Tweeting Populism in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election Candidate

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Abstract

Tweeting the populism of two candidates: Joko Widodo and Prabowo was part of an important discourse in the 2019 presidential election. The gap was as previous studies have argued the general characteristics of each candidate's populism, they have not examined twitter discourse deeply under the populism discourse analysis of each candidate. This article filled the gap by analyzing the twitter discourse of the two candidates in the 2019 presidential election, Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto, as the articulation of the populism rhetoric. Working with Laclau's discourse analysis strategy, this study has uncovered the main discourse by revealing the buzzwords of each account: @jokowi and @prabowo. The results of this study suggest that there are some differences nodal points between the populism discourse of the two candidates. Jokowi articulated populism of nationalist identity with his buzzwords of "Indonesia" and some of his flagship programs, while Prabowo buzzed about the Muslim identity and critics to the election process. Jokowi conveyed more optimism about the success of infrastructure development, land certification, and village fund programs. On the other hand, Prabowo was more concerned about Muslim identity with buzzwords "semoga"/"hopefully" and "Allah" during his campaign sessions. The other buzzwords were focused on critics regarding the presidential election that has been "tainted by compradors" with "TPS/ polling place" as the buzzwords.

Keywords: *Tweeting; Populism; Hegemony; Nodal Points; Buzzwords*

Introduction

The previous research has seen the general characteristics of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto as populist politicians (Aspinall and Mietzner, 2014; Liddle, 2019). However, the research has not reviewed the connection between the tweets and populism discourse. Aspinall and Mietzner (2014: 1) stated Prabowo as a classical populist who condemned the democratic system and dreamed of a country with a stronger and authoritarian government. His background as a member of the military is very close to the figure of Prabowo. He began his military career as the youngest operations commander in the Nanggala Team, a military operation in East Timor. The economist's son of Soemitro Djojohadikoesoemo, Prabowo's military career rose after serving as Deputy Commander of the Counter-Terrorism Detachment in the Special Forces Command (Kopassus) in 1983. In 1996, Prabowo, Suharto's son-in-law

became the Kopassus General Commander. His military career came to a halt after a military court declared non-compliance, deprivation of other people's independence rights, and kidnapping cases.

His opponent, as the incumbent, Jokowi is a figure who is identical to the underprivileged: poor and rural people. In addition to popular character, appreciation for democracy is also seen as a force that delivered Jokowi's victory with a thin margin of 6.3% in 2014. A figure that is interpreted as almost the failure of democracy. With his unique campaign style, he is called as a populism-lite who brings color to a new form.

This article analyzes the twitter discourse of the two candidates in the 2019 presidential election as the articulation of populism rhetoric. Some questions arise on this topic: what is the main discourse of each candidate on their twitter? Based on these buzzwords, what was the nodal points, and how did the concept of populism rhetoric articulate in the whole context of the tweets or other "text"? Those questions arise from some previous phenomena which in some studies is called the battle of (Islam and the right-wing) populism in Indonesia.

The populist battle in the 2019 presidential election was the contingent event from the previous election in 2014. The 2014 presidential election presented two presidential and vice-presidential candidates: Joko Widodo (hereinafter referred to as Jokowi) - Jusuf Kalla, and Prabowo Subianto (hereinafter referred to as Prabowo) - Hatta Rajasa. The result was Jokowi-Kalla won the election with a narrow vote gain of 53, 15%. The 2014 election gave the starting point of the use of massive internet-based mediums especially applications (59 applications with Jokowi theme and 27 applications with Prabowo), games (Jokowi GO! And Prabowo the Asian Tiger), website, Youtube, other social media.

Some analyzes mention the sentiment of Muslim identity also strengthened as a continuation of the Jakarta governor elections in 2017. A major event that dragged Ahok, the popular name of Basuki Tjahja Purnama, incumbent DKI Governor who was charged with blasphemy and jailed for his speech in the Kepulauan Seribu. In these two phenomena, the two rival candidates play on the issues of Muslim identity and anti-communism; and that was continued in the 2019 presidential election.

In the 2019 general elections, Jokowi paired with Ma'ruf Amin, the former chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and Prabowo paired with Sandiaga Uno, a former Jakarta deputy governor with his intelligent young executive figure who graduated from America. Conflicts and sentiments of Islamic identity in Indonesia are increasingly strengthened by the role of social media. There is a trend that social media became the new realm of politics. One of the indicators was the increasing number of Twitter using the accounts of the two presidential candidates.

During 2018, Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) data suggested that the frequency of using Twitter by the two candidates is increasing ahead of the determination of the Presidential and Vice-presidential Candidates. It implied the increase of tweets on September 21st, 2018 until the inauguration of the President-elect on June 30th, 2019. Chart 1 shows that the number of tweets fell slightly in August 2018 and has risen again since September and continued to peak in December 2018.
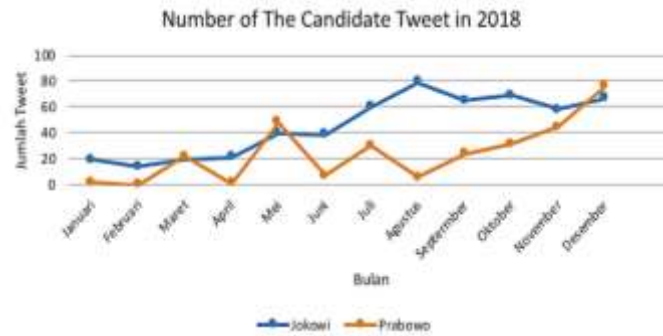
Number of The Candidate Tweet in 2018

Chart 1. Number of the candidates' tweet in 2018 (source: Wan Ulfa Nur Zuhra, Tirto.id)

The increasing issue of Islam and anti-communism also manifests itself in the form of a hoax. The Ministry of Communication and Information made a list of hoaxes from August to December 2019. In August 2018, there were 11 hoax contents. The number decreased in September 2018 with 8 hoax contents. In October 2018, there were 12 identified hoax contents. Meanwhile, 13 hoax contents were identified in November 2018. Hoax contents were most identified in December 2018, namely 18 contents. as one of the impacts, there was a polarization on social media between the supporters of Jokowi and Prabowo. Both are labeled by the opposing camp as a tadpole versus a bat (*cebong vs kampret*) for Jokowi and Prabowo.

Tapsell (2019) stated that the polarization that occurred in the 2019 Presidential Election was artificial and political polarization which was full of nothingness. Debates that do not focus on program criticism, but are dominantly driven by sentiment and emotions. He mentioned that the hashtag of #2019GantiPresiden showed very clearly the bluntness of rationality and the strengthening of emotional politics and the rise of populism rhetoric.

The populism rhetoric represented in a repetition of the word "people" and giving voices of the people in their tweets show the general characteristic of the populist politician. The two candidates compete with populist rhetoric to win the hearts of voters with an amount of rhetoric. The old criteria of an Indonesian president as Javanese, Islam, and military have shifted to the birth of a populist-pro-people leader (and of course Java-Islam) following a leadership crisis at the end of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration (Mietzner, 2014: 113-114).

The results of these studies suggest that there were some differences between the populism discourse of the two candidates. Jokowi articulated populism of nationalist identity with his buzzwords of "Indonesia" and some of his flagship programs, while Prabowo buzzed about the Muslim identity and critics to the election process. Jokowi conveyed more optimism about the success of infrastructure development, land certification, and village fund programs. On the other hand, Prabowo was more concerned about Muslim identity with buzzwords "*semoga*"/ "hopefully" and "Allah" during the campaign session. The other buzzwords were focused on critics regarding the presidential election that has been "tainted by compradors" with "TPS/ polling place" as the buzzword.

Research Theory

This study specifically aims to complement the theory of populism from Ernesto Laclau. In this context, it is important to reference some of the main concepts of Ernesto Laclau's (2005) populism theory. Laclau (2005: ix) defines populism as a relationship in the formation of identity, namely populism as a political logic to form a collective identity. Laclau argued that populism is the way to overcome the problem of representation in a liberal democracy. Some weaknesses related to people's representation can

be solved by what is called 'radical democracy' which is driven by populism. In this position, populism is seen as an emancipatory power that makes the conflict in politics and mobilization of marginalized people to shake the status quo possible (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 3).

Moreover, Laclau's populism theory (2005: 67-72) centers its ontological assumptions which involve three aspects namely discourse, rhetoric, and empty signifier & hegemony. The discourse according to Laclau & Mouffe (1985: 105) is a structured totality of the practice of articulation formed by a series of articulations. Articulation is a practice in building relationships between elements in such a way that the identities of these elements change as a result of articulatory practices. The main concept of populism which was how "the people" was articulated and what is their demand is important to reveal the hegemony of populist politicians. In other words, Laclau (2005: 68) illustrated discourse as the complexity of a set of elements in a constitutive relationship (not limited to speech or text). The concept is closely related to the third concept: hegemony.

Hegemony is the main theory in Laclau's political theory (1996, 49). The traditional understanding that hegemony means political domination by the state has expanded the theory of Marxism as a relationship of domination between classes (Williams, 1977: 108). Laclau (Howard, 2015: 8) interprets hegemony differently, namely as a practice of special articulation that forms social formation. Laclau's hegemony analysis answers the question of how discourses are built in a contestation as a process of fixation of floating elements over the process of signing by finding nodal points of each populist rhetoric on twitter seen from its buzzwords. In this study, the floating marker is a marker of populism articulated by the 2019 - two Presidential Election candidates.

Methods

This study uses a discourse analysis method developed from the hegemony concept which is part of Laclau's discourse analysis strategy. In particular, Laclau does not provide a technical description of how this approach is carried out in an empirical study, because he is more interested in abstract discourse research (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 20). Therefore, this study reflects and develops using the basic principles of Laclau's theory by finding the nodal points, and showing the logic of equivalence as an important part of the hegemonic process. Nodal point represent various discourses with special topics. While the logic of equivalence is the logic of simplification of the political sphere (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 130 & Andersen, 2003: 60). Articulation of the similarities between these elements increases the level of interchangebility between elements. Thus, the number of subject positions decreases.

Technically, data collection and data analysis use the tidyverse library provided in the open source software R Program. The two data analyzes used are buzzwords and semantic analysis in the form of endgraphs. Buzzwords analysis data is used first of all to find the nodal points of the hegemony populism of the two candidates. Furthermore, to show the context of each word, semantic analysis and other intertext analysis were used as part of the data interpretation.

Results

This midsection summarizes the buzzwords analysis and semantic analysis data from both candidates' official accounts. Buzzwords were the words that were often used by the user. The size of the words demonstrates the frequency of the words in tweets. The buzzwords giving meaning or context by look the words in the semantic analysis context. These two analyses could explore the articulation of populism as the floating signifier. It was mean that each candidate could articulate populism in their political interests. Following the finding of each analysis of each candidate's tweets.

Jokowi Buzzwords

Based on the dominant buzzers' words used by @Jokowi, it appears that "Indonesian" discourse was adopted as the main discourse in articulating its rhetoric of populism. During the election campaign period from September 20th,2018 to October 21st,2019, @jokowi repeated a massive tweet with the most dominant keyword 'Indonesia'. Chart 2. shows the complete buzzwords analysis with the bigger size of the letters is directly proportional to how often the word is used in tweets. According to Laclau (in Jørgensen dan Phillips, 2002: 49-50), the word "Indonesia is what is called the nodal point that binds the whole hegemony of its populism discourse.

Chart 2. Buzzwords @Jokowi's Tweet during the election campaign

Besides the word "Indonesia", in the same category, other words that were echoed are "state", "government", "citizens", "society", and "nation". Based on its semantic analysis, several major topics were discovered during this campaign period. The other discourse touted at this time is the topic of development. The word of development correlates with other words: "road", "*toll*"/ "highway", "lane", "MRT" (Mass Rapid Train), and "train". The construction of the Trans-West Java-East Java highway road is one of the flagship programs for incumbent candidates. The other is a land certification program. On several occasions, the moment of distribution of land certificates was also a means of campaigning.

The other buzzwords were village funds (*dana desa*). The provision of a large number of village funds in the range of Rp933.92 million in 2019 and an increase of an average of Rp960.59 million per village is a program that is favored by Jokowi (Ministry of Finance data https://www.kemenkeu.go.id). There are some critics regarding the program, but on the other hand, people like it.

Besides, @jokowi also talked about the TNI and Polri. These two words appear in various contexts. Starting from the role of the TNI in handling disasters namely earthquake in Banten, and flash floods in Sentani, a meeting of TNI and Polri leaders inauguration of adolescent officers, TNI anniversary, to the grand campaign of the Jokowi-Amin couple in Gelora Bung Karno (GBK) stadium on April 13, 2019:

> "For farmers, fishermen, laborers, for teachers, doctors, civil servants, military, police, artists, creative workers, small and medium businesses, large, young people, ladies, gentlemen ... We must make sure our lives are better than today. "

A number of these buzzwords can be seen in several contexts based on word sequences in semantic analysis in chart 3. Some prominent sentences raised popular issues: "*rakyat Indonesia maju*"/ "the people of Indonesia are progressing", and "*ribuan warga*"/ "thousands of citizens". Other topics raised were infrastructure development ("trans-west Java-East Java toll road"; "airport") and work programs ("*sertifikat hak tanah air*"/ certificate of homeland rights", "*dana desa*/ village funds").

Chart 3. Semantic Analysis @Jokowi's Tweet during the election campaign

A number of these data indicate that Jokowi has displayed a developmental identity as a leader. He does not say much about a particular identity, but tends to accommodate all with a frame of "Indonesia" and "development". The people in his view are considered in the same unity and invite him to fight together. A contrasting nuance is found in some findings from tweeting populism data from Prabowo below.

Prabowo Buzzwords

Jokowi presents himself with the Indonesian side and its developmentalism, while Prabowo comes differently. The following presents data from the campaign and voting period. The interesting data is that during the election dispute, Prabowo did not even make a post.

The first data in the campaign period stated that @Prabowo official account showed the use of different discourse. The buzzwords are "*semoga*/hopefully", "Allah", and "*bangsa*/ nation". These words imply a hope; hopes for a better Indonesia in the future: "amin/amen", "*selamat*/survive", "*makmur*/prosperous", "*demokrasi*/democracy", and "*adil*/fair". The words fair and prosperous were related to Prabowo's slogan Indonesia fair and prosperous (Indonesia *adil makmur*). The slogan appeared a week before the open debate period. Previously, Prabowo used the tagline "Indonesia Win". Therefore, the words "fair" and "prosperous" are echoed to increase their effect on voters.

The word folk has a big contribution as buzzwords after "hopefully", "allah", and "nation". How the articulation of the word "people" can be seen on the semantic analysis chart? It shows how Prabowo wants to draw the issue to religious identity. He tried to attract a variety of different identities in community groups and bind them with Islamic identity (as the logic of populism). To see the context of each word, it can be seen in the semantic analysis.

Chart 4. Buzzwords of @Prabowo's Tweets Election during Campaign

Word "people" has become very central in articulating several issues. The word "rakyat/people" in the @prabowo populist rhetoric is articulated in a few sentences: "*mohon doa rakyat Indonesia*/beg for the prayers of the people of Indonesia", "*rakyat gembira*/the people are happy", "*membela negara rakyat senang*/defend the country the people are happy", "*serah sk redistribusi tanah rakyat senang* /hand over the redistribution of the land the people are happy", "*rakyat indonesia duka cita mendalam* /the Indonesian people are deeply mourning", and "*sertifikat hak tanah rakyat*/ certificates of people's land rights".

Chart 5. Semantic Analysis of @Prabowo's Tweets during Election Campaign

While the word "*semoga*/hopefully" is closely related to several other words. One of the many words raised is 'the people'. Some of the sentences that appear include: Requesting the prayers of the Indonesian people, the people are happy, defend the country, the people are happy, the Decree Redistribution of People's Land is happy, the Indonesian people are deeply sorrowing. The word "hopefully" is the nodal point of Prabowo's populism discourse. It binds the whole discourse of populism with a preference for religious identity (Islam).

Discussion

As a summary, it can be seen in table 1 some keywords, articulation of people's words, and some specific issues for each candidate. Keyword identification is based on the highest buzzwords. Whereas articulation of the word folk is important to see how the concept of populism is articulated. From the two tables, it can be seen that Jokowi consistently uses the keywords "Indonesia" as the most widely echoed. The word folk is used consistently in its articulation with "the people of Indonesia (the nation) going forward". The sentence provides optimism for voters. This was supported by the specific issues he raised related to infrastructure development and leading programs that were claimed to be pro-people: the construction of toll roads, village funds, and land certificates. Related to the election, Jokowi did not give much comment. However, he is more focused on programs and other issues that are up to date. He successfully articulated Raja Salman's arrival in his tweet as part of an effort to attract the sympathy of voters who prioritize Islamic identity.

Table 1. Comparison of @Jokowi's and @Prabowo's tweets during the Election Campaign

Category	@Jokowi	@Prabowo
Keywords The articulation of the "people"	**Indonesia:** Indonesian people forward	**Hopefully:** a. Pray for the Indonesian people, b. Happy People, c. Defending the State of the Happy People, d. Indonesian People, Grief, Nation's Progress, e. Handover of Decree of People's Land Redistribution is happy, f. Certificate of people's land rights, g. Land is the object of forest agrarian reform
Specific issue	**Development:** a. Trans West Java - East Java toll road b. Village Fund c. Land Rights Certificate d. Airport	**Muslim identity:** a. May Allah, *b.* Presence of Allah
Election issue	-	a. Democracy Party, b. Election of Two Thousand and Nineteen
Others issue	a. Asian Games Two thousand and eighteen b. Earthquake c. Young adult	a. King Salman Denpasar b. City of Bali c. Sukawati Market d. Badung

On the other hand, Prabowo has two different keywords in the two periods. During the campaign, the word "hopefully" becomes a keyword, while during the voting period shifts to the word "TPS /". The word "hopefully" is still used by @prabowo during the voting, but in second place after "TPS"/ "polling place". The word "*rakyat*"/"the people" is articulated in a few sentences which indicate that the people must be defended and occupy a central position in Prabowo's tweets.

Conclusion

This article analyzes how Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto tweeting populism as the articulation of the populism rhetoric. Contestation as a process of fixation of floating elements over the process of signing by finding nodal points of each populist rhetoric on twitter seen from its buzzwords. The term populism is called as the floating signifier since it can be arbitrarily articulated by its users. The buzzwords and semantic analysis of the two candidates suggest that the two candidates articulate the term of populism in the different twitter discourse. The @jokowi account tends to be more refined in using this concept by raising the topic of nationalism ("Indonesia" as his nodal point) and development issues. Several development programs tweeted as an effort to raise the voice: village funds (*dana desa*), land certification, and also toll road construction. This was consistently echoed during the campaign period, during the voting, until during the session of the dispute over the results of the election.

On the other hand, @prabowo played more on the issue of Islamic identity politization by using the words hopefully (*semoga*) and "allah" during his campaign as his nodal point. With this sentence, he tries to attract sympathy from Muslims in Indonesia who have the majority power in terms of numbers. During the voting period, he focused more on the issue of escorting ballot boxes with the buzzing words polling place (TPS-*tempat pemungutan suara*), box (*kotak*), and vote (*suara*). Some of the @prabowo tweets criticized the implementation of the election which was said to have been "tainted by compradors", while other sentences invited to continue guarding the general election in the belief that Prabowo was the winner.

The articulation of populism is also seen from how "the people's" concepts are related to the other topic. Referring to Jurgen Mackert's theory (in Fitzi, Mackert, & Turner (ed.), 2019: 94), Jokowi means that the "people" look more like organic populist movements that define people as ethnos. The people are interpreted as a certain unity of identity (nationality). Equally using the logic of "us-them" to the people and outside the people. Whereas Prabowo looks typical as liberal populism by emphasizing the current position between those who embrace excessive pluralism and want to emphasize the issue of minority-minorities. The people are articulated by Prabowo as "demos" divided. He articulates "the people" as the subject's identity, which is articulated in various ways that are always dealing with the elite to show their support for the people. A populist discursive articulation that is also used by such Bernie Sander (Cezayirlioğlu, 2017).

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