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Freedom to hate: social media, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Empirically grounded in the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election (Pilkada DKI) case, this article discusses the relationship of social media and electoral politics in Indonesia. There is no doubt that sectarianism and racism played significant roles in the election and social media, which were heavily utilized during the campaign, contributed to the increasing polarization among Indonesians. However, it is misleading to frame the contestation among ordinary citizens on social media in an oppositional binary, such as democratic versus undemocratic forces, pluralism versus sectarianism, or rational versus racist voters. Marked by the utilization of volunteers, buzzers, and micro-celebrities, the Pilkada DKI exemplifies the practice of post-truth politics in marketing the brand. While encouraging freedom of expression, social media also emboldens freedom to hate, where individuals exercise their right to voice their opinions while actively silencing others. Unraveling the complexity of the relationship between social media and electoral politics, I suggest that the mutual shaping between users and algorithms results in the formation of “algorithmic enclaves” that, in turn, produce multiple forms of tribal nationalism. Within these multiple online enclaves, social media users claim and legitimize their own versions of nationalism by excluding equality and justice for others.

KEYWORDS

Social media; Indonesia; electoral politics; algorithm; nationalism

Introduction

An aerial photograph of protesting crowds in Jakarta’s Hotel Indonesia Roundabout bearing an oversized red and white flag of Indonesia went viral on social media on November 4, 2016.¹ The image was of a peaceful demonstration on the same day popularly called “Action to Defend Islam 2” (*Aksi Bela Islam 2*) or “Action 411” (*Aksi 411*). Accompanied by various short statements expressing the interweaving strands of love (*cinta*) for Islam and the country, using phrases such as “*cinta* Islam,” “*cinta* Quran,” and “*cinta* NKRI,”² protesters posted the image on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and claimed to support both true Islam and authentic nationalism. Hundreds of thousands of Indonesians marched in Jakarta, demanding that the city’s governor be arrested for allegedly insulting the Quran. The governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as Ahok, is Chinese-Indonesian, the first

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¹An electronic copy of this photograph can be viewed in <http://bit.ly/2r35Fuk>.

²NKRI, abbreviated from *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*, translates as the “Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.”

Christian governor in nearly fifty years,³ and was running as the incumbent in the 2017 gubernatorial election of Jakarta, which in Bahasa Indonesia is commonly termed *Pilkada DKI* (hereafter called Pilkada).⁴ The protest was the second in a series of “actions to defend Islam.” It had been preceded by a much smaller protest on October 14 and was followed by Aksi 212, a much larger mass prayer rally on December 2, 2016.⁵ The latter was possibly the largest mass demonstration in the history of Indonesia. These were in response to a single remark by Ahok that was allegedly blasphemous.

These demonstrations also went live on social media. The 414 and 212 protests were discussed, commented on, supported, praised, opposed, and ridiculed, prior, during, and after these events. Using hashtags such as #411, #aksi411, #212, #aksi212, #aksibelai-Islam (action to defend Islam), #aksibelaQuran (action to defend Quran), #aksidamai (peaceful action), #tangkapAhok (arrest Ahok), and #penjarakanAhok (jail Ahok), supporters and participants of the rallies posted texts, memes, photos, and videos on social media. Meanwhile, supporters of Ahok also used social media to claim their version of nationalism and accuse the protesters of being simply racist haters whose values were incompatible with NKRI, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Some hailed Ahok as a saint and a martyr who was victimized by the politicization of religion. Others upheld him as a hero of pluralism and called the protests attacks on the spirit of the nation as embodied in the national motto “unity in diversity” (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*). The supporters of Ahok labeled their opponents Arabized (*keArab-Araban*), un-Indonesian, radical, fundamentalist, intolerant, and even terrorists.

Following the 411 and 212 rallies, observers and pundits quickly framed the Pilkada as a contest between democratic and undemocratic forces. Some saw it as a battle between liberal and Islamic fundamentalist values.⁶ Others remarked that the Pilkada, including its social media campaigns, embodied a war between rational voters and racist-sectarian voters.⁷ Some blamed social media for the dissemination of fake news, as well as sectarian, racist, anti-Christian, and anti-Chinese messages that had emboldened the anti-Ahok movement.⁸ I concur with Greg Fealy’s analysis that the 2017 Pilkada DKI represents:

... a major setback for minority political rights and raises serious questions about Indonesia’s self-proclaimed diversity and tolerance, as well as its commitment to rule of law [and] revealed how elite political forces have used religion to undermine the government and bolster their own prospects.⁹

There is no doubt that sectarianism and racism played significant roles in the election and social media was heavily utilized in the campaign against Ahok. However, it is misleading to frame this in a binary such as democratic versus undemocratic forces, pluralism versus sectarianism, or rational versus racist voters. Using the Pilkada case as an empirical example,

³Before Ahok, Henk Ngantung, a Christian, governed Jakarta from 1964 to 1965. While he was rumored to be Chinese, Ngantung declined to specify his ethnicity. Similar to Ahok, Henk Ngantung served as a vice governor (1960–1964) prior to becoming a governor. In 1965, Ngantung resigned amid accusations of being a communist sympathizer; he spent the rest of his life in isolation.

⁴The official term in Indonesia is *Pemilihan umum Gubernur DKI Jakarta*. However, Indonesians ordinarily call it “Pilkada Jakarta” or “Pilkada DKI.”

⁵Smaller protests, called “Aksi 112” and “Aksi 313,” were held on January 12 and March 13, 2017.

⁶Varagur 2017.

⁷Budiari 2016; Tapsell 2017.

⁸Fealy 2017; Aspinall 2017; Tapsell 2017; Vernaz 2017.

⁹Fealy 2017.

I demonstrate that such a simplified binary approach only superficially reveals the dynamics of social media utilization in politics. The relationship between social media and electoral politics is complex and marked by the emergence of “algorithmic enclaves” and the rise of tribal nationalism. Through my analysis, I wish to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the polarized nature of electoral politics in Indonesia.

Social media and politics in Indonesia

In January 2017, the total population of Internet users in Indonesia was estimated at 132.7 million, including 92 million mobile social media and 106 million Facebook users.¹⁰ Social media platforms have become embedded in various aspects of Indonesian society, including politics, especially in urban areas such as Jakarta where the penetration is much higher than the national average. Across the world, and most certainly in Indonesia, the expansion of social media usage has sparked new hopes of and hype about political participation and civic engagement. Social media’s potential for politics has enthused optimistic pronouncements on digital empowerment and the renewal of public spheres. This optimistic and, at times, utopian view underlines how social media platforms increase civic exchanges among citizens,¹¹ encourage citizen engagement,¹² transform political participation,¹³ and facilitate citizen journalism that promotes transparency.¹⁴ Critics have been equally swift to dispute this utopian view by pointing to the dark sides of social media usage such as state and market surveillance,¹⁵ the loss of privacy,¹⁶ the decline of quality information,¹⁷ the proliferation of untruths (recently called “fake news”),¹⁸ and the rise of online radical groups.¹⁹ The latter position has been emboldened by the Brexit phenomenon in the United Kingdom and the victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 United States presidential election. In both of these views, social media platforms are perceived as the main actor, having agency in shaping politics. In both, social media are “foregrounded, while the role of other communicative categories, including history, people, [and] culture, is de-emphasized and backgrounded.”²⁰ These views flatten the complex and dynamic relationship between social media platforms and their users. Social impacts of the Internet and social media, instead, “should be understood as a result of the organic interaction between technology and social, political, and cultural structures and relationships.”²¹

In line with the utopian view I outlined above, until recently, in Indonesia, too, there has been enthusiasm about and even conviction in the democratic effects of social media, as exemplified in the quotation below.

In social media space, people only value the factual information [...] Social media users are not easily steered, they act based on their own disposition and consciousness [...] Social

¹⁰We Are Social 2017.

¹¹Zhang et al. 2010.

¹²Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012.

¹³Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011.

¹⁴Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes 2010.

¹⁵Trottier 2016.

¹⁶Boyd 2008.

¹⁷Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero 2012.

¹⁸Allcott and Gentzkow 2017.

¹⁹Thompson 2011.

²⁰Alrasheed 2017, 144.

²¹Lim 2013, 637.

media driven politics can be a true politic, namely the politics that is based on ideas and real actions for the public good [...] Social media can be a solution to minimize injustice. Social media can serve as a counter-balance of mainstream media that currently is neither independent nor pro-justice.²²

In contrast to this quotation, previous studies have shown that the Internet has been used by various interests to express their ideas, including undemocratic ones.²³ The above remark is an extension of the faith of Indonesian activists in its predecessor, the static, non-interactive Internet, or web 1.0. Digital media has been incorporated into the political landscape in the country since the early 1990s with the emergence of political mailing lists that eventually became one of the sources of resistance against Suharto and the New Order regime. The fall of Suharto in May 1998 may be considered an information revolution, since resistance was largely galvanized by the rapid flow of controversial information that previously had been unavailable. However, the Internet was not the only source of information for social mobilization leading to the downfall of Suharto.²⁴ My research on the 1998 *Reformasi*²⁵ (Reform) Movement reveals that, rather than the Internet itself, it was the linkages between the Internet and other media – old and new, small and large – and offline social networks, that made it possible for radical information to spread beyond the digital elites and reach society at large.²⁶

The Internet was already valorized as a technology of freedom when it arrived in Indonesia in the early 1990s. Onno Purbo, the father of the Indonesian Internet, once said that, “the development of the Internet is a very grassroots, democratic process.”²⁷ What is more interesting than the validity of Purbo’s statement is the faith of Internet development actors, activists, and users in the power of the Internet to deliver a better society. This widespread belief has shaped how technology, including social media, is used in domestic politics.

Digital media utilization in Indonesian electoral politics can be traced back to the first post-Suharto general election in 1999, in which PK (the Justice Party), whose name was later changed to PKS (the Prosperous Justice Party), used the Internet as a campaign tool. While other parties had one or no website, PK, a conservative Islamic party, maintained more than two dozen websites targeting voters in various localities. In both the 2004 and 2009 general and presidential elections, the Internet was more commonly incorporated into the electoral campaigns of all parties. It was not, however, until the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election that social media platforms were incorporated into electoral politics.²⁸ Two years later, in the 2014 presidential election, the centrality of social media in the campaign became more apparent.²⁹ The utilization of social media in the 2017 Pilkada DKI was an extension and expansion of these two earlier elections.

Meanwhile, social media’s potential for grassroots activism was first heralded through the case of Prita Mulyasari. Prita, a mother of two, was prosecuted for libel in 2008 when

²²Sugiarto 2014.

²³Bräuchler 2003; Lim 2002; Lim 2005.

²⁴Lim 2003; Hill and Sen 2005.

²⁵*Reformasi* refers to the democratic movement against the authoritarian leader Suharto and his New Order regime in the late 1990s and the overall project of political transformation and reconstruction following the fall of Suharto in May 1998.

²⁶Lim 2003.

²⁷This statement was delivered by Onno Purbo on the Foundation Day Oration at Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, October 31, 1996.

²⁸Ahmad and Popa 2014; Suaedy 2014.

²⁹Abdillah 2014; Tapsell 2015.

she sent an email to friends and relatives complaining about the service at a private international hospital. Her case became popular online when a “Coin for Prita” Facebook page was created and became a site for thousands of Indonesians to share their outrage and donate money to pay her court fine. In December 2009, an appeals court found Prita not guilty. The collection of donations for her, however, was very successful, and far exceeded the fine. The draconian Cyber Law³⁰ and the defamation law used against Prita, however, remain. Nevertheless, Prita’s case has misleadingly served as a go-to example for Indonesian journalists, pundits, activists, and politicians alike as evidence of the positive impact of social media in politics. In my analysis of this and similar cases, I have argued that social media activism in Indonesia generates “many clicks but few sticks”³¹ and that a successful case of social media activism, such as the Prita case, remains largely an anomaly. While activists and marginalized communities use the media for many causes,³² social media provides a friendly environment for activism that revolves around simplified narratives tailored towards urban middle class consumers. The landscape is generally unfavorable for complex narratives of justice and inequalities, or the poor. Causes of the poor are largely framed by middle class advocates and rarely depicted by the poor themselves. In addition, social media platforms are dependent upon a larger media system. In order to increase the possibility of success, social media activism necessitates an accommodation of “the incredible shrinking sound bite”³³ culture of mainstream media. The utilization of social media in politics is embedded in everyday social and cultural practices of the urban middle class which revolve around consumption. Hence, our understanding of the impact and role of social media in politics, including in electoral politics such as the Pilkada situation, should be contextualized within the rise of personalized forms of urban middle class political participation. In this milieu, communication practices are not separated from consumption orientations, and individuals are mobilized by commercial frameworks, with affect and emotion as the main currencies.

2017 Pilkada DKI and social media campaign

Ahok had assumed the governorship of Jakarta when former Governor Joko Widodo (Jokowi) was elected President of the Republic in 2014. Ahok ran for reelection to a full five-year term with his deputy governor, Djarot Saiful Hidayat (Djarot). In the first round of voting on February 15 of this year, Ahok won approximately forty-three percent of the vote, followed by former Education Minister Anies Baswedan (popularly called Anies) with forty percent and Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (the eldest son of former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) with seventeen percent. However, Ahok lost the second round of voting on April 19 to Anies, fifty-seven percent to forty-three percent.

³⁰The Electronic Information and Transactions Law (*Undang-undang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik*, UU-ITE) was originally designed to regulate electronic business transactions. While it is widely referred to as the “Indonesian Cyber Law,” this law covers a wider scope of electronic and information services, including radio, television, telephony, and any digital platforms that electronically facilitate information sharing and financial transactions. Article 27 of the law includes a vague definition of defamation which has been used in libel and defamation cases as well as to curb the freedom of expression. Between 2008 and 2015, seventy-four Indonesian citizens were charged with violating this article (see Toriq 2015).

³¹Lim 2013.

³²See Schäfer 2015 for a study of social media utilization by Ahmadiyya and Shia minorities.

³³Adatto 1990.

Ahok repeatedly received approval ratings of over seventy percent while in office. His electability, however, even before the blasphemy case, generally hovered between thirty and forty percent.³⁴ Being a double minority (Chinese and Christian), Ahok was the subject of frequent racist comments. Hardliner groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) had explicitly opposed Ahok based on his ethnicity and religion since Jokowi chose him as his running mate in 2012. Furthermore, his brash manner, record on forced evictions of the poor,³⁵ and problematic development policies (particularly on the Jakarta Bay reclamation project)³⁶ made him a contentious figure.

On September 27, 2016, while giving a speech in the Kepulauan Seribu (Thousand Islands), Ahok criticized his political opponents for using Islam as a campaign tool. He stated that voters were being “deceived using verse fifty-one of al-Maida” (a chapter of the Quran).³⁷ Following this event, a thirty-seven second video of this particular part of Ahok’s speech, which was cut from a one-hour video, was posted online.³⁸ The video swiftly went viral and incited outrage among conservative Muslims. Calling the incident blasphemy, hardliners mobilized rallies to call for the arrest of Ahok. In a country in which judicial independence frequently gives way to public pressure, these rallies were effective, resulting in Ahok’s arrest on a charge of blasphemy. In a South Jakarta courtroom on May 9, 2017, the head judge declared that Ahok was “found to have legitimately and convincingly conducted a criminal act of blasphemy, and because of that we have imposed two years of imprisonment.”³⁹

As commercial frameworks have become more prominent in political campaigns, the concept of branding has become integral to campaign strategy.⁴⁰ Hence, social media utilization in electoral politics cannot be separated from branding. The term “brand” in the political marketing context refers to the symbolic value, “the psychological representation,” of a product. The brand serves as “a shortcut to consumer choice, enabling differentiation between broadly similar products” by adding “a layer of emotional connection that operates over and above the functional use-value of a product.”⁴¹ During campaigning before the first round of Pilkada, each of the three candidates appointed a social media team as part of their branding strategy. Ahok relied on Jasmev, a network of social media volunteers previously utilized by Jokowi and Ahok in the 2012 gubernatorial election.⁴² For the 2017 campaign, the network renamed itself “Jakarta Ahok Social Media Volunteers” (Jasmev2017). Volunteers, who claimed they were unpaid, said their duties were to disseminate positive messages about Ahok, focusing on his achievements and his “anti-corruption, clean, and honest” (*anti-korupsi, bersih, dan jujur*) stance. Ahok was also assisted by a network of volunteers who called themselves “Teman Ahok” (Friends of Ahok). Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono was supported by KaribAgus (Best Friends of Agus), which initially was formed by his high-school classmates, while Anies Baswedan’s campaign team established

³⁴Vermonte 2017.

³⁵Ahok has been labeled “the Eviction King.” See Dhani 2016.

³⁶Padawangi 2017.

³⁷This verse is frequently cited as grounds for disqualifying non-Muslim leaders.

³⁸Most Western media reported that the video that went viral was either doctored or edited. After carefully watching both the long and the short versions, I found no edit in the 37-second version. The short version, however, lacks context.

³⁹Reuters 2017.

⁴⁰Scammell 2007.

⁴¹Scammell 2007, 177.

⁴²Hence the source of the group’s original name: “Jokowi Ahok Social Media Volunteers.”

JakartaMajuBersama.com. Although volunteers for all of the campaigns claimed they focused on positive messages, in practice this was not the case. Further, while none of the candidates publicly admitted to doing so, all three employed paid buzzers. The term “buzzer” describes a netizen who is paid by a company to disseminate promotional information of a certain product or brand on social media sites. In political campaigns, buzzers are recruited to promote issues that benefit a particular candidate. Some Pilkada buzzers claimed that they were paid between two and four million Rupiah (USD150–300) per month during the governor’s race. In addition to volunteers and buzzers, the candidates also used micro-celebrities. These micro-celebrities, exemplified by Denny Siregar (pro-Ahok) whose blog has thousands of subscribers and Jonru Ginting (anti-Ahok) who has 1.4 million Facebook followers, are attractive to political campaigns because they can command attention. However, as social media for them are “a place of self-presentation and framing in both a political and personal sense”⁴³ their branding of a political candidate necessitates an attunement to their own personal branding.

The social media campaigns during Pilkada DKI were heavily packed with negative information and “fake news.” The flow of untruths was heightened prior to the second round when the Ahok and Anies campaigns competed for the votes of Agus Yudhoyono’s supporters. It is inaccurately assumed that lies and untruths revolved only around the anti-Ahok campaign, and that the Ahok campaign generally focused “on winning over the rational voter.”⁴⁴ In fact, both sides engaged in post-truth politics, framing information and stories by appealing to emotions with very little or no regard to any policy details and objective facts.

As shown in Table 1, both pro and anti-Ahok campaigns created and maintained websites that provided one-sided information. Most of these websites were created just months prior to the Pilkada and yet very quickly gained a popularity that matched or even exceeded that of mainstream news media sites. For example, *seword.com*, a pro-Ahok website created in November 2015, attracted more visitors between October 2016 and March 2017 (56.7 million) than *Tempo* and *Republika*, both of which are long-running national news outlets (see Figure 1). The main source of traffic for *seword.com* was social media platforms, notably Facebook (95.6 percent).⁴⁵

In general, pro-Ahok websites generated more traffic than anti-Ahok websites. Figure 2 shows that with a daily average of 392,692 visits, the pro-Ahok website *seword.com* generated more traffic than the two most popular anti-Ahok websites, namely *portal-islam.co.id* and *voa-islam.com*.

Some of these websites deliberately published fabricated content and disinformation. For example, some pro-Ahok websites were in fact spoofs of Islamist websites. Examples include *arrahmahnews.com* (a spoof of *arrahmah.com*), *voa-islamnews.com* (a copy of *voa-islam.com*), and *pkspuyengan.com* (a spoof of the now defunct *pkspiyungan.com*).⁴⁶ During the Pilkada campaign, Islamist websites were utilized to disseminate conservative and sectarian views which were anti-Ahok in character, while their spoofs

⁴³Tufekci 2013, 859.

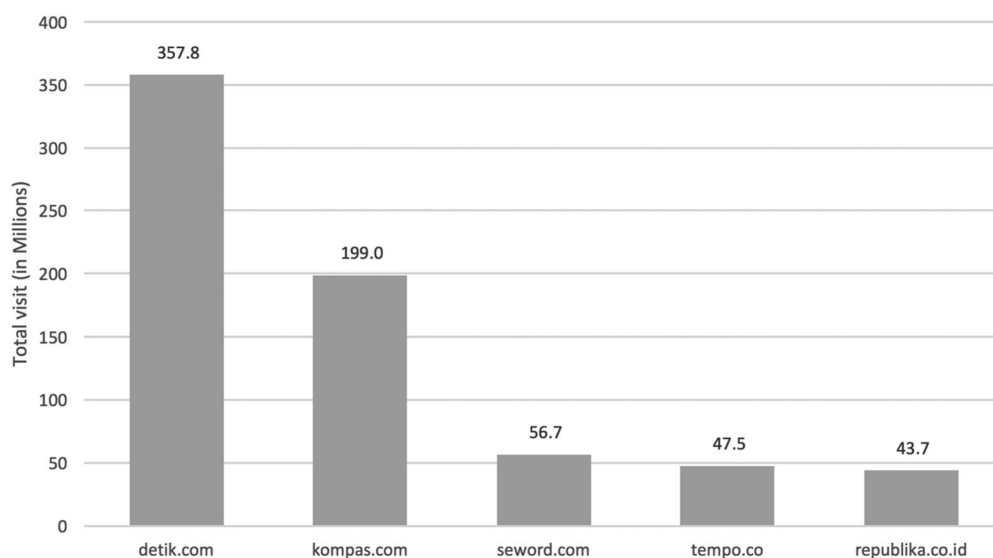
⁴⁴Tapsell 2017.

⁴⁵Interestingly, a blog of Denny Siregar, one of the Pilkada micro-celebrities mentioned above, was one of the most referred websites with 10.1% of total referrals.

⁴⁶*Arrahmah.com* and *voa-islam.com* present conservative views of Islam, while *pkspiyungan.com* was the official news portal of the Islamist party PKS.

Table 1. A representative list of 2017 Pilkada DKI campaign websites.

Pro-Ahok websites	Anti-Ahok websites
http://www.seword.com	http://www.posmetro.info
http://www.gerilyapolitik.com	http://www.saracennews.com
http://www.beraninews.com	https://pembawaberita.com
http://www.itukoran.com	http://www.muslimbersatu.net
http://www.cerianews.com	http://www.mediaopini.com
http://www.benderanews.club	http://berita.islamedia.id
http://www.permatanews.com	http://www.opinibangsa.id
http://www.funesia.net	http://www.idnusa.com
http://www.beritakepo.com	http://www.mimbarmerah.net
https://www.berita168.com	http://www.portal-islam.id
http://www.infoteratas.com	http://www.portal-piyungan.com
http://www.pkspuyengan.com	http://portalpiyungann.blogspot.com
http://arrahmahnews.com	http://www.arahmah.co.id
http://voa-islamnews.com	http://www.voa-islam.com
https://aksiberita.blogspot.ca	http://www.mediabangsaku.com
https://beritatribunnews.wordpress.com	http://informasivoa.blogspot.ca

**Figure 1.** Traffic comparison between Seword.com and select mainstream media sites, October 2016–March 2017.

delivered material that was pro-Ahok, anti-Anies, and anti-Islamist. These spoofs managed to attract significant traffic. For example, from March 18 to April 13, 2017, arrahmahnews.com attracted 88,000 unique visits, compared to the 259,000 received by arrahmah.com. A large amount of anti-Ahok campaign material was critical of Ahok's ethnicity and religion, labeling Ahok an infidel (*kafir*)⁴⁷ and communist.⁴⁸ In response, pro-Ahok groups fabricated facts that covered various issues, notably accusing Anies of

⁴⁷*Kafir* is an Arabic term for unbeliever or infidel, usually used to label someone who rejects Allah and does not believe in the Prophet Muhammad as the final messenger of Allah.

⁴⁸This is ironic considering Ahok himself, more than once, used the word "communist" pejoratively to label actions he considered wrong. In 2013, he used the term to deny any compensation to the evicted residents of Waduk Pluit, who had lived along the city's riverbanks for decades. At that time, Ahok called demands for compensation a communist act (Pontoh 2013).

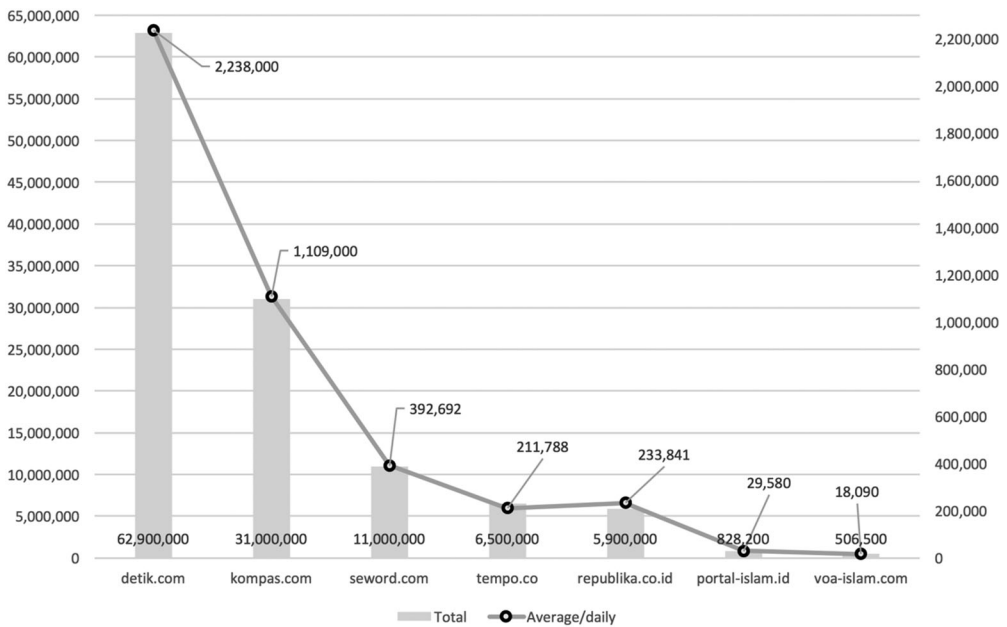


Figure 2. Traffic comparison of mainstream media sites with pro and anti-Ahok websites, March 15–April 12, 2017.

being involved in multiple corruption cases, planning to govern Jakarta under Sharia (Islamic) law, and being supported by Iranian Shias, ISIS, and Al-Qaeda.

Prior to the second round of Pilkada, PoliticaWave, one of the country's first social media monitoring companies, inaccurately predicted that Ahok would gain 52.7 percent of the total votes.⁴⁹ Ahok's campaign was more organized and professionally managed, and, as analyzed by PoliticaWave, generated more conversations with higher positive sentiment. Social media platforms alone, however, are insufficient to win an election. From Barack Obama's victory in 2008 to Jokowi's in 2014 and, most recently, the triumph of Emmanuel Macron in 2017 in France, we see the criticality of on-the-ground mobilization. Behind each of these victories were thousands of local volunteer committees organizing hundreds of small events each day for months prior to the election. These volunteer committees worked to reach the broadest audience, not only middle class but also lower class voters. While Ahok had Teman Ahok, which worked continuously for more than a year, this network of volunteers did not reach diverse audiences. In contrast, some anti-Ahok groups were diligent and disciplined in their on-the-ground mobilization. The FPI, for example, capitalized on the disenchantment of residents who had been evicted from their homes in the name of development.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Metronews.com 2017.

⁵⁰According to Ian Wilson (cited in Topsfield 2017),

[F]or all its faults, will often be there to provide logistical support during evictions or natural disasters. [...] People have a genuine affection for the group because of that. Most of the FPI members come from *kampung* (local neighborhoods) originally, so [people] relate to them more than middle-class intellectuals. Many *kampung* members have become bona fide FPI supporters over the past few months, taking part in the [anti-Ahok] demonstrations.

Additionally, the anti-Ahok camp benefitted from the skills, experiences, and on-the-ground discipline of the Islamist party PKS. In addition to its experience in online mobilizing, the PKS has an expansive and steadfast network connecting university campuses, Islamic boarding schools, and mosques. Further, the PKS has an impressive ability to mobilize the masses.⁵¹ The anti-Ahok camp also was supported by conservative religious leaders-cum-celebrities, such as Felix Siauw (a Chinese-Indonesian convert to Islam), who are social media savvy and frequent visitors to coffee shops, *warungs* (street-side eateries), and *kampungs* (neighborhoods) as part of their “reaching the grassroots” (*turba, turun ke bawah*) program. Hence, while social media tools can be used to mobilize the masses, on-the-ground mobilization still retains its currency.

Freedom to hate, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism

Social media alone did not cause the divisiveness among voters in this election. However, as politics has become increasingly entangled with social media, online and offline political talk and action are no longer separate. This entanglement is more pronounced in elections as candidates and supporters deliberately utilize social media in their campaign strategies. No doubt, volunteers and buzzers played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the Pilkada campaign. However, while volunteers and buzzers can mobilize decisive issues, including those that politicize race and religion, the tone, atmosphere, and interpersonal relationships on social media are mostly shaped and influenced by ordinary users. The incorporation of social media has made the Pilkada an everyday conversation not only among Jakarta residents but also Indonesian citizens home and abroad. The campaign, Ahok’s court hearing, and related mass rallies became a social media daily menu for Indonesians which, as explained by some of my interviewees, had consequences, both online and offline. “Unfriending” on Facebook might lead to strained friendships and political sarcasm on social media might lead to shouting matches around dinner tables.

Social media conversations about the Pilkada that were already polarized became even more fragmented in the months following the blasphemy case. This polarization extended from the 2014 presidential election where the clash between supporters of the two candidates, Jokowi and Prabowo, was particularly visible on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. While social media sites allow users to exercise freedom of speech, these also encourage people to exercise the *freedom to hate*. While individuals frequently used the phrase “freedom of speech” to defend their own right to voice opinions, they actively attempted to silence others.

As Indonesian politicians and political parties increasingly sell their brands, personality matters more than policies. Personality-driven politics has encouraged the practice of labeling among social media users. In 2014, this meant hating or loving Jokowi. In 2017, this went beyond just opposing terms. Conversations and interactions among social media users on Pilkada resembled that of Western radical right discourse – such as found in studies of anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands,⁵² the U.K.,⁵³ and France⁵⁴ – which is generally characterized by the construction of common enemies. In

⁵¹Noor 2011.

⁵²Verkuyten 2013.

⁵³Goodman and Johnson 2013.

⁵⁴Mols and Jetten 2014.

this context, the practice of labeling also serves to portray the enemies (or outsiders) in terms of difference, deviance, and threat.⁵⁵ For example, “infidel” was among the most frequently terms used by Ahok’s detractors to label his supporters. Similarly, people presumed to be Chinese-Indonesian were labeled “Chinese infidel” (*Cina kafir*), a term also habitually used to describe Ahok. Other pejoratives used by opponents of Ahok were immoral (*maksiat*), forbidden (*haram*), liar, cheater, stupid, pig, and tadpole. Ahok supporters were not short of labels for their opponents either. They accused them of being anti-nationalistic using terms such as anti-*Pancasila*,⁵⁶ anti-diversity (anti *ke-Bhinneka-an*), and traitors (*tukang makar*). They also described them as radicals, deviant Wahhabis,⁵⁷ apostates (*takfiri*), “robe-wearing thugs” (*preman berjubah*), terrorists, and ISIS supporters. Other pejoratives used against Ahok detractors were “the idiot tribe” (*bani koplak*), “camel people” (*kaum onta*), “flat-earth people” (*kaum bumi datar*), “short-tempered people” (*kaum sumbu pendek*), and “angry mobs.” These examples show how both pro and anti-Ahok camps exhibited the out-group homogeneity effect where each tended to view their opponents as homogeneously bad (“they are all alike”), and in-group persons as heterogeneous.⁵⁸ The reversal of victim–perpetrator positions, which is typically employed by the radical right to imply that “we are not the racists, they are the *real* racists,”⁵⁹ was also commonly found, along with scapegoating and the construction of conspiracy theories.

The polarization between the two camps was so prominent that it obscured other groups. For example, some social media users criticized Ahok for being anti-poor, pro-elite, and far removed from principles of justice, not because of his race or ethnicity.⁶⁰ Among them were activists who have been working with poor communities, especially those who have been evicted from their homes. These critics, however, were labeled “Ahok haters” by Ahok supporters. Some of these activists who are Chinese-Indonesians were accused by other Chinese-Indonesians of betraying their roots. And yet, while Ahok’s detractors often appropriated these social justice criticisms, they themselves did not support these. Instead, online discussions among Ahok detractors were sectarian, emphasizing ethnic and religious differences.

Many Ahok and Anies voters did not belong to either camp.⁶¹ Some Jakartans voted for Ahok based on his achievements while disagreeing with some of his policies. Others claimed they were not Ahok fans but voted for him simply because they thought he was the lesser of two evils. In personal interviews, several Anies voters said they are neither anti-Chinese nor anti-Christian but in the end resorted to being “good” Muslims by voting for a Muslim candidate. Other Anies voters were troubled by Ahok’s pro-elite and anti-poor policies; they had voted for Jokowi five years earlier and

⁵⁵Van Dijk 2008.

⁵⁶*Pancasila*, the official foundational philosophical theory of the state, is influenced by and has borrowed aspects of a range of values and ideologies, including monotheism, nationalism, humanity, democracy, and socialism.

⁵⁷Wahhabis are the followers of Wahhabism, an Islamic doctrine and religious movement founded by Saudi cleric Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), whose goal is to restore *tawhid* or pure monotheistic worship. The majority of mainstream Sunni and Shia Muslims strongly disagree with Wahhabism and label it as a vile sect, deviant, ultraconservative, and radically fundamentalist.

⁵⁸Smith and Mackie 2007, 200.

⁵⁹Van Dijk 2008, 128 (emphasis is in the original).

⁶⁰Padawangi 2017.

⁶¹The characterization of voters in this paragraph is generated from my interviews with random voters, online observations, content analysis of thirty-seven Pilkada-related public groups on Facebook, and content analysis of select Twitter conversations on #Pilkada. Facebook and Twitter data were collected using Netlytic, a cloud-based text and social network analyzer that discovers and summarizes social networks from online conversations on social media sites.

felt that Ahok's approaches deviated from the more social justice-oriented approaches of Jokowi. These alternative voices, however, were not expressed on social media for various reasons. Some users thought their voices would not matter as they were in the minority while others feared offending others. Some had tried to voice their opinions in the past but were frustrated for being either misunderstood, misjudged, or even bullied. In this polarized environment, any opinion or expression that was complex or nuanced, or simply did not adhere to either camp, was rarely welcome. Furthermore, beyond the labeling, collective bullying by both pro and anti-Ahok sides also occurred quite frequently. The aggressiveness of the two dominant groups silenced the (plural) rest. Here, we see an empirical example of the spiral of silence theory,⁶² which explains how majority opinions become dominant over time. The theory suggests that those who perceive their opinion group as ascendant, such as members of pro- and anti-Ahok groups, are more likely to express their opinions publicly whereas those who perceive their opinions to be in decline choose to silence themselves in order to avoid the threat of social sanctions, isolation, and conflict.

Studies show that users' exposure to information on social media is driven by algorithms that present information based on personal interests; this leads people to encounter only information that corresponds with their existing viewpoints.⁶³ The potential for online personalization of information exposure to effectively isolate social media users from a diversity of viewpoints or content is termed filter bubble.⁶⁴ I have observed, however, that on social media sites, especially Facebook, Indonesians are exposed not only to information based on their own political preferences but also their contacts' preferences. Indonesian users typically have a very large and diverse network of contacts (often above 1,000 "friends"), which exposes them to varied political discussions. For anti and pro-Ahok social media users, however, disagreeable information and discussions just confirmed their own viewpoints and intensified the antagonistic relationship they cultivated with their opponents. In some cases, users maintained Facebook "friendships" for the purpose of tracking materials that confirmed their perceptions of each other. Others resorted to "unfollowing," instead of "unfriending," to clean up their newsfeeds without necessarily losing an opportunity to access disagreeable information posted on their opponents' walls. Open conversations on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media sites are furthered amplified by private exchanges on instant messengers, WhatsApp, and BlackBerry Messenger.

This dynamic perpetuates the formation of what I term "algorithmic enclaves," which are formed whenever a group of individuals, facilitated by their constant interactions with algorithms, attempt to create a (perceived) shared identity online for defending their beliefs and protecting their resources from both real and perceived threats. These enclaves are a type of "imagined community"⁶⁵ that is techno-socially constructed. The algorithm itself does not predetermine the formation of enclaves. Users and algorithms mutually shape each other in the sorting, classifying, and hierarchizing of people, information, and political preferences. The partitioned environment of algorithmic enclaves is dynamic, not static; clusters shift in size and membership over time. Within these enclaves,

⁶²Noelle-Neumann 1974.

⁶³Bennett and Iyengar 2010; see also Frey 1986.

⁶⁴Pariser 2011.

⁶⁵Anderson 1991.

small-scale online deliberation takes place, furthering consensus among members and amplifying any pre-existing sentiments, beliefs, and opinions they share. It is not the information per se that facilitates amplification processes but the sharing and discussion of the information within the enclave, whether negatively or positively, that correlates with their pre-existing opinions.

In the Pilkada case, along with emergent algorithmic enclaves based on collective identities like Islamists and liberals asking for their rights and claiming their versions of nationalism, new types of enclaves – such as Chinese-Christians, *hijabis*⁶⁶ (both pro and anti-Ahok), and *pribumi* (native), have also increased, fragmenting social space into enclaves based around identity politics. While these enclaves are based on a perceived shared identity, they are predominantly unified by perceived threats from others. For example, Ahok critics who self-identified as *pribumi* had no cohesive notion of what constitutes an Indonesian native, but they agreed this category excluded Chinese and non-Muslims (typically Christians). This is a digital version of tribal nationalism.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Chinese-Christians used Ahok as a symbol of injustices perpetrated against minorities since the establishment of the Indonesian Republic while channeling their own spirit of ethno-religious tribal nationalism. This was largely framed by the exclusion of Muslims (especially Arab-Muslims) and was implicitly Islamophobic.⁶⁸ Similarly, discourses in other types of enclaves embraced an exclusionary form of justice where injustices perpetrated against the marginalized – such as the poor, Papuans, Ahmadis,⁶⁹ Shias,⁷⁰ Gafatars,⁷¹ or other victims of the blasphemy law – were largely ignored. Using the familiar phrase “NKRI *harga mati*” (The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is final, absolutely non-negotiable), a mantra often evoked by the New Order regime (1966–1998) to suppress opposing ideologies, each claimed its own version of nationalism while accusing

⁶⁶*Hijabi* (plural: *hijabis*) is a term used for a Muslim woman or girl who wear a *hijab*, a headscarf which usually covers the head and chest.

⁶⁷Arendt 1973.

⁶⁸Based on my online observations, I found that a large number of pro-Ahok Chinese-Christian Indonesians who reside in the United States are Trump supporters. While screaming injustice in the case of Ahok, they were turning a blind eye to any injustice against Muslims, undocumented immigrants, and other minorities in the United States.

⁶⁹The term Ahmadis refers to the followers of Ahmadiyya, a religious movement that emerged in Punjab, India, in 1889. The movement was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), who claimed that he had fulfilled the Quranic prophecy of the second coming of the Mahdi, the Messiah, awaited by Muslims. Ahmadiyya's teachings are based on the Quran and the Hadith and Ahmadis consider themselves Muslims. Due to Ahmad's claim, however, mainstream Muslims such as Sunnis and Shias view Ahmadis as heretics. Indonesia's approximately 200,000 Ahmadis have been suppressed under a 2008 Presidential Decree threatening them with a maximum penalty of five years in prison for preaching or spreading their beliefs. In 2011, there were attacks against an Ahmadi mosque and community in Cikeusik, a village in West Java, which resulted in three deaths. Following this attack, their leader, Deden Muljana, was sentenced to prison for inciting conflict and blasphemy. See Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2013.

⁷⁰Shia, or Shi'ite Islam, is the second largest branch of Islam after Sunni Islam. A dispute over the successor to the Prophet Muhammad is the key theological key difference between the two. In Indonesia, Shias number around one million in a largely Sunni Muslim country and endure various forms of official and societal discrimination. In 2012, the East Java chapter of the Indonesian Ulama Council proclaimed Shia a deviant sect. In the same year, more than 1000 Sunni villagers attacked Shia villagers in Sampang regency and burned their houses, causing one death and displacing more than 500 Shias. Shia leader Tajul Muluk was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for alleged blasphemy. See HRW 2013 and Makin 2017.

⁷¹“Gafatar,” abbreviated from *Gerakan Fajar Nusantara*, is a local back-to-land farming movement which was founded in 2012 by Ahmad Moshaddeq. Claiming about 50,000 followers, it does not call itself a religion, but many of its members adhere to Millah Abraham, a new faith that draws on elements of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Indonesian government, however, has refused to register it as an organization and has classified the movement as an illegal religion. In 2016, the government banned Gafatar, forcibly evicted its members from rural Kalimantan, and moved them to detention centers in Java. In 2017, its founder, Moshaddeq, and president, Mahful Muis Tumanurung, were sentenced to prison for five and three years, respectively, for blasphemy. In the last decade, more than twenty-five Gafatar members have been charged and eleven imprisoned under the blasphemy law. See Emont 2017 and Kine 2017.

others of endangering the integrity of the state. Further, there was hardly any resistance to the abusive and discriminative blasphemy law itself, which historically has been used to criminalize religious minorities.⁷²

The emergent algorithmic enclaves have produced multiple forms of tribal nationalism, which, according to Hannah Arendt, is expansionist and inherently related to modern imperialism. While it is not the ideal form of political organization, Arendt asserts that the nation-state, to a certain degree, limits the potential expansiveness of nationalism.⁷³ As demonstrated in the Pilkada case, once detached from stable political institutions, nationalism becomes tribal and centered around common identity politics binding people in a transcendental unity. Discussions within these online enclaves embody sets of attitudes and beliefs that claim the uniqueness of their own people and the impossibility of the equality of outsiders. By so doing, they legitimize exclusion from and inclusion into these imagined communities.

Conclusion

The outburst of social media uses in Indonesia has dramatically transformed the way information is created, disseminated, and distributed. In electoral politics, social media can easily be utilized to disseminate information to reach and influence the voters. However, as demonstrated in the 2017 Pilkada DKI case, on-the-ground outreach activities remain significant in mobilizing voters. On social media, political leaders have wholeheartedly embraced commercial branding techniques through networks of volunteers, buzzers, and micro-celebrities, saturating the public sphere with emotional messages designed to cultivate trust in their political brand. The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial campaign exemplifies the practice of post-truth politics in marketing the brand. While facilitating freedom of expression, social media also encourages users to practice their freedom to hate, where individuals exercise their right to voice their opinions while actively silencing others, and provides fertile ground for the flourishing of sectarian and racist narratives. My analysis suggests that the mutual shaping between users and algorithms results in the formation of algorithmic enclaves that, in turn, produce multiple forms of tribal nationalism. Within these multiple online enclaves, social media users claim and legitimize their own versions of nationalism by excluding equality and justice for others. With such dynamics, the utilization of social media as a political tool in electoral campaigns further deepens divisions among social groups in society and amplifies animosity and intolerance against each other. While my assessment of social media usage in politics is dark and somber, looking beyond the Pilkada, I find sparks of hope in small but growing networks of activists which are binding previously disconnected individuals who focus on issues of justice, equality, and pluralism beyond identity politics. If these networks continue to develop and flourish, both online and on-the-ground, they may give us hope for a more just, inclusive, and plural Indonesia.

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⁷²Following Ahok's arrest, a small group of human right activists and moderate Muslim leaders called for the law to be repealed; the call, however, lacks popular support.

⁷³Arendt 1973.

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