

BEGINNING OF DATA-DRIVEN POLITICS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Our daily lives have been increasingly based on social relationships via the Internet rather than through direct face-to-face interaction. Even if we live in the same house or work in the same office, the communication through SNS with members of our family or colleagues at work can be more frequent. This is even more true at a time when the COVID19 has been widespread as it is today. As a result, it is becoming normal for us to perceive the social relations to be filtered through digital spaces. In this paper, I will try to shed light on this digitalized trend in politics and what it is becoming in Indonesia.

Politics in the Post-Truth Era

In 2016, the UK's exit decision from the European Union and the election of President Trump in the U.S. were political events of global significance that were symbolized as the arrival of post-truth era. It is no wonder, therefore, that Oxford dictionaries chose post-truth as its "word of the year" for 2016. Post-truth, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is "an adjective relating to, or denoting, a situation in which appeals to emotions or personal beliefs are more influential in shaping public opinion than to objective facts". Looking at the political processes of Britain's withdrawal from the EU and Trump's election, messages that appeal to emotions, such as British nationalism and white-dominated American First ideology, played a more important role than objective facts. These messages were regarded as the major sources of the deepening conflicts of adherents, followers and supporters of different beliefs and candidates, and the political micro-targeting was utilized as a new political tool to deliver these messages to the voters.

Micro-targeting is a marketing strategy used by business sector to analyze each person's data, including gender, address, education, hobbies, and consumption patterns, to suggest the most appropriate products and services to that individual. Barack Obama introduced this strategy in politics during the 2008 US presidential election campaign and the term "political micro-targeting" became familiar thereafter.

The unexpected victory of Trump has since stirred controversy over political micro-targeting (Bodo, Herverger and de Vresse 2017). This was because of the political micro-targeting weirdly done by a political consultancy that the Trump team had contracted. Cambridge Analytica (CA), which specialized in data mining and analysis, is said to gather improperly the digital footprints of between 50 million and 87 million Facebook users and analyze their psychological attributes and then tailor campaign ads to their personalities to induce them to support Trump. Using the five-factor personality model (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) called OCEAN personality model, they allegedly quantify personality by scoring individual users' psychological attributes through their Facebook page likes, and then provided

campaign ads tailored to those personalities. Alexander Nix, the then CEO of CA boasted the algorithms of political micro-targeting as the winning factor of Trump. And the ex-CA staffs, Christopher Willey and Brittany Kaiser felt scared by the CA's operations and exposed the CA's legally dubious strategies and strengthened the views through the major newspapers such as Guardian and the New York Times that the CA's political micro-marketing tool was effective for the winning of Trump (Kaiser 2019; Wylie 2019).

In fact, however, Facebook asked Cambridge Analytica to delete the data in 2015, and Cambridge Analytica is said to have complied with the request and deleted the data, so it is not clear whether CA was able to use Facebook users' data to run such a campaign in the 2016 US presidential election. It is also highly questionable whether one can analyze the psychology of voters based on Facebook "likes" alone and use it for political micro-targeting (Sumpter 2019). Nevertheless, what is clear is that data-driven politics, using online data, digital footprints, AI and machine learning, has begun and will continue to grow in importance. It is also true to the politics in Indonesia.

Before the Start of Data-driven Politics in Indonesia

In the case of Indonesian elections, until the time of the 2009 presidential election, the most important election marketing was TV advertising (Okamoto 2010). For example, the winning candidates for the first direct presidential election in 2004, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla (SBY-JK) used an advertising agency called Hotline for TV ads. The company strategically decided the content and timing of the TV ads. While running ads that appealed for support for SBY-JK regardless of social class, ethnicity, or religion, Hotline also created ads that appealed for support for SBY separately for fathers, housewives, and youth. Since fathers are expected to make decisions quickly, the agency ran ads for fathers early in the campaign, followed by ads for housewives. The ads for young people were run at the end of the campaign, as young people are more likely to change their voting behavior even just before the election day. The ads for housewives were run during early morning programs and entertainment programs, and the ads for young people were run during music and entertainment programs. These ads were the ads targeted for specific audience groups, but it was still far from the micro-targeting. Even in the 2009 presidential election, the main campaign tool was still the broadly targeting TV ads, but Yudhoyono commissioned a company to create his own website like Obama's website. This might be the first time for any candidate to start utilizing the cyber space for election campaign.

The impact of online politics became quite visible in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election. At the request of Joko Widodo (Jokowi), the mayor of Solo City in Central Java, Kartika Djoemadi and others set up an online volunteer group called Jasmev (Jokowi Ahok social media Vounteers) and began to conduct an online campaign to support Jokowi and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the candidates for the governor and vice governor of Jakarta. This was the first time that the cyberspace became the politically significant space for election campaign. The online spread of fake news and the utilization of both have also started.

The 2014 presidential election saw the further intensification of online campaigning, with the presence of Muslim cyber forces consisting of Islamic radicals and conservatives. Ahok, an ethnic Chinese Protestant became the Jakarta governor upon Jokowi's inauguration and ran as the incumbent in 2017. The election campaign was fiercely contested between staunch supporters of Ahok, who respected Indonesia's

diversity, and Islamic conservative forces, who strongly opposed the idea of a non-Muslim becoming the head of Indonesia's capital Jakarta, and the online society was also clearly bifurcated. As a result, there was a lot of discussion about how the online campaign was deeply dividing the supporters of different candidates and then the society itself in Indonesia as was happening in the US.

The 2019 presidential election also saw a fierce online campaign between the incumbent, Jokowi, and Prabowo, who enjoyed strong support from Islamic conservatives. This 2019 presidential election is very different from previous presidential elections in four ways. The first two have been happening since the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, and the last two are new features seen in the 2019 presidential election. The first was the incessant and widespread use of disinformation, both online and offline. A second notable feature was the feverish online election campaigns of both the Jokowi–Ma'ruf Amin and Prabowo–Sandiaga Uno camps. Online influencers and buzzers^[1] in both camps played significant roles in the election, each with distinct characteristics and patterns. The third feature of the 2019 election was the serious effort required on the part of both campaigns to discern the real facts and real voices of voters amid tremendous volumes of fake or dubious news and social media messages. Both sides used artificial intelligence (AI) to analyze big data amassed from online news and social media sites as well as offline data sets. The fourth feature is the start of micro-targeting politics, in which AI is used to analyze big- data on voters. In the following, I will briefly touch on the last two points that are critically important for the future of Indonesian politics.

Start of Data-driven Politics in the 2019 Presidential Election

The 2019 campaign marked the first serious introduction of big data into politics and the full-fledged politicization of IT specialists. Alumni of ITB, computer science graduates from other institutions and internet autodidacts joined both camps and became politicized. This section focuses on the Jokowi side because it was technologically more advanced than the Prabowo teams. The official team leaders of Jokowi's digital campaigns received data and analysis from several shadow teams (*tim bayangan*). For example, Arya Sinulingga in charge of PR and social media of the Jokowi team constantly used his smartphone to check for both positive and negative sentiments expressed towards Jokowi and Prabowo on social media, and when Jokowi's popularity decreased even slightly, he immediately instructed *tim bayangan* to determine the reasons for the decline and deal with them. *Tim bayangan* would then analyze big data from social media and provide information for a response.[2]

Andi Widjajanto, Jokowi's former cabinet secretary was the head of the pro-Jokowi volunteer organization known as Cakra 19. He boasted that the Jokowi campaign had four teams with machines capable of processing big data. The first was operated by Cloud Team (*Tim Awan*) under the direction of Andi himself; the second by the political consultancy Political Wave under the direction of Yose Rizal; the third by Corona Team under the direction of Hokky Situngkir; and the fourth directly operated by the official Jokowi–Ma'ruf campaign team and coordinated by Wahyu Sakti Trenggono. These teams utilized the machines to (1) collect and analyze comments and chats on social media and online news sites; (2) calculate the positive and negative sentiments towards each candidate; and (3) estimate the electability of the candidates.

On election day, algorithms programmed on each of the four machines drew on the collected data to predict the election results well ahead of the closure of balloting. Andi said that the predictions at 10:00–10:30 am were nearly identical to the final election results (Kumparan.com, 2019a; 2019b). That means that the Jokowi team was able to discern the approximate election results sooner than the quick counts done by pollsters. This marked a significant shift in the political importance of big data in Indonesia.

One *tim bayangan* also introduced the political micro-targeting tools. The team used AI to analyze big data and, for example, identify the merits, demerits and impact of visits to a particular village by either Jokowi or Uno Sandiaga (Prabowo's running mate). Based on a village index created from various village data, the team suggested the most appropriate campaign themes for a specific village before any visit by a Jokowi team. The team even suggested where to put up campaign posters, based on information from Google Maps [3]. The target of the political micro-targeting done by the team was at a village level, not at an individual level as Cambridge Analytica boasted that it targeted. But the information the team gathered included the digital footprints left by voters on Facebook, Instagram, and others and this can pave the way for a far more elaborated and detailed political micro-targeting soon.

Tentative Conclusion

It has already been more than 20 years since Indonesia democratized, and elections have been held for a president, for national and local MPs, and for governor, district head and mayor. The election business is the most booming in Southeast Asia. As a result, new election tools have been introduced relatively quickly; the 2019 presidential election has finally seen the start of the politics of big data, AI, and political micro-targeting. Given the high interest of Indonesian people in SNS, a digital company might easily gather personal digital footprints and there is a high possibility that these data can be politically manipulated or utilized at any time by the company or by a political agency that obtain these data from the company. In that sense, it is quite urgent for Indonesia to create a regulation to protect the online privacy and recognize the ownership of personal own data by us. If not, the Indonesian society could be more and more divided not only in the cyber space but in the real society, and that might lead to the severe and violent politicization of social cleavages of the multi-ethnic and religious Indonesia and to the democratic decay of Indonesia.

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[1]A buzzer is a social media account that creates issues that can go viral in the social media. It can be an anonymous account or that of an identifiable individual or group. The term is quite commonly used in Indonesia. A buzzer is different from an influencer. An influencer is usually an identifiable person with a lot of followers who can make an issue viral to influence the views of certain groups of people in cyberspace.

[2] Interview with Arya Sinulingga on 11 February 2019.

[3] Interview with Hokky Situngkir on 13 June 2019