**NU's Political Face on Social Media**

**In 2019 Presidential Election**

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**Abstract.** Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) roots their political affiliation in Joko Widodo's government more than the previous regime in the reformation era. Despite having declared for political neutrality in accordance to 1926 *khittah* that declared in 1984, in fact, the politic characteristic is still dominant. Indeed, the political attitudes are inseparable from NU’s political identity construction for almost a century in Indonesian. Even as time flies, NU adapts quickly to technological developments which creates informational links affiliated with NU on various social media platforms. NU has spread no effort in countering hoax during the administration of Joko Widodo, who gets attacks for his leadership performance and personality. This paper aims to prove and explain that NU has a significant role in the victory of Joko Widodo in the presidential election by analyzing the social media related to NU. The important role of NU during the 2019 Presidential election is not only by countering the hoax against Joko Widodo, but also protecting NU’s interest for maintaining the local Islam in which the rival of Joko Widodo is mainly supported by Islamic hard-line group.

***Keywords:*** *NU, political action, social media, hoax.*

**1. Background**

The social media platform on the internet is a big free market, and then a buyer is free to choose anything desirably, all depends on the buyer, not the market. The leap of online technological information that had never been imagined before 1980s was called social media platforms. AOL messenger, the embryo of social media was just created in 1997 and developed rapidly at the beginning of first second millennium, and today it has a renewal face like Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and so on. Anne Marie Van Den Hurk (2013) called this as an 'explosion of social networking' and the sites is no more than a part of pop culture. Thus, if content attracts public attention, it may go viral easily and gets wider audience. Otherwise, it will also be forgotten easily for other more fascinating content. As the online media is uncontrollable, people can freely talks, write, post, repost and share the content without any limitation. Unfortunately, irresponsible people use the online media not only to share news, but also to create a misleading opinion, to tell misinformation and even to create and spread hoaxes. Within this circumstance, if the misinformation and hoax repeated in many time, it may create a 'post-truth’ phenomena.'

The study discovers that NU's role in various social media platforms began to appear since Joko Widodo's administration (2014-2019) the media implicitly support Joko Widodo for his second match of 2019 presidential election. The support expressed and exposed mainly through online media. This affiliation was also closely related to government support to Islam Nusantara that initiated by NU since the 1980s. In addition to this support, an online media also opens the layer of NU identity politic to disseminate local Islam and protects against *salafist* groups that presumes traditional Islam had violated Islamic narration.

**2. Method.**

This study investigates the sites that actively counteract the misinformation and even the hoax issues about Joko Widodo during the campaign period of presidential election. These sites are representation of NU's political actions and also the preference of the identity politics for the current social and political situation. Furthermore, this paper is based on a qualitative approach by analyzing NU's declarations in various online media (social media). In addition, the writer also conducted in-depth interview with NU's religious-political thinker. These figures explained the tendency of NU to support Joko Widodo, even some declared for their political neutrality during the political campaign. Furthermore, to observe from different view, the observation also held by attending NU activities and discussing with the relevant parties. The study found that NU had a significant role in the victory of Joko Widodo in the 2019 presidential election by the news and the declaration shared out through social media. This effort also influences the perspective, likeness, electability and positive sentiment on NU fellow to the government of Joko Widodo. For example, the following is some published news and statements on social media regarding NU's support to Joko Widodo:

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| **The Title of Article** | **Media Online** |
| Chairman of PPP (Development Unity Party): Becoming the Obligation of NU Support Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin | news.detik.com |
| Chairman of the East Java PWNU: If the Fellow of NU Do Not Support Jokowi, Means they are Stupid | news.detik.com |
| Ma'ruf Amin States that NU Wholeheartedly Supports Jokowi in the Presidential Election | cnn.indonesia.com |
| Ulama and Santri in Jombang Declares to Support Jokowi 2 Period | liputan6.com |
| Nahdliyin Compact Support Jokowi-Ma'ruf | beritasatu.com |
| NU students support Jokowi-Amin | mediaindonesia.com |

**3. Finding and Discussion**

**3.1. NU and Social Media**

NU is a traditional organization with millions follower based in rural areas and religiously considered as *santri*. Since establishes in 1926 until today, NU is the largest and the significant organization for Islamic traditional community in Indonesia. Islamic political history also noted that NU has significant force during its participation to political practice. The force remains powerful after the withdrawal of NU from political practice and the decision to return to the basic foundation (*khittah*) as in 1926 and in 1984. Recently, many hands with their own individual political interest utilize NU to raise their electability and popularity during the political practice.

Welcoming online generation, NU’s figures adapt and adopt the continuous renewal media to spread local Islam. Especially young figure, they were quite active in spreading the local religious values by examining the role of religion in social and political issues. The prominent figures such as K.H. Ahmad Mustofa Bisri or well-known as Gus Mus, Habib Luthfi bin Yahya, K.H Anwar Zahid, K.H. Ahmad Muwafiq also known as Gus Muwafiq and Miftah Maulana Habiburrahman or known as Gus Miftah and many others figures that actively share their view, including share their preaching on social media. However, this activity is still debatable especially in learning religion. The traditional value of Islam views on the importance of guidance from the teacher and face to face between student and teacher during the learning. This value, for example, was quoted in the Wali Songo teachings, *'if people learn religion, they must be guided by a teacher; if not, then the teacher is a devil'* (Sahal and Aziz, 2016). In another side, these figures also realize that online generation, especially youth, are likely opens more online world wide than the authoritative source books. As YouTube, facebook and other social media platforms replace face to face interaction, it is important to discuss people interaction in the online world.

Basically, NU has strong follower in traditional *pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) that limited the use of online media interaction and emphasizes the traditional method of face to face interaction. For the figures that more open to online world, social media are also a choice to argue against misinformation about NU. As frequently happened, NU issued as a heretic organization that close to local culture than normative Islam. This problem is based on the research conducted by the State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel (UINSA) Surabaya, which found about 67 percent of fake accounts in the name of Aswaja (NU), and even many accounts that clearly against NU were widely circulated on the Internet (Ulumuddin, 2019).While, according to K.H. Hasyim Asya'ari (1887-1947), the founding father of NU as quoted by the book *Qanun Asali Li Jami'ati Nahdlatul Ulama*, a movement that denies other Islamic groups themselves reproduce heretics (Zada and Sjadzili, 2010).

NU community faces modernity and changes, enjoying the online world that totally different from physical world. This development revised Delia Noer's thesis that NU is a conservative, traditional Islamic group that far away from the modern innovation and the follower of NU are mainly in the countryside and less-educated people. The relevant thesis today is that NU has embraced and surpassed the thought of Islam modernist. This situation is indeed inseparable from the liberal and open-minded thinking of KH Abdurrahman Wahid or well known as Gus Dur who served as chairman of the PBNU from 1984 to 1998. His thoughts inspired many young of NU generation to embrace innovation, but also respecting the tradition.

Furthermore, by embracing local Islam, NU's effort in social media is to maintain Indonesia. Meaning, NU has actively refused and rejected purified Islamic view and any movements that threaten the NKRI (The Unitary State of Republic Indonesia). This is in accordance to NU's national politics. Indeed, this choice has unintended consequence, that is an act of constructing NU's identity politics.

**2.2. NU, Hoaxes against Joko Widodo and Political Interest.**

During the political years of 2019, NU actively fights against the misinformation and hoaxes that disadvantageous for Joko Widodo. Since Jokowi’s win in the 2014 presidential election, NU has a close relation to Joko Widodo's administration (2014-2019) than other Islamic organization. This relationship is clearly depicted through Joko Widodo’s special request to NU dated on february 27, 2019, during the Ulama National Conference and the General Conference of NU in Banjar, West Java. The request is for responding the misinformation, insult and hoax before the Presidential and legislative election in 2019 due (setkab.go.id., 2019). Hoaxes and false news against Joko Widodo are increasing rapidly by the extensive use of social media since presidential election in 2014. Based on the survey of SMRC (Saiful Mujani and Research Consulting), many political rumors and hoaxes had attacked Joko Widodo's administration (2014-2019) and increased significantly during 2019 presidential election. According to Jayadi Hanan, the director executive of SMRC said that according to survey in 24 February-5 March 2019 in 34 provinces, 10 percent respondents believe that Joko Widodo is a Chinese henchman, while 6 percent believe that he is an anti-Islam and a communist (Paath, 2019). Even though 6-10 percent seems small to the total percentage, but if converted, it is equivalent to 9-15 million people who believe that Joko Widodo is a communist, an anti-Islam, and Chinese henchman. The government has to consider these amounts, because it may cause public distrust to the legitimate government and could be harmful for national unity.

Although the support never really expressed clearly, but NU's actions show the way. As quoted by Greg Fealy (2018) that NU regained political support under Joko Widodo's administration, and it was almost similar when NU closed to Soekarno in which NU has significant political power in the 1960s. However, an apolitical kiai (*ulama*) disagree with this relationship criticize that NU will lose its spirit as Islamic civil society organization. However, through deeper view, NU's support to Joko Widodo government is in accordance to NU's goal to embrace Nusantara Islam or local Islam. Indeed, K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, who is also a senior figure in NU, became a vice presidential candidate of Joko Widodo in the 2019 presidential election. This, borrowing Azyumardi Azra view, shows about the development of local Islam or progressive Islam in which the leader in religious organizations is also a political leader. Thus, it is reasonable that NU's support for Joko Widodo is also to protect their existence as *'local Islam',* in which the competitor of Joko Widodo, Prabowo Subianto, is mainly supported by Islamic hard-line organization that embraces purified Islam.

**4. Conclusion**

After the end of the Soeharto regime, political euphoria occurred and embraced by all elements of society, including Islamic groups in Indonesia. For three decades Soeharto government has ruled the 'politic of repression’ in which every organization was under surveillance. However, the freedom also brings hard-line Islamic groups that reproduce the ideas of Islamic transnational movement. These groups are actively producing their teachings and ideology through social media. As radical and intolerant faces of Islam dominated social media, NU also appears online to reproduce the narration of local Islam. Under Joko Widodo's administration, NU got various supports, for example is disseminating Islam Nusantara discourse. The government policies also control the problem of intolerance. It is reasonable to say that NU played an important role to bring the victory of Joko Widodo in the 2019 presidential election. Many NU figures openly expressed their support for Joko Widodo in various online media.

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