

**“RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA” IN THE CONTEXT OF 2019
INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:
POLITICIZATION OF NATIONALISTIC SENTIMENTS**

**“PROPAGANDA RUSIA” DALAM KONTEKS PILPRES 2019
DI INDONESIA: POLITISASI SENTIMEN NASIONALISTIK**

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Abstrak

Makalah ini menguji tuduhan propaganda Rusia yang muncul sepanjang masa kampanye dalam perhelatan pemilu serentak 2019 di Indonesia. Tuduhan tersebut dipicu panasnya tensi politik selama pemilu berlangsung. Dugaan adanya propaganda Rusia pertama kali dilontarkan oleh calon petahana, Jokowi, saat menanggapi banyaknya serangan hoax dan fitnah yang diproduksi kubu lawan untuk menyerang dirinya dalam memengaruhi opini pemilih. Tuduhan Jokowi ini membuat tensi politik semakin panas. Bahkan kubu lawan menuntut Jokowi untuk meminta maaf kepada Pemerintah Rusia karena dianggap telah melontarkan pernyataan yang tidak berdasar fakta. Ketegangan semakin meningkat saat banyak media menyorot isu ini serta menyeret-nyeret perwakilan Rusia di Jakarta. Artikel ini akan menguji sejauh mana tuduhan propaganda Rusia yang muncul selama pemilu berlangsung memengaruhi hubungan antarkedua negara.

Kata Kunci: propaganda Rusia, Pemilu Presiden 2019, hoax, Jokowi

Abstract

This paper examines Russian allegations of propaganda that emerged throughout the campaign period during the 2019 simultaneous elections in Indonesia. The accusation was triggered by the heat of political tension during the election. The allegations of “Russian Propaganda” were first raised by the potential incumbent Jokowi in responding to many hoaxes and slander attacks produced by the opponents to strike him in influencing voter opinion. Jokowi’s accusation made political tension even hotter. The opposing camp demands Jokowi to apologize to the Russian government for being considered to have made a statement not based on facts. Tension had increased when many media highlighted this issue and dragged Russian representatives in Jakarta. This article examines to what extent “Russian Propaganda” accusations emerged during the election affecting the two countries’ relations.

Keywords: Russian Propaganda, Indonesian Presidential Election, hoax, Jokowi

Introduction

Simultaneous elections in Indonesia just ended in December 2020. It is called as simultaneous because this election is different from the polls that have been held before. These polls carry out for all levels of government, both at the district-provincial and national levels, to vote legislators and presidents in one day. Because of the density and brevity of time, many international monitoring institutions consider Indonesia's simultaneous election the most complex election that has been organized worldwide (CNN Indonesia, 2019). Compared to elections run in other major democracies countries, referring to the size of the country and population, such as India and USA, Indonesia election is unlike. Despite having almost a population as large, India elections last for one month, longer than Indonesia (Biswas, 2014). While the elections in America use Electronic Machine Voting system (brace) (Lin & Espinoza, 2006) so that the implementation is more efficient and modern than the elections in Indonesia, which still uses ballots.

The complex implementation of simultaneous elections in Indonesia resulted in many Polling Station Working Committee (KPPS) passing. According to data released by the Indonesian General Election Commission (KPU), the number of election officers or KPPS officers who died until April 29, 2019, was 311 people (Faridz et al., 2019). However, the number continues to increase to 440 people until May 4, 2019 (Astuti, 2019). The cause of death is primarily due to fatigue. With a high portion of the workload with the implementation of elections at all levels, the polling organizers are required to complete the ballot counting task in just one day. Many of them worked long hours, even overnight, until the next day. Overall, the system of simultaneous elections in Indonesia has been praised, but it is also criticized and encouraged to review the system for future elections.

In this paper, the mechanism of electoral work in Indonesia will not explain in detail, although several interesting issues can be elaborated, especially in the third-largest democratic country in the world. This paper

will only further highlight the electoral tensions that potentially impact the relations between Indonesia and Russia.

Election in Indonesia: An Overview

Elections, wherever they are, indeed bring warm tension to the dimensions of domestic politics and foreign policy. Even not a few of the election issues often attract intervention from other countries to get involved. The allegation of involvement of foreign countries, especially superpower countries, over the election results that run in a country was explained by Dov H. Levin. According to Levin, from 1946 through 2000, the US and the Soviet Union had been involved in one of the nine competitive elections held (Levin, 2016). Interestingly, the intervention was carried out not only through covert and confidential interventions but also operated openly. Indeed, Levin sees this overt intervention provides many benefits for candidates since overt intervening is usually done by considering the minimum risk conditions. As he said, "*I also show that overt interventions are usually more effective than covert interventions*" (Levin, 2016).

In addition, Levin also explained two conditions where significant force interventions usually occur. First, large powers will be involved if certain candidates and parties threaten their interests. Second, the existence of domestic actors who are willing to work together on the mission of the intervention (Levin, 2016). Unfortunately, any intervention performed by superpower countries could harm democracy in a country. The intervention is not suitable for continuing the post-election democracy because the state is in a foreign grip, so the democratic institutions do not work effectively. Interventions damage the joints of democracy, although the intervention is intended to change the regime to be more democratic (Levin, 2019).

In the account of Daniel Corstange and Nikolay Marinov (2012), *Taking Sides in Other People's Elections: The Polarizing Effect of Foreign Intervention*, they detail the involvement of countries such as the US, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Syria in an attempt of their

influence in the elections at Iraq and Lebanon, or Russia suspected of involvement in electoral interference in Georgia and Ukraine, and allegations of US involvement in elections in Latin America (Corstange & Marinov, 2012). The entanglement of foreign countries in the elections in the other country is commonly aimed at strengthening or opening new alliances with candidates they are supporting until new government policies benefit the intervening state. According to Corstange and Marinov, there are many ways foreign countries do in influencing elections in a country, as they said,

“...including help with campaign logistics via funding and expertise, attempts to swing the vote directly through threats of sanctions or promises of aid, or even corrupting the electoral process itself by ignoring or contributing to abuses by their protégés” (Corstange & Marinov, 2012).

In addition, there is also a paper written by Michael Tomz and Jessica L. P. Weeks (2018) entitled *Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention* which explains that foreign country intervention impacts voter opinion. Foreign intervention can also exacerbate the friction between partisan voters and reduce trust in democratic institutions (Tomz & Weeks, 2018). This analysis is based on their latest highlights in the US elections a few years ago that many people suspected Russian involvement in influencing the election results. This news had shocked the world and invited reactions from many politicians and academics from both countries.

By presenting several pieces of literature related to foreign countries' involvement in electoral at several countries, this paper does not intend to lead the opinion that the same issue/problem happens in the Indonesia elections. This paper cannot prove through valid facts or official documents that Russia was involved in the recent Indonesian elections. Although the “Russian Propaganda” appears in electoral discourse in Indonesia, it does not mean Russia has been de facto involved in its electoral intervention. This paper wants to examine whether Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) statement about «Russian Propaganda» to accuse the

opposing camp in his campaign strategy has implications for Indonesia and Russia's relations. Jokowi's statement has become big news in the Indonesian media and has invited reactions to many people, particularly the Russian ambassador in Jakarta.

However, it should be noted, even long before Jokowi accused the opposing camp of using “Russian Propaganda”, the polarization of the emergence of Russian-related discourses was often made by several politicians in both camps. For example, the feud between the two politicians, Fadli Zon and Tsamara Amany, each representing the opposing camp and incumbent, debate about the ideal type of Indonesian leader in the future by referring to President Putin as a barometer. Alternatively, the hashtag «#cyberMuslimRussian» has recently been echoed by one of the supporters of the opposing camp and has become a trending topic on all social media platforms. This hashtag is a cyber campaign movement aimed at Muslim hackers in Russia to help monitor the course of the online vote-counting recapitulation process being run by the Indonesia election commission (KPU), where these supporters suspect indications of KPU's non-neutrality in favor of potential incumbents.

With reference to the above events, the discourse on «Russia» became a hot topic and was often politicized between time intervals both before and after the election. By taking into account the responses of Indonesia and Russia regarding this issue, this paper will examine does this issue cause Indonesian-Russian relations to be increasingly close or far. Another question is whether Jokowi's statement on “Russian Propaganda” will be a bad precedent for future relations between the two countries after the General Election Commission officially declared the election's winner. To answer these questions, this paper will be divided into several sections. The first part of this paper explains the political landscape and interest groups that fought in the 2019 simultaneous elections in Indonesia. The second part will explain the emergence of allegations of potential incumbents regarding “Russian Propaganda” and the origin of this term. The third part will

explain the history and dynamics of Indonesian-Russian relations both in global, regional, and bilateral political settings. The fourth part will examine whether these allegations impact Indonesian-Russian relations.

Indonesian Political Dynamics 2019

Approximately two years since the Jakarta governor election in 2017 is over, political tension in Indonesia is still more or less hot until 2019. Elections or regional head elections in DKI Jakarta are in the spotlight and are a melting pot for Indonesia's political landscape in the following years. The issue of religion became the best-selling issue in the contestation to reap voters in DKI Jakarta. Mosques are widely used as a place of political campaign for one of the candidate pairs. Therefore, the Jakarta regional election is arguably the starting point for the rise of Islamic populism and identity politics in Indonesia.

The election of the Jakarta governor has indeed produced an extreme dichotomy between nationalist voters and conservative Muslim voters. The nationalist voters consist of moderate Muslims, ethnic Chinese, and followers of minority religions, while many conservative Muslims are filled with hardliners, anti-tolerance, and some of them are against the Pancasila (the official ideology of the Indonesian people).¹ This dichotomy persisted until the presidential election in 2019. The background of the rise of Islamic populism in Indonesia can be traced to when Ahok, one of China's ethnic minorities who successfully led Jakarta, advanced again in the contestation of the gubernatorial elections in 2017. Regrettably, Ahok's success in building Jakarta was not accompanied by success embrace conservative Islamic groups.

¹ Pancasila is an Indonesian nation ideology consisting of five basic principles: 1) Believe in one supreme God, 2) Justice and civilized humanity, 3) The unity of Indonesia, 4) Democracy led by understanding wisdom among honorable representatives from the parliament house, 5) Social justice for all of the people of Indonesia.

Amid his candidacy as governor of Jakarta, Ahok was accused of blasphemy against Islam. This refers to the videotape that allegedly insulted the Quran verse Al-Maidah verse 51, which he did in 2016. This video was viral, circulating amid the tumultuous campaign period of the Jakarta governor's election, and succeeded in undermining Ahok's voice in the election. Several large conservative Islamic organizations such as the FPI did not stop carrying out demonstrations demanding Ahok be punished. This action attracted millions of people, not only conservative Muslim masses in the capital but also a mass of conservative Muslims from various regions throughout Indonesia. Millions of mass gathering and demonstrating in the heart of the capital city of Jakarta continuously. The protests they carry out are often held on Friday because the day is considered a glorious day for Muslims. From a series of actions executed, the "212 Islamic Defending Action" was the most phenomenal for the number of participants was claimed by the GNPf MUI (MUI Fatwa National Guard Movement), one of the action coordinating organizations, reaching seven million participants (Fransiska, 2016). This action became the second historic protest after the demonstration of President Soeharto's decline in 1998. The case ensnared him made Ahok lose the election and was sentenced guilty and must be imprisoned. According to Vedi Hadiz, an Indonesian scholar, the rise of Islamic populism in the Jakarta Pilkada was triggered by Ahok's personification of three important issues: the ethnic Tionghoa, religious opponents, and infidels (Garadian, 2017).

Two years later, after the Jakarta elections, in 2019, Indonesia was again confronted with the presidential election. The format of the election this time is different from the prior elections. The presidential election in 2019 was held simultaneously with the election of legislative candidates at all levels of government, both district, provincial and national, and regional legislative elections. The camp fought in the 2019 elections was a rematch of the 2014 election competition. However, with the pair of vice-presidential candidates, each had changed. If Jokowi paired with Jusuf Kalla in the previous election, in the 2019 election, he

was accompanied by Ma'ruf Amin, one of the leading Islamic scholars. Prabowo Subianto, who was previously accompanied by Hatta Radjasa, is now paired with Sandiaga Uno, one of the young wealthy businessmen as his deputy.

As with the 2014 presidential election, religious sentiments, identity politics, and nationalism continue to circulate even more rapidly in the 2019 elections. Various slander and hoax news attack both sides milling about on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

While news hoaxes inside the sentiment issue of religion and identity politics have been explained, the hoax alludes to nationalistic sentiments also sells well in leading public opinion. For example, the issue of the rise communist party and the issue of foreign powers' support often attack Jokowi rather than his rival. Even this has been an old issue since the 2014 election, Jokowi is often associated with the rise of communism and foreign stooges. Political opponents continuously played these issues until Jokowi served as president. Therefore, when compared, slander and hoax news directed to Jokowi can be said to have a far more significant political impact than his challenger, Prabowo Subianto. It has a significant impact because the slander was undertaken repeatedly and had begun since his leadership as president or before the political season began. These hoax news more or less influenced the perception of voters towards him. As for news of hoaxes and political attacks on Prabowo Subianto began to be crowded only during the political campaign.

Some configurations of slander and lie attacks directed to Jokowi as a whole include: Jokowi a foreign stooge, Jokowi a communist, Jokowi pro legalizing free sex, Jokowi will abolish religious lessons from the education curriculum, Jokowi pro legalize same-sex marriage, and Jokowi will ban the "adzan", calling to Muslim prayer (Tanjung, 2019). The frame of attack towards Jokowi is more dimensionless in religious sentiment than nationalistic sentiments. In comparison, the attacks launched on Prabowo Subianto revolved more around the issues of human rights violations that Prabowo had carried out

in the past. As a former soldier of the Republic of Indonesia, Prabowo allegedly kidnapped several activists during the May 1998 riots.

However, if it is examined comprehensively, religious sentiment remains above the sentiment of nationalism. I argue there are two important factors why religious sentiments sell well in the 2019 elections compared to nationalist sentiments, regardless of the dominance of Muslim voters in Indonesia. However, this does not mean the sentiments of nationalism do not sell at all in Indonesian elections. The sentiments of nationalism are still selling well, but the flow is not as easy as the religious sentiment. The reason is, first, this is the aftermath of the Jakarta Pilkada (regional election), which has just ended a few years ago, and second, the emergence of perceptions in some Indonesian Islamic circles that the Jokowi government is against Islam. This perception refers to the banning of hardline Islamic organizations such as Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia², and the widespread perception of attempts to criminalize ulama by the government, referring to the case of Habib Rizieq³, an influential elite in the organization of the Islamic Defenders Front, who is currently becoming a fugitive of Indonesian police due to his central role in mobilizing the demonstrators in "the 212 action".

Therefore, voter convergence in the 2019 election remains the same, referring to two large voter groups, between nationalists on Jokowi's side and conservative Muslims on Prabowo's side. This reason then became Jokowi's consideration to collaborate with prominent Islamic leader Ma'ruf Amin to accompany him. The urge to appoint Maruf Amin as his deputy was because Ma'ruf's position was considered capable of reducing the vile slander with religious nuances towards Jokowi. Since Ma'ruf Amin himself is one of the crucial figures

² An Islamic organization that has international affiliation in various countries and aspires to replace the democratic system with the Islamic caliphate system.

³ Habib Rizieq is one of the most influential people in the organization of the Islamic Defenders Front, a conservative Islamic organization that aims to save the dignity of Muslims and uphold the *amar maruf nahi munkar* (Tirto.id, 2016).

to defend Islam 212. Although Jokowi was rumored to be appointing Mahfud MD, one of the moderate Muslims, prominent legal experts, and political activists as his representatives, the plan failed to be realized.

“Russian Propaganda” in the Context of Indonesian Election

The emergence of “Russian Propaganda” accusations in the context of Indonesia elections was first raised by candidate incumbent Jokowi while touring several locations in mass pockets in several cities in Indonesia. He pointed out the successful team of Prabowo Subianto using “Russian Propaganda” in their campaign strategy. This accusation became a scene in various media reports and made domestic political tension hotter. This is because the public space is now filled with the suspicion that foreign forces are playing and involved in supporting the opposing team. Whether Jokowi’s winning team takes this accusation into account, we will examine it later based on several facts found.

However, the public’s suspicion of this accusation did not stand alone. Other accusations reinforce these allegations, such as Prabowo’s team used the same political consultant as Donald Trump and a political strategist from Russia who worked for his team. Such accusations have more or less succeeded in constructing public perceptions, as the case of Russian involvement in US elections has also recently occurred. The people’s memory regarding the case is still warm and has not disappeared. Apart from the truth of the allegations, this paper argues that Jokowi’s team allegations are intended to fortify Jokowi’s patriotic and nationalistic feelings which are often attacked, as well as to fight the stamp of “foreign stooge” on him.

Jokowi’s accusations and his team, which triggered the emergence of public prejudice over Russian interference in politics in Indonesia, seemed very reasonable. Since a similar case is still warm, it has become a scene and has just been experienced by American elections a few years ago. Many American politicians at that time suspected Russia was involved in winning

the elected president, Donald Trump. According to a Reuters / Ipsos poll survey, as many as 55 percent of American adults, including 51 percent of the Republicans and 65 percent of Democrats, believe Russia is involved in the succession efforts of leadership in America (Wise, 2016). With this fact, it is only natural that the alleged interference of Russia in the presidential election returned to the elections in Indonesia, especially when connecting this moment with the fact that Indonesia’s economic development is getting better. Not to mention that Indonesia is predicted to be ranked fourth globally as the biggest producer of GDP in 2050 based on the calculation method of Purchasing Power Parity under China, India, and America (PwC, 2017) and Indonesia’s central role in ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific region. With this background, it is not impossible for Indonesia to become an object of various interests and foreign powers to interfere.

It seems normal if a country with abundant natural wealth will always be the target of domination by superpower countries. One of these can be viewed from the writings of John Perkins (2005), *Confessions of an Economic Hit* which tells how the US is involved in mastering natural resources in other countries through various means, notably, if the country is politically unstable. Although Indonesia has succeeded in passing through periods of political transition towards a democratic state, starting with the reformation in 1998, the process of democratic consolidation in Indonesia is still tinged with bursts of political sentiment by utilizing ethnic and religious issues. Trauma and imagination of Indonesia’s break up into small countries like the Soviet Union in the past are still envisaged. Since the initial days of reform, many regions have wanted to break away from the Republic of Indonesia. In this crisis period, Indonesia loses Timor Leste, which has successfully separated itself and is now a sovereign country.

The issue of “Russian Propaganda” thrown by Jokowi has added to this concern. Nevertheless, Jokowi’s statement does seem ambiguous. On the one hand, Jokowi’s government had a lot of cooperation and

close relations with the Russian government, such as purchasing 11 Sukhoi aircraft through national commodity barter (Erdianto, 2017). It does not make sense if Jokowi attacks his political opponents to sacrifice his interests in such cooperation. The most logical answer is that Jokowi wants to portray himself as a true nationalist patriotic while accompanying opinions that the opposing party is in the opposite position. So far, Jokowi has often been accused of being exposed to hoaxes that doubt his nationalistic attitude. These allegations, for example, Jokowi, a foreign stooge (accomplice of a foreign party), and Jokowi are Chinese henchmen, are intended to cover up the disappointment of some Indonesians for the rise of Chinese investors and workers who fulfill Indonesian employment field. Videos related to Chinese workers working in Indonesia are increasingly afloat and are a hot conversation among the people. Not a few residents were provoked and agreed that Jokowi was a Chinese stooge.

For this reason, this section will give a brief explanation to answer at least two of these questions: why is Jokowi dragging “Russian Propaganda” to describe the opposing team’s campaign strategy? Is this just a statement of spontaneity without intention or fruit of the mature political calculations of Jokowi’s winning team?

Based on research in various prominent media reports in Indonesia, Jokowi’s accusations against Prabowo Subianto regarding “Russian Propaganda” have been echoed twice. It was first stated when he attended the campaign agenda in Surabaya, East Java, on February 2, 2019. In front of his supporters, Jokowi said,

“The problem is, there is a successful team that prepares propaganda, which is called Russian propaganda, which always bursts out slander, false blast, hoax bursts, this must be immediately corrected by you all as intellectuals” (Bhaskara, 2019).

This statement is followed by the second statement on February 3, 2019. When attending a camping activity in Karang Anyer, Central Java, Jokowi said,

“..... as I said, Russian propaganda theory is like that. Spouting falsehood as much as possible, spouting as many lies as possible, spouting hoaxes as much as possible so that the people, the community becomes doubtful” (Saleh et al., 2019).

Although Jokowi does not explicitly mention the Prabowo camp in his statement, it leads to them because this election leaves only two candidate pairs who fight.

A few days later, Jokowi’s accusations became a wild ball rolling in the middle of public opinion and used by his political opponents to counterattack and fight the Indonesian government with the Russian government. Various responses arrived from the Russian embassy in Indonesia, academics, to politicians’ debates in both camps. Although later, there was a clarification after a while, both from Jokowi and the Jokowi winning team. They realized the statement could disrupt relations between the two countries. Therefore, Jokowi hastily clarified that the statement was not intended to accuse Russian involvement in the political process in Indonesia. Jokowi explained that the term “Russian Propaganda” which he addressed to his political opponents, was purely referring to the discourse of academic theory in a paper entitled *The Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It*. The paper was published by RAND Corporation, a think tank institution and global policy analyst in the US (CNN Indonesia, 2019).

According to Jokowi, the paper describes the community’s psychological condition, which in the end will believe in slander and lies because it is carried out continuously, constantly, and for a long time. What Jokowi delivered was based on facts. Refers to a survey released by SMRC (Saeful Mujani Research Consultant), a credible political consulting institution in Indonesia, in 2017, out of 1,220 respondents who were used as survey samples, 5.1 percent (Taufiqqurahman, 2017) of them believed that Jokowi had links with the Indonesian Communist Party or PKI⁴

⁴The Indonesian Communist Party or PKI is one of the oldest and largest parties of its time. Being the largest communist party in the world after the communist

(although in fact, the PKI has become a banned party in Indonesia). Meanwhile, based on a survey conducted by Indo Barometer through a sample survey of 1,200 respondents spread across 34 provinces in Indonesia between 6 to February 12, 2019, found at least 10.9 percent of the community believed and 51.1 percent did not believe that Jokowi was a foreign stooge (Putra, 2019). Although the two surveys above show a not too significant number, these issues remain dangerous if they are not taken seriously.

Thus, even though it is true Jokowi's statement did not intend to attract Russia in domestic political contestation, as he stated: *"Again, this is not our country's business, Indonesia and Russia. No. I am with President Putin very, very well connected"* (Jordan, 2019), then why did Jokowi put the risk on his attitude. Despite no specific terminology from the statement that directly indicates Moscow's involvement in the case of politics in Indonesia, the meaning of "Russian Propaganda" remains terrible. It is interpreted as a strategy to attack and bring down political opponents in devious ways. However, as mentioned earlier, based on the facts and various lies directed at Jokowi, this attitude was taken by Jokowi to guard his nationalistic sentiments. Jokowi wants to be portrayed as a true nationalist. Jokowi is not a foreign stooge, but instead, on the contrary.

This is confirmed by other facts, such as allegations concerning the opposing team using foreign consultants as a political think tank. As alleged by Ace Hasan Syadzily, the spokesman for Jokowi's winning team, he accused Prabowo-Sandiaga of using political consultancy that Donald Trump has been used. He also suspected that the opposing team used political consultants from Russia, *"Besides using foreign consultants who also won Donald Trump, there was strong suspicion that candidate pair 02 also uses foreign consultants from Russia"* (Retaduari, 2019). Alternatively, the imputation of Benny

party in the Soviet Union and China. In the 1955 elections, the PKI was ranked fourth as the largest mass party in Indonesia respectively after the PNI Party, Masyumi Party, and NU Party. Unfortunately, during the New Order under Soeharto's leadership, this party began to be banned and many of their members were killed by the regime.

Ramdhani, Director of the National Campaign Team, who pointed out the number of hoaxes in the current election because the opposing team used the same political consultant as the Donal Trump so that the phenomenon of hoax attacks in Indonesia was almost similar as the US presidential election several years ago (JawaPos.com, 2018).

Although all of these allegations are limited, the accusation the Prabowo team is using a political consultant Donal Trump is reinforced by the fact that Prabowo once delivered a political slogan «make Indonesia great again,» alike with Donald Trump's political slogan at a national working meeting in an Islamic organization. Prabowo argued that long before Trump popularized the concept, he had already had the notion of a glorious Indonesia:

"The idea of restoring the glory of Indonesia is not spontaneity has emerged lately. Long before US President Donald Trump popularized the slogan "Make America Great Again", (thank God as part of the struggle for ideas and thoughts) I had written that thought into a book that I titled "Return Indonesia" in 2004 and "Rebuild Indonesia Raya" in 2007/2008. A lot of thought and enthusiasm is based on a spirit that has been embedded since 73 years ago when the nation's founders formulated the ideals of Indonesian independence. And the dream is very expensive, redeemed with blood and tears" (Ibrahim, 2018).

I argue the accusation of "Russian Propaganda" to the opposing team is a strategy to shift the issue of the Jokowi team to keep the hoax from smelling foreign sentiments against him. Evidently, after this news was exciting, there were talks between representatives of the two governments. The talks between the two parties between the representatives of the Indonesian government and the Russian embassy implied that Jokowi's seriousness in his statement was not intended to damage relations between the two countries that were so good (Jaramaya, 2019). Indeed, days after Jokowi issued "Russian Propaganda" terms, the resistance from the opponents was getting louder. Saleh Daulay, a politician and one of the Prabowo team debaters, demanded Jokowi apologize to the Russian government.

“At this point, the National Campaign Team (Jokowi) should apologize. Apologize to Russia and, of course, also apologize to the BPN Team (Prabowo Team). This contestation must be properly guarded and dignified. Not recriminating without basis and valid proof” (Retaduari, 2019).

The Russian embassy in Jakarta also undertook the response. The Russian ambassador in Indonesia, Lyudmila Georgievna Vorobieva, expressed disappointment and strongly rejected Jokowi’s “Russian Propaganda” terms. In a statement of her position, she said: “We underline that Russia’s principal position is not to intervene in domestic affairs and electoral processes in foreign countries, including Indonesia, which is our close friend and important partner (Nurita, 2019).” She also argued that “Russian Propaganda” was only political engineering made by America.

The “Russian Propaganda” meant by Jokowi indeed refers to the RAND Corporation article. This article explains that “Russian Propaganda” is a way to influence the target with a variety of confusing things, so the target unconsciously acts according to the will and interests of the propagandist. This method was launched by the Soviet Union during the cold war and again modified by Russia when it annexed the Crimea peninsula in 2014. This propaganda is known as “the firehose of falsehood” and has two essential things. First, the number of channels (media) and messages is unstoppable, and secondly, the lies are displayed vulgarly without cover. In the contemporary era, this propaganda has four characteristics: 1). High-volume and multichannel, 2). Rapid, continuous, and repetitive, 3). Lacks commitment to objective reality, 4). Lacks commitment to consistency (Paul & Matthews, 2016). The nature of propaganda like this is indeed difficult to stop, and even a statement appeared in that paper: “*don’t expect to counter the firehose of falsehood with the squirt gun of truth*” (Paul & Matthews, 2016). However, as written in the paper, there is still a way to stop it all. As quoted from Lewandowsky’s writing, these methods include (1) warnings at the time of initial exposure to misinformation, (2) repetition of the retraction or refutation, and (3)

corrections that provide an alternative story to help fill the resulting gap in understanding when false “facts” are removed (Paul & Matthews, 2016).

Long Days Before “Russian Propaganda” Issues

Although Jokowi’s statement did not significantly impact the relations between the two countries, the Russian ambassador says Russian-Indonesian relations were fine. This was confirmed after clarification from both Jokowi himself and after talks between official representatives of the Indonesian government and the Russian embassy as well as also reported by one of the Indonesian media, Republika, who stated,

“Vorobieva understands, the condition of every country that will hold elections is always heating up, and can trigger emotions. Thus many words may be wrong” (Jaramaya, 2019).

However, in the future, crucial issues involving relations between countries should be avoided in political campaigns to gain votes from the masses because the case of “Russian Propaganda” is not the first case in the context of Indonesian politics that sparked the reaction of the Russian government.

A similar case occurred on 30 March 2018 during a debate between politicians from both camps before the election occurred. The case began when Fadli Zon, a Gerindra Party politician and one of Prabowo’s trusted people, updated his Twitter status:

“If you want to get up and prosper, Indonesia needs a leader like Vladimir Putin: brave, visionary, intelligent, authoritative, not a lot of debt, no ‘planga-plongo’” (Rochmanuddin, 2018).

This status was directed to President Jokowi. The term «planga-plongo» is a shot that is often used by the opposition to insinuate the Jokowi leadership style, which is not as fragile as the presidents who come from the military world as the previous president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Jokowi himself is a civilian, a former wood furniture entrepreneur with a brilliant political career.

Fadli Zon's satire was answered by Jokowi's political sympathizer and politician of the Indonesian Solidarity Party, Tsamara Amany. In a short video, Tsamara revealed,

"Putin is not an example for a good leader. He silenced opposition and the press in Russia. In Russia, there is no freedom of aspiration like in Indonesia. Even there, corrupt practices are left unchecked. If we look at the corruption perception index, Indonesia is far above Russia. Well, if you already know that, are you sure that such people could be used as leadership standards? If you ask me, I do not want such a leader in Indonesia" (Ariefana & Raharjo, 2018).

The debate grew hot and received a response from Russian state media and the Russian ambassador in Indonesia. Even the threat of worsening bilateral relations between the two countries is spread on mass media news. Gerindra Party politician, Sudaryono, the government opposition party, asked Jokowi through the foreign ministry to reprimand PSI for apologizing to the Russian government and Putin (JawaPos.com, 2018).

Tsamara's statement also drew a response from the Russian government media, Russia Beyond The Headlines Indonesia (RBTH Indonesia), a media controlled by the Kremlin that aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Russia to the world (Dzaki, 2018). The media commented on Tsamara's statement and called her a superficial politician:

"We think there is a misunderstanding here about your knowledge of politics and even the press system in Russia. This is very unfortunate. We don't defend anyone, including Fadli Zon or even President Putin. However, your statement about our country, that in Russia there is no freedom of aspiration like in Indonesia, this shows the shallowness of insight. Your statement is also very unfortunate because the relationship between the two countries is very good. You might disagree with Fadli Zon, but your statement as a young politician really shows immaturity. We think you need more research about our country. If there are Indonesian politicians who idolize our leaders, what can we do? Clearly, you can always also discuss with us, the Russian Embassy in Indonesia or the Russian Cultural Center to know more about our country. About

corruption, there is corruption in Russia, and yes, big - that's true. Our rating is below Indonesia, that is also true. However, that does not mean we do not fight corruption and just leave it as you say. Did you know in Russia there were mass arrests of officials during post-Soviet history? Russia has sentenced 8,800 Russian civil servants to corruption cases (within one year). Many? Yes, of course. But that does not mean we allow it at all. We see, you have a career that is on the rise. Therefore, we hope you can be wiser in the future when commenting on other countries, especially if your knowledge of the country is very minimal" (Ariefana & Raharjo, 2018).

Tsamara insisted that her statement was based on facts. According to her, the data was taken from credible institutions, such as The Economist and Transparency International (Putranto, 2018). Finally, RBTH Indonesia asked the Russian ambassador to invite Tsamara to hold a joint dialogue and clarify her statement at a press conference, but she could not attend (Putranto, 2018). The second meeting took place on April 11, 2018, where the representative of the Russian embassy, Sergey Drobyshevskiy, came directly to the office of the Indonesian Solidarity Party. According to Sergey, the polemic involving Tsamara and Russia was only a misunderstanding. The real polemic occurred between PSI and Fadli Zon. Russia did not interfere in this matter.

"In my opinion, I do not want to make political comments in Indonesia, as Tsamara has said it is a matter of word play between PSI and Gerindra. So it's certain that the name of my president (Putin) is very exploited, not only in Indonesia, but in other countries" (Irwinsyah et al., 2018).

Although tension can be managed well, such matters can be a bad precedent for the relations between Indonesia and Russia in the future. Given that the relationship between the two governments is getting better and better in all aspects, of course, above statements can ignite a fire in the chaff that could impact the deterioration of relations between the two countries.

History of Indonesian-Russian Relations

Indonesia-Russia relations are intertwined since Russia was still under the Soviet Union. The relationship between them was extraordinary. The Soviet Union was the first country to oppose the Dutch occupation after Indonesia claimed its independence in the UN session in 1946 (Sandi, 2014). The Soviet Union's condemnation of the Dutch violating the constitutional rights of Indonesian independence received support from many countries. Similar criticism then began to arrive from various countries such as India under the command of Jawaharlal Nehru and several other countries (Hartanto, 2016). Finally, the last round of Dutch colonization of Indonesia ended in 1949 through tough negotiations known as "round table conferences" (Pratama, 2018).

The history of the Soviet-Indonesian diplomatic relations was officially opened in 1950, a few months after Soviet Union foreign minister Andrei Vyshinsky sent a telegram to the Indonesian Prime Minister, Mohammad Hatta. The contents of the telegram are as follows:

"On behalf of the government of the Soviet Union, I kindly inform you, since the recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia on December 27, 1949, in The Hague, the Dutch government decided to recognize the sovereignty and independence of the Republic of Indonesia and establish diplomatic relations with Indonesia" (Isnaeni, 2010).

Hatta answered the telegram on February 3, 1950, one day before the cabinet meeting was held to discuss the letter. The principal of the Hatta reply was that Indonesia was ready to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (Isnaeni, 2010).

"Judging appropriately by the decision, I, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia United with great respect, informed that we valued the recognition highly. My government is always open to the start of talks on the realization of diplomatic relations" (Sandi, 2014).

The recognition of the Soviet Union for Indonesian independence became a news

headline in various media in Indonesia (Sandi, 2014). The correspondence between the two countries was intensified to ensure the placement of representatives of diplomats in each country. On February 15, 1950, the Soviet Union government sent a telegram again:

"There are two ways to hold talks, namely whether you send your representatives, or we send our representatives to you. We agree with both ways and we want to know which is more pleasing to you? Our party agreed to both."

The telegram was then answered by Hatta:

"with satisfaction, we conveyed that we accepted your proposal. We will send our representatives to hold negotiations. Regarding the date and composition of the delegation, we will notify you later by telegram" (Sandi, 2014).

The establishment of diplomatic relations further strengthens the cooperation ties between the two countries in all conditions. The familiarity of the two countries can also be seen through a photo depicting Soekarno, the President of Indonesia, and Nikita Khrushchev, the President of the Soviet Union, smoking together. In the photo, Sukarno appeared to be thrusting the fire of his cigarette into Khrushchev's cigarette. Even at one time, Khrushchev and his group had spent two weeks visiting Indonesia. Khrushchev went to visit various cities in Indonesia such as Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bali (Maulida, 2018).

The intimacy of Soekarno and Khrushchev also manifests in various collaborations. As a strong country, the Soviet Union helped Indonesia with the war equipment. Until the 1960s, Indonesia was still trying to liberate West Irian from the grip of the Netherlands. The Netherlands still did not recognize West Irian as a part of Indonesia's territories. In order to end the Dutch occupation of Irian, President Soekarno requested support from Nikita Khrushchev to free West Irian. Most of the Indonesian war equipment at that time arrived from the Soviet Union, including one cruiser, 14 destroyers, eight diving anti-patrol boats, 20 missile ships, several motorized torpedo boats, and Meriam boats, several armored vehicles

and amphibians, helicopter, and Tupolev Tu-16 bombers equipped with the AS-1 Kennel / KS-1 Kome anti-missile missile (Haryadi, 2017).

With the modern war equipment from the Soviet Union, Indonesia's confidence in facing Dutch confrontation is increasing, but this also resulted in increased tensions between Indonesia and the Netherlands, such as the war in the Arafura Sea between the two navies. Seeing the heated situation and the political closeness between Indonesia and the Soviet Union, as well as the emergence of fears of a bigger war, the US under John Kennedy finally pressured the Netherlands to end its colonialization in West Irian (Danudoro, 2016) and hand over West Irian affairs to the UN Assembly. This Soviet military assistance has also made Indonesia the most important and strongest military force in Southeast Asia (Danudoro, 2016).

Two factors affect the intimate relationship between the Soviet Union and Indonesia at that time. First, Soekarno's ideological orientation was more left-leaning since he was anti-colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Second, the existence of PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia). PKI has a special relationship with the Kremlin and a massive mass. Furthermore, PKI is the third-largest communist party in the world after the communist party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China (Heriyanto, 2017). These two factors made Indonesian-Soviet union relations had become more fluid.

Unfortunately, this relationship ended after Suharto ousted Sukarno from the presidency, which was preceded by a series of issues of the coup. The PKI was accused of being behind the incident. Moscow reacted by criticizing the PKI because it was considered to become too pro-Beijing, leaning more towards Mao Zedong's ideas than Marxist-Leninist ideas and notions (Danudoro, 2016). Soeharto, who took power, carried out the cleansing of people who were considered members of the communists since 1965. He carried out massacres of PKI members. After that, relations with the Soviets were frozen. New relations were opened in 1990 after communists collapsed in the Soviet Union. Indonesia's relations with Russia only

began to increase again during the time of President Megawati. In Megawati's period, Indonesia made a massive purchase of two Sukhoi Suu-27SK fighter jets, two SU-30MK versions, and two Mi-35 helicopters (Mantolas, 2016). The reason for buying warplanes from Russia was because Indonesia experienced an arms embargo by the United States from 1995 to 2005 (Sofwan, 2018). The US considered Indonesia had committed human rights violations during the Santa Cruz massacre in East Timor in November 1991, so Russia was another choice to keep modernizing Indonesian combat equipment (Buszynski, 2006).

Megawati's period became a turning point for Indonesia-Russia relations. Various steps in political, economic, military, and security cooperation were run (Yustiningrum, 2011). Furthermore, the relations between the two countries have increased during the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), where the two countries collaborate in the defense and economic fields. The trade balance between the two countries in 2005 reached 680 million US dollars, up from the original 480 million US dollars in 2004. President SBY also encouraged Russian entrepreneurs to invest in Indonesia (Mantolas, 2016). SBY and Putin's closeness was also recorded when SBY welcomed Putin with guitar passages and the 61st happy birthday song at the 2013 APEC Summit in Bali (Detik News, 2013).

During President Jokowi's period, the cooperation between Indonesia and Russia was increasingly opened in all sectors. According to the trading volume in 2017, the figure reached 2.5 billion US dollars. Moreover, Jokowi announced that the figure would increase to US \$ 5 billion in 2020. Jokowi also asked Putin's support to help Indonesia export crude palm oil (CPO), which is often viewed negatively by the European Union (Farras, 2018). In addition, Russia also committed to investing 25 billion US dollars in Indonesia (Berita Moneter, 2019).

Since 2010, Russia has had a clear commitment to Asian countries, especially Southeast Asia, after China. Under Putin, Russia declared "Turn to the East," which essentially wanted to be more intimate in carrying out

economic, political, and security cooperation with countries in the region. There are several factors why Russia took this step. Apart from the relations with the West that were heating up due to the annexation of Crimea by Moscow, which resulting in the economic sanctions by the US and the European Union, Asia is considered a strategic economic region with rapid development (Storey, 2015). However, this pivot to the Asia Pacific is not a new thing in Russian foreign policy, this has long been confirmed in the speech of Mikhael Gorbachev at “Vladivostok” in 1986:

“The Soviet Union is also an Asian and Pacific country ... We are ready to expand our ties with Indonesia ... the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, [and] Brunei ... all young and independent participants in the political life of the region” (Tsvetov, 2016).

In addition, the focus on the Asia-Pacific is also another way for Russia to remain aligned as an influential country amid the acceleration of the countries in the region as the center of the economy and global security (Mankoff, 2015).

Impact of “Russian Propaganda”

Looking at the close relations between Indonesia and Russia, it is unfortunate if the relationship suddenly breaks down due to trivial negligence. The issue of accusations of Russian involvement in Indonesian elections triggered by Jokowi’s multi-interpretation statement certainly has harmed Russia’s image globally. Moreover, similar issues are still warm in memory when US elections took place several years ago. So far, there has been no significant reaction from the Putin government. However, if a similar incident continues, there is a possibility that Russia will take more decisive action.

This paper argues that the Russian government takes no decisive step because Russia still considers Indonesia an influential country in the Asia-Pacific region. This is primarily when referring to Russia’s relations with the West and some EU countries that are unstable after the Crimea case, as described above. Therefore, Russia needs to maintain harmony with the Asia-Pacific countries,

especially Indonesia, to maintain its image as a superpower country, after China and USA. Igniting the flames of hostility with Indonesia will further complicate Russia’s image in global political relations. Let alone the Asia-Pacific region is currently the most developed economic region in the world and is predicted to become the most critical zone in the future. In this sense, leaving this region will further harm Russia.

Regarding “Russian Propaganda” issue, Jokowi himself said his relationship with Putin was still good, *“I have a very good relationship with President Putin”* (Indopos, 2019). Besides, the response of the Russian embassy in Jakarta did not apply it as a serious matter. Although the Russian ambassador stressed the need for caution from the political elite when addressing issues relating to other countries,

“I think this issue will not affect bilateral relations (both countries), I hope so. So far, the relations between the two countries have been very good, and I don’t see the reason for this relationship going in the opposite direction, We think this problem is over. Everything is clear. We will not take any official steps after this” (Indopos, 2019).

According to information from the Indonesian ambassador in Russia, Wahid Supriyadi, Putin is still planning his visit to Indonesia in 2019. This agenda was a reciprocal visit when Jokowi visited Russia in 2016. Regarding Putin’s arrival in Indonesia, it had been planned for a long time but was postponed several times. As Supriyadi said

“there are no obstacles, it is only a matter of time. They also understand that we are in a general election period. In fact (Putin’s visit) there will be something big, including improving relations to strategic relations” (Maulana, 2019).

Although the issue of “Russian Propaganda” did not have a significant impact on relations between the two countries, it was different from what happened in the domestic political situation. The practice of throwing negative issues or black campaigns at each other - not even just a matter of the “Russian Propaganda”- has persisted until the election is over. As a result, the political polarization

of the two camps has unavoidable escalated. Furthermore, such negative campaigns still exist even after the new government comes to power. The grudges between the camps seem to be ingrained. Hatred is already stuck and difficult to recover. The election candidacy that only provides two rivalries holds harmful excesses that were previously unimaginable. For that matter, the tendency of campaigning in the election frame, which only provides two candidates, is indeed more dominated by negative campaigns than campaigns for competing programs and comprehensive policies. The rules that minimized the occurrence of negative campaigns were ignored due to the heated tension consequence that comes from only two-way rivalry. The sharp picture of the rivalry was recorded, for example, when the KPU announced the winner of the history of the first simultaneous general election held. At the end of the recapitulation of the vote count, Prabowo's camp rejected the official results announced by the KPU. They consider that there has been a structured, systematic, and massive fraud in the election's implementation, so it is difficult to accept defeat gracefully.

Once again, the 2019 election still has enormous homework for Indonesia's democratic journey ahead. It is not only the issue of the readiness of the election infrastructure from a not simultaneous to simultaneous transition that has resulted in the death of much electoral personnel, but also other substantial issues in order to minimize sharp frictions through negative campaigns which, if left unchecked, could disrupt the nation's integration. Moreover, the power of politics is very vulnerable to being manipulated by certain political elites. This image of a friction-laden identity political rivalry will persist in the future if the KPU, Bawaslu, and other election officials are not firm in taking action against all harmful campaigning practices that occur, especially if the election stage is only filled with two competing candidates.

Conclusion

The history of foreign countries' involvement in interfering with the elections in certain countries is a common phenomenon that has occurred since the cold war era. The reasons behind it are also varied, starting from the struggle for influence to the spread of ideology. In the context of the Indonesian presidential elections in 2019, we have witnessed a similar issue. The suspicion of the community suddenly appeared to indicate the existence of foreign support involvement in the pair side of Prabowo Subianto - Sandiaga Uno. This foreign country referred to point to Russia. It began after Jokowi, the strongest candidate for presidential candidates, accused the opposing team, Prabowo Subianto - Sandiaga Uno, of using "Russian Propaganda" in their campaign strategy. This accusation refers to the rampant lies that filled the social media room during the election campaign in Indonesia. Jokowi's statement was motivated by his feeling of becoming a victim of the scattered hoax waves launched by the opposing team. Since the 2014 election, Jokowi has often been associated with hoax news about the rise of communism and foreign henchmen. Political opponents continuously played these issues until Jokowi served as president.

The Jokowi's interpretation of "Russian Propaganda" became ambiguous in public as they assumed Russia was involved in Indonesia's election. Moreover, the public's suspicion of this accusation did not stand alone. These allegations were also reinforced by other accusations, such as Prabowo's team used the same political consultant as Donald Trump, and there was a political strategist from Russia who worked for his team. Several politicians in Jokowi's camp stated these indictments. Such accusations have more or less succeeded in constructing public perceptions, as the case of Russian complicity in US elections has also recently occurred. The people's memory regarding the case is still warm and has not disappeared. Ultimately, the degree of public trust in allegations of Russian intervention is increasing.

Ultimately, this accusation received a strong reaction from Russian representatives in Jakarta. Jokowi then clarified that his

statement about “Russian Propaganda” was purely pointing to academic discourse, referring to a paper issued by the RAND Corporation entitled *The Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It*. According to Jokowi, the paper describes the community’s psychological condition, which in the end will believe in slander, falsehood, and lies because it is carried out continuously, constantly, and for a long time. He said,

“... as I said, Russian propaganda theory like that. Spout falsehood as much as possible, spout as many lies as possible, spout hoaxes as much as possible so that the people, public becomes doubtful” (Saleh et al., 2019).

Conforming to this statement is a paper written by Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, saying that “Russian Propaganda” is a way to influence the public with a variety of confusing propositions in order to make the public unconsciously acts in accordance with the wishes and interests of the propagandist. The Soviet Union launched the “Russian Propaganda” method during the cold war and was then modified by Russia when it annexed the Crimea peninsula in 2014. This propaganda is known as “the firehose of falsehood” with two important things: First, the number of channels (media) and messages is unstoppable, and second, the lies are displayed vulgarly without cover. In the contemporary era, this propaganda has four characteristics: 1). High-volume and multichannel, 2). Rapid, continuous, and repetitive, 3). Lacks commitment to objective reality, 4). Lacks commitment to consistency

Apart from the truth of the allegations, this paper argues that Jokowi’s accusation to his opponents about using “Russian Propaganda” is a political strategy to form a nationalistic and patriotic image of his existence in the 2019 election. Jokowi wanted to be portrayed as a true nationalist while fighting the ‘foreign stooge’ issue, which was often addressed to him while accompanying opinions that the opposing party was in the opposite position. As for a reason behind the Russian government’s indecisive responses to Jokowi’s accusation, this paper argues that Russia still considers Indonesia

influential in Asia-Pacific region. Mainly when referring to Russia’s relations with the West and some EU countries, which are unstable after the Crimea case. Consequently, Russia needs to maintain harmony with the Asia-Pacific countries, particularly Indonesia.

Despite the impact of relations between Indonesia and Russia, the use of “Russian propaganda” in Indonesian elections has caused extreme cleavage, dividing the electorate groups in Indonesia between nationalist and conservative Muslim voters. Emergence of many intolerant groups in Indonesia are contributed by this phenomenon. Indeed, “Russian Propaganda” is a phenomenon commonly encountered since the 2014 presidential election and continues in the 2017 elections in Jakarta. Nationalist voters include moderate Muslims, ethnic Chinese, and followers of minority religions, while conservative Muslims are filled with hardliners, anti-tolerance, and some of them are against the Pancasila. This is certainly hazardous for Indonesian democracy survival in the future. Albeit Indonesia has succeeded in going through periods of political transition towards democratic consolidation, the situation is still tinged with explosions of political, ethnic, and religious sentiments, which are very worrying. This situation remained the same as before when the democratic tap opened in 1998. The rise of hate speech spread in the community, the threats to minorities, and the efforts to delegitimize democratic institutions by certain groups are the effects of “Russian Propaganda”, and those problems have become the stake of Indonesian democracy in the future.

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