

Islamic Populism and Village Chief Elections in Java¹

Cornelis Lay², Wegik Prasetyo³, Norin Mustika Rahadiri Abheseka⁴

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Abstract

The strengthening of political identities, including the use of Islamic populism, has widely been used to explain the electoral victories and defeats of candidates at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. However, no study has been found to investigate this phenomenon in the village elections (pilkades) of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Our research, conducted in ten villages, did not find a tendency to use Islamic populism. Rather, in two villages—Baleharjo, Gunungkidul, and Temon Kulon, Kulon Progo—we identified an interesting phenomenon: the principle of inclusivity was used to ensure that competition was open to candidates of all backgrounds, including religious minorities. This article seeks to investigate this trend, which

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² Cornelis Lay was Professor of Politics and Government at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Editor in Chief of the *Power, Conflict, and Democracy (PCD) Journal*, and head of the Research Centre for Politics and Government (PolGov) at Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada. His main areas of interest included political parties, democratic decentralisation and local politics, political linkages, civil society, and border governance.

³ Wegik Prasetyo currently works at the General Election Supervisory Agency. Previously, he was a researcher at the Research Centre for Politics and Government (PolGov), Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada. His main areas of study include democracy, political parties, election, and local politics. He may be contacted at wegikpras@gmail.com.

⁴ Norin Mustika Rahadiri Abheseka currently works at the State Civil Service Agency. Previously, she was a research assistant at the Research Centre for Politics and Government (PolGov), Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada. She is interested in electoral studies, gender issues, and public policy analysis. She may be contacted at rabheseka@gmail.com.

enabled religious minorities to be elected to the highest position within the village government: chief. It finds that minority candidates' electoral victory was made possible by several factors. Importantly, Islam's limited penetration into suburban Java restricted its ability to be used for identity politics in village elections.

Keywords: *Islamic populism, village elections (pilkades), minority candidates, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.*

Introduction

This article investigates the factors that contributed to religious minority candidates' victory in village elections (*pilkades*) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This study departs from the question of why, even as identity politics and Islamic populism are increasingly exploited in Indonesia's municipal, provincial, and national elections, religious minority candidates were elected in two of the ten villages studied.

This is an important question as, in the past decade, populism has become increasingly common in elections around the world (Bernhard & Kriesi, 2019; Ivanov, 2020). This has included Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2016; Kirdiş & Drhimeur, 2016), which this article defines generally as a multi-class political expression that positions the shared interests of the Muslim *ummah* vis-à-vis the interests of elites and non-Muslims. In Indonesia, identity politics—particularly Islamic populism—has been rampant, especially during Jakarta's 2017 gubernatorial election (Hadiz, 2018; Hara, 2018; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2017). In a survey conducted by Lingkaran Survei Indonesia (LSI) in January 2017, shortly before the aforementioned election, 71.4 per cent of respondents stated that it was important for a candidate to share their religious beliefs. This represented a significant increase over previous surveys, conducted in March and

October 2016, in which this sentiment was expressed by only 40 and 55 per cent of respondents, respectively (Situmorang, 2017). Prasetyawan (2020), drawing on data from the General Elections Commission and Statistics Indonesia, found that the Muslim candidate Anies Baswedan carried 80 per cent of subdistricts, including all subdistricts with more than the median Muslim population (87 per cent). Islamic populism was also exploited during Indonesia's 2014 presidential election (Hadiz, 2016), and again in the country's 2019 presidential election (Fossati, 2019). It can therefore be concluded that, while Islamic populism has been perceived as having the transformative power to challenge the oligarchy (Aspinall, 2015; Hadiz & Robison, 2017), it has also affected candidates' electability.

Problematically, however, studies of Islamic populism in Indonesia have primarily used municipal, provincial, and national elections as their cases (Sulistyo, 2002; Bhakti, 2004; Aspinall, 2005; Buehler & Tan, 2007; Tomsa, 2009; Erb & Sulistiyanto, 2009; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2010; Choi, 2011; Mietzner, 2014; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Village elections (*pilkades*) are absent from public discourse and receive little scholarly attention, not being used to understand contemporary Indonesian politics but perceived as

unimportant local events that are unrelated to broader electoral phenomena.

Such a perception is hard to defend, however, given that village elections have deeper historical roots in Indonesia than other elections (Aji, Hermawan, & Trilaksana, 2020; Lombard, 2005; Muis & Immerzeel, 2016), and that these elections are extremely numerous. Villages are the smallest government units in Indonesia, and 74,954 are recorded throughout the country (Pusat Data Desa Indonesia, 2019). Because village chiefs interact routinely and intensively with voters, and because village chiefs are at the vanguard of public service, their election directly affects the interests and routines of the Indonesian public.

This article departs from a study of elections in ten villages in three regencies: Banjarharjo, Brosot, and Temon Kulon in Kulon Progo Regency; Dlingo, Ngestiharjo, Panggunharjo, and Srihardono in Bantul Regency; and Baleharjo, Monggol, and Mulusan, in Gunungkidul Regency. Research was conducted by the Research Centre for Politics and Government (PolGov), Department of Political and Government Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, in collaboration with the Australian National University, Australia, and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), Netherlands. Data were collected through live-in, shadowing, and direct observation. In each village, two members of the research team (three in Baleharjo) lived at the homes of candidates—selected based on their potential for electoral victory—for one week before and after the election (7–21 October 2018) and participated in their routine activities. This method enabled the

researchers to gain the trust of the candidates and the voting public and thereby access a broader wealth of data and information. It also ensured that the researchers had a good understanding of local issues. Further information was collected through unstructured, in-depth interviews with key actors, including candidates and their families, campaign teams, village administrators, and social/youth/religious leaders. Informants were selected through snowball sampling, with the number of informants increasing until information and data were deemed sufficient.

This article argues that the victory of religious minority candidates in the village elections of Baleharjo Village, Gunungkidul Regency, and Temon Kulon Village, Kulon Progo Regency, resulted from a combination of several factors: the limited penetration of Islam in suburban Java, the strength of interpersonal solidarity and kinship networks, and candidates' control of and access to capital (particularly cultural capital). These structural factors were complemented by more individual ones, including candidates' social skills, distribution of resources, technocratic abilities, willingness to offer quality programmes, and capacity to deliver said programmes (which, in both cases, was facilitated by candidates' incumbency). Combined, these factors reduced the influence of identity politics and enabled minority candidates to not only compete in village elections but to win them. We show that Islamic populism cannot be taken for granted as a feature of electoral politics in Indonesia. Structural and individual factors are very influential in village elections (*pilkades*) in Java.

This article is organised as follows. First, it discusses the concepts of populism, Islamic populism, and general elections in Indonesia, then highlights the link between these concepts and the anomalous nature of these cases. Second, it discusses the contexts of the villages in which these elections occurred. Third, it delineates the factors that influenced minority candidates' electoral victory, with a particular focus on the shortcomings of Islamic populism. Finally, it draws conclusions and elucidates the implications of this research for future studies.

Populism, Islamic Populism, and Indonesian Elections

In recent years, populism has commonly been studied by political scientists (Panizza, 2005; Müller, 2017; Conniff, Roberts, Basurto, et al., 2012; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Hadiz, 2016; Grant, Moore, & Lynch, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). As the concept of populism is ambiguous, there has been extensive disagreement as to its definition, essence, and application (Stanley, 2008; Mény & Surel, 2002; Anselmi, 2017). This ambiguity has also resulted in the concept being used to identify a broad range of political ideologies, styles, and strategies.

At the same time, it must be recognised that populism has been applied diversely in different places and at different times, depending on the particular spatial and cultural context (Anselmi, 2017). It has been found in various countries, including in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. For instance, Stockemer (2019) compared the histories, actors, strategies, successes, and failures of populism around the world. He

found that, in the United States and Russia, populism traces its roots to the peasant movements of the late 19th century; in Latin America, meanwhile, it emerged in the mid-20th century. Movements in these regions subsequently promoted populism in Europe (Stockemer, 2019) and, later, in the Muslim world.

Populism has frequently been defined and applied broadly as a political ideology (Ibrahim, 1998; Hadiz, 2016; Hadiz, 2018; Gandesha, 2018). According to Mudde (2004), populism is a "thin-centred" ideology that divides society into two homogenous and mutually antagonistic groups, the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite", and claims to express and realise the desires of the majority. Owing to its "thin-centred" nature, populism may be found across the political spectrum. Both leftist and rightist forms of populism exist, being shaped by the particular socio-political contexts in which they develop and are practised (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Populism has also been identified as a political style, as a means of making political and discursive claims. De la Torre (2010), for example, defines populism as a rhetoric that frames politics as a moral and ethical struggle between the people and the oligarchy. In doing so, it creates a discursive dichotomy between "us" and "them" (Kazin, 1998), a Laclauian "empty signifier" that enables the link between the signifier and signified to be filled with a range of discourses (Panizza, 2005). Certain social groups are defined as "the people", and positioned in binary opposition with an ill-defined oppressive "Other". Populism, thus, is a discourse that challenges the status quo and its inherent hegemony and subjugation.

Populism has also been defined as a political strategy, a means of policymaking and organisation. Madrid (2008) argues that populism may be manifested in policies that promote the redistribution of resources and mobilise the masses against the establishment and the system. Such a strategy may involve, for instance, a declaration of support for the disenfranchised majority and/or a claim of being free from elite influences. It often requires candidates to establish personalistic relationships with their constituents and to flexibly adapt to populist demands (Weyland, 2001)

Despite these ambiguities, it can be seen that all populist movements share three fundamental elements (Mény & Surel, 2002). First, they emphasise the fundamental role of "the people", not only in society but also in the political structure and system. As a discourse that challenges the status quo, populism reduces political spaces and structures to the people and the others, the populace and the elites. Second, populism involves a claim that the people have been betrayed, subjugated, and exploited by others. These may be politicians, elites, oligarchs, public officials, or others who abuse their power to stifle the people. Third, populism seeks to bring power to the common people, overthrow the elites, and replace them with leaders who are willing to advance their shared interests. These three components are flexible, providing space for diverse movements, leaders, and programmes.

In Indonesia, the Power, Welfare, and Democracy (PWD) research project—a collaboration between Universitas Gadjah Mada and the University of Oslo—identified populism as a Manichean political style involving the above-mentioned elements

(Savirani et al., 2014; De Raadt, Hollander, & Krouwel, 2004). Others have seen Indonesian populism as a political strategy for mobilising voters and garnishing support.

Populism has emerged in Indonesia as a result of public pressure and protests against the increasingly elitist and oligarchic political system. Representative democracy has been perceived as not promoting the interests of the public but rather the interests of oligarchic and bureaucratic elites. Political parties, similarly, have been perceived as being oligarchic in their administration and as failing to fulfil their political promises. Elites are perceived negatively and often labelled as corrupt by populist leaders who, claiming to represent the common people, present themselves as incorruptible (Hara, 2017).

Several forms of populism have been found in Indonesia, including the technocratic populism of Joko Widodo (Hamid, 2014; Mietzner, 2015) and the populism of Prabowo (Aspinall, 2015; Hatherell & Welsh, 2020). By far the most prominent form of populism in Indonesian elections, however, is Islamic populism. Religious sentiments have been increasingly exploited and several studies have shown that such populism is an effective means of securing votes and winning elections (Setijadi, 2017; Ubaid & Subandi, 2017).

Islamic populism is inexorably linked with voters' perceptions of Islam and their Muslim identity. As religious issues are paramount for rightist Muslims, Islamic populism has a strong emotional effect that facilitates candidates' search for support (Nastiti & Ratri, 2018). Islamist groups, claiming authoritative religious

knowledge, exploit voters' piety to (re)define right and wrong. At the same time, these groups convince voters that the Indonesian government has not only failed to accommodate Muslims' interests but bears enmity towards the religion (Hadiz & Robison, 2017); this strategy was particularly common in Jakarta's 2017 gubernatorial election. Through their narratives, such groups shape the everyday religious beliefs and practices of voters, thereby manipulating the emotions of people of diverse social classes and backgrounds. Candidates promise to change the status quo through specific programmes (Burhani, 2017; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018; Muhtadi, 2019).

At the same time, other identities—such as ethnic identity—have also been exploited in Indonesian elections (Aspinall, Dettman, & Warburton, 2011; Fox, 2018; Haryanto, Sukmajati, & Lay, 2019). When significant social inequalities exist, such strategies have often been successful. Nonetheless, in municipal, provincial, and national elections, religious identity politics have been most prominent. Religious sentiments are inherently emotional, and as a rule, populism targets voters' emotions (Alamdari, 2005; Geovanie, 2013; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Salmela & Scheve, 2017).

Populism can only emerge in democracies; in authoritarian nations, discourse is too restricted for the public expression of sentiments that challenge the regime and its status quo. Consequently, populism only emerged in

⁵ The violence employed by the New Order to control Islamic ideology (Fealy, 2005) can be seen, for instance, in the 1984 Tanjung Priok incident (Tirto, 2019) and the 1989 Talangsari incident (Wasis, 2001), and its response to the

Indonesia after the authoritarian New Order regime collapsed in 1998 and political reform began (Azra in Muhtadi, 2019). Populists came from both ends of the political spectrum, involving groups whom the New Order regime had labelled the extreme left and the extreme right, monitored closely, and controlled with violence.⁵ As elsewhere, populism has never been a centrist ideology, and thus, it is not surprising that it has offered a means of challenging the establishment and the political system (Muhtadi, 2019).

In Indonesia, Islamist populists have defined "the people" as those Muslims who experience injustice and the "other" as encompassing both the ruling regime and the non-Muslim community. As such, it has not only positioned everyday Muslims vis-à-vis the ruling regime but also people of different religious beliefs and, by extension, other minorities. Islamist populists have positioned themselves as representing the aspirations of the people. In doing so, they use discourses that not only challenge the elites and the status quo but also frame ethnic minorities (predominantly Indonesia's Chinese diaspora community) and religious minorities (particularly Christians) as being party to the subjugation of Muslims in Indonesia (Hadiz, 2018).

Baleharjo and Temon Kulon

This article examines the experiences of two villages, namely Baleharjo Village, Gunungkidul Regency,

1981 hijacking of a Garuda Indonesia airliner (Wiwoho, 2016) and the 1985 bombing of Borobudur Temple (Tempo, 1999).

and Temon Kulon Village, Kulon Progo Regency, both of which participated in the simultaneous 2018 village elections. Both villages are suburban, with the majority of residents earning their livelihoods through agriculture. In the past decade, Baleharjo has experienced rapid modernisation; consequently, much farmland has been repurposed, the social structure has transformed, and many residents have entered the service and trade sector. Historically, the two villages have never experienced religious conflict. The people of these two villages, as plural regions, live side by side peacefully, and their religious activities are undertaken without conflict.

The demographics of both villages reflect general trends in Java. Both have Muslim-majority populations; approximately 69% (4,605) of Baleharjo residents and 82.7% (1,519) of Temon Kulon residents are Muslim. Villagers tend to practice *kejawen*, a traditional system of culture and habits. They practice rites such as *slametan*, believe that certain objects have spirits, and hold that specific times are sacred. *Kejawen* continues to influence how residents understand right and wrong; consequently, it informs their political behaviour. Village heads and administrators—who, as stated empathetically by one informant, must be distinguished from staff—must embody such values as honesty and goodness, maintain social proximity with constituents, and dedicate themselves to protecting the village.

⁶ *Kepulungan* is derived from the word *pulung*, which means to receive a divine revelation. *Pulung* is often depicted as a blue, green, or white light that radiates from the sky and shines on the home of the next leader. The

The 2018 Baleharjo election was contested by two candidates, the incumbent Agus Setiawan (49, Catholic) and Agus Sulistyio (49, Muslim). Setiawan was an entrepreneur and property broker who delivered such necessary services as cooperatives and restaurants. Although public response was divided, the majority of respondents perceived the incumbent as having successfully delivered his programmes. As one informant stated, "his work performance is apparent. He simply had to sign" (interview, Nanok, merchant, supporter of incumbent, 14 October 2018). Setiawan used his spatial proximity, family networks, social skills, and political experiences to reach voters. He also relied on public beliefs about honesty. As one informant stated, and as Setiawan confirmed (interview, Setiawan, incumbent candidate, 7 October 2018), residents of Baleharjo believed that corrupt leaders would lead short lives (interview, Nanok, merchant, supporter of incumbent, 14 October 2018). Villagers believe that leadership is a divine mandate, one that requires the blessings of the Almighty. As one informant stated, "Becoming a village administrator is a *kepulungan*.⁶ If one does is not *kepulungan*, one cannot become a village administrator" (interview, Lestari, Director of Public and Administrative Affairs, Baleharjo Village, 9 October 2018).

The challenger, Sulistyio, was also a wealthy property broker. He was known as a kind, polite, and religious man who was heavily involved in community activities (including farmer organisations, Family

Indonesianist Benedict Anderson (1972) describes *pulung* as signifying the legitimacy of leadership in the traditional Javanese logics of power.

Welfare Empowerment groups, and communal prayers). However, he was still inexperienced in matters of politics. As with the incumbent, Sulistyو relied on his spatial proximity and kinship networks to gain public support. In an interview, he emphasised the importance of clans (*trah*) in village elections and claimed that 70–80 per cent of the people of Rejosari and Gedangsari were his clansmen (interview, Sulistyو, challenger, 8 October 2018).

During Baleharjo's 2018 election, development was a hot-button issue and candidates quickly became proxies for the struggles between those who supported and opposed development. Sulistyو's campaign promoted transforming village-owned land into productive agricultural land, framing it as part of a moral (Islamic) narrative. Meanwhile, Setiawan's campaign promoted the transformation of Baleharjo into a centre of tourism and trade, arguing that the village had significant potential owing to its proximity to the regency's economic and government centres.

Villagers saw that Setiawan had "survived" for six years, and this evidenced the honesty and quality of his leadership. In the election, Setiawan received 54% of the votes (1,911) and carried three polling stations, with particularly strong showings in areas occupied by his family, local youth movements, and programme beneficiaries. He thus enjoyed incumbent advantages, the exposure, networks (Cox & Katz, 1996; Krebs, 1998; Kushner, Siegel, & Stanwick, 1997), economic capital (Fourinaies & Hall, 2014), and experience (Cox & Katz, 1996) he accumulated over his term.

Interviews indicate that the absence of identity politics was crucial. As Sulistyو stated, "Gedangsari is 70% non-Muslim, but they mostly supported me. Meanwhile,

Wukrisari is predominantly Muslim, and they mostly supported my opponent" (interview, Sulistyو, challenger, 28 October 2018). This was confirmed by Setiawan. "I am a Christian, and Mas Agus [Sulistyو, ed.] is Muslim. In Baleharjo, 17% of residents are Christian, while 83% are Muslim. That's strategic. I would have lost if religious sentiments were used for campaigning. I would not have been able to win." (interview, Setiawan, incumbent, 14 October 2018).

The Temon Kulon election was also contested by two candidates: the incumbent Ari Sasongko (41, Catholic) and the challenger, Heri Kristiyanta (49, Muslim). Sasongko, who ultimately won the election, was the son of the village secretary. Sasongko's mother was Muslim and his father was Catholic; their children, Sasongko and his two siblings, were raised Catholic. Having been born and raised in Temon Kulon, Sasongko had been recognised for his involvement in village activities since his youth, and he had established strong networks through said involvement. Sasongko exploited his kinship and social networks during the election, as stated by one informant:

"Pak Ari and his wife are from Temon Village. Their main capital is their family networks. Even if attacked with various rumours, so long as he had his family networks, he could still emerge victorious" (interview, Pak Gendhut, Chairman of the Incumbent's Campaign Team, 10 October 2018).

This was supported by another informant, who confirmed that Sasongko was better known by residents (*Dina, District Staff and Member of the 2018 Temon Kulon Election Committee*)

During his six years as village chief, Sasongko was perceived as responsive to residents' needs and as an honest and visionary leader. He also maintained close social relations with his constituents by participating in their ceremonies and rituals, including *seripah* (funerals), marriages, and communal prayers. Although he was Catholic, he maintained close relations with Islamic leaders (scholars, imams, etc.). This had a positive effect on public perceptions.

"Pak Ari has a good record as village leader. Any time we have communal prayers or Eid celebrations, he comes. So far, he has had no issues with his performance. The only matter is religion." (interview, Heri, leader of Kedungbanteng Hamlet, 8 October 2018; interview, Awang, resident of Kedungbanteng Hamlet, 9 October 2018).

This was confirmed by Sasongko.

"My principle is that, working as the village chief, I must facilitate the people in their activities, such as through service. For example, if someone requires the signature of the village chief, no matter where I am, I'll handle it. If there's a funeral or communal prayer activity, I will attend. From the beginning, I've never sought to involve religion in village elections. As for those who practice indigenous faiths, I help them too, as there are many of them here." (interview, Sasongko, incumbent, 8 October 2018).

Evaluations of Kristiyanta were significantly different. The challenger, the chairman of the Village Representative Body (Badan Perwakilan Desa, BPD)—a

village-level legislative institution—was perceived as having performed poorly. Furthermore, he was not born in Temon Kulon and rarely interacted with residents. One informant explained, *"A lot of people know him, but he hasn't lived long in Temon Kulon. Pak Hery spends more time handling his showroom"* (interview, Dina, District Staff and Member of the 2018 Temon Kulon Election Committee). Kristiyanta's focus on his entrepreneurial activities was emphasised by another informant (interview, Suparji, police officer stationed in Temon Kulon, 4 October 2018). One informant contrasted the challenger's limited social networking with the vast networks of the incumbent (interview, Awang, resident of Kedungbanteng, 9 October 2018).

In his campaign, Sasongko integrated such *kejawen* values as *primbon* (auspicious dates on the Javanese calendar) and *pulung* (revelatory light, i.e. a sign of electoral victory). He and his campaign team also wore batik shirts with the *kawung* motif, symbolising the culture of Yogyakarta. By doing so, he emphasised his Javanese cultural identity, as noted by the leader of his campaign team (interview, Pak Gendhut, Chairman of the Incumbent's Campaign Team, 10 October 2018).

Kristiyanta, meanwhile, attempted to emphasise his Islamic identity. He presented himself as a religious man, a pious Muslim who frequented the local mosques. During his campaign, he gained the support of several religious leaders. As stated by the administrator of Nurul Huda Mosque:

"I have good relations with both candidates, but for the election I had to vote for someone of the same faith. That's what we call akidah (creed). So

during every prayer session, we emphasise the importance of voting for a leader who shares our faith. It's not that Pak Ari has performed badly or what have you, but it is best for Muslims to be led by Muslims" (Parji, Chief Administrator of Nurul Huda Mosque, Temon Kulon, 12 October 2018)

The use of religious identity was confirmed by the coordinator of the challenger's campaign team:

"I sought to optimise the elders in the mosques. We used a strategy" (interview, Budi Susilo, coordinator of the campaign team, 29 October 2018).

Ultimately, Sasongko won the election with 694 votes (64.14 per cent of all valid votes). Identity politics, therefore, was ineffective.

Successful Minority Candidates and the Limitations of Islamic Populism

Our research shows that, to a certain extent, Islamic populism was exploited during village elections in Yogyakarta. However, these strategies were ultimately unable to sway voters. Unlike in municipal, provincial, and national elections, where Islamic populism is widely and often successfully used in elections, in these villages it was ineffectual. Rather, the keys to electoral success were personal capacity, political experience, social networks, the capacity to formulate and deliver programmes, as well as the ability to control village spaces. Such control was exerted through several instruments, including claims of indigeneity, kinship networks, and social proximity with constituents.

More specifically, we find, first, that Javanese villages have not used Islam as a symbol in their social and power relations, including in their electoral processes. This may be related to the historical transfer, translation, and acceptance of Islam in Javanese villages (Drewes, 1968; Hooker, 1983; Ricklefs, 2007). Abdullah (1987) writes that Islam was disseminated throughout Southeast Asia in three ways. First was the Pasai approach, in which Islam developed and spread along with state power; in this approach, Islam provided the State with the legitimacy necessary to shape the direction of society. Second was the Malaka approach, found in such diverse places as Malaka, Patani, Gowa Talo, and Ternate, where Islam was spread from power centres to rural areas. Third was the Javanese approach, wherein Islam was spread through dialogue between local communities and Islamic leaders.

These three patterns fall into two main categories: the integrative tradition and the dialogue tradition. The integrative tradition, employed in Pasai and Malaka, created a strong Islamic culture as power flowed outwards from centres of power. Meanwhile, the dialogue tradition—as used in Java—resulted in acculturation. According to Ricklefs (2007), when Islam first entered Java, conflict occurred between the predominantly Hindu–Buddhist Javanese and the new converts. Over time, however, acculturation produced a syncretic belief system wherein Javanese and Islamic cultures complemented each other. Ricklefs identifies this syncretism as "the Mystic Synthesis" and argues that it was built upon three pillars: a commitment to a shared Islamic and Javanese identity, a commitment to performing Islamic

rituals, and an acceptance of local spirituality (including belief in spirits, sacred sites, and other Javanese beliefs such as the Queen of the South Sea).

The limited penetration of Islam in rural and suburban Java is also evident in previous village elections. Chailley-Bert, an Indonesianist and contemporary of Raffles, observed a village election in Probolinggo, East Java. This election was contested by five candidates, one of whom dropped out soon after declaring his candidacy. Of the remaining four candidates, one was the sitting village secretary, two were local landlords, and one was a merchant. The landlords subsequently dropped out, leaving two candidates. Although this village had 607 residents, only 130 had the right to vote; suffrage was limited to tax-paying landowners. Chailley-Bert noted with interest that voting was simple and practical: voters simply sat behind the candidate they supported and then were tallied. Ultimately, the village secretary received 86 votes, while the merchant received 42 (Lombard, 2005).

Based on this, the victory of minority candidates in village elections in Java is not surprising when compared to, for example, what happens in village elections in areas with a strong Islamic culture (such as Aceh). In addition, referring to Geertz (1976), the process of acculturation of religion and culture in Java resulted in a category of devout Muslim society (*santri*) and nominal Muslims who profess more

indigenous modes of religious beliefs and cultural belonging (*abangan*).

Several conclusions may be drawn from this study. First, these cases not only highlight the lack of universal suffrage and secrecy, both important tenets of modern elections, but also the fact that patron-client relations were more important than religious personal identities in village elections. Here, patron-client relations refer to how elites can mobilise their capital to bind clients. This is not limited to their positions within the village they have but more to capital that is useful to provide social services to their constituents. Candidates also did not use Islamic identities but rather presented themselves with symbols that indicated economically important crops: bananas, rice, cassavas, papayas, melons, durians, etc.

Second, these cases also highlight the importance of kinship networks in creating and maintaining solidarity. In Java, although villages have been important loci for electoral competition even before broader political reform began in 1998, they are not solid political entities. Sub-village units, known as *dusun* or *dukuh*, are used to distinguish between insiders and outsiders;⁷ in such a context, clans (*trah*) significantly shape social bonds and political preferences. Although such a situation is not unique to Javanese villages (Koentjaraningrat, 1967; Kartodirdjo, 1992; Haryanto, Sukmajati, & Lay, 2019), the *dusun* of Javanese villages are more consolidated than elsewhere.⁸ Tönnies

community. Migrants, meanwhile, are those who trace their roots to other villages yet still interact with villagers.

⁸ According to Statistics Indonesia, in 2019 there were 83,813 villages/subdistricts in

⁷ In the context of Javanese villages, the concepts of inside and outsider are strongly correlated with one's status as a local or migrant. Locals, or indigenous peoples, are those who have lived for generations within a village and established deep roots within the

(2001) describes these *dusun* as *gemeinschaft*, being united by shared blood, location, and perspectives. Such *gemeinschaft* are characterised as intimate, private, and exclusive; by a shared common will and consensus; and by natural law perceived and obeyed by members. *Dusun*, thus, are close and intimate social spaces, wherein the activities of all residents—even the elites—are known by all (Kartodirdjo, 1987).

Third, in Javanese villages, political symbols are predominantly linked to elites' power and ability to mobilise their social capital (including status), cultural capital (including knowledge and experience), and symbolic capital (including *pulung*, the revelatory light deemed to portend electoral victory).

Fourth, candidates must be able to provide social services to their constituents. Interviews indicated that, in elections, candidates' benevolence is deemed more important than more material aspects. This phenomenon was explained aptly by one informant: "[*The candidate*] is a good man and often interacts with villagers. If we have a ceremony, he'll attend. He isn't reluctant, and will reply if we greet him in the streets." (interview, Awang, resident of Kedungbanteng Hamlet, 9 October 2018). In interviews, informants stated that village heads are not merely government officials, but also "fathers" to their communities.

Indonesia. Almost a third of these (25,277) were located in Java: 8,562 in Central Java, 8,501 in East Java, 5,957 in West Java, 1,552 in Banten, 438 in Yogyakarta, and 267 in the Jakarta Capital Region.

Conclusion

This article has shown that, even as Islamic populism has become widespread in Indonesia's municipal, provincial, and national elections, it has had little effect on elections in the two studied villages. Such a phenomenon is not without precedent; a cursory review of election results showed that several Javanese elections were won by minority candidates. For instance, in 2012, Rogomulyo Village in Semarang Regency, Central Java, elected a Christian priest named Timotius Trimin with 60% of the votes (1,559 of 2,600 votes); Trimin was re-elected in 2018 (Satuharapan, 2013; UKDW, 2019). In 2013, a Christian named Mulyadi was elected the head of Nglinggi, a Muslim-majority village in Klaten, Central Java; although this village was home to only 20 Christians (0.8% of its 2,400 residents), Mulyadi received 52% of the 1,248 valid votes cast (BBC Indonesia, 2019). Meanwhile, Giling Village in Pati, Central Java, elected a Buddhist leader named Sunarsih (Patikab, 2019),

This article has shown that Islamic populism has had limited influence on village-level political contestations in Indonesia, a situation that may be explained by several factors. Village elections are thus inclusive, with minority candidates being provided space to contest and even win elections. This article has also indirectly shown the limitations of analyses that emphasise the importance of

It was estimated that, in 2018, Java was home to 149.6 million people, divided as follows: West Java, 48.7 million; East Java, 39.5 million; Central Java, 34.5 million; Banten, 12.7 million; Jakarta Capital Region, 10.5 million; and Yogyakarta 3.8 million (Kata Data, 2019).

Islamic populism in elections and offers a window into contemporary electoral processes. Islamic populism, though used commonly in Indonesia's elections over the past fifteen years, has its limitations. Since 2004 (and particularly following Jakarta's 2018 gubernatorial election), scholars have emphasised the role of Islamic populism in contemporary elections and argued that this populism—together with money politics, paternalism, and programmatic politics (Allen, 2015; Aspinall & Rohman, 2017; Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Mas'udi &

Kurniawan, 2017; Sukmajati & Aspinall, 2014)—poses a significant threat to Indonesian democracy. Our findings indicate that, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesian electoral processes and political developments, we must also obtain an understanding of village elections, as these are integral parts of broader political processes. We thus believe that this article can enrich and expand contemporary discourse on elections in Indonesia.

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