

## The identity politics of the local head election in Bolaang Mongondow, Indonesia

Alfon Kimbal<sup>1\*)</sup>, Jufri Frani Rompas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Government Studies, Universitas Sam Ratulangi, Indonesia

### Abstract

*Democracy in Indonesia should be a place to channel the aspirations of the people according to their preferences. The identity politics is a strategy carried out by interested groups in a contestation, the goal is to gain sympathy and votes in the election. However, the impact of the the identity politics tends to be negative where people tend to be selfish for one and group's sake and this is contrary to Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Bolaang Mongondow Regency is the locus of this research, where this area is still thick with the phenomenon of identity politics. This research examines the phenomenon of the the identity politics for election participants and also its impact on society as well as data found in the field and also previous studies that have examined matters related to the title of this research and then conducted a focus of group discussions. From the results of the study, it was found that the Identity Political Behavior in the Bolaang Mongondow Regency, especially in the Election of The Regional Heads in 2017 is still within the level of reasonableness and is one of the political strategies of the candidate pairs but is still within reasonable limits and it can be seen that there is no longer a majority force that has a sectoral ego in the interests of power but also the community has matured in choosing their leaders in the elections.*

**Keywords:** *identity politics, local head election, political behavior*

\*)corresponding author

Email: [alfonkimbal@unsrat.ac.id](mailto:alfonkimbal@unsrat.ac.id)

### Introduction

Indonesia is a country of cultural diversity. Cultural wealth characterizes Indonesia which is inherent in its identity. This certainly has an influence on the life of the nation and state in society. The motto of Unity in Diversity is then relevant to reinforce the view of the community to unite in diversity. In the political context, diversity in society is often a trigger for conflict (Mubarok & Rahman, 2021). Political phenomena can emerge and develop dynamically and are determined by how the phenomenon is assembled into a specific part that appears (Bagaskoro et al., 2022). The democratic system adopted by Indonesia is not free from various obstacles that sometimes cause apathy for the community. The many problems that exist in the process of traveling democracy in Indonesia are a direct result of the various obstacles that exist (Wakhid et al., 2017).

Politics is really just the art of managing the realm of power. Although in practice, politics can expand everywhere. At the textual level, politics is fine. At the level of context or implementation, politics can turn scary. Politics is actually not scary, but these days it has become a scary myth. Politics is sometimes longed for and sometimes reviled. Returning the meaning of politics to the text is what is difficult to do. This is because it is in this context that politics is practiced in the wrong way (Mubarrod & Syarwi, 2024). Thus, religious tradition is not a good predictor to explain political violence. This finding speaks to some important debates on the issue of religion and politics (Syarifudin, 2022).

The main factors that trigger diversity conflicts in Indonesia are inter-ethnic conflicts, cultural conflicts, and conflicts between beliefs. These conflicts trigger conflicts between individuals and other individuals. These triggers became more complicated after the arrival of a group that acted on behalf of nationalism as an assumption of tolerance for the independence achieved by Indonesia. Ethnic identity, race, beliefs, and customs are dominated by nationalist groups. Various forms of political dynamics and intrigue in political contestation at the local level indicate that the political climate that grows and develops is very coloring social and political life in the region, ranging from subtle to coarse: ranging from implied to explicit: even ranging from elegant to undignified (Tinov & Handoko, 2016).

The identity politics is still a new issue in Indonesia. Although it has been around for a long time, its effects have only recently been felt. Identity politicization is based on a social action approach to gain public sympathy in order to be elected as the main candidate for activism (Putra et al., 2023). The democratic process in Indonesia is a democratic process that is inseparable from religious and ethnic identity orientation. This can be seen in the participation of political parties that participated in previous elections or regional elections. The democratic process, especially in regional elections, is often inseparable from the participation of various parties with various ideologies that undermine it. Various religious and ethnic identities are often used as political tools (Nasrudin & Nurdin, 2019).

The political process in Indonesia has been marked by cases of politicization of religious identity that undermine democratic reasoning. The politicization of ethnic and religious identity reached its culmination during the 2017 DKI Jakarta's Election of Regional Head. Since Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (Ahok) ran for governor of DKI Jakarta. Ethnic and religious sentiments began to be played by certain parties for their political interests. The blasphemy case that ensnared Ahok became political capital for his political opponents in playing religious sentiments in the electoral competition (Frenki, 2021).

The identity politics can be seen from two aspects. First, the theoretical aspect, where political identity is something that lives or exists in every ethnicity, where its existence can be latent and potential, and at any time can surface as a dominant political force (Kurnia et al., 2024; Misbahuddin et al., 2023). The identity politics based on similarity of identity is often the main cause of political conflict, especially with regard to tensions between superior and inferior groups or between majorities and minorities. Not least in Indonesia, the understanding of liberal democracy that glorifies Pancasila above all makes religion a substance whose existence is considered a threat to the diversity that exists in Indonesia, especially against religious minorities (Febriansyah et al., 2024). The positive thing that can be taken from the identity politics is that there are efforts to preserve the cultural values that characterize the group concerned, so that the strengthening of culture will not fade and disappear (Habibi, 2017; Hartaman et al., 2020). In the life of the nation and state and the life of multiculturalism in Indonesia, national, ethnic and religious identities play a very important role (Zarbaliyev, 2017).

In Indonesia's diverse political landscape, marked by a multitude of ethnic and religious groups, identity politics plays a prominent role. Politicians and parties employ various strategies to appeal to different segments of the population, making it challenging to avoid identity-based campaigning. These approaches range from leveraging ethnic, racial, and religious narratives to constructing identities around ideologies, specific issues, ecosocial perspectives, or personal characterizations. This

complex interplay of identity politics reflects Indonesia's rich social tapestry and the varied tactics used by political actors to navigate and capitalize on the country's diversity in their quest for support and influence (Romli, 2019; Winarni, 2014). National political uproar has been colored by the outbreak of various particularistic issues about indigenous and non-indigenous, Islam and non-Islam, China vs. anti-China, Islamic Caliphate vs. Pancasila, which have become commonplace to be discussed, initiated, and blown up in the contestation of power in the regions and nationally under the pretext of democracy (Al- Farisi, 2018). In the life of mankind, there are always variants of life that attract public attention, among these variants are the lives of the upper class and the elite in society (Jurdi, 2019).

Member of the General Election Supervisory Agency, Lolly Suhenti, estimates that in the 2024 elections, the identity politics strategies will still be used, so it is hoped that religious leaders can help prevent the identity politics strategies from occurring. However, it is recognized that the definition of "identity politics" itself must first be agreed upon, especially considering that the definition of "identity politics" does not yet exist in Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections. The policy to prevent the identity politics in Indonesia itself is still weak and unclear because it has not been included in the general election law itself so that the prevention of the use of the identity politics itself only becomes a discourse and is difficult to materialize. Furthermore, in the regional head elections that refer to the general election commission regulation number 15 of 2017 concerning Amendments to the General Election Commission Regulation Number 3 of 2017 concerning Nomination for the Election of Governors and Deputy Governors, Regents and Vice Regents, and / or Mayors and Vice Mayors also does not emphasize identity politics.

The identity politics strengthens because of growing resentment, due to neglect of the need for recognition, entrepreneur of identity, namely the role of key actors who mobilize and politicize identity. The identity politics threatens because of the tendency to limit rather than liberate. The ambiguity of representation and legitimacy claims, potentially manipulated by elites to achieve their interests (Wingarta et al., 2021).

Bolaang Mongondow Regency is one of the regions that in 2017 held regional head elections. The thick nuances of the identity politics in the elections still colored the dynamics of the elections at that time, the camps of Islamic and Christian groups were still political commodities to obtain votes in the elections. Of course, this strategy is not entirely wrong but also cannot be fully justified. The higher the level of popularity of the candidate, the easier it will be accepted by the community for what is delivered. Second is the image or persona. Every candidate who wants to advance in the regional election contest needs a positive image to show to the public (Yuliani & Ardianto, 2020).

Learning from the experience of the 2019 simultaneous elections, it is possible that these issues will re-emerge in the upcoming 2024 elections. Past events have a great opportunity to be echoed by radical groups for personal gain. Likewise, by groups that basically want division between the majority and minorities in Indonesia. Eliminating the practice of the identity politics will be one of the important homework for Indonesia ahead of the next 2024 elections, including in Bolaang Mongondow Regency. This is important, especially because it is closely related to equality of rights, community unity, and democratic principles. Moreover, the issue of SARA (Ethnicity, Religion, Race) is quite sensitive to be used as a campaign tool.

Unlike previous studies, this paper analyzes the impact of the identity politics not only from a negative point of view but also from the positive side of identity

politics. The identity that is often discussed in the general elections in Bolaang Mongondow Regency is the biggest about religion and then about ethnicity, where Islam dominates the community in Bolaang Mongondow Regency and is followed by Protestant Christianity. Furthermore, the issue of ethnicity is also often played in politics in Bolaang Mongondow Regency. The largest tribe that inhabits this region is the Mongondow tribe and is followed by the Minahasa tribe. The Mongondow tribe is predominantly Muslim and the Minahasa tribe is predominantly Protestant Christian.

Community life in Bolaang Mongondow Regency is conducive even though it is dotted with various kinds of differences in the midst of community life. These differences are integrated into everyday life without any significant friction. Therefore, the identity problem is only used during election contestation.

In direct elections, where voters have the freedom to determine their leaders, the popularity and mass base of a candidate or a pair of candidates is one of many important variables to win a political contestation. Popularity and ownership of various strategic positions can be valuable social capital for each candidate pair to gain votes to win electoral contestation (Elis Mardianti, 2024:18). In the case of regional head elections, the resources in question are in the form of energy, technology, and so on that support the victory of regional head candidates. Resources in the form of personnel are people who support the implementation of strategies (Maulida et al., 2021).

This research explores the strategy of using identity issues in winning the regional head in Bolaang Mongondow Regency, North Sulawesi Province. Although there have previously been several studies related to the use of the identity politics in a contestation, the research seeks to show the other side of the use of identity politics, whose use does not divide the lives of the people in Bolaang Mongondow, but rather emphasizes the position of minorities in determining the victory in the contestation of regional elections in 2017.

In research on identity politics, most of them bring up the negative side that is more visible in the practice of identity politics, but from a certain side, the use of this method can actually develop the potential of minorities in certain areas. As in Bolaang Mongondow Regency, generally located in North Sulawesi Province, which has a majority of Protestant Christians, seen from the district side, Muslims are more dominant, but at the provincial level Muslims are a minority in North Sulawesi Province. Likewise, tribally, the Minahasa tribe is the majority tribe inhabiting North Sulawesi province but in Bolaang Mongondow district, the Minahasa tribe is a minority tribe.

The winner of the regional head election was the candidate pair Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow and Yanny Ronny Tuuk with 89.091 (Eighty nine thousand ninety one) votes. Superior to the pair Hi. Salihi Mokodongan and Jefri Tumelap. The interesting thing here is that the candidates for vice regent come from Protestant Christianity and the Minahasa tribe, making the important minority vote in the Bolaang Mongondow Regency regional head election battle important and interesting. More details can be seen in the table below:

**Table 1.** Vote gain of the candidates in Bolaang Mongondow Regional Head Election

No	Name of Candidates	Vote Gain	Presentation
1	Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow and Yanny Ronny Tuuk	89.091	64,88 %
2	Hi. Salihi Mokodongan and Jefri Tumelap	48.224	35,12%

*Source: kpu.go.id*

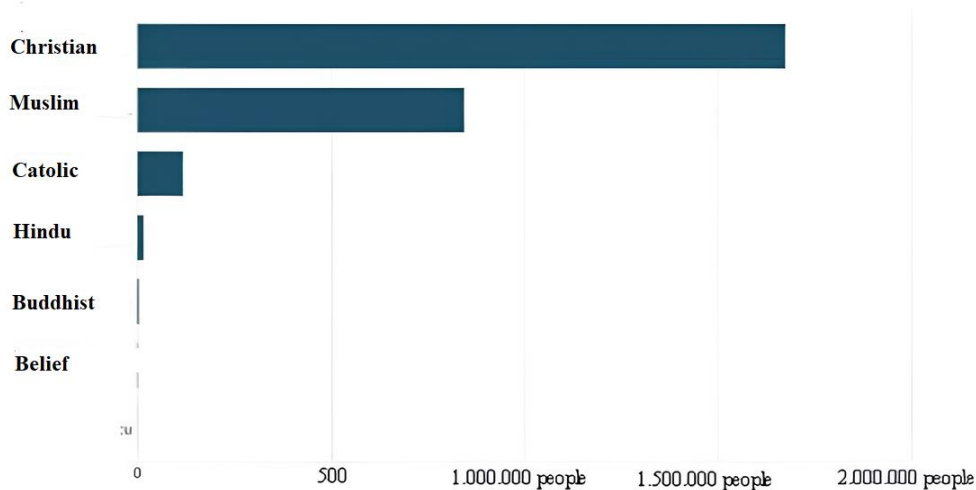
Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow as a candidate for regent embraced Islam and came from the Mongondow tribe, while his partner Yanny Ronny Tuuk embraced Protestant Christianity and came from the Minahasa tribe. Likewise with its rival Hi. Salihi Mokodongan is Muslim, from the Mongondow tribe and Jefri Tumelap is a Protestant Christian and from the Minahasa tribe.

**Table 2.** Religion and ethnic of the candidates in Bolaang Mongondow Regional Head Election

No	Name of Candidates	Religion	Ethnic
1	Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow	Islam	Mongondow
2	Yanny Ronny Tuuk	Kristen Protestan	Minahasa
3	Hi. Salihi Mokodongan	Islam	Mongondow
4	Jefri Tumelap	Kristen Protestan	Minahasa

*Source: processed secondary data.*

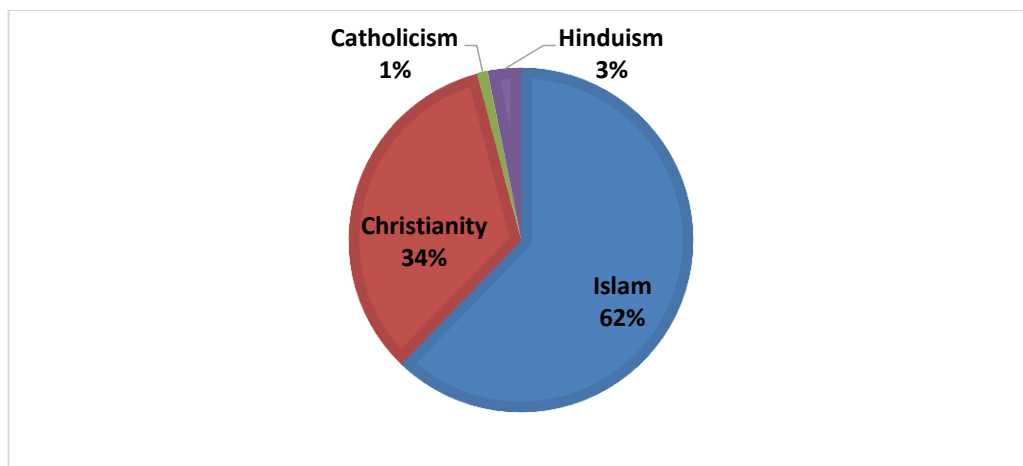
The data obtained from the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration of the Ministry of Home Affairs recorded that the population in North Sulawesi reached 2.66 million people as of June 30, 2021. Of this number, the majority or 1.67 million people (62.98%) are Christians. As many as 843.68 thousand (31.77%) of the population of North Sulawesi adhere to Islam. There are also 117.71 thousand (4.43%) residents in the province who are Catholic. Then, as many as 15.84 thousand (0.6%) residents of North Sulawesi are Hindus. A total of 3.88 thousand (0.15%) North Sulawesi residents are Buddhists. North Sulawesi residents who are Confucian are 1.66 thousand people (0.06%). Meanwhile, as many as 425 (0.02%) people in the province adhere to a belief. This can be illustrated in the picture below:



**Figure 1.** The population of North Sulawesi based on religion

*Source: processed secondary data*

From the data obtained that the total population in this district is 213,484 people with a density of 39.55 people/km<sup>2</sup>. Most of the people of Bolaang Mongondow Regency embrace Islam (61%), Christianity (33%), Catholicism (1%) and Hinduism (5%) from this data is a separate strength for a party or candidate who comes from the Muslim majority. However, in reality, the majority candidate carries several candidates so that the votes of the majority are divided so that other votes are needed to win the election.



**Figure 2.** Voters identity based on religion  
*Source: processed secondary data.\*

With a total area of 15069.00 km<sup>2</sup>. The tribes found in this province include: Minahasa (30%), Sangir (19.8%), Mongondow (11.3%), Gorontalo (7.4%), Chinese (3%). These figures become data that can be the basis of a political strategy for any political parties, pairs of candidates who will compete in regional head elections, the selection of the right deputy regent can boost significant vote acquisition.

The formulation of the problems in this study are: How is the Phenomenon of The identity politics in the Election of Regional Heads in Bolaang Mongondow Regency which was held in 2017. The specific objective of this research is to provide policy input to anticipate the negative impact of the identity politics in the 2024 General Election and the next Regional Head Election.

### **Research Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach that aims to understand symptoms that do not require quantification by applying a comparative case approach to investigate cases through in-depth data. According to John W. Creswell in the book *Research Design*, qualitative research is: "Qualitative research methods are one type of method for describing, exploring and understanding the meaning that a number of individuals or groups of people ascribe to social or humanitarian problems. The qualitative research process involves important efforts, such as asking questions and procedures, collecting specific data from participants, analyzing data inductively from specific themes to general themes, and interpreting the meaning of data (Creswell, 2016). Changes in problems in qualitative research are common and even expected. Because the goal is to reveal facts in accordance with the conditions and situations in the field. Regarding the problem, it has a conclusion (1) that qualitative research does not start from something empty. The implication is that the researcher limits the study problem with a focus as previously described. (2) focus is a problem that comes from the researchers experience. The researchers experience is a previously known experience that the researcher is in the area and the researcher knows exactly about the research focus in the study.

In this study, data collection and processing techniques were carried out in various forms, namely through: Observation, In-depth Interviews, Primary and Secondary Data Collection and Documentation. To present the data to make it more meaningful and easy to understand is to use the *interactive model analysis* from Miles & Huberman (2014). Data collection and data analysis activities cannot be separated. Data collection is placed as a component that is an integral part of data

analysis activities. Data analysis has basically been carried out from the beginning of research activities to the end of the study. In this model, analysis activities are divided into 3 stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

## **Results and Discussion**

The implementation of regional head elections in the midst of a combination of a multiparty system and a presidential system has the effect of strengthening the sovereignty of political parties, but weakening the sovereignty of the people in the regions. This can be seen from the many cases of dynastic politics, rent politics and corruption in the regions (Pinem et al., 2024). As a form of democratic implementation, local elections are intended not only to fulfill the desire to replace the old mechanism of electing leaders and representatives of the people in the style of authoritarianism, but also philosophically want to achieve the implementation of sustainable democratic values, namely developing participation and responsiveness and accountability as a whole (Suyatno, 2016).

The identity politics in Indonesia is decorated with various issues regarding the conflict between people who carry the identity of nationalism and people who carry religious identity. In this issue, a truth claim emerges between the two regarding the superiority or exclusivism of each identity that they echo. Looking deeper, the long history of Indonesian independence to date has proven that the religious (Islamic) foundation has contributed greatly to the formation of the Indonesian nation, not least with the formation and agreement of Pancasila as the foundation of the Indonesian state. However, the struggle for political power has repeated the dark history by making religious the identity politics a tool of power propaganda.

The identity politics during the election period was formed by the populist movement that made the election an agenda that could achieve the enforcement of exclusive ideologies based on religion by conveying hate narratives with issues of Religion, Ethnicity, Race and Intergroup that seemed to be closely linked within themselves both in the real world and digital spaces. The populist movement driven by the two parties is carried out with SARA discriminatory patterns so as to create politics of division and polarization in a very strong society and even produce physical violence solely to delegitimize election opponents (Yehezkiel & Takalamingan, 2023) Religious elites are figures who have power in the form of influence in society. Religious elites have a different position and power from political elites. Where religious elites have hidden power (Farid & Priyatmoko, 2021).

An extreme form of the identity politics is the rise to some extent of the idea of separatism. This can be seen, for example, in French-speaking and cultured Quebec, which wants to separate itself from English-speaking Canada. It can also be read in the typical Islamic movement of Louis Farrakhan with his Nation of Islam in the United States, but which is rejected by other large black Muslim groups. However, in 2000, the religious the identity politics of this model was overcome when Farrakhan reached peace with Wareeth Din Muhammad, his former rival, to reduce the the identity politics of the Black Muslim group and unite itself with the plural American mainstream.

The practice of democracy in Indonesia seems to have turned into a race that knows neither friend nor foe, everything is run in an oligarchic democracy that is very familiar with racial and divisive politicization. The sentiments against ethnic minorities that have occurred until now could be social engineering conceptualized by certain groups to attract public sympathy.

In short, the identity politics cannot be countered with "softer" identity politics. It must be countered with politics that prioritizes public interests over personal interests. Another thing that also needs to be addressed is that religion should not be brought into the political realm. Religion is sufficient as a life belief and moral guidance, both in the individual and social spheres, because religious teachings emphasize faith, ritual worship, and morality, while politics emphasizes the rules of the game in the struggle for and distribution of power in the context of state life, because if religion is used as a primordial sentiment and ethnicity for political interests. The fact that Islam is the majority must have clear political implications. The existing political forces will definitely fight over the Islamic mass base, including parties that do not even have an Islamic mass base (Karim, 2021).

Ideally, elections in a democracy are a peaceful and alternative to violent means for all groups in society to fight for their interests or seize power. In this context, the use of identity in politics is legitimate and not necessarily harmful to democracy. Renowned political scientist, Amy Gutmann in her book, *Identity in Democracy* (2003) writes about the crucial role of identity in democracy. For Gutmann, identity in democracy is a form of interest aggregation that reflects the reality of society. He believes that democracy is not only about rational interests, but also about identity ("democratic politics is both interest and identity driven"). Various ways from prospective contestants to demonstrate themselves to be recognized and elected by their constituents. The various ways in which the prospective candidates show themselves to do political marketing

The variety of ethnic identities that form the division of groups based on ethnicity can be a forum for candidate pairs to attract the attention of the community in the ethnic group itself in their own way. With the existence of groups or associations owned from each ethnic identity, it can be utilized by each candidate pair as a place to get support from ethnic groups. Each candidate pair tries to find support from each ethnicity to become one of the capital needed. Therefore, people who come from ethnic groups provide their support for candidate pairs based on inter-ethnic closeness (Nur Ainun *et al.*, 2022:32).

In general, the general theory of the identity politics and various research results show that there are two main factors that make ethnicity and religion interesting and salient to be used and influential in the political process. First, when ethnicity and religion become factors at stake. There is a need to maintain or defend the identity of a group. Second, when the political process is competitive. That is, the political process causes identity groups to face each other and there is no dominant one, so it is not so clear who will be the winner in advance. General elections, including regional elections, are political processes in which various factors such as identity are at stake. It remains now how the actors involved in it manage issues such as ethnicity and religion, which are at stake. The importance of political education for the community is key, political education is to increase peoples knowledge so that they can participate maximally in the political system (Candra Romance, 2018:75).

The democratic system implemented in Indonesia where people vote directly, such as in the election in Bolaang Mongondow Regency in 2017, has a positive impact on the community where people can use their votes to elect their leaders, but also voters are easily mobilized on the grounds of identity, not only religious identity, but also tribal identity, where in Bolaang Mongondow Regency not only the Mongondow tribe but some also come from other tribes and the largest comes from the Minahasa tribe. This was utilized by politicians to collaborate with deputy regents from tribes



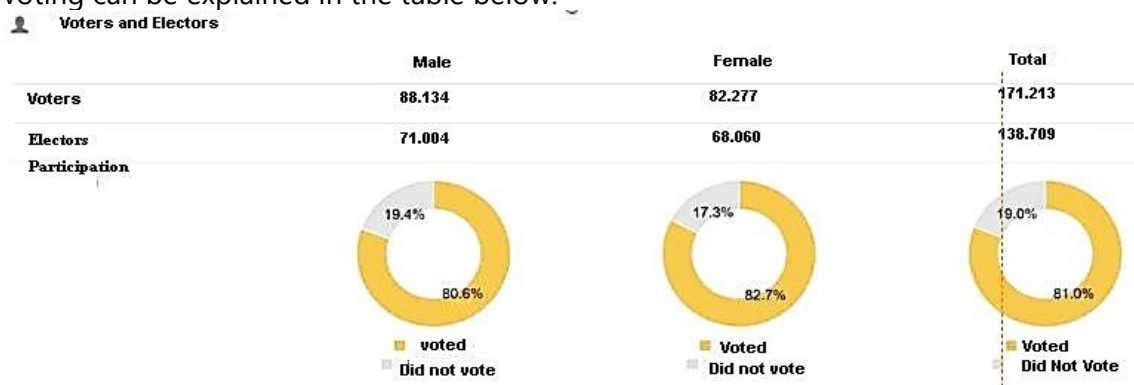
outside Bolaang Mongondow, as was done by the Yasti Soepredjo pair who collaborated with Yanny Tuuk who is originally Minahasan (tribe) by birth. Seen from this side, the identity politics can be a positive thing where minorities can send their representatives to hold government positions, which has never happened before where previously it was monopolized by certain tribes and religions.

The dynamics that occurred in Bolaang Mongondow Regency are faced in many regions in Indonesia, the importance of joint commitment of the government, the community, political parties and also all elements of election and regional election actors. Law enforcement that does not see the need should be a powerful weapon for violators, including those who act in the name of democracy but behind it is ridden by the desire for power.

It is this electoral process that has become the focal point of the growing divide between nationalism and religion in Indonesia. The governments inability to organize a fair and wise government coupled with the greed to maintain power has made the identity politics the most powerful vehicle to get peoples votes. The slanting and shaping of public opinion through the mass media regarding the spirit of diversity and nationalism has divided the life of the nation. In fact, it cannot be denied that the majority religion in Indonesia has long practiced the principles of nationalism in the administration of the government system in Indonesia, such as the approval of Pancasila as the foundation of the state to tolerance in religion by recognizing the existence of religious minorities.

The 2017 General Election of Bolaang Mongondow Regent was held on February 15, 2017 to elect the Regent of Bolaang Mongondow for the period 2017-2022. There are two pairs of Regent and Vice Regent who registered in this 2017 Simultaneous Regent Election. The first candidate, Dra. Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow ran with Yanny Ronny Tuuk and was supported by the political parties such as PDIP, PAN, PKB, PKS, and Nasdem. In addition, Hi. Salihi Mokodongan is also running for Regent's position accompanied by Jefri Tumelap. The pair is backed by the political parties such as the Democratic Party, Golkar and Gerindra.

In the 2017 regional head elections, the number of community participation in voting can be explained in the table below:



**Figure 3.** The number of community participation in voting

Source: [kpu.go.id](http://kpu.go.id)

From the data above, it can be seen that the use of voting rights in Bolaang Mongondow Regency during the 2017 Election of Regional Head was quite high, reaching 81% of the total votes, namely 138,709 voters who voted 112,354 who used their voting rights. Only 19% did not exercise their right to vote, namely 26,354 voters who did not exercise their right to vote. The polling stations provided by the Regional Election Commission of Bolaang Mongondow Regency were 346 polling stations

spread across 15 sub-districts, 2 villages and 200 villages in Bolaang Mongondow Regency.

The 2017 regional elections in Bolaang Mongondow highlighted the complex interplay of identity politics and voting patterns. The election saw 1,201 invalid votes, while disability voter turnout was notably high at 89.8% (79 out of 88 eligible voters). Identity politics played a significant role, with religious and ethnic sentiments being key factors. The region's ethnic composition, primarily Mongondow with minorities including Minahasa, Gorontalo, and Sangihe, influenced vote distribution among candidates. While identity politics can be an effective strategy for gaining votes, it requires careful handling. On the positive side, it can make political strategies more effective by addressing issues relevant to specific social groups. For instance, the Christian minority's voice was considered in selecting the deputy regent candidate. However, this approach also carries potential negative implications, underscoring the need for balanced and responsible use of identity-based appeals in political campaigns.

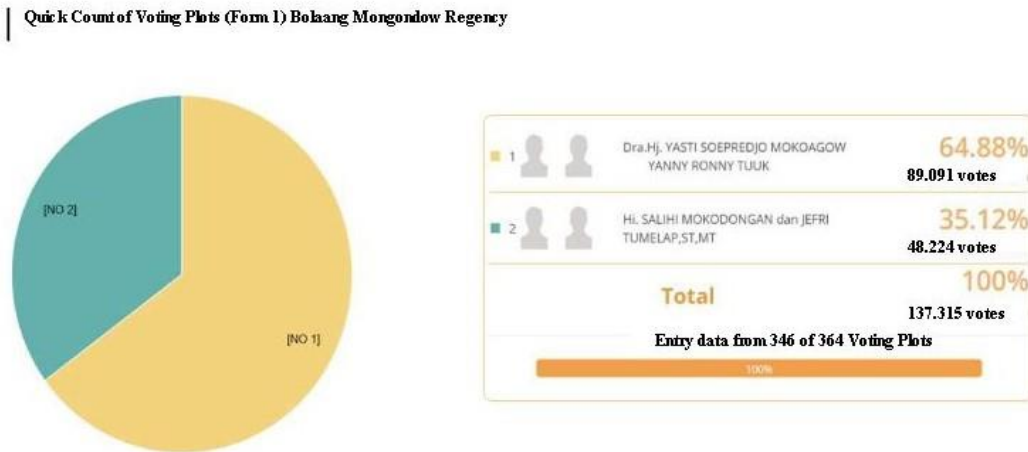
The negative side of the identity politics is that it can break the unity of the Indonesian nation. This happens because the Indonesian nation consists of various tribes, races, and religions. Using the identity of one group in society can cause conflict between one group and another, which has a prolonged impact, such as the elections in DKI Jakarta. The impact of Islamic populism incidentally affects the political choices of DKI Jakarta residents who are faced with the elections (Prayogi, 2019). Supervision is an important element in creating quality regional head elections. The performance of election organizers, in this case election supervisors, can be improved by being consistent in work efforts (Sultan et al., 2023).

Therefore, the government needs to clarify what the identity politics is in the electoral rules so as not to generate debate and social conflict in the community, so that the unity of the nation is maintained. This means that in the future election system, including the election of regional heads in 2024, there needs to be strict regulations to regulate divisive the identity politics issues. However, if we look back at the case of identity politics, we can easily find the factor is the multicultural society with its various uniqueness (Omli Romli, Elly Nurlia, 2023:36).

The results of the regional head election in Bolaang Mongondow Regency were won by candidate Dra. Yasti Soepredjo Mokoagow who is a Muslim from the Mongondow tribe and her partner Yanny Ronny Tuuk Christian from the Minahasan tribe both obtained 64.88% of the valid votes, namely 89,091 votes while the campaign Hi. Salihi Mokodongan and Jefri Tumelap ST, MT obtained 35%.12 valid votes, namely 48,224 votes. From these results, the use of identity is quite visible and clearly becomes a political strategy that has proven successful in getting significant votes in the election. The use of the identity politics strategy becomes a powerful weapon if utilized optimally through an approach process that can be accepted by certain circles, of course, by not attacking other identities. Each region has its own uniqueness and also a different political power map, therefore political elites in the regions adjust to the conditions of the constituents in their respective regions. However, it is the emotional closeness between voters and challenger candidates that encourages vote switching (Wawan Sobari, 2022:243).

A political strategy or marketing should be part of the dynamics of regional head elections, at the end of which the interests of the candidates and their success teams are prioritized. The use of an identity is a common thing in a contestation because in principle our country consists of various kinds of identities that are deeply rooted at every level. The identity politics refers to political strategies that focus on the

identity of certain groups such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. In the context of the presidential election, it involves political strategies that try to mobilize support from various identity groups (Rosdiana & Annis Azhar Suryaningtyas, 2024).



**Figure 4.** Quick Count of Voting Plots (Form 1) Bolaang Mongondow  
Source: kpu.go.id.

The following are the results of the recapitulation of the votes obtained by the two pairs of candidates at the sub-district level:

**Table 2.** The recapitulation of the votes obtained by the two pairs of candidates

The Sub-sudistricts	The Number of Votes For Candidate Pairs, YSM-YRT	The Number of Votes For Candidate Pairs, SBM-JITU
Bilalalang	1.635	1.660
Bolaang	6.010	5.239
Bolaang Timur	3.438	3.583
Dumoga	6.379	2.345
Dumoga Barat	7.463	2.339
Dumoga Tengah	4.699	1.633
Dumoga Tenggara	3.293	1.601
Dumoga Timur	8.075	4.409
Dumoga Utara	6.455	1.174
Lolak	8.430	8.330
Lolayan	10.286	4.198
Passi Barat	5.791	3.784
Passi Timur	5.959	1.787
Poigar	6.930	4.343
Sangtombolang	4.215	1.859
<b>Total</b>	<b>89.091</b>	<b>48.224</b>

Source: kpu.go.id

Thus, from the description of the discussion above, it can be concluded that the political event in the Election of Regional Heads (*Pilkada*) in Bolaang Mondondow regency did not escape the orientation of the identity politics and representation. The

form of orientation leads to economic, religious and racial orientation. There are several reasons for this conclusion. First, researchers observed the electability of the candidate pairs in the elections through data submitted by several survey institutions which resulted in the electability of the two candidates fluctuating, this was influenced by several issues raised during the elections. As well as cases related to ethnicity and religion as explained in the discussion above. In addition, it is more clearly seen in the victory of the candidate pair Yasti Soepredjo and Yanny Tuuk who won the election with 89,058 votes. It was also inseparable from several factors behind it, such as the desire of political parties and couples to win the election as well as the ethnic and religious background of the deputy regent candidate, Yanny Tuuk, who is Minahasan (tribe) by birth.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis presented, this study yields several significant findings related to the research theme outlined in the initial problem formulation. Firstly, it reveals that candidates competing in regional head elections employ diverse strategies, largely dependent on their available resources or "modalities." A prominent strategy frequently utilized is leveraging the candidates' identities. This approach has been proven to be a powerful tool in garnering voter support. Second, the study highlights that the prevalence of identity politics has not only posed challenges for those in power but has also confounded scholars who had previously anticipated a decline in the influence of religion, race, and ethnicity due to societal progress and enlightenment. In the context of the 2017 regional head elections in Bolaang Mongondow Regency, while the use of identity politics was not alarmingly pervasive, it was nevertheless evident as a strategy for winning voters. The most commonly exploited identities in this strategy were religious and ethnic affiliations, a tactic that has been employed since the inception of direct regional head elections.

The research further underscores that identity politics, while potentially disadvantageous to minority groups, often serves as a potent tool for the majority. Regrettably, despite clear legal prohibitions outlined in Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning general elections, specifically Article 280 paragraph 1 which forbids the use of ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup approaches in campaigning, enforcement of these regulations remains inadequate. This persistent practice in electoral contestations highlights a critical area for improvement. The study proposes that addressing this issue should be a collaborative effort involving the government, election organizers, and all segments of society. It emphasizes the need for a collective agreement to ensure that Indonesia is perceived as a shared nation, eliminating principles of domination and promoting equality, security, and general welfare for all citizens. To mitigate the negative impacts of identity politics, the research recommends strengthening the commitment of election organizers and law enforcers, coupled with extensive community outreach to provide political education about the detrimental effects of identity-based political strategies. Crucially, the study advocates for non-selective law enforcement against individuals who exploit identity politics in their campaigns, ensuring a fair and equitable political landscape for all participants.

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