Textual Analysis of Populist Discourse In Development Policy of Bandung City

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Abstract— Populism has been vastly present in Indonesia as a political strategy to gain the vote in the election, but it has been almost completely left out of scientific inquiry. The dynamics of populism in the local election also occurred in Bandung City, where in 2013, the populist new mayor (Ridwan Kamil) had been elected. This paper uses content analysis to examine how populism discourse is articulated in the development policy of Bandung City during Ridwan Kamil's administration. This paper applies content analysis method to measure populism on two distinct but related levels - as a political ideology and as a political communication style. Data is gathered through documents, such as official development planning documents and public speeches or statements given by the Mayor of Bandung as a key political actor and other political elites involved in the implementation of both programs. The results show that populism practice in Bandung City is categorized as pragmatic populism, characterized by the figure of the politician with popular support. In this context, it would be a necessity to transform political institutions by developing the government's organizational capacity, to overcome the political oligarchy.

Keywords— *populism, development policy, political ideology, political communication style*

I. INTRODUCTION

Local elections are still a strategic political event for democratization in Indonesia. This event plays an important role in the arena of power struggle and the emerging of political leaders who will direct the route of local democratization. Even though there are several new actors who emerged as the result of direct local elections since 2005, however, the changing in governance not always presents immediately, as the public hope. Formal political institutions and bureaucracy tend to focus on procedural order, which makes them rather slow in responding public's demand to rapid changes. In the context of decreasing public trust toward government's performance, several heads of local administration, in fact, perform distinguish creativity and innovation in governing and serving the public. Names such as Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (former Governor of Special District of Capital Jakarta), Tri Rismaharini (Mayor of Surabaya), and Ridwan Kamil (mayor of Bandung) become popular due to their new breakthrough to overcome stagnation in public service delivery. Those examples above indicate that there is a

growing shifting in governance's practice that nowadays put forward practices of populist approach.

Even though populism has become a new trend nowadays, there is still difficulty in differentiate populism with popularity. Whereas populism as a concept has a wide coverage. Populism generally is understood in four perspectives: as ideology [7], as a challenge to established structure [3]; as a political communication style (Taguieff, 1995; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014; Grbeša and Šalaj, 2016); and as an anti-establishment figures or movements to attract popular support [5]. Building on the fourth variant of populism, as pragmatic populism, the study uses textual analysis to examine how populist style is transformed into development policy. As mention before, Ridwan Kamil, Mayor of Bandung, is well-known for his populist style in engaging the public. This style is also translated into his popular program. Two of his most popular program in Bandung is city garden project and smart city program. Both the programs are the signature of populist approach in governing Bandung City. By examining these two programs, this article seeks to analyze how populism discourse is translated into development policy. The aim is to identify what kind of populism presents in the development policy of Bandung City. To achieve the purpose, this article uses textual analysis on city policies to capture words, phrases, and meaning that construct populism variant in both of the programs.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines to which extent was populism present in the development policy of Bandung City. This examination further identifies what is the populism variant emerge in Bandung City. To do that, this research adopts method developed by Grbeša and Šalaj (2016). The method applies a two-level approach to measure populism as a thin-centered political ideology and as a political communication style. As a political ideology, the defining idea of populism is that there is the presence of references to the people and the presence of anti-elitism is a necessary condition for someone to be labeled populist. The analysis of populism as a political communication style is primarily set to determine efforts of

mainstream politicians to use populist cues to resonate with the citizens. This research uses content analysis to examine documents, such as official development planning documents and public speeches or statements given by the Mayor of Bandung as a key political actor and other political elites involved in the implementation of both programs.

Unit of analysis is texts from documents to identify two main dimensions of populism, such as (1) presence of explicit references to the people; and (2) politicians' attitudes towards political elites [4]. The first dimension is examined through 3 indicators: (a) presence of references to the people, anti-elite sentiment, and references to 'dangerous others'; (b) politicians' attempts of displaying proximity to the people by using private and informal language; and (c) their use of 'empty signifiers' that are typical of populist discourse. The second dimension examines politicians' attitudes towards political elites and is first examined through two main indicators: (a) the presence of references to political elites ('politicians,' 'politics'); and (b) the valence of those references. References to specific politicians were registered only if a certain politician was mentioned as an example of politics or political elites as a whole. Each reference to political elites was assigned its valence (positive, negative or neutral) and predominant valence of all references to the people was then recorded as the overall sentiment towards political elites.

III. FINDINGS

A. *References to the people*

All the development planning documents use neutral valence to the people. All the documents use the terminology of 'population' to address the people as a target of policy. This term is mentioned more than 200 times in all government document of development planning. The use of this term indicates that people are more positioned as a subject in administrative perspective, rather than in social or political sense. Long-term and mid-term development planning policies focus on establishing a general direction for program and activities within 5-20 years. For this purpose, 'people' or 'population' - as in the documents- is generalized as a statistical number with a certain condition to be governed. It is similar to data in annual development planning documents, which uses the term 'population' to address the people. It indicates that official documents tend to use more formal and normative reference to the people.

This reference is different from what is covered by public speech or statements made by Ridwan Kamil. In his speeches or statements, the 'people' is defined more explicit as 'citizen at productive age,' 'youth', and 'technology literate's citizen' [12]. Ridwan Kamil uses term 'youth' frequently to define certain segments in Bandung's population. He even uses specific terms such as 'jomblo' (refers to single man or woman) and other languages popular among young generation to identify himself with the youth groups. Even though this is not treated as a reference to the people as a collectivity, nevertheless this term indicates to whom the mayor as mainstream political actor wants to directly connect. As shown

in statistical data, the population at the age of 20-34 years is the upper three majorities in Bandung City (Document of Development Planning, 2014-2018). Not only they are majorities in Bandung, but they are also a segment of the population that commonly use the internet. Therefore, by using the term 'youth', 'citizen at productive age,' and 'technology literate citizens,' Ridwan Kamil has indicated the main target for development policy in Bandung.

To reach out this segment, the 'empty signifiers' frequently spoken by Ridwan Kamil is 'happiness,' 'innovation,' 'change.' These three words become the basic concepts that underlying city garden project and smart city program. Nevertheless, if we seek in development planning policies, we only find those terms in a very few frequents. The word 'happiness' is mentioned only ten times in the five strategic City Documents for Development Planning between 2013-2017, which include the long-term, mid-term, and annual development planning policies. In those documents, 'happiness' is connected to 'index of happiness,' a universal measurement that used by the City Government to indicate the condition perceived by the people as satisfactory wellbeing. Meanwhile, the word 'change' is mentioned 203 times, and 'innovation' is mentioned 243 times.

Compare to the term 'change' and 'innovation' that more familiar with bureaucracy, the term 'happiness' and 'index of happiness' is rather a new concept for development. Therefore, the presence of the term 'happiness' is not as many as the other terms. On the other side, the lack of appearance of those terms verifies that those are empty signifiers, that being popularized without having certain meaning within each of the terms. This is the reason that bureaucracy translates those terms into formalistic measurement and principles of development, not as a specific program.

The city garden project and smart city program was the Mayor's idea to realize 'happiness,' 'change,' and 'innovation.' In the beginning, the main idea is to create public space that could directly connect citizens and at the same time reducing the boundary between government and citizen. This is the core idea of populism. As shown in blueprint document of Smart City Program, one of the applications installed is Media Social Mapping, sophisticated software granted to Government of Bandung from the Government of Norway as pilot project. This software could capture various kind of citizen's talks in social media, such as Facebook and twitter that directly connected to public service's complaint. After the complaints have been mapped according to the area of residency, the Mayor could directly make decision to overcome the problem. Allocation of resources is distributed according to the mapping of problems. This application gives actual data for the government to make objective decision making.

B. *Politicians' attitudes towards political elites*

Even though the Mayor is offering innovation and changes, there are still critics addressed to his performance. The city garden project and smart city program are two examples of the program to reform the bureaucracy. The city garden project transforms the governance of city garden through collaboration between government, private sectors, and communities. Meanwhile, smart city program reforms the method of public

service through digitalization. Both programs are aiming at bureaucracy as political elite to be reformed.

The reason underlying to reform bureaucracy is the low score of Corruption Perception Index in Bandung, which in the year 2015 had been the lowest among another 15 cities in Indonesia. According to survey organized by Transparency International Indonesia in September 2015, the low score is due to maladministration in licensing services provided by the City Government. For several years, licensing services and also other public services had not been a problem for people in Bandung. As an urban area depends on trade and services to activate economy and local revenues, licensing service has played a significant role to create a conducive climate for investment. Therefore, the private sectors and corporations are another actors that perceived strategic for the populist approach in governing Bandung City.

However, this does not mean that bureaucracy is perceived as 'dangerous other' for the Mayor, neither as a common enemy that needs to be destroyed. The populist approach is used as a strategy to transform bureaucracy to create more effective and efficient performance, while on another side also open up more access for the public to control the government's performance. In this context, politician attitudes toward bureaucracy tend to be neutral, even though the mayor in several interviews with mass media admitted that bureaucracy is one of the problems that need to be overcome immediately.

C. Variant of populism

Referring to the background of the emergence of populism in Bandung, we can say that populism in the city of Bandung is the presence of a populist figure as mayor. This figure does not come from the opposition, but able to articulate the issues that are popular in the public as it pertains to the needs of daily life of citizens. By forming the self-image as a reformer, Ridwan Kamil managed to mobilize public support to be elected as mayor and also to support the development programs being operated. His programs loaded with populist characteristics, especially in the form of a scheme that channeled distribution of resources directly to the community.

This phenomenon is similar to the variant of populism, not as an ideology against the established structure of power, but a figure of a politician with popular support [5]. Populism in Bandung characterized by more pragmatic rather ideologically principles, such as inclusiveness, nonconfrontational, and supportive of the democratic practice. Populist appeals to the people are characteristically more as a style that is democratic in the sense of being aimed at ordinary people. Popular distrust of politicians' evasiveness and bureaucratization, populist figures pride themselves on simplicity and directness.

For more than a year of his administration, Ridwan Kamil has made a number of changes through the pro-public development programs. Results of a survey conducted by the Center for Research and Dynamics Development in University of Padjadjaran (June, 2015) found that 43% of the population in Bandung responded well to the programs run by the Government of Bandung. As many as 71.8% stated they were

quite satisfied with the government's performance in Bandung. Nevertheless, the criticism appears to sustainability programs that began to be questioned in the three aspects: first, directly scheme to distribute grant or program to the public are considered vulnerable in terms of accountability; second, involvement of community groups as volunteers is criticized as neglecting the existence of the bureaucracy; and third, the use of funds from the private sector raises questions related to the accountability of the fund and the capacity of government to absorb the public budget [2]. These criticisms come down to the capacity of the populist leader to achieve effective government. Technocratic populism as mentioned by Mietzner (2015) is one of the alternative approaches to combine bureaucracy and populism. This means that Ridwan Kamil leadership should transform direct scheme of public provision to more comprehensive policy and systematic administration.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results point to some important findings. First, the analysis of the positive referencing to the people shown that Ridwan Kamil is a populist politician. His approach to govern Bandung City is further reinforced by his dual understanding of political systems and processes and his refusal to be recognized as a political professional. Second, analysis of the attitude toward other political elites shown that the mayor as a mainstream political actor tends to have a neutral perspective on bureaucracy, however, he wants to reform the bureaucracy and admit that bureaucracy is one of the sources of the problem in governing Bandung City.

According to the analysis of how populism is translated into development policy, populism practice in Bandung City is categorized as pragmatic populism, which is similar to the variant of populism, not as an ideology against the established structure of power, but a figure of a politician with popular support. In this context, it would be a necessity to transform political institutions by developing the government's organizational capacity, to overcome the political oligarchy. In this case, society and its self-awareness play important role in controlling populist leader and public policies formulated from this approach.

Populism is useful for explaining Ridwan Kamil's leadership of his administration. He had opened up an opportunity for people to be involved in controlling the government's performance in public services, directly or through the social media. Populism fills the gaps of substance within procedural democracy by allowing people to access and influence the government policy, which did not occur in previous eras. However, institutionalizing these changes is important to ensure that the populist leader plays within the rules of the game and that these changes continue to be implemented even after the change of leader. These changes cannot be carried out simply to achieve popular support and less control from the local parliament or the public.

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