam is the politicization of religion in the sense of using religious symbols in politics, even though the goals and political activities are not at all related to the political guidance of religion.

The politicization of religion has a negative connotation if it is aimed at personal interests where the candidate for governor or deputy governor of North Sumatra visits or invites ulama intending to be considered close to Muslims or to gain votes in the 2018 North Sumatra governor/deputy governor election. So when the candidate approaches the ulama, is the politicization of religion bad or good. It is difficult to judge because judging intentions is not easy, but people will judge.

According to the view of Islam, politics or *siyasa* is the regulation of the affairs of the people at home and abroad. Politics is carried out by the state and the people, because the state directly carries out these arrangements practically, while the people supervise the state in these arrangements. Islamic politics means regulating the affairs of the people at home and abroad with Islamic law. This definition is also taken from the hadiths that show the activities of the authorities, the obligation to correct them, and the importance of taking care of the interests of the Muslims. Islam is the main foothold where the political aspects of Islam come from the Qur'an and Sunnah. He also emphasized that what is forbidden in Islam is the politicization of religion (Jati, 2014).

Thus, if there is the use of religious symbols for political purposes and activities in the gubernatorial election just because of electoral interests, it is not justified because it is part of the politicization of religion. Indeed, every leader that the community wants to elect by the people of North Sumatra in the 2018 Gubernatorial Election has a real work program to attract people's hearts, not by displaying a religious figure for the community to choose by ignoring the values that are important in the election.

## **Analysis of the Impact of Politicizing Religion Through Social Media Facebook on the Candidates for Governor of North Sumatra in 2018**

In studies related to elections and the science of communication in the politics of religious identity, religion is the dominant, if not the only, decisive part of people's lives. There is almost no sphere of life that is absent from the influence of religion, including the world of politics such as the implementation of leadership succession both at the legislative and executive levels, from the center to the regions (Province and Regency/City).

This is even more pronounced when you see various media broadcasting advertisements from figures promoted by political parties. Not to forget the candidates for representatives of the people and candidates for the regions who try to gain sympathy by spreading charm which in the end is none other than to be elected by the community (I. Ruslan, 2014).

In the early days of the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, all religious expressions and symbols are used to increase political support, religion will become an issue that divides Muslims, and sensitive principles and beliefs may not be accepted. negotiated will burden electoral politics. This is then associated with the use of religious symbols in every activity of the candidate pairs if we follow them on social media. In the 2018 North Sumatra election, the phenomenon of the use of religious symbols, such as religious *performances*, as well as slogans such as trustworthy, honest, populist, and also issues that signify a religious life are plastered on posters on streets and places. another common.

Of course, this strategy is quite effective and is an entry point for voters who are not rational and still use trust in determining leaders. Because not a few voters in North Sumatra are very easily trapped by appearances and slogans. However, for voters with a higher rational level, it can be said that this strategy is still far from what they want because this group will not only look at the external aspect but also look at the programs offered, whether pro-people or otherwise.

Thus, in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, it is objectively recognized that there is a correlation between the development of democratization towards a more mature direction and the level of rationality of a country's society. If the intellectual level is higher which is characterized by an educated society in the truest sense, such as objective and rational thinking, so that it can put aside religious, ethnic, regional, outward appearances, and other sentiments and emotions, then this kind of community group will never be affected. by the pragmatic promises of a potential leader.

Not only that, voters in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election will be very easily influenced by outward appearances which are often used by a prospective leader by using conventional cultural religious symbols, not substantially. Cultural tendencies in often exploited by political elites and religious leaders who are involved in the practical political stage to increase the electability and popularity of candidates.

Thus, in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, it is not surprising that many religious activities with political nuances were held only to gain sympathy and the voices of the people such as joint remembrance, recitations, and others. They realize that religious attributes can increase popularity and acceptability by touching the emotional side of the people in making their choices.

In this situation, it can also be understood that other religions can exploit the use of religious symbols by the political elite. Voters – especially in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election – have a fairly high religious sensitivity, so they are easily influenced when using religious issues.

An account named @Amri Saragih on May 9 2018 sent a snippet of a picture on social media facebook with a caption. When Edy is Prayed to by the Pastor.



Picture 4.  
Edy Rahmayadi is prayed for by the priests

Analysis of this image confirms that Edy Rahmayadi as a Muslim candidate is being prayed for by the priest. Electoral during the campaign period, of course, is part of Edy Rahmayadi's way of getting votes from Christian voters in North Sumatra, especially voters from the districts: Simalungun, Samosir, Toba Samosir, North Tapanuli Humbang Hasundutan.

Then the post on the Facebook account @Tengku Adri written on April 18 2018 sent a picture of the candidate for deputy governor of North Sumatra, Musa Rajeckshah with the caption: "Ustad Somad and Bang Ijeck are getting more compact every day".



**Picture 5.**  
**Candidates for deputy governor of North Sumatra,**  
**Musa Rajeckshah and Ustad Abdul Somad**

What was written by the Facebook account @Tengku Adri confirmed that the candidate for deputy governor of North Sumatra, Musa Rajeckshah cares about the ulama by posting with Ustad Abdul Somad. This of course aims that Islamic voters in North Sumatra to believe that the Eramas couple cares about the Ummah.

Then related to the figure of Djarot Saiful Hidayat who is a candidate for Governor of North Sumatra who was promoted by the PDI-P and PPP, a facebook account named @Purwestri Yayuk wrote a caption that Djarot was the type of leader who cared about Islam.

## CONCLUSION

Social media facebook is one of the tools used by supporters of the candidate for governor and candidate for deputy governor from the Eramas and Djoss pairs to promote the vision and mission of regional head candidates to the public. Facebook in political communication can influence voter opinion and behavior through information, reporting, reviews, and investigations it presents. Through Facebook, people get information that is shared by the candidate pair related to developments in politics that are happening.

Departing from the public opinion that was built, each candidate in the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, both the Eramas couple and the Djoss pair used *buzzers* in their campaign activities. In the 2018 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, the use of buzzers on Facebook was related to the electoral process for promoting the image, vision and mission, candidate programs, to attacking political opponents with a *negative campaign* or a *black campaign* for each supporter.

During the 2018 North Sumatra election campaign, which took 5 months, candidates who were not of a particular religion were mentioned about religion and other sensitive matters, the sensitive effect would be even stronger. In the course of the issue-raising process to attract voters' interest carried out by the winning team through the stages of stimulus, organism, and response to the stimulus carried out during the election socialization period by the winning team and the elites of each pair, then the object of the stimulus is the community. The next North Sumatra with the results of the output is a response that is of interest to voters.

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