

## **The Use of Populism as a Pragmatist Approach in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Populism usually appears when there is dissatisfaction towards the system and creates two different camps seen as polarization, “the elite” versus “the people.” Those camps are a result of the appeal of anti-elite. Indonesian populist leader also uses the strategy to appeal a large support of citizens, but the strategy must be understood as a part of pragmatist leadership. This paper argues that the utilization of populism in Indonesia is more motivated by pragmatic reasons rather than fundamental reasons. This pragmatic reason can be seen through inconsistent statement in the leadership which, at first, supports populist claim but tends to be different in reality. Political leaders in Indonesia try to strive for a progress as well as to seek a compromise and a support from various groups, including those labeled as elite by the populists themselves. Through an observation of secondary documents from journals and news articles during the latest presidential campaign between Jokowi and Prabowo in 2019, it is concluded that all characteristics of populist strategy have been used pragmatically by both leaders. It is applied to attract more supports in order to respect the political constraints and to work with the system.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, populism, pragmatist, the elite, the people

### **Abstrak**

*Populisme biasanya muncul saat terdapat ketidakpuasan terhadap sistem, dan menciptakan dua kelompok berbeda sebagai bentuk polarisasi, “elit” melawan “rakyat.” Kelompok tersebut merupakan hasil dari daya tarik anti-elit. Adapun pemimpin populis Indonesia juga menggunakan daya tarik tersebut untuk mencari dukungan masyarakat, namun demikian hal tersebut harus dilihat sebagai bagian dari bentuk kepemimpinan yang pragmatis. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa penggunaan populisme di Indonesia lebih dilatarbelakangi motivasi pragmatis daripada alasan fundamental. Alasan pragmatis ini dapat dilihat dari pernyataan yang tidak konsisten dalam kepemimpinan yang mana, pada saat awal, tampak mendukung gagasan populisme namun berbeda secara realita. Para pemimpin politik di Indonesia berusaha untuk mengupayakan kemajuan sekaligus mencari kompromi dan dukungan dari banyak kalangan, termasuk dari mereka yang dianggap sebagai bagian dari elit. Dengan menggunakan studi dokumen sekunder dari jurnal dan artikel berita pada saat kampanye presiden terakhir antara Joko Widodo dan Prabowo pada tahun 2019, dapat disimpulkan bahwa semua ciri strategi populis telah digunakan secara pragmatis oleh kedua tokoh tersebut. Strategi populis pragmatis diterapkan untuk menarik lebih banyak dukungan terutama untuk menghadapi batasan-batasan politik serta untuk bekerja dalam sistem.*

**Kata kunci:** elit, Indonesia, populisme, pragmatis, rakyat

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Many democratic countries, such as the United States (U.S.) and the Philippines started to experience populism nowadays. In the United States, for instance, President Donald Trump came to power with his political campaign of white American society and a staunch anti-immigration position (Robinson, 2018). Meanwhile, President Duterte of the Philippines identified himself as a strong anti-drug leader and, allegedly, exploits gender in his political approach (Tanyag, 2018). The rise of populism in the world is not only seen as an emergence of certain political figures, but also as a fight against inequality (Darmawan, 2017). Populism is also believed to have happened in Indonesia. Many political science scholars believe that the rise of Joko Widodo or more popularly known as Jokowi, as the Governor of Jakarta in 2012 and as the Indonesian President in 2014 (Sianipar, 2015), indicated to the rise of populism in Indonesia. Jokowi was viewed as a representative of the people and was detached from Indonesia's oligarchy thus his public image demonstrated characteristics that populist leaders identify with (Beech, 2014).

In supporting the claim of anti-elite, populist leaders tend to utilize demagogy by accusing the ruling elite. Indonesian populist leader also applies the strategy to appeal large supports of citizens. In the words of Mietzner (2015: 22-23), it is related to the rise of Prabowo with his populist textbook approach and Jokowi's inclusiveness and politeness form of 'technocratic populism'. However, these implementations of populism must be understood as part of pragmatist leadership. The populist leader in Indonesia uses anti-elite discourse merely as a political strategy to find larger support. This paper argues that the utilization of populism in Indonesia is more motivated by a pragmatic reason rather than a fundamental reason. The fundamental reason here is related to the

original background that forms anti-elite motive, which in turn will be fulfilled in future policy. Meanwhile, the pragmatic reason is a leader's interest to be in power. This pragmatic reason can be seen through inconsistent statement in the leadership which, at first, supports populist claim but tends to be different in reality. Political leaders in Indonesia try to strive for a progress as well as to seek a compromise and a support from various groups, including those labeled as elite by the populists themselves. This paper will focus on the case of Jokowi and Prabowo up to the 2019 presidential campaign, to see how the dynamics of Indonesia created a different phenomenon in populism.

To elaborate on the above argument, this paper is divided as follows. It starts with a simple explanation of populism and pragmatist leadership. Second, there is a brief trajectory of Indonesia's path to what we see as 'pragmatic populism'. It presents a phenomenon of how political leaders in Indonesia compromise and start using populism as an approach. Then, there is an analysis of populism in Indonesia. This section focuses on how Indonesia presents a unique and a different phenomenon compared to other countries. Last but not least, there is a conclusion at the end of this paper. The paper aims to offer some observations, on how populism is used in Indonesian political context.

### **The Concept of Populism**

Populism usually occurs in the context of people's dissatisfaction towards an unbalanced power relation. Concerning democracy; Canovan (1999) stated that populism tends to appear when there is domination inside the government and political parties by the elite and oligarchs. Populism, therefore, can arise from the failure to recognize the voice of the majority (Crick, 2005: 630-632). However; populism hasn't

been defined into one single explanation because political science scholars are still debating over what populism is. Some argue that populism is an “ideology”, while others say that it is more into the style of leadership or political strategy (Jaffrelot, 2018). One of the most popular definitions of populism is from Mudde (2004: 543). He argues that populism is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volontégénérale* (general will) of the people.”

On the other hand, according to Weyland (2001: 14), populism is defined as a “political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated and uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.” In the words of Pakulski (2018: 4-5), populist leaders share ideal common characteristics, which are: use anti-elite discourse, employ demagoguery, claim to be authentic voices, try to blame the elite, and offer simplified remedies. However, recent development on populism has shown that contemporary populist leader tends to be different in practice (Pakulski, 2018: 7). In Indonesia, recent development has raised technocratic populism (Mietzner, 2015), which in practice tends to be more pragmatic as it offers a very different approach compared to classical populism. Here, this development will be seen as a pragmatist approach of populism in terms of political strategy and leadership. This paper uses the definition of a pragmatist leader, the leader who focuses on reaching his goals and also accommodates different ideas particularly if there is a pressing issue for him. In this regard, the ability of a pragmatist leader is to find, to maintain and to combine support from various backgrounds of groups. The

ability is an important characteristic. Therefore, pragmatic leaders can sometimes be viewed as being indecisive (Hermann, et. al., 2001: 97).

Looking into the above definitions on populism, it can be concluded that populism as a political strategy and leadership is related to Resentment, Representation, and Relationship as its characteristics. It tries to condemn the elite, by establishing a direct relationship with the people in which at the end could undermine democracy. Resentment is the situation in which the leader tends to condemn the elite as the source of the country’s problems. An ideal populist leader tries to frame the elite with contempt and hatred while a pragmatic pluralist tries to find a compromise between the people’s will and the government or elite’s interest without targeting a specific group. In this regard, the goal of an ideal populist is to revamp the political system of the country by targeting a specific group as the enemy of the state. The pragmatist, on the other hand, acknowledges the need of the people without promising a radical change of the system and not targeting a specific actor as the enemy of the state. Moreover, non-populist leaders try to support the interest of the elite without acknowledging the interest of the people (Mietzner, 2015: xii-xiii).

The second characteristic is related to representation or to whom the leader is associated with. Ideal populists identify themselves as a part of the people and to proclaim the interest of the people, especially to those who are excluded and marginalized by the elite. This type of populists is often seen to identify themselves as a true representative of the people, where they come from, and know what is best for the people. Therefore, they usually portray themselves as a part of the majority group (Aspinall, 2015: 1-5; Mietzner, 2015: 17-18). Meanwhile, a pragmatist populist tries to be in the middle, accommodating both “the

people” and “the elite”. In the words of Mietzner, this is close to what he considers as ‘technocratic populism’ (Mietzner, 2105: 23-28). For Herman, et. al. (2001: 97), this type of the leader tends to garner the support of people who can assist him in reaching his goals. As for a non-populist leader, he identifies himself as a part of the elite.

The last characteristic is about the relationship between the leader and the people whom they represent. A populist leadership can create a close connection with the people; therefore, an ideal populist leader tends to forge a direct relationship. As such, populism has been viewed as a threat to democracy because of the possibility to undermine checks and balances (Hamid, 2014: 89). On the other hand, a pragmatist populist combines both direct communication and communication using intermediaries. The last type of populist is a non-populist leader, who tends to use intermediaries when communicating with the people. For Müller (2015: 86), a non-populist leader will say that he works with the system of democracy which lies on the concept of representation. As a working definition, this paper defines populism in a broad manner as a political strategy used by leaders to reach their goals by identifying themselves as part of the people fighting against the elite. In terms of pragmatist leader, he tends to use populism rhetorically, in which he can accommodate different ideas even if it signifies working with the elite.

### **Research Methods**

Before we begin with the analysis, it will be important to clarify some methodological issues. First, this is a qualitative study and primarily it rests on discourse analysis. This study exploits secondary documents from journals and news articles that contain speeches or statements made by Jokowi and Prabowo during the latest presidential

campaign in 2019. The writers then analyzed those documents in order to look the clarity of the use of populism. The study describes the use of populism as a political strategy conducted by Jokowi and Prabowo. The objective is to look whether populism serves as a true intention of the leader or merely as a rethoric of the leader.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Indonesia’s Path towards Pragmatic Populism**

Indonesia’s path towards pragmatic populism can be traced back from the beginning of its independence. Although the use of populism varies from time to time, and tends to be absent in the era of Soeharto’s authoritarian administration, the tendency of using populism is always the same: populism is used merely as a political strategy to gather large support in order to be in power. It is related to the fact that Indonesia is quite diverse in terms of cultures, races, groups, communities, and even ideologies. Populism, therefore, is used not only to get support from “the people” being represented, but also used pragmatically to attract support from various backgrounds of people who usually compete against each other because of populism. In the end, populism in Indonesia creates less polarization of two different camps compared to populism in other countries with its appeal of anti-elite. The use of populism in the early days of Indonesia up to now has paved the way for the creation of pragmatic populism in Indonesia.

After gaining its independence in 1945, the Indonesian government strove to find the most suitable political system which was in line with the country’s ideology and philosophy, *Pancasila*. Since then, Indonesian democracy has had its fair share of battles and struggles among different groups where each presidency and government faced their problems and challenges. Thus, Indonesian politics became a contest of several political

parties and communal groups, which has resulted in social cleavages (Ufen, 2010: 18). To gather and to unite support from various parties and communal groups, an Indonesian leader starts to use populist strategy to represents “the people” as a whole.

The first president of Indonesia and ‘Proklamator’ of independence, Soekarno, used populist strategy to unite Indonesian people. He used a populist doctrine of Marhaenism to represent Indonesian day-to-day struggle of predominantly rural working class (*wongcilik*) in the 1950s and early 1960s (Ziv, 2001: 75). The use of populist strategy somehow has become pragmatic since Soekarno himself was a very pragmatic leader. He did use symbolic representation when it best suited with his political agenda, such as with the Islamic symbol. His motive is not a religious one, although he did use Islamic symbols prior to 1945 when he used it to organize various groups to fight for independence. He even tried to create coalition of different segments: nasionalist, socialist and also communist. (Chalmers, 2019). Soekarno is considered as a resilient leader and a great orator, especially in exploiting the right moments. He believed that he can unite all beliefs in Indonesia, and in 1950 it was suggested that Soekarno should have a party of his own. This mainly because of he believed that all of Indonesian people will support him regardless of the people’s religious or belief backgrounds. This including combining Muslim and Marxist, even though Muslim politicians is known to be very critical towards him (Wejak, 2000: 55-57). Soekarno’s populist appeals is used pragmatically, as he used populist leadership as an effort to unite all Indonesian people, especially in the situation of domestic political struggle (Ramadhan and Simatupang, 2021; Yilmaz, 2020).

As the second president of Indonesia, Soeharto tried to suppress mass politics as well as populism in Indonesia (Ziv, 2001: 75).

He banned all activities related to the PKI, cleared the principles of communism, and controlled mass media. He also welcomed foreign investment to support economic development in Indonesia (Suparno, 2012: 53; Erdianto, 2016; Sammy, 2018). The revival of populism in Indonesia was begun with the reformation era, especially with the rise of Soekarno’s daughter Megawati Soekarnoputri. Megawati was known for her obsession on nationalism and national integrity. She also used her father populist doctrine of Marhaenism to attract people to support her as the next president of Indonesia in 1999. Megawati was seen as a true representation of Indonesian people who have been the victims of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime (Ziv, 2001: 75-76, 86). Although Megawati seemed to inherit her father’s populist image, her policy during the administration was simply a pragmatic one. Her leadership brought to light events that raised public concern and caused dissatisfaction such as the privatization of Badan Usaha Milik Negara/ BUMN (State-Owned Enterprises).

The use of populism in a more pragmatic manner, which is to support interest to be in power, occurs during the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) era. In the research of Mietzner (2009), he described it as a conduct of economic populism, in which economic subsidies used by the incumbent to support his image among low-income segments of Indonesian society. One important point explained by Mietzner is that SBY cash payments was made close to the presidential election and it turned to boost his positive image, which had suffered from low popularity in opinion polls before the cash payments. Another example of pragmatist strategy during the era SBY was the abolishment of rice import, in which it is happened in SBY first term (Purwaatmoko, 2015). This phenomenon has amplified that

populist is used mere as a strategy to gather larger support to be in power.

Furthermore, Indonesia's experience regarding populism is also related to its democratic experience. Indonesian democracy has long been surrounded by issues of rationality and pragmatism except for the Soeharto regime which was more authoritarian. Rationality and pragmatism here is when political parties and the Indonesian people gain the opportunity to make a choice most in-line with their interests. Political parties will attempt to gain power by offering programs to attract voters' attention. This situation is best attributed to the phenomenon of a *catch-all* party in Indonesia. As stated by Mayrudin (2017: 164-166), a catch-all party is a phenomenon in which political parties tend to accept pluralism, inclusivity, and accommodate various issues and agendas from various groups in the community. In other words, a catch-all party tries to position itself in the middle of different groups, camps, or ideology camps. Recent research conducted by Burhanuddin Muhtadi, Edward Aspinnall, Diego Fossati, and Eve Warburton, revealed that political parties in Indonesia tend to move in the middle of the spectrum of left ideology and right ideology. The research outlined how religious issues were the only aspect where political parties in Indonesia obtain concrete and consistent differences. This research proved that ideology for political parties in Indonesia was not the most decisive factor. Previous studies stated that political parties in Indonesia were open towards the formation of a big and broad coalition (Aspinnall, et. al., 2018).

### **'Pragmatic Populism' in Indonesia: An Observation**

One of the main characteristics of populism is the use of anti-elite appeal to attract support from "the people." Populist strategy tries to represent "the people" by

blaming the corrupt elite that harms ordinary people. Besides, populism usually represents itself as homogenous people. As a result, populism is also necessarily anti-pluralist and claims itself for 100% of representation of "the people," not only 99%. Those unified people who are led by populist leader always positioned themselves against small minorities, especially elites (Müller, 2015:83 - 85). In the context of Indonesia, it all started with the use of Indonesian day-to-day struggle of predominantly rural working class (*wongcilik*) by Soekarno that represented the people of Indonesia. The term *wongcilik* is still relevant in today's context as it is still used by many Indonesian leaders to show their alignments with poor and marginalized Indonesia. On the other hand, "the elite" is a small minority who does not genuinely work or take benefit from the system (Müller, 2015: 84). To be more precise, groups such as political elites (government, political parties), media (media tycoons, journalist), economic (multinational corporations), or intellectual (scholars, teachers or well-educated background) are usually being targeted as part of the elite by populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007: 324). In Indonesia's context, groups like business conglomerates, intellectuals, bureaucrats, and political parties are often considered as part of "the elite". Those elites, especially from the government and political parties, are usually ranked high in terms of performance dissatisfaction among Indonesian people. As stated by Fossati and Meitzner, in terms of populism, Indonesian people are more focus on politico-economic unfairness (Fossati & Mietzner, 2019: 793). This unhappiness among Indonesian people about politico-economic system is an aspect used by populist leader in Indonesia to attract attention from various groups of people.

Pragmatic populism in Indonesia positions the leader at the center of the fault line between two polarizing groups created

by populism, “the people” and “the elite.” Although populism pushes the leader to be recognized as a part of one big group of “the people,” pragmatism in Indonesia has encouraged political leaders to find, to maintain and to combine supports outside their affiliation, including those who are labeled as “the elite.” Populist leaders in Indonesia have been known to garner the supports of “the people” by opposing the elite group while at the same time being mingling among “the elite” itself. Another consequence of this phenomenon is the reality that populist leaders in Indonesia have to confront other populists although it is not necessarily opposing the elite, as is commonly the case in conventional populism (Hadiz, 2017).

In the context of modern-day Indonesian democracy, two leaders are considered as populists by many scholars, Jokowi and Prabowo, even though both leaders do not share the same type of populism. However, they actually use populism pragmatically as a political strategy to reach their political goals. When we analyze the three indicators of a populist position, there is a tendency of both leaders to interchange into pragmatic populism. This is mainly because of Indonesia’s democratic pragmatism that pushes a political leader to be more pragmatic instead of identifying him solely as the representative of “the people.” The term of people here is used pragmatically, based on the situation faced by the leader, as an indication of Indonesian people which also consist of the elite as well. This phenomenon is different compared to original populism which is characterized with strong opposition to the elite. Using the characteristics of resentment, representation and relationship as well as pragmatic style of leadership, we could see the use of populism as a pragmatist approach by Jokowi and Prabowo.

The first characteristic of the analysis is **resentment** which is evident in statements

made by both leaders. As explained by Müller (2015: 86), populist leader consistently and continuously denies the very legitimacy of their opponents. Meanwhile, a non-populist leader says that the policy is merely misguided. In the words of Ufen (2019: 28), populist leaders try to create clear antagonism between good and bad. Both Jokowi and Prabowo use their positions to criticize the elite. For Jokowi, he tried to criticize the previous government while Prabowo’s tactic was to chastise Jokowi’s administration. Prabowo frequently criticized and publicly lambasted the government. On one occasion, Prabowo stated that Jokowi’s government lacked of strength which he claimed was the byproduct of the country’s legal uncertainty and conflicts among governmental bodies (Rahadian, 2018). He additionally claimed that the state of modern-day Indonesia as a country was misaligned with the nation’s founding fathers’ vision. Harnessing social media as a tool, Prabowo made numerous remarks on Facebook about Indonesia’s independence being threatened, how the government made violations during the election, the country’s economy and military forces being weak, and how the nation’s trajectory was headed in the wrong direction (Kumparan, 2018). On his Facebook page, he went so far as to claim that Indonesia’s former colonialists stole the country’s resources thereby creating problems for every generation. Prabowo also expressed his discontent with Jakarta’s elite and how the public had been too kind towards the elites although they were lazy and despicable by continuously lying to the people (Kompas, 2017). Prabowo stated that, “elite in Jakarta, I’m sorry, it’s already bad. I give up with them. But this is our faults. Because our people were too good, the elite were not. I am not willing to talk about the elite because most of them are lying” (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: *“Elite di Jakarta itu, minta maaf*

*deh, sudah parah. Saya kapok dengan mereka ini. Tapi ini kesalahan kita semua. Karena tadi rakyat kita terlalu baik, elitnya tidak. Jadi malas bicara elite karena kebanyakan bohongnya”).*

To create a sense of antagonism between good and bad, Prabowo went further by stipulating that the government operated recklessly (*ugal-ugalan*). The word of *ugal-ugalan* is considered as a strong and vulgar word in Indonesia (Rahadian, 2018), and it means literally as indecent (rude) behavior, impertinent, or naughty (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, 2020). He said that reckless behavior was responsible for the recent situation of Indonesia and it was the time to “Make Indonesia Great Again.” He stated that, “slowly the dream to restore the glory of Indonesia faded by reckless ways in managing the country” (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: *“Perlahan-lahan mimpi untuk mengembalikan kejayaan Indonesia luntur oleh cara ugal-ugalan dalam mengelola negara”).*

On the state of the Indonesian economy, Prabowo believed that Indonesia’s poverty line had gone from bad to worse (Pebrianto and Hanggi, 2018). He used the word ‘stupidity’ to describe the current situation of Indonesian economy. He further stated that Indonesia nowadays was implementing the era of ‘economic stupidity.’ According to Prabowo, Indonesia’s economy was worse than the neo-liberal economic system of today (Erdianto, 2018). He said that, “in my opinion, this is not a neoliberal economy anymore. This is worse than neolib. There must be a term; this is, in my opinion, a foolish economy. The economics of stupidity. This is what happened” (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: *“Ini menurut saya bukan ekonomi neoliberal lagi. Ini lebih parah dari neolib. Harus ada istilah, ini menurut saya ekonomi kebodohan. The economics of stupidity. Ini yang terjadi”).*

On the other hand, Jokowi also criticized previous governments though in an indirect manner. In one of his speeches, Jokowi mentioned social justice in Indonesia namely the single-price policy of gasoline in Indonesia. Even though he didn’t mention any specific names in his speech, many observers believed it was directed towards the SBY administration. While SBY responded to Jokowi’s speech, Jokowi didn’t provide any further comments (Ihsanuddin, 2016). Furthermore, he also addressed the injustice in Papua specifically referring to gasoline prices, therefore, his government tried to create social justice by implementing a single-price gasoline policy in Indonesia (Putsanra, 2017). He stated that, “there is injustice in (the price of) BBM, in Java, it is only around Rp7,000. Here (in Papua) up to Rp100,000 per liter. In Wamena, Rp60,000 to Rp70,000 per liter” (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: *“(Harga) BBM ada ketidakadilan, di Jawa hanya kisaran Rp7.000 di sini (Papua) ada yang sampai Rp100 ribu per liter, di Wamena Rp60 ribu hingga 70 ribu per liter”).*

The second characteristic is about the **representation** of the people. In this regard, a traditional populist would say that he is a part of the homogenous people. In the words of Müller (2015: 83-85), populist leader tries to say that he represents 100% of the people. Regarding this aspect of representation, Prabowo attempted to identify himself as a true representative of the people. Having been inspired by people like Chavez, he tried to mobilize the rural poor namely the farmers in Indonesia where he was the Chairman of the Indonesian Farmers Association (HKTI) until 2015 (Kusumadewi, 2015; Mietzner, 2015). According to Mietzner, Prabowo also named his party with the name of Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra) or The Great Indonesia Movement to echo the sound of anti-party sentiments. In doing so, he aspired to restore Indonesia’s greatness. Nonetheless, Prabowo’s efforts to identify



himself as a part of the people were mostly manufactured (Mietzner, 2015: 21-22). Prabowo also tried to grab the attention of rural voters and the lower class as part of his populist strategy, especially since he recognized the need to ease his image as part of the elite. Overall, Prabowo promised to fight for the interest of all Indonesian people (CNN Indonesia, 2018b). On one occasion, he stated to one of his supporters, "Thank you, sir. Thank you for your support, my struggle is to defend all groups and communities so that our children and grandchildren prosper" (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: "*Terimakasih, Pak. Terima kasih atas dukungan Bapak, perjuangan saya adalah untuk membela seluruh kelompok dan golongan agar anak cucu kita hidup makmur*").

On the other hand, Jokowi also tried to represent "the people of Indonesia." Jokowi's outreach method of meeting and engaging in dialogues with various Indonesian communities demonstrated his approach of populist style of representation. Among those he held discussions with were young Indonesian conglomerates (Ihsanuddin, 2018), artists and comedians (Jordan, 2015), representatives of small and medium enterprises (Siswanto & Tanjung, 2016), and religious figures (Jordan, 2017). Jokowi also tried to engage with Indonesians who were considered to be neglected by previous administrations. This included as the first Indonesian President who visited the Papua region (Tempo.co, 2017) whereas of April 2018, he made eight official visits to the area (Sutriyanto, 2018). The move had been viewed as groundbreaking given that the general opinion in Indonesia was of a government that solely focuses on Java Island (Javacentris). In addition, Jokowi had stated his intention to initiate social justice for all Indonesians, including for Papua (Seto, 2018).

Culturally-speaking, Jokowi has promoted Indonesian culture and heritage by using traditional outfits and costumes on many occasions. This act had been repeated by his first Vice President, Jusuf Kalla, and other ministers which carry on today. On one occasion, Jokowi wore a traditional costume from Bugis, while Jusuf Kalla wore a traditional costume from Java. This gesture symbolizes Jokowi's efforts in trying to represent Indonesia's diversity from every culture, group, and community (Adam, 2017).

The final characteristic is the **relationship** between the leader and their constituents or the people. A sign of populist approach by Jokowi could be seen from his hobby of blusukan, an impromptu visit to public places such as markets where he is able to listen to public concerns (Mietzner, 2015: 26). Since his role as the Governor of Jakarta, Jokowi had become synonymous with carrying out blusukan where he maintains this initiative as the President of Indonesia. He has gone so far as to promote his trademark blusukan act to global leaders (Sipahutar, 2016). Jokowi's opponent, Prabowo, made a similar effort to Jokowi's signature act. It is even claimed that Prabowo had already been managed a kind of impromptu visit since he was the leader of Indonesian Traditional Market Traders Association (*Asosiasi Pedagang Pasar Seluruh Indonesia*) (Liputan 6, 2014).

Nevertheless, all the above characteristics of populist strategy have been used pragmatically. The antagonism between elite and the people is not polarizing as it should be brought by populist leader. In Indonesia, both Jokowi and Prabowo used the anti-elite strategy inconsistently, making it pragmatic as it was used only to attract larger support from the people. As stated by Ufen, leader who condemns and attacks the corrupt elite does not automatically become a populist. In this regard, we call him as a pragmatist populist, since the leader uses

populist strategy (anti-elite) to attract more support in order to respect the political constraints and to work with the system. For Hermann (2001: 97), the indication of pragmatist leader is “if the time is right to push their own positions, they can do so; but such leaders can also accommodate to pressure if the time is quite right.” In Indonesia, both Jokowi and Prabowo tend to accommodate populist strategy if the situation is right.

In regards to characteristics of populist strategy, we could see that both Jokowi and Prabowo did not use the anti-elite strategy all the time. On one occasion, Prabowo acknowledged Jokowi’s administration of running the country and also some achievements being made (Ibrahim, 2019). He stated that, “my friends, we see good faith (government development) and, however, Mr. Jokowi has the results already achieved” (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: *“Sahabat-sahabatku, kita melihat itikad baik (pembangunan pemerintah) dan bagaimanapun Pak Jokowi punya hasil-hasil yang dicapai”*). Moreover, during the registration of the Presidential candidacy event, Prabowo arrived at the Komisi Pemilihan Umum/ KPU (General Election Commission) with his car, accompanied by a marching band, and conducted a traditional military ritual by greeting his supporters from his open Jeep vehicle. This illustrated Prabowo’s signaling his character that he was a General and had a military background (Wiwoho, 2018). Thus, while Prabowo originally portrayed himself as the voice of Indonesian farmers, his public event displaying his military background was considered contradictory given that the army was once part of the country’s elite group. It is true that, as stated by Ufen (2019: 29), a populist leader can also come from an elite background. However, it would be too naïve to neglect the fact that Prabowo comes from a group that still considered as an elite in

Indonesian history: the Soeharto’s group of people. The fact that Prabowo was looking for supports from elite can be seen as an indication that he used populist merely as a mean to gather larger support. It was reported that Prabowo even visited Cendana to find support from his ex-wife Titiek Soeharto (Kurniawan, 2018). Titiek then said that her family (through her new political party) would support Prabowo in the next presidential election, “We are ready to welcome this support for Pak Prabowo Subianto and Pak Sandiaga Uno” (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: *“Kami bersedia menyambut dukungan itu untuk pasangan Pak Prabowo Subianto dan Pak Sandiaga Uno”*).

Besides, Prabowo’s popularity was well accepted in the middle-class people of Indonesia. The fact that Prabowo condemned and attacked the government quite often was seen as merely a strategy to gather more support from grassroots level since Jokowi’s base of support was rural and poor people. Although Prabowo had tried to mobilize the lower class and rural voters, he was predominantly supported by a middle class, educated and urban electorate (Mietzner, 2015: 44). Various surveys conducted by LingkaranSurvei Indonesia (LSI), KonsepIndo, LitbangKompas, CSIS and IndikatorPolitik Indonesia revealed that Prabowo was popular among elite, such as urban elite and well-educated people (Nathaniel, 2019). To compete with Jokowi’s rural-based support and to win support at the grassroots level, Prabowo chose Sandiaga Uno who was more attractive to the people (CNN Indonesia, 2018a).

The same phenomenon also happened to Jokowi. Jokowi came from the nationalist party, PDI-P. This alone created political constraint that Jokowi represented nationalist groups rather than religious groups. He, however, tried to combine nationalism and Islam as a means of

underlining Indonesia's diversity (Bayuni, 2017). After registering his Presidential candidacy, he chose Ma'ruf Amin as his Vice President in the 2019 Presidential Campaign. Ma'ruf Amin was the Chairman of the Indonesia Ulema Council (MUI) and was considered as a representative of the Muslim community (ABC Net, 2018). This decision highlighted Jokowi's bid to catch-all people or communities in Indonesia by representing both nationalist and religious groups.

Moreover, Jokowi also represented the elite since he received support from the elite business people, for example from Erick Tohir, Hari Tanoesoedibjo, Surya Paloh and Oesman Sapta Odang (Nathaniel, 2019). In terms of resentment, one of the differences between Jokowi and Prabowo was the direct condemnation towards the elite. Jokowi rarely criticized the elite in front of the public, but often spoke about social justice in Indonesia without referencing any specific actors. He strove for a compromise between the people and the elite by using non-confrontational language. In his state-of-the-nation-address before members of the MPR on 16 August 2017, Jokowi said (Putsanra, 2017), "I am sure that only with an equitable economic equality, we will be more united. Equitable development will unite Indonesia. Equitable development will make us stronger to face global competition" (Original statement in bahasa Indonesia: "*Saya yakin hanya dengan pemerataan ekonomi yang berkeadilan, kita akan semakin bersatu. Pembangunan yang merata akan mempersatukan Indonesia. Pembangunan yang berkeadilan akan membuat kita semakin kuat dalam menghadapi persaingan global*"). In the same occasion, Jokowi also said that all institutions had to work for the people. He further said that only with cooperation between state's institutions the justice for Indonesian people would be achieved (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, 2017). This showed his

pragmatism over populism in which he combined both populist method of impromptu visit while at the same time encouraged the use of intermediaries as part of a good democracy. He also supported a good democracy to be conducted in Indonesia, something which is rarely seen in the conduct of ideal populist.

## CONCLUSION

Populism becomes a buzz word in today's political debate. The phenomenon happens in many parts of the world as a sign of dissatisfaction towards the corrupt elite. One of the important characteristics of populism is resentment towards the elite which creates antagonism between "the people" and "the elite." This kind of phenomenon is also believed to occur in Indonesia, especially in the context of Jokowi and Prabowo in the last Indonesia's presidential election. According to many scholars like Mietzner, Aspinall and Hadiz, Jokowi is labeled as a polite populist leader while Prabowo tends to be an ideal populist. However, through an observation during the presidential campaign in 2019, it can be seen that Indonesian leaders have a tendency to use populism merely as a strategy of leadership in order to find larger supports. It is not intended as a true populist style strategy in which it focuses on anti-elite discourse. Populism is merely used as a means to an end by both Jokowi and Prabowo.

Many Indonesia's leaders have tried to use populism as a strategy to attract supporters. It might be used at first by Indonesia's proclinator Soekarno when he claimed supports from many poor Indonesian and marginalized or *wong cilik*. The idea of *wong cilik* is still relevant in today's Indonesian politics. The use of populist idea as a strategy could be observed from inconsistent statement which supports populist claim at first but tends to be different in reality. In fact, political leaders in Indonesia

try to compromise and to combine supports from various groups, including those labeled as elite by the populist himself.

It is true that both Jokowi and Prabowo used a populist idea, but both of them applied it to attract more supports for their presidential campaigns. In this regard, it is a strategy of leadership that tries to find, to maintain and to combine more supports, including those who are labeled as “the elite.” Therefore, the idea of populism that usually creates polarization between “the people” and “the elite” in Indonesia has derived a different antagonism. Indonesian leaders themselves even usually work with the system in order to support their interest. For example, Prabowo said that he was tired with Jakarta’s elite but at the same time he looked for support from Soeharto’s circle that is considered as the true elite opposed by the people of Indonesia. On another occasion, Prabowo even praised the achievement of Jokowi’s administration. In similar way, Jokowi also did almost the same thing. He tried to criticize previous government for misguided policy in non-confrontational

manner, did impromptu visit, but also acknowledged the achievement of Indonesian democracy and worked with successful Indonesian businessmen. This paper offers the observation on what happened with populism in Indonesia, and it suggests that all characteristics of populist strategy have been used pragmatically by Indonesian leaders, both Jokowi and Prabowo, in order to work with political constraints. This phenomenon might have appeared as a consequence of Indonesia’s democracy which always related to the issue of pragmatism and populism itself somehow cannot be the sole way to attract support. The fact that Indonesia has a specific journey towards independence and democracy could become a lesson learned. Thus, diverse background of cultures, races, groups, communities, and even ideologies might be resulted in the utilization of populism pragmatically, especially to gather more support and have communication with wider audience. However, further research should be conducted in order to know whether Indonesia’s populism really creates a new kind of populism or not.

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