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Party Identification in the Voting Behavior of Tamil Indonesians in 2015 Medan Mayoral Election

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Abstract:
The purpose of this study is to define the party identification on Tamil Indonesians living in Medan. Tamil Indonesians, who originated from Tamil Nadu, one of the states in the Southern part of India, has established a community that settled in Medan since the occupation era. Thus, since then acculturation has taken place and shaped the identity of the Tamil descendants in Medan. As a part of Indonesian citizens, they took part in exercising their rights to vote in 2015 Medan Mayoral Election.
This study was conducted in Medan in 2018 by means of interviews and questioners. To elaborate the main objective of this study, the theory of voting behavior from psychological approaches were used as the theoretical framework. The findings of this research are as follow: there were few political parties that Tamil Indonesians in Medan could be identified with, and they were Gerindra, Golkar, and PDIP. The findings of this study affirm the notion which started the psychological approach in the study of voting behavior as even by that time sociological approach was no longer deemed as sufficient in explaining voting behavior.

Keywords: 2015 Medan mayoral election, Tamil Indonesians, party identification

1. Introduction

The study of voting behavior was getting attention back in 1950s but in Indonesia it wasn't much of a case until the era of Pancasila Democracy under Soeharto ended in 1998. Afan Gaffar (1992) suggested that it was because during that time the electoral practices were questionable. Thus, instead of studying what influenced the voters` behavior, the study on this topic was restricted to how the election was conducted as well as the result of election. The same thing was also stated by Chusnul Mar'iyah (Mar'iyah & Suwarso, 2013) who said that general elections from 1971 up to 1999 were just instruments used to legitimize power of government of that time. Among the processes that happened to shape the democracy in Indonesia, one important thing to note that, only after the ratification of law Number 32 in 2004, the head of the state and regions are directly elected. That law inevitably increases the need and interest to study people's behavior during election. Responding to that need, the General Election Commission (GEC)[1] started conducting research on people's voting behavior. As a result of those changes, nowadays this study is no longer a restricted one. Now not only that the election is upheld with the principle of direct election, the government is also trying to conduct simultaneous elections to elect mayors, district heads as well as governors throughout Indonesia. As a mean to achieve simultaneous elections in   Indonesia, the government has designed 3 phases of simultaneous elections. Phase 1 in 2015, phase 2 in 2017, and phase 3 in 2018, each phase will cover some electoral areas, then only a simultaneous election throughout the country will be held, that is in year 2027.

To measure the success rate of the first phase of simultaneous elections on 9 December 2015, one could see it through the numbers of people who used their rights to vote. For that matter GEC fixed the target 75% of voters would participate in the first national wide simultaneous elections. However, the findings showed that only 69.20% of voters participated. After the counting process was done in the 269 regions, another thing that draws the attention is the report of GEC which stated that the mayoral election of Medan city had shown the lowest participation of voters in the history of election performed in this country. The election for regional head has its own appeal to voters based on the feeling of attachment between candidates and voters and regional interests compared to national elections. Nonetheless, in fact the appeal does not mean that it will ensure that voter participation at the regional level will be higher than the national election. Medan as one of the cities that participated in the 2015 simultaneous election has proven the appeal to be ineffective. Out of the 1,998,835 registered voters, only 507,350 people used the right to vote. This means that the participation of Medan city residents in the election only reached 25.38%. GEC through its publication entitled Pilkada Serentak 2015 dan 2017 stated that the low participation of

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[1] In Indonesia it is referred as Komisi Pemilihan Umum

citizens of Medan in elections in 2015 was triggered by corruption cases that befell the mayor from the previous period. In this regard, KPU Allegations about corruption cases was also the cause of the dismissal of Medan mayor period 2005 - 2010, Abdillah who was eventually convicted. The next mayor of Medan, Rahudman Harahap for 2010 - 2015 was also dismissed from his position as mayor for the allegation of his involvement in corruption case.

Medan is the largest city on the island of Sumatra whose society consists of various ethnic groups including Batak, Javanese, Chinese, Mandailing, Minangkabau, Malay, Karo, Aceh, Sundanese, and Tamil. Among the tribes there are two tribes that are not indigenous tribes of Indonesia but have settled for generations - by generation in Medan. One of them is the Tamil tribe which is one of the indigenous tribes of India from Dravida family that can be found in some areas in Indonesia but in general they domicile in Medan. This tribe is part of the Indian diaspora in Indonesia. The study of the existence of this tribe in Indonesia is very limited compared to studies of Indian diaspora in other countries. It seems that it is due to their relatively small number of presentations in the composition of the Indonesian population. Nonetheless, their existence is an interesting thing to learn as a diaspora community that has undergone various forms of acculturation so that although they retain some of their main forms of culture in religious ritual practices at temples in Medan, they are still part of Indonesian citizens as in their daily interaction with the Indonesian language. One example of a major activity that reinforces citizen identity is the practice of exercising the right to vote in the elections, such as in Medan Mayoral Election.

1.1 Tamil in Medan

Diaspora is one of the most recent terminology that emerged and became the talk of humanities field of study at least here in Indonesia. In the context of this article the diaspora which will be the subject of research is the Indian diaspora of the Tamils in Indonesia. There are several definitions of diaspora offered by experts who are generally concerned with the deteriorated aspect which refers to the dissolution of social, political, cultural practices of a person from a place of origin or a similar population. Diaspora is defined by Judith Shuval as a social construction based on feelings, awareness, memory, mythology, history, group identity, which plays a role in creating a diaspora reality, therefore the individual's attachment to his homeland must be strongly built so that attachment cannot be erased by distance nor assimilation process (Raghuram, Sahoo, Maharaj, and Sangha, 2008). In the context of people originated from India, the Indian government distinguishes between what they call as the Person of India Origin (PIO) and Non-Resident Indians (NRI). The PIO refers to those who still recognize relations and closeness with India as their hometown but have abandoned Indian citizenship and become citizens in the countries they live. While NRI refers to those who are Indian citizens but settled abroad.

The word Tamil itself comes from the basic word izh or il which means sweet (Aiyangar, 1982). The arrival of the Tamils in Indonesia was initially driven by economic interests. In the 1800s Tamil immigrants had entered hundreds of plantations in North Sumatra. Those who did not work in plantations or non-contracted by invaders, also known as non-contract Indians under the supervision of the Deli Sultanate, worked as a money lender, goldsmith, trader, rancher, etc. Those working in the plantations were facilitated with everyday necessities by the Dutch, so that when Indonesian got independence and the occupiers left the Indonesian territory the Tamil workers lost their jobs which then caused the economic instability of most Tamils. Later in 1948, Indonesian government provided an opportunity for Tamils in Indonesia to choose to remain in Indonesia or return to India (Sami, 2009). To facilitate this the Indian government also provided ships to dispatch Tamil people. From this period, it is clear that Tamil people who live in Indonesia are those who wish to become Indonesian citizens.

Even after decades of settling in Medan the Tamils' role in politics is not prominent and this can be seen from the limited academic papers on the subject. The existing writings on the existence of the Tamils in Medan are more likely to address the issues that relate to culture. As time goes by, the awareness of Tamil community to politics continues to grow. Some of the names that showed their interest in politics were Parameshwara, whom was supported by the Democratic Party in the election of members of parliament of Medan city in 2009, then Hariram who participated with support from Gerindra party in the 2014 district parliamentary elections, and Selwa Kumar also participated for the election of DPRD North Sumatera in 2014 through the support of Gerindra. One of the reasons of the little involvement of Tamils in politic is that many of them are still experiencing economic difficulties where this causes their priority is to get a good education in order to get a good job as well so that family economic life can be improved. This is directly proportional to the study of the typology of political culture described by Gabriel Almond which said that political consciousness is influenced by the level of education. In the city of Medan alone so far there has never been a Tamil who managed to serve as a member of parliament.

1.2. Theory - Party Identification

A book written by Hugh A. Bone and Austin Ranney (Bone & Ranney, 1976) entitled "Politics and Voters" first published in 1963 revealed that generally in those days the books on politics would tend to talk about political elites, including presidents, congressmen, judges, diplomats, etc. The similarity between these people is that they are people who hold office in other words they are classified as people who have power in government and engaged in politics in everyday life. This indicates that the books discussing politics only from one side which is the side of people who are actively involved in politics whereas the political behavior of ordinary people is not in the spotlight. It takes time to change "who chose what" to "who chose what, and why?" Until eventually we came to variety of answers which are provided by the study of voting behavior, and one of that answers is party identification.

Indonesia is a democratic state that runs under multi-party system in representing the voice of its people in politics. Alan Ware (1996) in his "Political Parties and Party system'' defines party as an institution that unites people with the intention to govern or run authority in a state. Further he elaborates the definition that a political party is an institution that (a) seeks influence in a state generally by exercising efforts to get key positions in government, and (b) usually the party will have more than a single interest in the society then attempt to make the interest bigger. In the initial stage of party identification studies, the intention was to find out the composition between democrat and republican voters how they were different and even how they voted same different parties (Budge, Crewe & Farlie, 1976). Difference meant between them who voted for same different parties whether the person always voted for the same party in every study. These findings would show how loyal a person to his voted party.

Michigan school identified the tendency to choose someone based on psychological factors. If the sociological approach centers on short-term influences, then this approach focuses on long-term effects. This approach does not see the influence of social positioning by necessarily influencing one's behavior. Social position does have an influence but when viewed in the context of one's interaction with family, neighbors, colleagues, etc. The psychological factor focuses on three aspects to explain the behavior of choosing an individual. These three things are based on the interest or attachment of a person to a political party, the orientation of the candidate in the election, and the last one is one's orientation to political issues. Party identification is a concept coined by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes on their work entitled The American Voter (Burden & Cloftsad, 2005). Before this concept was established, it only gotten as far as to be referred as partisan. Party identification explains the attachment of a person to a political party. The party's identification of the original theory itself defines it "As an affective orientation or 'habit of the heart', where American voters came to see themselves as habitual Democrats or Republicans, as part of their core self-identity, rather as they came to see themselves as Southerners or New Englanders, Catholics or Protestants, and fans of the Yankees or Red Sox" (Norris, 2004).

1.3. Result of the Research - Tamils' Voting Behavior

During the time of Pancasila Democracy[2], Indonesia had 2 political parties namely PPP, PDI and Golkar[3]. Under this political situation Tamil community showed loyalty to Golkar. In addition to the political situation at the time that led the community to support Golkar, one other important factor was the economic influence. This community faced a new economic influence with the growth of a Textile company owned by a person of Tamil origin outside Sumatra. In 1970s with the tremendous growth of Texmaco group an integrated textile company owned by Tamil Indonesian with plants located in several places from West to East Java, some people of Medan Tamil community moved to Java to seek better opportunity for employment. This company contributed in shaping the living standard of some Medan Tamil and making them move to Java. Three years after reformation Texmaco faced financial constrain and then stopped operating. The aftermath cause Tamil people`s attachment towards Golkar to experience some change. Since then in an anthropology journal published by University of North Sumatera it was mentioned that Medan Tamil community favored PDIP (Lubis, 2005), and after that there is no further study from political point of view about party identification of this community.

This study aimed to identify the latest party identification formed in the Tamil community living in Medan. In this study, 100 respondents, 48 males and 52 females, were selected through Snowball sampling method. This method was deemed necessary as there is no recent nor sufficient official documents which can help to learn about this community. Field study was carried out by means of interviews and questioners. The outcome of the study showed that majority of the respondents gave their votes in favor of candidate 1, who was the incumbent who won the election. The following table shows detailed of respondents' votes distribution:

Males		Females		Total Votes	
Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
34	14	29	23	63	37
Total Males = 48		Total Females = 52		Respondents = 100	

Table 1: Respondents` Votes Distribution in Medan Mayoral Election 2015

Despite of the result represented by the above table, 16 respondents consisted of 10 females and 6 males had no idea who were the pairs of candidates in the election. They just took part as an appreciation that they have the right to votes as citizens of this country.

Among 100 respondents in this study, 18 were persons who voted for the first time in 2015 mayoral election. Apart from the first timers, 38 male and 34 female respondents also gave their votes in 2010 mayoral election. Those who exercised their right to vote in 2010 again did the same in the election of people representatives of town and province levels in 2014 as well as presidential election. As already known that in Medan numbers of people who gave their votes in mayoral election decreased, yet the study on respondents showed that majority of them who voted in 2010 also exercised their right in 2015. The following are parties chosen by respondents in 2010 and 2015:

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[2] Pancasila democracy refers to the system of democracy upheld by the second president of Indonesia, Soeharto who was in office from 1967 to 1998.
[3] Golkar at that time was not referred as political party but rather as a work group.

Parties	Voters-2010			Voters 2015		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Demokrat	3	1	4	1	4	5
Gerindra	11	16	27	13	18	31
Golkar	18	12	30	15	13	28
Hanura	0	1	1	0	1	1
Nasdem	2	0	2	4	2	6
PDIP	8	8	16	15	14	29
PKB	1	0	1	0	0	0
PKS	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	43	39	82	48	52	100

Table 2: Party Voted by Respondents in 2010 & 2015 Elections

During 2015 mayoral election of Medan there were 10 political parties, 7 of them supported candidate 1 and the other 3 were in favor of candidate 2. The distribution of party votes from Tamil respondents in Medan mayoral election in this study found that most were in favor of Gerindra with a total of 31 voters, followed by PDIP with 29 voters, then 28 voters for Golkar, 6 voters for Nasdem, 5 Democrat voters, and 1 voter of Hanura. Of 48 male respondents, 1 respondent is a member of PDIP, 2 respondents are members of Golkar, and 1 other respondents are members of Gerindra. In addition to that, 2 men were part of Golkar's boards and 2 others were Gerindra's and one of them acted as a campaign team of candidate number 2. On contrary to that, of the 52 female respondents, only 1 is a party member of Golkar. Although party identification isn't necessarily formed based on formal identification towards a political party, but these numbers show at least 2 things. First is that interest towards politics can be found in the community albeit not being a dominant one. Second, based on the respond from the respondents it is known that the male members are more active on political party.

As previously mentioned that the most voted parties were Gerindra, Golkar and PDIP. From interview done during the study, it was found out that Gerindra won the attention of Medan Tamil community in respect that there were 2 persons of this community, Selwa Kumar and Hariram supported by this party to race for the seats of Medan's legislative office. It is also noted that Gerindra had supported Tamil community in Jakarta. Here Tamil community always organizes Deepavali nights[4] to celebrate this festival among themselves, in year 2016 and 2017 Gerindra supported the execution of these events.

Meanwhile for PDIP, the voters were influenced by 2014 presidential election. This is inferred from the statement of the respondents upon filling questionnaire on which political party they voted for in the 2015 Medan Mayoral election and the given answer is something among the line, they voted the president's party. The aftermath of the 2014 presidential election lead some people to associate this party as something which is inseparable from the current president, Joko Widodo. As for Golkar the third most favored party, part of the support it has is noticeably a remain of its influence during the Pancasila Democracy era granting it the long period in power. Explaining the basis of this assumption is quite a hard task to do as there is no clear statement on this and the nature of the relations was not an explicit one. This party identification is reflected on the result that showed the respondents who voted for Golkar are mostly over 35 years old which means they are the ones who grew during Pancasila Democracy era.

2. Conclusion

The party identification on Tamils living in Medan was identified after a study conducted in the beginning months of 2018 and focused on the 2015 mayoral election which was the last election held in Medan. This study discovered that the majority voted Gerindra, then PDIP followed by Golkar. Towards those 3 political entities, party identification was formed with different reasons. The identification on Gerindra varies depending on its support to Tamil community as it was the main attraction towards this party for this community, one that differentiates it from the rest. While for PDIP it depends on the political condition in the country as the main attraction of this party came from the fact that this party supported the current president, and last for Golkar the identity is more or less of what remained from the old time when this party had the biggest influence in this country. The theory of party identification proven to be prevalent in this community although it is not the sole way to determine the Tamil people voting behavior it has it share in explaining why people choose certain candidate in an election.

3. References

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[4] Deepavali literally means festival of lights, on this day Hindu celebrates the day as a victorious moment when Lord Vishnu destroyed the demon.

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