# Identity: Factor of the Political Contestation in a Country

(Case of Presidential Elections in Indonesia and the Separation of Crimea from Ukraine)

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Abstract:

The questions of identity become more influential in recent days when scholars subject it become the determinant factor of the political contestation in the society. Identity can be described as much as people want, it can be a religion, ethnicity, language, job, education, and many else. Political contestation in this essay means the contestation between internal societies to reach their interest (power) using identity issues. This essay use an understanding that there are three main identities that rely on the society and often used by the actor in the political contestation, such as cultural identity, social identity and personal identity. From both of the case, cultural identity are used in the political contestation on the country with different agenda and impact.

## Research Problem:

Presidential elections as one of the example of political contestation in a country present us not only the contestation of vision, mission, and the programs, but even more interesting things is the contestation of identity. On July 2014, Indonesia will held the third direct presidential elections after the succeeded of authoritarian regime by the reformation on 1998. Two months before the elections, mass media in Indonesia fully filled by the contestant and their supporter with the contestation of identity issues. Most of them contesting several identities that rely on the society, three identities that become the crucial contestation are religion, ethnicity, working background.

As well as the presidential elections, the separation of one region from the country also the example of political contestation between the local entities with the state. The Separation of Crimea from Ukraine pursed in the contestation of ethnicity between becoming a Russians or Ukrainians. As we already know that the referendum result held on March 16, stated that over 96% of the Crimea citizen vote to joint with Russia. The citizen of Crimea which is majorities are Russians in blood, won their referendum to be separate from Kiev and proposing to be the part of Russian Federation.

Identity in the political contestation issues is very influential factor but then it leads into the question of the good practises of identity as one factor of nations building.

## Research Question:

Identity as a factor of political contestation in a country leads to the question of the good practices as a factor in nations building. In fact, the political actors used identity usually only for the short-term agenda, just to gain vote from the society in the elections process, for getting the power, and have less attention to build it as a foundation for long-term agenda for a country in addition to build their national consciousness. The question is which identity that is relied on the society can be used not only in the short-term agenda, but also in the long-term agenda and will help the country to reach the national interests more effective and efficient.

## Research Goal:

This essay will try to identify the most important identity that can be used not only in the short-term agenda, but also in long-term agenda for a country that will help for reaching the national interests.

# Background

The basic question for us as the researcher is what is the meaning of identity? Is it based on ethnicity, race, religion, origin, or what? According to Ivanov, Identity is any scientific idea may be regarded as an attempt to cognize culture and as fact of its life through which is generating mechanism take effect (Ivanov, 1998, p.60). It is still unanswered question, “Identity is treated as a “black box” within and between individuals, groups, and cultures, with little explanation about what it is and how it operates” (Seth J. Schwartz , Curtis S. Dunkel & Alan S. Waterman, 2009, p.540).

This essay will use the term identity as a general explanation from Schwartz and friends which is more understandable and easier to capture the reality for the both cases. “The term identity refers to a complex theoretical construct involving elements originating at three levels: (a) cultural identity (nationality, ethnic, religious, and education), (b) social identity (believe in groups, affiliation), and (c) personal identity (personal goals, values, belief and perspective)” (Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel & Alan S. Waterman, 2009, p.540). Based on this explanation, this essay tried to understand the reality in Indonesia and Crimea recent days. Which identity has more valuable meaning and big impact for the society, especially in long-term agenda as a foundation for nation building? Is it cultural identity, social identity or personal identity?

# Analysis

## Identity fight in the Presidential Elections in Indonesia

In the election process in Indonesia, there are so many identity issues, from cultural identity, social identity also of course personal identity. The cultural identity issues that rise and heating up the tension during the election process for the example are attacking the ethnicity, and religion issues. All the candidates have been attacked by the religion issue about their past. Indonesia as a country with majorities Moslem has a sensitive matter with religions issue. That’s why the candidates have been attacked by the information about their religion in the past, for the example the issue said that one of the presidential candidates, Mr. Joko Widodo and spouse use to be a Christian believer not a Moslem, and this issue predicted can reduce his vote among the regions that consists of traditional Moslem majorities which is very sensitive with other religions. Also about ethnicity, Indonesia for almost 32 years was under the Javanese regime, from the top level leader until the region leader are from Javanese. It is not undoubtedly because almost 60% of the Indonesian citizen are live in Java islands, and it is in line with the total vote of the national voters which is Java still become the most influential region in Indonesia. In the unconsciousness mind of the political actor and the society, the presidential candidate package must be consists of Javanese actor and then with another actor from east or west Indonesia.

The social identity issues that came up during the election process are the issues about the presidential candidate sensitiveness for the social matter within the country, such as about the labour system, agriculture problem because of the import, also the poverty issue. The candidates have been attacked because of their affiliation with one or several organizations which are not support the resolution of the social matter in the society. The personal identities that usually used to attack by the competitor such as the lack of their personal goal also their previous job issue. One of the candidates which retired from the national army attacked by the competitor use the Human Right violation issue during his serve in the army. Another candidate attacked by the competitor because of his lack responsibility to finish his serve as a governor of the Indonesian Capital, Jakarta, beside that his competitor also accusing him for the unfinished problem in the province such as the flood, traffic-jam, and poverty issue.

In the case of presidential elections in Indonesia, it seems clear that the cultural identity, social identity and personal identity become the influential notions during the political contestation in a country, especially in order to gain the vote from the society and to get the power.

## Identity in the Case of Crimea Separation

In the context of Crimean case, the identity issue is easier to be understood because from the beginning of the case, the influential matter which becomes the background for the succession is the historical point of view about their identity. The majorities of Crimean citizen believe that they are Russian in blood, not Ukrainians, that’s why when there is a chance to separate from Kiev, the Crimean citizen, especially the local government propose to held a referendum for it. The majority citizen of Crimea did not see the new temporary government have a legitimacy to protect them from the fear of discrimination also from the fear of comfort life, that’s why the local government proposing a referendum to the citizen, which majorities are ethnic Russian. “National identity is a complex and demanding element in the systems engineering process of building a modern nation state, and serves as the major source for the legitimacy of that state” (Wang Zhuojun & He Hualing, 2014, p.141).

The spirit of secession can be also described because of several aspect, such as the domination from one group that discriminate another group, in this sense group means ethnicity, also about the legitimacy of the state in the citizen point of view. As explained by the two scholars Wang Zhuojun and He Hualing, “Systemic failure is typically found in the following respects. First, some powerful groups dominate the formulation and implementation of rules for group relations, causing systemic injustice that infringes on the interests of other groups and triggers inter-group tensions. Second, citizenship and civil rights, the basis of the state’s legitimacy, have no institutional guarantees or cannot be put into practice despite the existence of institutional regulations. As differentiation of the political structure usually lags behind that of the social structure, this weakens the functions of the political system and affects citizens’ trust in the system in general (Wang Zhuojun & He Hualing, 2014, p.147). When there is no trust anymore from the society to the state or government, it seems that the factionalism within the country is undoubtedly anymore.

Again, this essay analyse that the secession of Crimea from Ukraine is a part of the political contestation, especially the contestation of their historical cultural identity as a Russians. This consciousness from the citizen can be seen from the result of the referendum, despite the fact also that several groups of the citizen did not use their right to vote, almost 96% of the total vote choose to be a part of the Federation of Russia. “We might define identity as the reflexive capacity for producing consciousness of action (that is, a symbolic representation of it) beyond any specific contents. Identity becomes formal reflexivity, pure symbolic capacity, the recognition of the production of sense of action within the limits posed at any given moment by the environment and the biological structure (Melucci. A, (1982), L’invenzione del presente: Movimenti, Identita, bisogni individuali, Bologna, Il Mulino.)

In this Crimea case, we already know that from the 3 identities we discussed before, the cultural identity become more influential in the process of political contestation between the Ukrainians government and Crimean citizens also government.

# Conclusion

According to the case analysis above, this essay found that the cultural identity has an influential meaning for the development and process of the political contestation in a country. The cultural identity in the political contestation in election process in Indonesia proved to be used by each actor to gain vote from the society. In the Crimea case, this cultural identity used by the local government and the citizen of Crimea to hold a referendum with the result is to be separated from Ukraine and be a part of Federation of Russia. From both of the case, we can conclude that the cultural identity is one of the influential factors for the political contestation in a country, with different impact.

The cultural identity that used in the election process only has an impact for the short-term agenda, to gain vote from the society. Unfortunately, for this short-term agenda, there is a huge impact on the society, such as the distrust between the supporters of the candidates, also become a trigger for the social conflict on the society. Because of the political contestation that use this identity, in the long-term agenda could endanger the unity of the society because of the segregation and intolerant manner from one group of society to others.

The cultural identity that used in the Crimea case can be seen more to be a long-term agenda for a nation building. This cultural issue about to be a Russians than to be Ukrainians is the crucial point for Crime region to build their national consciousness. Historical background of the region also the society bring the region to held a referendum after the irresponsibility actions that happened in Kiev and several cities a few month earlier.

To sum up the decision, this essay conclude that three identity we discussed before have an influential position on the political contestation in a country, moreover the cultural identity become the one of identity which is often used by the actors both for short-term agenda in addition to gain a vote also in long-term agenda to build a national consciousness for the nation.

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