

## Articulating Islamist Sectarian Group Antagonism Memes on the Indonesian Politics

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### ABSTRAK

Polarisation among Indonesians has arisen after the presidential rematch in the 2019 presidential election. It stimulated the repressive action of the Jokowi government has made Indonesian democracy to be on decline. Some scholars consider this as an atavism of an entrenching ideological conflict since hundreds of years ago between nationalism vs. Islamism. However, we argue that polarisation is more complex than what we expected before. This article examines the Islamist grassroots discourses to get an alternative perspective regarding the resurrection of conservatism in Indonesia. We collected and analysed qualitatively data of internet memes during the 2019 Indonesia Presidential campaign. We argue that antagonism occurred among the Islamist sectarian groups as a continuation of the *Aksi Bela Islam* (The Defending Islam Movement) in 2016. The antagonism among the groups indicates the rise of the Islamic radical-conservatism groups through the presentation of the antagonism between Islam Nusantara and Islamist puristic movement. The Islamic radical-conservatism group has successfully exploited the anti-Ahok movement with the Bela Islam (defending Islam) discourse. However, using Islamist issues during the 2019 presidential election has represented the triumph of the Politics of Islam: Islamization of Indonesian political ideology. Islam has harmonised into nationalism and secularism despite the internet memes' incoherent and irrational language. The triumph of Islamic hegemony transformed and infected Indonesia's political ideology. Islam has become an obligatory symbol in Indonesian politics.

**Keywords:** *Islam conservatism, politics of Islam, political internet memes, Indonesian Politics, humorous political communication.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the second period of Jokowi's presidency, Indonesia's democracy declined (Aspinall et al., 2020; Power, 2018) and entered the illiberalism era (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Diprose et al., 2019). This marked a significant departure from the previous analysis during the 2014 Presidential Election, which had portrayed Jokowi as the saviour of Indonesian democracy from the predicted authoritarian rule of Prabowo (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014). Bouchier (2019) argue that the decline of the Indonesian democracy relates to Prabowo's successful utilisation of Islamic sectarian groups in his campaign. These Islamic conservative-sectarian groups had gained considerable momentum during President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's era and eventually merged to initiate the massive protest known as the "Defending Islam Movement" in 2016. This movement demanded the imprisonment of Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (also known as Ahok) on charges of blasphemy against Islam. Led by the conservative-radical Islamic group known as "The Islamic Defenders Front," these protesters leveraged Islam as a political tool in the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election and collaborated with Prabowo in the 2019 Presidential Election (Bouchier, 2019; Hadiz, 2018; Peterson, 2020; Sholikin, 2018).

The utilisation of Islamist issues and the collaboration between Prabowo and the conservative-radical Islamic groups in the 2019 election insisted that Jokowi took repressive action and became authoritarian (Bourchier, 2019). The conservative-radical Islamic groups propagate the issue that Jokowi came from a communist, anti-Islam, and ignored Islam's blasphemy. Notably to the conservative-radical Islamic group due to the resistance to the Jokowi's regime. The conservative-radical Islamic groups further propagated the narrative that Jokowi had communist leanings, was anti-Islam, and ignored the issue of Islam's blasphemy, which significantly fuelled resistance against his regime.

From mid-2020, Indonesian authorities initiated a series of arrests targeting certain conservative-radical ulama figures, including Habib Rizieq Shihab, Habib Bahar Smith, Ustad Gus Nur, and Ustad Maaher At-Thuwalihi. These ulama figures were known for opposing Jokowi's regime and faced various legal charges. Furthermore, Jokowi's administration disbanded and outlawed the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) on June 21, 2019, the group that had played a pivotal role in initiating the "Defending Islam Movement."

In the post-presidential election 2019, political polarisation still occurs between Jokowi and the ex-Prabowo grassroots supporters. Polarisation and political debate on social media continue on the social media between supporters group (Afrimadona, 2021; Haq, 2021). Despite Prabowo's reconciliation and his appointment as a minister in Jokowi's government in October 2019, the discourse war at the grassroots level continues, with social media acting as a catalyst for reinforcing the divide between those labelled as 'pro-Islam' and 'pro-NKRI' (Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia). This polarisation has its roots in the 2014 Presidential and 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections and is still used by politicians today (Sujoko et al., 2022).

Mietzner and Muhtadi (2018, p. 13) argue that the polarisation tends to reflect ideological antagonism rather than the presidential candidates' supporter's antagonism, which has been established since President Yudhoyono. Fossati (2019) supports this argument that the 2019 Presidential Election is a historical recurrence of the *aliran* politics in the 1950s, between *santri* (pious Muslims) vs. *abangan* (nationalists and communists or nominal Muslims). This argument makes the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election an essential event in studying Islamist politics in Indonesia. This article will discuss the Islamist discursive toward the 2019 Election. Is Islam only competing with secular, nationalist, and other ideologies, or still conflicting with its Islamist groups as a consideration of the dynamics of Islamic politics in Indonesia, which is more complex than expected? Our data can contribute to providing a new perspective on contemporary grassroots Islamic discourses and the Islamist political dynamic among political ideologies in Indonesia.

This article posits that the political conflict observed in 2019 differs significantly from the ideological conflicts of the 1950s, which often framed the discourse as Islam versus nationalism or Islam versus secularism. Instead, we argue that this conflict is a direct continuation of the 'anti-Ahok' movement that gained prominence in 2016-2017. During this period, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) strategically employed emotional and irrational Islamic rhetoric, making them the most prominent radical-conservative group on the national level. However, at the same time, we found that the antagonism among Islamic sectarian groups has constructed the harmony of Islam in Indonesian politics.

The data we will present focuses on the practice of Islamist discourse and the conflicts among Islamic sectarian groups as expressed through internet memes within grassroots discussions. We consider an internet meme a relatively new form of political discourse in the internet era that is useful and used by young Indonesian middle-class people (Akmal, 2017)

and is often ignored by many political scholars. However, the internet memes data is also beneficial for examining the grassroots discursive practice (Denisova, 2019). The discursive practice that emerges from articulatory practice in societies could represent antagonism, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) had mentioned.

Furthermore, internet memes allow us to explore the politics of identities in Indonesia, especially regarding the transformation of conservatism and radical intolerance against Ahok, which shifted from the lower class to the middle class (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). This shift is significant as the middle class represents the largest group of internet users in Indonesia, making it a critical arena for understanding the evolving political landscape when politicians rely on social media to disseminate campaigns and their ideological messages (Astuti & Hangsing, 2018).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Review of the Antagonism*

To comprehend the conflict within Indonesian politics among Islamic sectarian groups as manifested in the discourse war through internet memes, it is beneficial to reference Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept of antagonism. Antagonism is the opposition in the democratic society due to the pluralism of the society in the form of meaning, discourse, objectivity, and societal group. It is developed by the closure of the identity, which continuously manifests itself in a social movement. Then, it makes antagonism a certainty in the democratic society. In other words, antagonism could be the political ontology in democracy. The antagonism explained the relation of the group in society. The relation creates boundaries among the group to reveal the objective perspective of the group. At the same time, it creates an antagonistic position among a group within society. The antagonistic position creates conflict and division as a prerequisite of plural democracy to gain harmony (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. xvii). However, harmony was not a purpose of antagonism in the democratic society. The harmony will generate new antagonism in any discursive practice.

On the symbolic level, antagonism represents the conflict between groups, class or dominant and subordinate groups. The antagonism on the symbolic level is a symbolic outlet that people need to express their position and avoid humans becoming a state of nature (Lefort, 1988, p. 217). Moreover, Porta and Diani (2006, p. 49) argue that symbolic antagonism can emerge powerful in the social movement context. The symbolic antagonism expression reconstructs the opposition or different position in the articulatory practice. Articulation is understood as a practice that fixes meaning by articulating moments in the position of difference. The differential position that appears articulated within discourse (called moment). Articulation is a process of relating elements that create a meaningful moment. It is an open interpretation that can be considered reality and truth.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 96) argue that the discourse is the structured totality emerging from articulatory practice. This argument makes the social reality only can exist and be accessible only through construction and discourse. This accentuation of inequality and marginalisation within recognised discourses can fuel successful social movements, with "accentuation" denoting the presence and absence, not disappearance but concealment, within language games. This interplay between language games and discourse can give rise to new antagonisms, such as the shift from bourgeois versus proletarian to the conflict between the ruling and working classes, forming new social groups marked by integration or division and culminating in identity formation.

We argue that the conflict and division among societal groups in Indonesia depict antagonism. Indonesia has been declared a democratic country since its declaration of independence in 1945. Despite Indonesia being declared a democratic nation since its independence in 1945, the full implementation of democracy has faced challenges. Ideological antagonism has persisted since the founding of the Indonesian state, with the first President, Soekarno, attempting to reconcile nationalism, communism, and Islamism. Some scholars argue that ideological antagonism still occurs (Bourchier, 2019; Fossati et al., 2020), even though communism has been prohibited since 1965.

### *Expressing Political Discourse with Internet Memes*

The scholar refers to Dawkins's (1976) definition of 'meme' as a cultural mimetic unit replicating from one person to another person, likewise a gene. According to Dawkins's definition of memes, Shifman (2014) has developed the concept of examining the meme in the digital form and replicating it from one person to another on the internet. Shifman (2014) defines the internet meme as digital content created and shared with imitated and modified popular content by many internet users in their consciousness. Shifman's definition identified the essential elements of internet memes: content, form, and stance. According to this definition, internet memes are not individual products but a product of collectives. A product created based on consciousness and common knowledge of the group of persons. Its presence represents shared consciousness. Meme creation as a collective product occurred due to internet connectivity, which has enabled many people to be connected simultaneously.

Since the 2014 Presidential Election and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, Indonesians have already used political internet memes and emotionally intense discourse antagonism in their political discussions (Beers, 2014; Lim, 2017; Syahputra, 2016; Tapsell, 2017, p. x). Indonesian citizens use internet memes to discuss political issues in a ridiculing and mocking manner. Their discursive practices use jokes, satires, paradoxical content, ridicules, and insulting labels, such as *cebong* (tadpoles), *kampret* (bat), or *kadrun* (desert lizard). Internet memes are created by articulating popular digital communicative symbols with an incoherent and contradicting language structure to send big ideas and meaning in the humour mechanism (Shifman, 2014).

Furthermore, Shifman mentions that internet memes always have their form, content, and stance to deliver a specific discourse. In political discursive practice, memes can dodge strict government censorship (likewise in China) (Mina, 2014) or collaborate with the mass media to enlarge issues and go viral (likewise in Brazil, impeach President Dilma Rousseff)

(Gambetta & Kossowska, 2018). The meme in this case is a political cartoon that consists of a photograph of Habib Rizieq Shihab. Habib Rizieq Shihab is an *ulama*, symbolising Indonesia's Islamic leadership. In this context, his right to be highly respected is highly respected and should be respected, but instead, he became the object of mockeries in the pre-presidential election political discourse. In the Islamic perspective, it is prohibited to insult the *ulama* and disparage 'something sacred'. Insulting the *ulama* is taboo in Islam and could trigger resistance from his *umat* (followers). Islam prohibits satire and ridicule that intend to deride other Muslims, as mentioned in the Qur'an (83:29), 'Indeed, those who committed crimes

*used to laugh at those who believed.*'. In some instances, mockeries such as satire and ridicule have become a real issue and even an international crisis (Kuipers, 2011). However, internet memes can conceal mockeries and silently go viral.

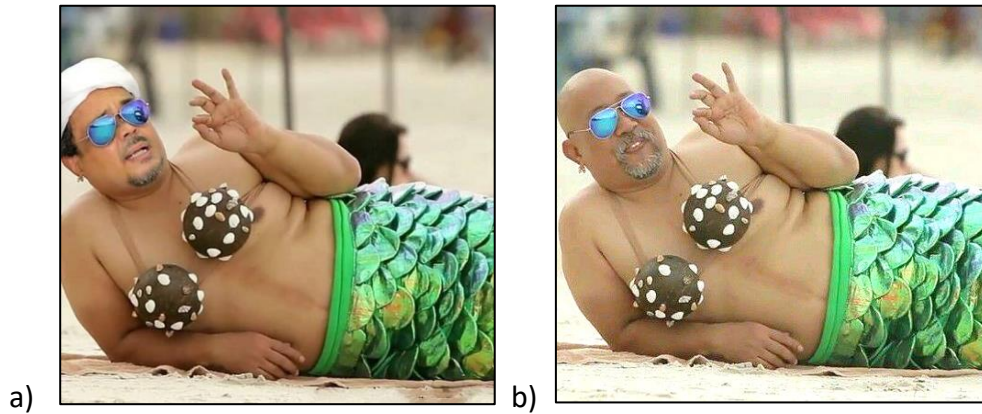


Figure 1: (a) A meme in the maniphoto format which insults Ulama Habib Rizieq Shihab, (b) The actual photograph taken from a comedy movie, Warkop DKI Reborn: Jangkrik Boss Part 2

Content articulation in humour mechanism and creativity makes the internet meme conceal harsh mockery and become a laughable joke. Koestler (1964) argued that humour and creativity are created by two (or more) ideas or situations that merge in a single message context. It makes humorous messages in internet memes tend to be irrational and paradoxical (incompatible frame of reference). Two or even more associative contexts construct these humorous messages to create humour. Therefore, we identify the potential meaning of the semiotics resources in the associative context to get a related issue discussed on the internet memes (see Figure 2). These humorous memes' message structure grows in the West, goes global, and becomes the digital culture (Shifman et al., 2014). The circumstances made Indonesia a consumer and adapter to the Western's free and liberal digital culture. Furthermore, with the freedom and democracy of the expression issue, buzzers derate, attack, and even silence the opposition (Beers, 2014; Lim, 2017; Syahputra, 2019).

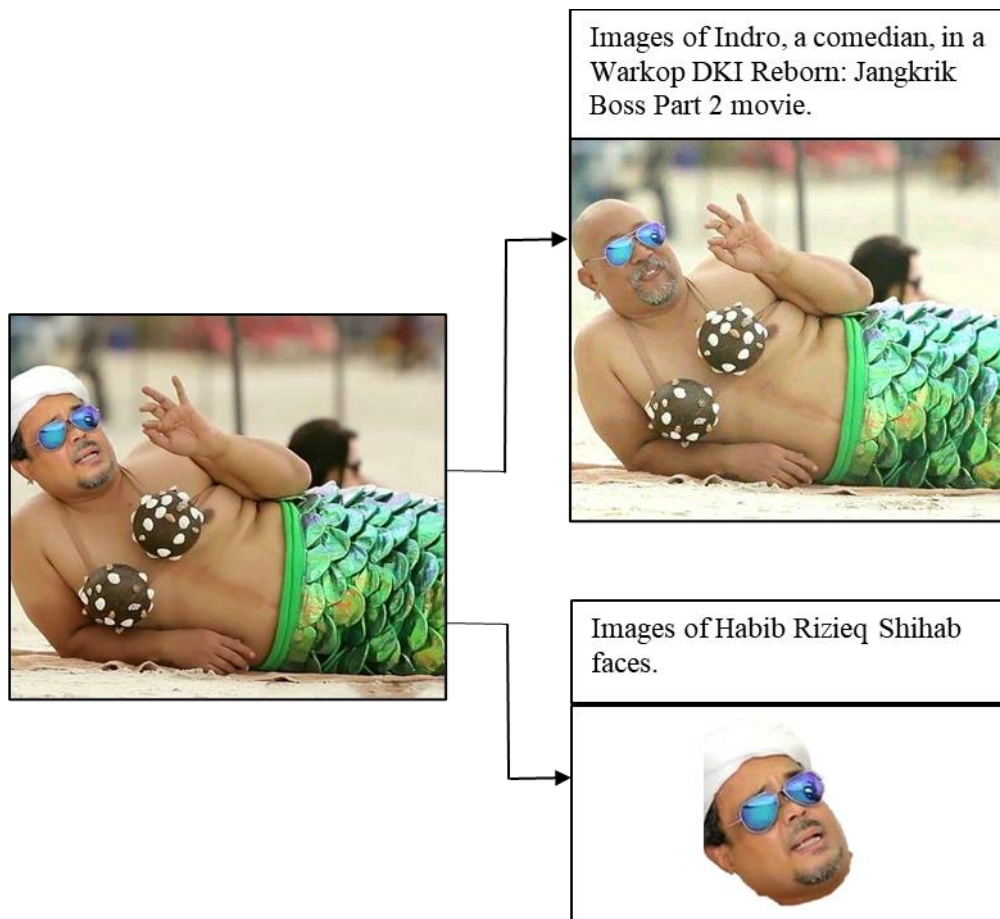


Figure 2: Humour mechanism on the internet meme to identify the idea or issue in an associative context.

Humour application in slacktivism conduct, such as the political internet meme, can be a deceiving tool (a trickster) (Weaver & Mora, 2016). Some politicians use political humour to engage the public and increase their popularity (Kasmani, 2022). Furthermore, humour can conceal an intention and evade social norms while attracting public attention. Nevertheless, in this context, the intended political humour's norms are Western norms (American) (Fry, 2004). Western norms allow their society's freedom to mock and laugh at their leaders, including religious leaders. These norms and values may contradict Indonesian society's established norms and Asian values, which accentuate the religious norms, considered authoritarianism, and abstinence impoliteness in freedom of speech (Thompson, 2015).

#### METHODOLOGY

Internet memes are selected as an analysis object to get the essential data regarding issues being discussed by the grassroots, in popular discourse, and unexpectedly (Shifman, 2014, p. 171). The internet meme is also essential to get a collective consciousness regarding a particular issue. An internet meme is created from popular digital sources and then articulated into other digital content in a particular language structure. It is sharing and replicating messages and stances to other internet users. Internet memes are propagating, imitating content, sharing meanings and ideologies, and even reflecting the collective consciousness of society. Thus, by examining the discussed issues within a meme, we also examine the collective consciousness within the society. Furthermore, this article examines the collective consciousness of Indonesian society regarding Islam. Whenever a tense political

discourse brings Islam into its discussion, that event will provide insights into the extreme perspective of Islam and Islam's interconnections with contemporary Indonesian politics.

In the first stage, we examine memes with a particular theme that discusses Islam in political discourses toward the Presidential Election of 2019. Data in the form of memes is collected using Google's search engine in Indonesia. The term '*meme pilpres 2019*' (*Pilpres* is the abbreviation of *Pemilihan Presiden* or Presidential Election) is employed as the search's keyword because it is a popular semantic label in Indonesia and an appropriate word to represent the event. In applying those three keywords, Google Search refers to the previous research and optimising the search engine algorithms' data searching capability (Cilibrasi & Vitányi, 2007; Huang et al., 2011; Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2018). The data collection started from August 2018 until April 2019, which is the period when the KPU (General Election Commission) began its presidential candidates' registration until the Presidential Election took place. This eight-month period is a precise moment for collecting data in the most frequent and intense discussion of the political discursive during the campaign period. We collected 583 memes that discussed political and election issues at this stage. Theme analysis was carried out on these 583 memes to learn the main ideas and involved associative context and semiotics resources in these memes. In this stage, we collected 61 or 10.46% of memes discussing the issue or content regarding Islamic discourse.

Furthermore, we analysed 61 memes to get the main idea regarding the discussed issue and theme. At this stage, we interpret internet memes by identifying the essential elements of memes, form, content, and stances (Shifman, 2014), and the potential humour mechanism of the memes is constructed by the context of discourse. The humour mechanism on the memes referred to Koestler's (1964) argument that humour is built by two or more stories or associative contexts in one frame of reference. This argument helps us identify the discourses within the internet memes and the stance of the internet memes according to the potential meaning of the memes in particular communication contexts. The discourse appeared from a semiotic resource that discussed the issue based on the conventional knowledge within society. These semiotic resources are what van Leeuwen (2004, pp. 93–95) mentions as a knowledge of the reality constructed by the social process. Then, it is represented in many genres of representation and multimode of representation. According to the analysis process result, we were able to get seven themes regarding Islamist discourse that Indonesian society discussed toward the 2019 Presidential Election (see Table 1).

Table 1: Islamic theme discussed through political internet memes

No	Theme	Quantity	Percentages
1	Insulting Habib Rizieq Shihab	19	31%
2	Derision of Jokowi religious piety	4	7%
3	Derision of Prabowo religious piety	12	20%
4	Derision of Ma'ruf Amin	2	3%
5	Derision of Sandiaga Uno religious behaviour	6	10%
6	Mocking religious worship of the candidate's supporters	13	21%
7	Mocking the Islamic sectarian groups	5	8%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following research findings illuminate the alternative perspective regarding the Islamist sectarian group antagonism during the 2019 election. The findings will be divided into three subchapters to display data, develop the argument, and make conclusions.

### *Mocking Habib Rizieq*

According to the data in Table 1, Habib Rizieq Shihab is the most frequently discussed political discursive toward the election. Most memes involving Habib Rizieq Shihab are intended to derate him. The memes' messages vary from the *halus* (soft) and implicit to the *kasar* (rude), explicit and emotional. **Error! Reference source not found.** is an example of a meme that contains the *halus* and implicit derision toward Habib Rizieq. The meme presents a photograph of Habib Rizieq Shihab, which is manipulated as the personification of Yoko, a character from the mid-90s popular TV series of Indonesia, *The Return of the Condor Heroes*. The meme insinuates Habib Rizieq as Ratna Sarumpaet's partner in crime or considers him an individual who behaves similarly to Ratna Sarumpaet, an activist who has propagated a big hoax before the election. Ratna claims that some unknown person intimidated and persecuted her following her contra-government stand, as she shows her bruised face. On the latter day, however, she admits that her bruised face was due to plastic surgery. Ratna then became the ridicule of Indonesian society and national figures following her lawsuit and implicit accusation toward the perpetrators.



Figure 3: The meme which contains derision or the subtle insinuation toward Habib Rizieq Shihab

Data in Figure 3 is a meme that insults Habib Rizieq Shihab. The manipulated face of Habib Rizieq made him look like Satan, which was done by editing his teeth and eyes and adding the Star of David on his forehead. The personification of Satan contains the potential to symbolise the lack of morality and bad behaviour. The added Star of David legitimises the moral lack of someone on earth. According to common Indonesian Muslim belief, it related to these matters is the discourse of the Zionists (The Jewish organisation that has a mission



to disintegrate Muslims). This meme has the text '*maha bejat FPI dengan segala premannya*' (The depraved greatly FPI with its whole thugs). Text of '*maha*' (the great) is a hyperbole word which is often associated with God's traits, such as *Maha Pengasih* (The Most Beneficent) and *Maha Penyayang* (The Most Merciful). Bad behaviour or lacking morality are the potential interpretations of the '*bejat*' (depraved) word. The combination of these two hyperbolic words' intention is to point out the destructive behaviours of FPI and Habib Rizieq as its leader. The '*preman*' (thugs) word refers to the behaviours of Habib Rizieq followers and FPI members as their behaviours were notorious for violent actions (that resemble the thugs) in 'upholding' the Islamic sharia (see Wilson, 2014). It also reflects the label of FPI as an aggressive, intolerant, and radical Islamic group. Amplifying the Islamism stigma was during the collaboration of FPI with HTI, which was vigorous in the caliphate (Islamic state) campaigns.



Figure 3: The meme which insults Habib Rizieq Shihab

People who created and circulated memes in **Error! Reference source not found.** and Figure 3 created, imitated, and circulated to mock and derate Habib Rizieq. This meme and its semiotics resources on memes do not directly relate to the election. Nevertheless, this meme also attacks Habib Rizieq Shihab and his transgression in the past. These memes tend to disregard their respect toward the *ulama* and strip Habib Rizieq out of his *ulama* status and Islam. These memes made Habib Rizieq seemingly appears as the bad guy that deserves the mocking and laughing.

We also found other memes that relate Habib Rizieq to the 2019's Election discourses. Instead of mocking or derating him, both memes in Figure 4 subtly insult Habib Rizieq Shihab. These memes insult Habib Rizieq Shihab due to religious law and doctrines abuse. In a biased judgment, Habib Rizieq Shihab considered using Islamic law in politics to appraise Prabowo's religious piety and Jokowi's (and Ma'ruf Amin's) sins. The insulting messages are represented in a six pictured meme arranged into two columns and three rows. We can read the meme with a zigzag pattern that starts from number one to six (see Figure 5 to interpret it).



Figure 4: The memes of Habib Rizieq



Figure 5: Guides for interpreting the meme

Meme on Figure 5 represents Habib Rizieq Shihab inculpate *haram* (prohibited) for a Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin's religious behaviour. These memes discuss an issue regarding misdoubting Ma'ruf Amin as an ulama in the imaginary conversation between Habib Rizieq Shihab and Ma'ruf Amin. In this imaginary conversation, Habib Rizieq Shihab asks a satirical question, '*ulama Bukan sih?*' (You are not an ulama, are you?). This question satirises Ma'ruf Amin, who has considered sins and committed forbidden (*haram*) actions, congratulating *Merry Christmas* to Christians. Then in another column, Habib Rizieq Shihab also accuses Jokowi as '*kafir, laknatullah*' (Infidel, God's curse on you). However, Habib Rizieq Shihab neglected Prabowo's sin, with the satirical sentences, '*absolutely halal. Ini baru capres pilihan ijtima ulama dan alumni 212*' (literally translated as 'Absolutely halal'. This presidential candidate is the choice of the *ijtima ulama* and the 212 alumni'). Furthermore, this meme did not discuss *sharia law* or any Islamic law in a serious debate. This meme engages the interpreters to laugh at Habib Rizieq Shihab's religious deviation in the humorous puns (points 5 and 6) and the story's context in points 1 to 4.

Ma'ruf Amin is a distinguished ulama of a traditional Islamic group, leaders in the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI), and a professor in the Syariah banking. In Indonesian Muslim society, Ma'ruf Amin is a well-educated and well-respected ulama. As represented in Figure 4 (a) meme, Ma'ruf Amin's Islamic law application differs from Habib Rizieq's. Similar with Habib Rizieq Shihab, Ma'ruf Amin has considerable *umat* (followers). Habib Rizieq is respected for his educational background, teachings, and preaching and is considered a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. So, Habib Rizieq is implicitly preaching a 'pure Islam' than the local (traditional Islam) preachers. He always represented himself in traditional Arabic attire, such as *sorban* (turban) and *gamis* (robe). They use Islamic symbols in their political action. Nevertheless, people have not considered the symbols as sacred and saintly politicians. Although there are cases of arrested for blasphemy under the country's Information and Electronic Transaction Act. It is argued that mocking Islam as a scapegoat in political debate in an incoherent and paradoxical meme is acceptable. It is reflected in modern society's consciousness and rational discourse, in contemporary humorous digital content. Which the religious authority expanded their conventional mode of interaction to create an alternative perspective of the global societies (Turner, 2007). We argued that the issues of the *ulama* in these memes reflect society's rational attitude, which views the ulama as an ordinary human who does politics, has human natures and does not necessarily bring God's righteousness.

#### *Mocking Candidate's Religious Piety*

Pepinsky et al. (2018) define Islamic religious piety as obedience to the five pillars of Islam, belief in Allah and Prophet Muhammad, daily prayers (*Salat*), obligatory tithing (*Zakat*), fasting during Ramadan, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca (*Haji*). Their research found that religious piety strongly relates to Indonesia's public opinion and political behaviour. Religious piety has become an essential issue in the political discourse due to the enhancement of the internet user in Indonesia. Religious piety on social media has become a new relevance in contemporary internet users in Indonesia for religious purposes. Moreover, social media makes it possible to express piety and further expands the possibilities of Islamic sociality and organisations (Husein & Slama, 2018). Lengauer (2018) found that social media has become a model for disseminating religious piety.

Figure below is a meme that insults Sandiaga Uno regarding his (sudden) transformation into a religious character regarding his candidacy. The insulting uses a hyperbolic modified image of Habib Luthfi Yahya's ulama (see Figure ). The meme also discusses the label of *santri* for Sandiaga Uno, his supporting Islamic parties' figures given that during his declaration as a vice-presidential candidate. Sohibul Iman, the chairman of Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), uses the term of '*Santri Post-Islamism*' for Sandiaga Uno religious identity (Akbar, 2018; Sani, 2018). Sohibul Iman argues that Sandiaga Uno is a good and pious Muslim, the modern era's *santri*. However, Sandiaga Uno was widely known as a businessman and did not have historical relations with Islam, Islamic organisations, or even Islamic parties. Thus, the label of *santri* or ulama does not suit Sandiaga Uno and seems to be forceful. Labelling Sandiaga Uno as a *santri* will create an impression that he represents the Islamic groups.



Figure 7: The meme insinuates and ridicules Sandiaga Uno's religious behaviour

Furthermore, the meme is society's collective representation that ridicules politicians and Uno's action in toying with Islamic issues and labels. Meme's text sarcastically criticised Uno, saying that he had 'bought' the Islamist label for 1 trillion Rupiahs. Then become a *santri* (Muslim religious student) in August; an *ulama* (person who possesses the quality of Islamic knowledge in the broadest sense and the guardian of Islamic doctrine) in September; a *syekh* (preacher and scholar in Islam) in October; a *wali* (saint) in November; and a *nabi* (Prophet) in December. Moreover, the meme went viral and was categorised as disinformation after becoming an Indonesian hoax busters community verification object. These mockeries and ridicule memes represent the antagonism among supporters' candidacy using the religious issue.



Figure 8: Foto the photograph of Habib Luthfi bin Yahya, the meme, and the disinformation label of TurnBackHoax's community



### *Antagonism Among Islamic Sectarian Group*

The conflict between the most prominent Indonesian Islamic organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, has shifted from ideological-based to political sectarianism (Arifianto, 2021). Arifianto argues that the sectarianism issue has effectively politicised when Muhammadiyah aligned with the opposition of Jokowi against NU, which aligns with Jokowi. However, we found an alternative perspective regarding sectarianism in the Islamic group antagonism in the 2019 Presidential election. The NU, which aligns with Jokowi, opposes the other Islamic group in certain discourses.

We found that the internet memes discussed antagonism among Islamic sectarian groups in a humorous mechanism. Figure is a meme that discusses an Islamic sectarian group antagonism, *Islam Nusantara* (traditional Southeast Asia's Islam) and *Islam Murni* (puristic or pure Islam). Both sectarian group antagonisms have a long history in Indonesia but have new terms. The Nahdlatul Ulama's leader, Said Aqil Siraj, introduced and popularised the concept of *Islam Nusantara* (see Kato, 2021). *Islam Nusantara* concept refers to the traditional Islam movement, which evolved in the tradition of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (established in 1926). The introduction of *the Islam Nusantara concept counteracted* and weir the Islamism and *Khalifah* concepts. These Islamism and *Khalifah* concepts are prevalent in Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and other radical Islamic groups. Hence, the collaboration of Prabowo and Sandiaga Uno with these conservative-radical Islamic groups automatically becomes the opposing side of Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin with NU support. The label of *Islam Nusantara* on Jokowi's camp supporters had created another opposing antagonism pole with the radical Islamic groups. The meme in Figure reflects this antagonism with an insinuation in the imaginary conversation of Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin. 'Our Islam is Nusantara Islam and is different from the Saudi Arabian's,' was a statement Amin made in the imaginary conversation containing the insinuation. It intended to answer Jokowi's question of 'where should we go for our Hajj pilgrimage?'



Figure 9: The meme which discusses the Islamic group

In the 2019 Election, the radical Islamic groups that offer Islamism and the *Khilafah* collaborated with the Modernist (Prosperous Justice Party, and National Mandate Party) Islamic parties (Fossati, 2019). Thus, in general, Prabowo's candidacy was seemingly receiving full support from the Islamic group. This group is similar to the Islamic purification notions of the Islamic unification movement, whose grand notion is Islam through politics (Ricklefs, 2012, p. 420). The internet meme in Figure is a *puristic Islam group* that insults traditional Islamic groups, with the discourse regarding the differences with the origin of Islam from Saudi Arabia.

Islamic sectarian groups strongly relate to the Islamic political movement in Indonesian history. Islamic political movement within Indonesian society stretched far before the very existence of the Indonesian Republic. Ricklefs (2012, p. 12) writes that the Islamic political movement occurred in the indigenous aristocrats of Minangkabau (West Sumatera) in the 1780s. The movement's purpose was to purify Islam to its origin that the Minangkabau society has widely adhered to Islam. After having the puritan group go to the Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca and be inspired by the Wahhabis movement (an Islamic reform movement founded by Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhāb in central Arabia and adopted by the Saudi family), the locals established the Islamic purification movement. This movement creates resistance from the aristocrats who request the help of the Dutch Colonial Government. Which eventually led to much more complicated conflicts and triggered the Padri War. In the 19th century, while some Indonesian societies already had national and political consciousness, the Islamic political movements were still intertwined with Islamism. Some of these intertwining resulted in conflicts with various tension and complexities. Referring to Ricklefs (2012), significant conflicts involving Islamic movements or politics during Islam's evolution in Indonesia occurred in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1940s, a blood-shedding conflict occurred in Java between the *santri* (pious Muslims or Pesantren students) and the *abangan* (nominal Muslim or nationalist). The 1930 depression and intensifying Javanese society's political movement had strengthened the polarisation, which eventually triggered the conflict.

In the 1955 election, the first Indonesian election since its independence, the Islamic voters could elect the Islamist party to support the Islamist political agenda. Ricklefs (2012) argues that a competitive *aliran* rivalry between the *santri* (pious Muslim) and the *abangan* (nationalists and communists or nominal Muslims) in the 1955 election. NU and *Masyumi* represent *santri*. Then PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and PNI (Indonesian National Party) represent the *abangan* (Nurdin et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the Islamic party's voters never dominated the election. The highest cumulative number of voters for Islamic parties occurred in the 1955 General Election (only 43% for cumulative percentages) and declined in subsequent elections (Cumulative Islamic parties' voters in 1955 general election is 43%; in 1999 general election is 38%; 2004 general election is 38%; 2009 general election is 29%; and 2019 general election is 30%. Furthermore, referring to Fossati (2019), the identity politics of this sectarian was re-identified in the 2019 general election. After 32 years of Islamic politics being repressed by the New Order and escalated in 2016 through a massive demonstration of Anti-Ahok or *Bela Islam* (Defending Islam). In the election, PDIP (*Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle*) represented the *abangan* (Secularist parties). In contrast, PKB (*National Awakening Party*), PPP (*United Development Party*), PAN (*National Mandate Party*), PKS (*Prosperous Justice Party*), and PBB (*Crescent Star Party*) represent the *santri*. However, in the 2019 general election, the *santri* split into traditional Islam (PKB and PPP) and modernist Islam (PAN, PKS, PBB, and a part of PPP) due to the president's candidacy. Another finding concerning the *Politik aliran* existence in the 2019 election refers to Duile and Tamma (2021),

which mentioned that the 2019 Presidential elections' rivalry reflects Islam (*santri*) vs Nationalist (*abangan*) rivalry.

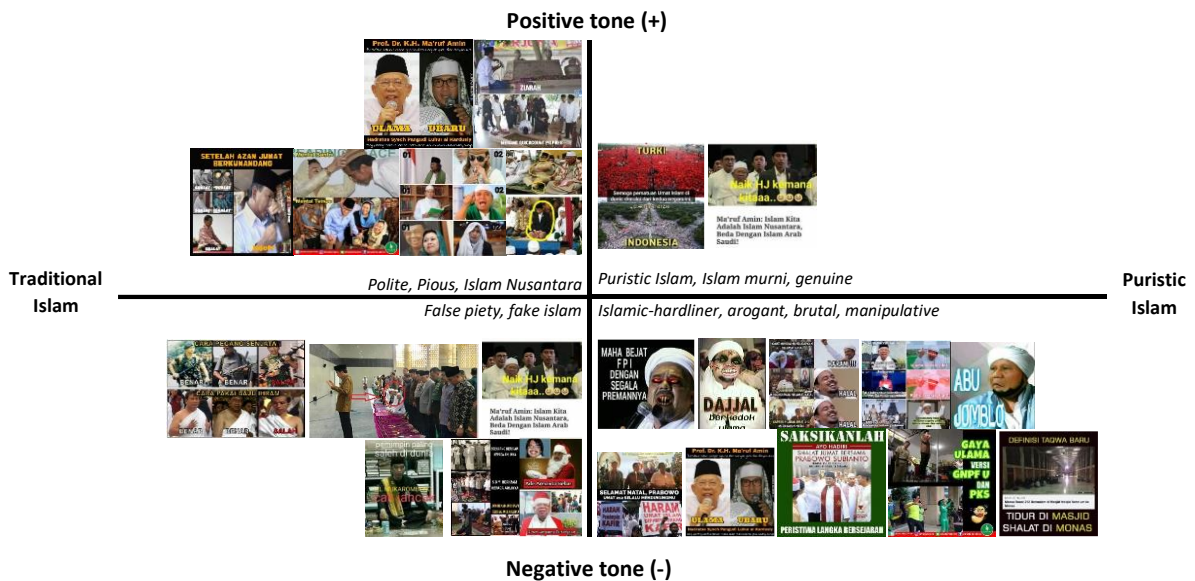


Figure 10: The antagonism between puristic Islam and traditional Islam group

The antagonism between puristic Islam (pure '*Islam of Saudi Arabia*') and traditional Islam (*Islam Nusantara*) is reflected in the mimetic content and the discourse within memes (Figure ). Traditional Islam mocks the puristic with insulting labels and symbols. For instance, puristic Islam is hard-line, arrogant, brutal, and manipulative Islam. These labels and symbols relate to the Islamic sectarian group's violence and arrogance of the FPI and its leader Habib Rizieq Shihab (see Ugur & Ince, 2015; Wilson, 2014). The FPI is an intolerant Islamic group and frequently does violence due to upholding the '*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*' (literally translated as 'enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong'). They grew during President SBY as the Islamic vigilantes' group outside the established Islamic, for instance, NU or Muhammadiyah. Even more, they are against another Islamic group. For instance, they attacked a religious tolerance campaign (National Alliance for Freedom and Belief Campaign) for advocacy Ahmadiyah on June 1 2008. This tragedy caused many participants to be injured, notably the pluralism sympathiser. Mass media address it as *Monas Incident*. Conflict and debate occur in discourse after the *Monas Incident* between pro-FPI and pro-pluralist. For instance, Habib Rizieq Shihab quarrelled with Maman Imanulhaq (Representatives of NU on a TV talk show) and insulted Gus Dur as '*Gus Dur itu buta mata juga buta hati*' (Gus Dur is blind, both of his eyes and his heart) on the TV talk show. This insulting was popular and was reminded by Gus Dur followers. Moreover, the video was reshared on Twitter (1.145 retweeted) by Jokowi supporters before the 2019 election to remind the antagonism to FPI (see Figure 6).





Figure 6: The Gus Dur insulting video by Habib Rizieq in 2008, which was reshared on Twitter toward the 2019 Election

Furthermore, antagonism is represented with symbols, such as *gamis* (the robe) vs *sarung* (the longyi), Islam *murni* (pure Islam) vs Islam Nusantara (Maritime of Southeast Asia's Islam or traditional Islam), genuine Islam vs false Islam, and true vs false. Habib Rizieq Shihab has advantages for reinforcing authenticating Islam regarding his race and Arabic symbol on his outfit. Notably, his designation '*Habib*', '*cucu Nabi Muhammad*' (Prophet Muhammad's grandson), '*Imam Besar Umat Islam Indonesia*' (Supreme Leader of Indonesian Muslim), and his Arabic outfit (*gamis* and *sorban*) substantiate the puristic of his Islam. This symbol has become the mockery object of traditional Islam groups. Regarding these symbols, in contrast, puristic Islam inculpates traditional Islam as a false Islam and has fake religious piety expression. However, traditional Islam has represented itself as a modest *Muslim* with a traditional outfit, such as *sarung* and *peci*. The candidates use this symbol as a tool to expose their religious piety. All candidates, Jokowi, Prabowo, and Sandiaga Uno was a nationalist-secular figure. Only Ma'ruf Amin has an Islamic education background and affiliation with the Islamic organisation Nahdatul Ulama; however, they need an Islamic symbol in their campaign. For instance, Jokowi was an engineer, businessman, Mayor of Solo, and Governor of Jakarta supported by the nationalist Party (PDIP); Prabowo is an ex-military general. His mother is a Christian; Sandiaga Uno is a businessman. However, they need an Islamic symbol for their campaign. Jokowi needs to expose his religious piety with *solat*, *peci*, *sarung*, and other Islamic symbols. Moreover, Sandiaga Uno deemed it necessary to get the label '*santri post Islamism*'.

Some scholars argue that the use of Islamic symbols and issue in the Prabowo campaign generates prejudice of the socio-political agenda of HTI and FPI to the resurgence of Islamism (see Hew, 2018; Muhtadi, 2009; Nawab & Osman, 2010). Nevertheless, our data have shown that Jokowi uses these issues and symbols. In this context, Islamist has become a symbol of moral standards. Islamic symbols have become a scramble symbol for persuading and manipulating religious piety. Fortunately, Islam has many groups in Indonesia, making the candidates select the sectarian group. For instance, traditional Islam, modernist Islam, puristic Islam, conservative, or even radical Islam.

## CONCLUSION

The 2019 presidential election was the fierce post-Reformation presidential election. Not only because it is a rematch between Jokowi vs Prabowo, but also the utilisation of the Islamist issue after a massive protest *Aksi Bela Islam* in 2016 (Arifianto, 2019). The Protest encouraged the grassroots candidate's supporters to enter the discourses war stance with their beliefs on the internet. Some scholars consider it an ideological or *aliran* entrenching antagonism—for instance, *santri vs abangan*, Islamist vs secularism, or Islamist vs nationalism (Bourchier, 2019; Fossati, 2019; Ricklefs, 2012). Ricklefs (2012) discerns the antagonism as a religious atavism since the *Padri* war in 1780. This argument has become our reference to examine the antagonism among Indonesian citizens according to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) antagonism. This research contributes to a new perspective on contemporary Indonesian politics and the resurgence of Islamic conservatism in Indonesia. Regarding issues and the discourse discussed on the internet, examining the collective consciousness of Indonesian society.

Furthermore, we have several conclusions regarding our findings. First, we argue that the antagonism does not only occur between political ideology or *aliran*. The antagonism also occurred among the Islamic sectarian groups. It relates to the Islamic purification consciousness regarding Islamist practice. However, it is too far to connect with the purification movement in 1780 in Minangkabau, or Darul Islam rebellions to declare Islamic Indonesian State in 1955s. We prefer to argue that the idea of building the Islamic States will permanently reside in the collective subconsciousness of Indonesian Muslim society. Then will resurgence when stimulated by the social movement, for instance, *Aksi Bela Islam* protest. However, another Islamic sectarian group is always against them regarding belief differences, power seizure, or irrational reason. This position is an advantage for a state to control Islam's power and maintain Islam's diversity in Indonesia with conflict and division. At the same time, the antagonism also maintains democracy through the Islamist movement.

Second, the discourse on the internet meme represents the rise of conservatism in the 2019 election, a triumph of the conservative-radical group FPI social movement, which presents the antagonism among the Islam Nusantara vs Islamist puristic movement. It successfully exploits the anti-Ahok movement with the *Bela Islam* (defending Islam) discourse. This finding reinforces the debate regarding the resurgence of conservatism in Indonesia. We argue that the conservatism issue emerges regarding the internet's virality, amplified by the mass media. This argument reinforced Mietzner and Muhtadi's (2018) argument regarding the resurgence the intolerance in the *Aksi Bela Islam* movement. We found that the conflict and division among grassroots supporters discussed the candidates' religious piety expression and antagonism of a sectarian group. We did not find the discussion regarding the establishment of Islamic States. We did not refuse the prejudice of Islamism's political agenda.

However, we recognise the collaboration between FPI and HTI as a different organisation. The FPI is not a continuation of a previous organisation established before the Reformation Era. Wilson (2014) calls them an intolerance-vigilante group outside the established organisation, such as NU or Muhammadiyah. They differ from *Darul Islam*, even though they often talk about purification, mainly piety and religious behaviour. This finding established Arifianto's (2021) study examining sectarianism shifting NU and Muhammadiyah. In this context, we argue that the resurrection of Islam in the 2019 Election is the conservative-radical Islamic group's success in acquiring support from the Indonesian Islamic community and mobilising the Indonesian Muslim community to stand by their side in their

movement. It is bringing conservative-radical Islam (FPI) to become more prevalent at the national level against new antagonism. These are the consequences of the assertiveness of their expression in the anti-Ahok Protest in 2016-2017. In vice versa, the overdue traditional Islam assigns stance in the blasphemy protest makes them lose popularity in the protest discourses.

Third, the use of Islamist issues in national politics represents the rising of the Politics of Islam: Islamization of Indonesian political ideology. Since the 1955 Indonesian general election, the Islamic party has never dominated and won the election. However, in the 2019 general election, Islamists dominated Indonesian politics. Even though the cumulative votes for Islamic parties only reached 30%. However, in the 2019 election, all presidential candidates need an Islamic label and religious piety as an important political symbol. Islam has harmonised with other ideologies, married to nationalists (in the Jokowi-Maruf ideological campaign symbol and Prabowo-Sandiaga). There is no more (only) ideological antagonism between Islam vs secular or Islam vs nationalist. Islam has harmonised into nationalism and secularism despite the internet memes' incoherent and irrational language. Discussed in emotional language, paradoxical, to juxtaposition, but still within the context of rational political discourse. So, we can conclude that the 2019 election is not just an antagonism between *santri* vs *abangan*, Islam vs nationalist, or political replication of the 1950s (election 1955). It is a new antagonism between traditional Islam vs conservative Islam. Islam has harmonised into Indonesian national politics. However, this harmony was not the end of the Islamist movement, nevertheless was the beginning of new antagonism.

Moreover, this is the triumph of the supremacy of Islam that has mutated and infected Indonesian political ideology. Islam has become an obligation symbol in Indonesian politics. Islam (or the symbolic identities of *santri*) is not always opposed to the secular-nationalist ideology (or *abangan*). It is a dominant political ideology and the standard of morality for contemporary politicians in Indonesia. However, as this trend continues further, more research could examine discursive practice in society, even more in the growth of an internet-remix culture and political buzzer exertion in politics.

#### BIODATA

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