

# The Dynamics of Identity Politics Management in The Tanimbar Islands Regency

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## ABSTRACT

Following the reform era, Indonesia faces the challenge of the widespread emergence of identity politics that prioritizes certain groups or symbols to gain political influence. If left unaddressed, this phenomenon could disrupt national resilience and the quality of democracy in Indonesia. This research aims to analyze the dynamics of identity politics in the Tanimbar Islands Regency, Maluku Province, and to find solutions so that identity politics can lead to goodness, in accordance with values and culture, thereby achieving stability in society. The research methodology involves a literature review or literature study as the primary approach. This method entails in-depth analysis of various literature sources relevant to the research topic, aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of current issues, conceptual frameworks, and approaches taken by previous studies. The results of this research reveal that the management of identity politics in the Tanimbar Islands Regency has been organized and become a shared interest. The community sees identity politics as a means to facilitate the interests of groups, ethnicities, religions, and collective interests, allowing peace to be achieved, and government policies to be implemented fairly and equally.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the post-New Order government, identity politics in Indonesia has received special attention. During this period, the nuances of identity politics in Indonesia have shifted focus towards issues of ethnicity, religion, ideology, and local interests, generally represented by the elites. The movement for regional expansion can be viewed as one manifestation of identity politics. Issues related to justice and regional development take center stage in their political discourse; however, in reality, much

of it is influenced by intricate problems not easily explained.

During the New Order government, there was a concerted effort to eliminate anything associated with ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations. This was preceded by Soeharto's rejection of all regional sentiments deemed to be part of tribalism. Although it is evident that the understanding of ethnicity then and now is deeply ingrained in the psyche of most Indonesians [1].

The demand for broader regional autonomy and the escalation of ethnic conflicts after 1998 indicate that ethnic identity is still very much alive after being suppressed for more than three decades. After being silenced for so long, issues related to tribalism have resurfaced in recent years. Ultimately, ethnic identity is being used as a political tool to exert pressure on the state [2]. This identity politics is subsequently manifested in the form of separatist demands or state disintegration [3]. Cases such as Aceh, Papua, and Riau serve as examples where ethnic issues are used as bargaining chips to exert pressure on the state to pay more attention to the respective regions [4].

In my view, during that time, the statement "One Nation, One Homeland, and One Language" seemed more intended to rally and mobilize political sentiments and social energy for the sake of the struggle for independence and less as a serious effort to develop a new national identity, namely the Indonesian identity that was conceived and should have been intentionally developed and nurtured. In this context, what Furnivall and Pariela recorded about the plural society can be considered an important reference that explains the social, political, and economic conditions of Indonesian society until the end of the 1940s. Based on his studies, Furnivall depicted a plural society, interpreting it as a society consisting of two or more elements or social orders that coexist but do not blend into one political unit. The most disturbing political characteristic in this society, according to him, is the absence of a common social will among them [5].

Identity politics also gives rise to the phenomenon of the majority wielding power over the minority in the form of spiritual tyranny. The majority group will exploit its position to gain political advantages over the minority, such as through slogans like "choose the majority" [6]. Identity politics is intentionally constructed by political elites to maintain power and influence, and power-sharing built on the basis of identity. Meanwhile, social media can "sharpen the divisions within the nation" and "trigger a crisis of public trust in democracy" [7]. The

behavior of individuals with low political awareness in interacting on social media has a negative impact on political education and democratic values. Such political realities serve as an early warning for the state of democracy in Indonesia and a stern reminder of the fading foundation of national unity. Therefore, we must enhance and uphold a climate of "democratic culture" in line with the values of Pancasila Democracy [8].

Duan-Lolat is a marriage tradition in the Tanimbar tribe in the Tanimbar Islands Regency. "Duan" refers to the family giving away the maiden, while "Lolat" refers to the family receiving the maiden. Marriages are considered valid through arranged marriages, mutual consent, or elopement. The Duan and Lolat parties are bound by customary agreements that require the Lolat side to prepare a request from the Duan side. The marriage process begins with the approval of the marriage by a religious leader, symbolized by the holding of hands by the couple. After the marriage is declared valid, it is celebrated with traditional ceremonies and festivities (Dasfordate, 2023).

These rules are passed down through generations and bind the Tanimbar community, even though they may not be written and despite the existence of social classes or groups (social stratification). In practice, the rights and obligations of "Duan" and "Lolat" remain regulated, ensuring that there is no indication of group domination. From every perspective, there is still room for negotiation, allowing this system to govern individuals with individuals, individuals with groups, groups with groups, the community and the government, and so on.

The Duan-Lolat culture embodies values derived from traditions that are alive in the Tanimbar Islands in regulating the "blood relationship" of a continuous husband and wife marriage. Duan represents the lineage from the mother, and if there are no daughters in a family, the relationship is automatically severed. Another finding is that in practice, the Duan-Lolat culture becomes an effective means to connect social networks held by individuals and their social groups. The role and function of the Duan-Lolat

culture are clearly aimed at creating and organizing every social network, whether general or specific. In this relationship, when viewed positively, it can be described as a partnership, a value of unity, brotherhood, as well as task sharing and responsibility.

In the view of [9] an element of civic culture is civic virtue, which includes active citizen participation, egalitarian relationships, mutual trust and tolerance, cooperative living, solidarity, and community spirit. From this explanation, it means that the Tanimbar tribe in the village of Waturu has formed its identity as citizens with active civic participation, egalitarian relationships, mutual trust, tolerance, solidarity, and community spirit. In the context of civic culture, the Duan-Lolat culture contains civic culture values marked by citizens' attitudes such as mutual trust, cooperation, religiosity, responsibility, solidarity, deliberation, togetherness, and mutual assistance. Civic culture is used as a label to summarize various values and behaviors that strengthen democratic institutions. Elements of civic culture include respect for competitive culture with fair play, the ability to cooperate and mutual trust (interpersonal trust) in social interactions, a tolerant and moderate way of life, technical competence required by active citizens such as the ability to select information and think critically, self-determination, and trust in the legal system and state institutions.

The Tanimbar community constitutes a collection of indigenous communities whose daily lives are firmly rooted in the prevailing local cultural system. Their continuous behavior is consistently guided by the embraced culture, and in this context, their lives are inseparable from the culture they hold as a shared balancing force. Additionally, in the early days before the regency underwent territorial expansion, life in the Tanimbar community was relatively harmonious. The daily focus of the Tanimbar people revolved around farming and earning a living to meet their basic needs.

Identity politics in Tanimbar today is managed by referring to group interests and even collective interests. The Tanimbar

community often falls prey to identity politics issues that lean towards religious nuances. In this context, religion is no longer solely a process of individual belief but is used as a political tool to consolidate specific interests. This kind of identity politics management is quite prevalent and evident in the Tanimbar community, especially during significant events such as local leadership elections or the appointment of strategic positions within the government in the Tanimbar Islands Regency.

As widely known, the Tanimbar community heavily influences political processes such as legislative elections and the selection of local leaders through identity politics, primarily based on considerations of religion and regional origin. Considering these issues, the author is interested in examining the dynamics of identity politics management in the Tanimbar Islands Regency.

## 2. METHODS

The approach used in this research is through a literature review or literature study. A literature study involves theoretical exploration, reference tracing, and the examination of other literary works such as books, journals, notes, and case studies related to religion and the regional context in the current political identity situation. The approach taken by the author requires twelve sources, consisting of four books and eight journals, which can be used as literature sources for this research. This is because the research aims to conduct a more in-depth analysis of issues that are intricately linked to the research topic.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identity politics in Tanimbar cannot be separated from religion and regional origin. In Tanimbar today, it can be observed that achieving power often involves utilizing religious issues, which serve as a representation to strengthen the bases in each specific village. However, identity politics, played by political opponents, makes religious issues a collective interest between the government and Tanimbar figures

competing in the management of identity politics. As a result, the process of identity politics is considered quite effective in maintaining relations between religious communities and between the Northern and Southern Tanimbar regions, as a form of mutual trust and mutual safeguarding of future governance interests.

Religious identity, as commonly observed in majority communities, always depends on the situation and context in which an individual finds themselves. In the political context of a multiethnic region, especially in the Tanimbar Islands Regency, identifying regional religious identities becomes a necessity. Identifying someone based on their religion is part of communication behavior and actions, both in political activities and social life.

The formation of indigenous identity can be seen through Stuart Hall's theory of identity formation, using a constructivist approach that views identity as a result of a complex social process formed by cultural ties in society built on past experiences. Through this approach, political elites shape the identity of the Tanimbar community.

#### ***Territorial-Based Solidarity***

Social solidarity utilizes the existing local cultural values in Indonesia. Emile Durkheim divided solidarity into two forms: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Communities characterized by mechanical solidarity unite because they share the same activities, occupations, and responsibilities. Conversely, communities characterized by organic solidarity endure together precisely because of their differences, with the fact that everyone has different jobs and responsibilities [10]. Regional-based solidarity and solidarity are contexts inseparable from the lives of the Tanimbar community in general, especially in the political process or efforts to achieve power, where collective unity has been directly formed by the communities of South Tanimbar and North Tanimbar.

Social networking is a social structure formed by individuals or organizations bound by one or more specific types of relationships such as values, visions, ideas,

friends, ancestry, and others. Social network analysis views social relationships as bound associations. In various academic fields, it has been shown that social networks operate at many levels, from family to the state, and play a crucial role in determining how to solve problems, run organizations, and the degree of an individual's success in achieving their goals. A social network is a map of all relevant connections between studied nodes. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors.

The social networking process built by the Tanimbar community has been going on for a long time, from ancestors to the present generation, and the built network process is quite intensive. During political moments and religious holidays, families from North Tanimbar visit their relatives in South Tanimbar, so it needs to be maintained and strengthened. The formation of groups and teams among the North Tanimbar or South Tanimbar communities must be based on diverse situations, where in this situation, the team is required to unite. Whether through physiological family ties or originating from the same ancestors, through marriage, shared religion and beliefs, shared language and regional culture, mutual needs, and so on, these are efforts to strengthen the team from within and the team from outside who already trust each other. Thus, the agreed political goals in seizing power or achieving political positions in the Tanimbar Islands Regency Government can be achieved.

#### ***Religion-Based Solidarity***

Social solidarity can be found in various social contexts. Society, as a living entity capable of thinking and taking various actions, faces various social phenomena or facts. Understanding the conditions in various social realities related to knowledge becomes crucial to comprehend the background of the formation of social relationships within society. The most important aspect of social reality in life is social interaction, which impacts the creation of mutual relationships, fostering solidarity between individuals [11]

Social interaction within solidarity is evident in Indonesian society. Indonesia, as a diverse nation with a population comprising

different attributes such as race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion, sees this diversity as a social potential for local areas to shape character and social representations. Although societal diversity may lead to conflicts within a group, it is because each group has its own distinctive characteristics and uniqueness used to unite its members, creating strength within each group towards a common agreement to not accept differences from other groups [12].

Tanimbar represents a religious diversity where people of different beliefs coexist, and in societal life, decisions are always considered through the lens of religion, a foundation built over the past decade. However, religious moments built between Catholic and Protestant communities have solidified during political and strategic distribution of individuals in influential positions. Identity politics serves as a tool used to resist or showcase the identity of these groups. Identity can be controlled or politicized by individuals with the goal of gaining support from groups or individuals who share similar beliefs, whether in religion, ethnicity, culture, or other similarities.

The prevalence of identity politics in Tanimbar is attributed to the role of religious figures such as bishops and pastors, who act as backstage players behind the emergence of issues like Christians voting for Christians and Catholics voting for Catholics. This role has been systematically established, and success teams continue to follow the rhythm that has existed for a long time in Tanimbar society. Religious figures in Tanimbar, utilizing their authority as religious leaders, have an inseparable and closely linked relationship with public political participation. When religious figures perform well, political participation tends to increase [13]. This happens directly without the need for political work through speeches on the political stage but rather through tangible service in the community.

#### *Dynamics of Identity Politics in the Tanimbar Islands Regency*

The people of Tanimbar consider identity politics an inseparable aspect of today's reality, particularly the differences in

group identities within a society, including variations in local identities. These differences are acknowledged as a natural reality and, therefore, need not be debated. Just as there is day and night, east and west, high and low, male and female, and so on, the distinct identity of one local or indigenous community differs from that of another, and this is seen as a matter of course. Debates arise concerning local and religious identities, often intertwined with political interests related to rights over natural resources and cultural heritage.

Drawing from Max Weber's thoughts, human actions are not solely determined by norms, customs, values, and other elements encompassed in the concept of social facts. Although Weber eventually acknowledged the presence of social structures and institutions in society. Social structures and institutions are interrelated concepts that shape social actions. Political success teams, as interest groups, may not directly engage in politics like political parties aimed at securing positions within the political system. Still, it cannot be denied that individuals within success teams are involved in practical politics. There is no prohibition for Tanimbar community members to participate in practical politics. Success teams, as interest groups, can play a role in political lobbying, political communication, political socialization, political education, public criticism or pressure, and distributing their group members who can enter various government positions.

Substantial resources contribute to the success of individuals involved in practical politics, as seen in some election cases. When certain groups from success teams participate in practical politics, after the election and victory, they often secure strategic positions within the government or other private sectors. According to Weber, this constitutes instrumental rational action, meaning a social action undertaken by an individual based on conscious considerations and choices related to goals and the availability of means used to achieve them.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The management of identity politics in Tanimbar is guided by the interests of various groups. The Tanimbar community perceives that approaching politics through group dynamics can accommodate personal interests while serving as an extension to channel individual interests for structured and massive welfare. Furthermore, the management of identity politics in Tanimbar is conducted as a collective interest. The community sees the utilized identity politics as a bridge to facilitate the interests of groups, tribes, religions, and even collective interests. Therefore, it is essential to safeguard these

dynamics in every situation. The aim is to maintain peace and uphold the neutrality of the government with considerations agreed upon socially and politically through political positions.

Moreover, the management of religious identity politics is considered an effort to consolidate various societal movements directly impacting Tanimbar's community. The competition between Protestant and Catholic followers is viewed as a means to achieve power through the roles of religious figures. The goal is to ensure that all government policies are implemented fairly, without neglecting any segment of the community

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