

ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF PRE-ELECTION POLLS IN INDONESIA

Samsul Ma'arif Mujiharto

Faculty of Philosophy, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Email: samsulmaarifm@ugm.ac.id

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menghubungkan praktik survei politik pra-pemilu dengan isu-isu moral dan demokrasi. Beberapa studi telah dilakukan dan mengonfirmasi bahwa survei politik pra-pemilu telah berkembang pesat dan menjadi salah satu pilar penting demokrasi. Kemampuan memprediksi yang dimiliki oleh survei politik dapat membantu politisi untuk menyusun strategi, mendengarkan suara publik, dan memenangi kontestasi politik. Kendati demikian, survei politik pra-pemilu bukan semata-mata kegiatan ilmiah, tetapi juga kegiatan politis, sehingga survei politik pra-pemilu berada di area “abu-abu” yang di antara keduanya. Konsekuensinya, hal ini bisa memicu beberapa hal negatif, seperti; korupsi metode, manipulasi data, efek bandwagon, dan mobilisasi politik. Dengan memfokuskan pada pemilihan presiden pada 2014 dan 2019, artikel ini menyimpulkan beberapa pertimbangan etis untuk memastikan praktek survei politik pra-pemilu tetap memainkan peran penting sebagai salah satu pilar demokrasi.

Kata kunci: Refleksi Etis, Survei Politik Pra-Pemilu, Demokrasi

Abstract

This paper aims to connect the practice of pre-election polls to moral issues and democracy. Several studies have indicated that pre-election polls have grown to become essential pillars of democracy. The prediction capabilities of pre-election polls can help politicians arrange strategies to listen to the public's voice and win political contestation. However, since the practice of pre-election polls is not only scientific evidence but also political credential, it crosses the blurry boundary where they intersect one another. Consequently, this may exacerbate some pathologies of polls such as method

corruption, data manipulation, bandwagon effect, and political mobilization. Focusing on the 2014 and 2019 Indonesia presidential elections, this paper suggests that ethical consideration to ensure the practice of pre-election polls is necessary for bringing the polls back as one of the prime pillars of democracy.

Keywords: *Ethical reflection, pre-election polls, democracy*

INTRODUCTION

In the 2014 presidential race, Indonesians were bombarded with the releases of pre-election polls with contradictory results. Some long-established pollsters including Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC), LSI (*Lembaga Survei Indonesia*—the Indonesian Survey Institute), Indikator, Indo Barometer, Charta Politika, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Cyrus Network, and Poltracking led by Denny JA (*Lingkaran Survei Indonesia*—the Indonesian Survey Circle), Populi Center, and Litbang Kompas suggested the decisive victory for Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and his running mate, Jusuf Kalla (JK). Meanwhile, other four pollsters; LSN (*Lembaga Survei Nasional*—Institute for National Survey), JSN (*Jaringan Survei Nusantara*—Nusantara Survey Network), Indonesian Research Center and Puskaptis (*Pusat Kajian Kebijakan dan Pembangunan Strategis*—Centre for Policy and Strategic Development Studies), announced the victory of Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, Hatta Rajasa.

Although supported by only four pollsters, these particular polling results were quite widespread across the country since they were broadcast by two national TV stations owned by Prabowo's alliances; Aburizal Bakrie and Hary Tanoesoedibjo. Following the claim of Prabowo's victory, the TVs were also repeatedly broadcasting Prabowo and his supporters performing *sujud syukur*, the prostration of gratitude to God due to the victory. The controversy remained in dispute until, on 22 July 2014, the KPU (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, General Elections Commission) officially

announced the victory of Jokowi which was later confirmed by the Constitutional Court.

In comparison to 2014, the 2019 presidential election looked slightly different. It was none of the pollsters that publicly proclaimed the victory of Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, Sandiaga Uno. Even some pollsters that previously declared Prabowo the victor of the 2014 election, announced that Jokowi and his running mate, K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, confidently held the victory. Both TV stations that were previously allied to Prabowo, switched their allegiance to Jokowi in the 2019 presidential election and did not broadcast Prabowo's self-proclaimed victory. In short, there was no narrative from pollsters as well as media platforms about Prabowo's victory.

However, Prabowo and his supporters raised another narrative of electoral fraud and the lies of mainstream pollsters. He rejected polls showing Jokowi's comfortable victory with a double-digit lead (Aditya & Salna, 2019) and trusted only in 'internal polling' conducted by Gerindra (*Gerakan Indonesia Raya*—Great Indonesia Movement) party where he is the chief of the party. Without further details about the exclusively called internal polling, Prabowo Campaign Director, Sugiono, told that Prabowo had led with 62 percent over Jokowi. Ironically, he only mentioned that the internal polling involved about 1.440 respondents selected through *multistage random sampling* without mentioning the *margin of error*. Following the claim, on April 2019, in front of more than 1.000 supporters at his house in South Jakarta, he accused the mainstream pollsters had been 'partisan' and tried to sway public opinion that he had already lost in the bid (Iswara & Ramadhani, 2019). Furthermore, he suggested they move to Antarctica, as mentioned in the following passage:

"Percaya nggak lembaga survei abal-abal? Hai tukang bohong, tukang bohong, rakyat tidak percaya sama kalian. Mungkin kalian harus pindah ke negara lain. Mungkin kau bisa pindah ke Antartika,

kalian tukang bohong, kau bisa bohongi penguin di Antartika"
(Hariyanto, 2019)

"Do you trust fake pollsters? You cheating pollsters, the Indonesian people do not trust you anymore. You, the cheating pollsters, may move to other countries. You may be able to lie to penguins in Antarctica." (Hariyanto, 2019)

More than raising that narrative above, we found another controversial act done by Prabowo's supporters. It was widely reported that after a series of investigations by Indonesian police officers, a vocal supporter of Prabowo retired major general Kivlan Zen was suspected of designing an assassination plot to kill some influential figures including the executive director of a polling agency *Charta Politika*, Yunarto Wijaya (Nathalia, 2019). In addition, Zen was also accused of backing a plot to kill four other top Indonesian security officials including Indonesia's chief security minister Wiranto, the head of BIN (*Badan Intelijen Negara*—the national intelligence agency) Budi Gunawan, coordinating maritime minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, and special presidential security adviser Gories Mere were also targeted to the assassination (Da Costa 2019).

What the author is mainly concerned about here is why polling that is originally scientifically based or evidence-based once it is brought into the context of polarized Indonesia seems to be 'partisan' and easily twisted to become a political weapon. This result can lead to a growing distrust of polls, so how to recover polls as a scientific instead of political activity?

To understand and answer the question above, and this is our concern here, it is important to consider that the practice of polling in the political atmosphere is recently located at an unavoidable 'intersection' between scientific and political credentials. As scientific evidence that aims to accurately find the truth, pollster relies on a 'gold' scientific standard of random sampling to achieve a representative sample of the overall population. The agenda of this kind of scientific evidence is to minimize bias by utilizing its best

capability. However, once it is brought to political realization, it can be used either as a political weapon to attack their competitors or persuade respondents to the preferred choice.

This paper is a more theoretical approach to the practice of pre-election polls that invites a complicated relationship especially when scientific practice is brought to the political atmosphere to provide a basis for bringing the function of political polling as one of the prime pillars of democracy. While it would be interesting to examine ethical issues in greater detail, in this paper, we confine ethics, as it is linked with our effort to improve the quality of democratic life for the interest of humankind (read: the principle of beneficence) and to avoid harming others (read: no harm principle). The practice of pre-election polls in Indonesia has emerged as an important part of humans' to improve the quality of democracy. So, every question can be considered an ethical issue, in our view, when it is seen from the ethical point of view

RESULTS

1. Pre-Election Polls and Democracy In Indonesia

There are a number of studies on the relationship between pre-election polls and democracy, but in this paper, we do not wish to imply by this study covers all pre-election polls in Indonesia. We focus on 2014 and 2019 Indonesia presidential elections, in which Jokowi defeated Prabowo Subiyanto. Based on this background, this paper aims at filling the gap by framing this in ethical issues linked to the practice of pre-election polls in Indonesia, more specifically in the context of the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections in Indonesia.

Polling and the Search for Accuracy

One of the influential questions about the role of polling in social sciences is whether accurate prediction (as done by polling) possible in social sciences. There are several answers to this question. The first camp is those who answer 'no'. Social science, according to this camp, is seen as an open system that has a huge number of variables very hard to be controlled and modeled. The

aim of social science is 'to understand' (*verstehen*), not to predict. Included in this camp are some social theorists such as Giddens (1976) and Hacking (1995). Another camp suggested opening the possibility of prediction since it is still possible to discover a kind of causal mechanism (Brante, 2001) and to develop, at least, an underlying theory (Elster, 1989; Little, 1991). However, most social scientists accepted prediction based on 'understanding' or 'underlying explanation' instead of a causal mechanism.

Other studies pointed out that polls have not merely been used to capture the voice of public sentiment by enhancing the image of politicians during campaigns through effective communication strategies with the voters. In this case, a poll is used to capture public opinion, benchmark, bushfire, tracking, deliberative, entrance, exit, straw vote, push, and aggregate polls (Trihartono, 2014). However, some political actors exploited the pre-election polls as political vehicles to bring politicians to power, such as a map for soliciting bribes, and guiding the mobilization of votes, and, this is widely used for, amplifying the bandwagon effect (Trihartono, 2014). To ensure the accuracy of this, a more practical criterion for polling quality may include some steps from forming questions to be used in capturing the opinion of respondents, developing samples that precisely represent the particular population, collecting data through interviews, statistical analysis in the light of widely accepted principles and procedures, interpreting the results, and reporting the finding.

As scientific evidence, polling along with its principles of openness, accountability, and transparency (Brady, 2000) has contributed to the development of not only political science (Blumer, 2000) but more importantly, also of democracy. Democracy requires polling as a 'tool of democracy' to translate the abstract concepts of deliberative democracy into concise and efficient practice at each stage of democracy. The use of polling in democracy is supposed to be an analogy to telescopes used in astronomy or microscopes in biology, which have the ability to help us examine physical-material phenomena. In the same vein, polling

has features for the social sciences to collect data about public opinion by way of taking a sample of thousands of randomly selected participants to really represent a particular population.

Here, polls can help us find the accuracy to unveil the relationship of, for example, presidential debates, political scandals, rumors, and circulation of propaganda with individual preferences by which leaders can anticipate voters' expectations. Furthermore, Trihartono (2014) points out some purposes of having a survey. For example, politicians are able to map special programs attractive to the voters, evaluate the performance of incumbents, measure the degree of popularity; acceptability; likeability; and electability of the candidates, identify population categorized as voters or swing voters, identify the most suitable mass media partner for informing the programs to the public, identify the best type of communication to the voters, identify supporters or rivals, and test the waters to minimize the losses.

Polling, Bandwagon Effect & Democratic Consolidation in Indonesia

Historically, it was Kard D. Jackson who conducted a survey in Indonesia. He investigated the relationships between traditional authority, Islam, and rebellion in political behavior (Ufen, 2010). His research was under a company named PT. Suburi founded in 1967. It was an Asia research Non-governmental Organization (NGO) that focuses on business research related to national development that aligns with the main focus of development under Soeharto's administration (Trihartono, 2013). Unfortunately, we found no sufficient information explaining the development of polling in Indonesia until the 1990s.

From the very beginning, the establishment of polls in Indonesia was aimed at democracy consolidation and at promoting the importance of listening to the voice of ordinary people which was previously neglected by the authoritarian government of Orba (*Orde Baru* – New Order) under Soeharto administration. Studies on

polls had typically concentrated more on the performances of pollsters during elections in 1999 and 2004 (LSI, *Jajak Pendapat dan Pemilu di Indonesia*), the rise of polling at a national level (Mietzner, 2009), the increase of professionalism among pollsters (Qodari, 2010) and the rise of political marketing employment (Ufen, 2010).

Further development of political polls in Indonesia was dominated by mass media-based polling. One of the most controversial polling was done by *Monitor* Tabloid which published a controversial survey finding entitled "Here We Are: 50 Figures Most Admired by Our Readers". Its publication on 15 October 1990 triggered massive protests from Muslim communities since it ranked Prophet Muhammad 11th. Out of the 50 figures, on the first rank was President Soeharto (the second president of the Republic of Indonesia) followed by Prof. Dr. B.J. Habibie (minister for research and technology under Soeharto administration), and Ir. Soekarno (the first president of the Republic of Indonesia). In the protest, they demanded the banning of the tabloid and its editor-in-chief to be granted a death sentence.

It has been noted that mass media-based polling in comparison to scientific polling is low in cost, robust new values, and fast in capturing a public pulse (Trihartono, 2013). This is because mass media-based polls utilize the internet, short messaging service (SMS), or telephone which is of course much cheaper than a face-to-face interview with respondents across the country that may cost millions of rupiah. However, mass-media polling is not confidently reliable due to the problem of its representativeness and methodological weakness. This is because the target of this particular polling is 'curiosity fulfiller' (Trihartono, 2013). The design of this polling is to provide entertainment to the public, not to provide the mirror of *a vox populi*. Therefore, in the next period of post-Soeharto Indonesia, mass media-based polls tend to be abandoned. Scientific polling which further guarantees accuracy has consistently been increased.

The omnipresent rise of pollsters in the post-Soeharto era has been an effect of democratization that was marked by the Law

Number 23 of the Year 2003 on the 'General Election of the President and Vice President'. Under the principle of 'directness', people as voters could directly elect the candidate in accordance with their aspirations, without any mediator. In the local government context, the implementation of Law Number 32 of the Year 2004 regarding 'Regional Government' implied that local leaders including *gubernur* (governor) and *bupati* (major) were also elected directly by the people. These two laws revoked large power from the hands of political parties to the people which has implications for the direct relationship between voters and candidates.

One of the important political fashions marking this transition has been the presence and involvement of pollsters in political contestation. With the help of polls which provide clear data, voters are able to identify which one among candidates whose better quality to say the most favored candidate. Vice versa, in the same vein, the candidates can understand the voters' preferences. The role of pollsters, as reviewed by the *Mahkamah Konstitusi* (Constitutional Court), has grown increasingly with the weakening role of a political party as the only part in deciding the choice of candidacy. According to the reviewed Law Number 32 of the Year 2004, it is legally accepted to nominate any individual to run a political bid as an independent. Since it is without political nomination, it is then called the 'independent pathway' (*jalur independen*).

According to Ufen (2010), the strengthening role of pollsters that use scientific means in Post-Soeharto Reform can be seen as a sign that the political party has been moving to become more 'professional' and 'commercial'. Professionalization here means the increasing use of pollsters and consultants that use a scientific approach, while commercialization is a result of huge investment due to the high cost of campaigning. Elsewhere, Mietzner (2009) suggested that before 2004 polling mostly had been driven by curiosity, but some switched to 'commercial'. By then, he divided pollsters into two types: academic and commercial. Included in the academic type are those who believe that polling should be directed

solely to serve the public needs to access correct information by way of upholding the principle of transparency. Even if they do not refuse to advise politicians to find out their strengths and weaknesses, they still refuse to give strategic advices on how to win elections or to develop a particular image. Pollsters' position is just like a 'doctor' who is only entitled to provide a diagnosis, but not to give medication directly to patients. In contrast, the commercial pollsters continue to insist that they can go further by giving drugs directly to patients through providing assistance to politicians to win the election. Not only do they conduct a survey, but they also organize a whole series of campaigns including preparing drafts for advertisement.

The 2004 election was marked by the victory of pollsters at the national level as indicated in the following example. Based on some surveys, former security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono known as SBY had consistently at the top rank of the presidential bid, while his party PD (*Partai Demokrat*—Democrat Party) got only marginal support from the public. This fact has led the elites of two top rank political parties; PG (*Partai Golongan Karya*—Party of Functional Groups) and PDI-P (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*—Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) dismissed the polling and further not nominate SBY for the presidency. The election remained shocking when SBY significantly won with a 60.62% lead surpassing the incumbent Megawati Soekarnoputri with 39,38%, supported by the parties with very large votes in parliament. This is why Mietzner (2009) points out that the 2004 election in which the pollsters accurately captured the victory of SBY as the 'victory of pollsters'.

Since then, polling had been significantly considered in determining candidates both at national and local levels. The nomination and the choice of candidacy, especially in a local context, was mostly based on funding availability or *mahar politik* (political dowry) given by the candidate who look for political vehicles for the contestation. Conversely, political parties tend to charge the candidates with a huge number of money and treat the

candidate like an 'ATM' machine since political process requires fuel (Buehler & Tan, 2007). With the shifting role of political parties in the nomination process, the results of polling can be used by candidates to bargain with political parties. The 'dowry' becomes negotiable subject to the candidate's electability because the party still prefers to nominate candidates who are likely to win.

2. Playing Polls in a Political Atmosphere

As mentioned above polls could be fruitful for democracy in regard to its ability to grasp the voice of the people. Under scientific principles and procedures, polls could be the best way to have accuracy. However, since it is costly and money often brings particular intended interest, polls, therefore, turn out to be easily controlled by interest other than for the sake of accuracy. In this section, we explore its complicated issue in regard to bringing polls into the political atmosphere.

The Operational Cost of Polls and Its Implications

The starting point for the discussion in this section is the fact that the operational cost of polls is tremendously expensive. This is caused by the long implementation time and the high need for high-quality human resources capable of carrying out the survey procedures properly. The issue of human resources is less problematic because the input and internal systems are relatively well established, while the issue of funding is problematic. Given that not all pollsters are financially sufficient, looking for sponsors is often their preferred option. However, the precautionary principle is therefore essential here, because sponsors' intervention in the work of pollsters can affect credibility.

We found some cases related to the credibility of pollsters and mostly regarding the exploitation of biased polling data to favor the intended candidates. For example, after the 2014 presidential election, *Persepi* (*Perhimpunan Survei Opini Publik Indonesia*—the Indonesian Public Opinion Survey Association) conducted an ethical audit over its members; the *Suara Indonesia Network* and

Puskaptis. According to Yunarto Wijaya, the Executive Director of *Charta Politika* and Secretary General of *Persepi*, during the checking process, these two pollsters were proven to be lying. "The two survey agencies were fired from the *Persepi* membership. The track records can be seen from hundreds of *Pilkada* (*Pemilihan Kepala Daerah*—local election). For us, that's a lesson," said Yunarto (Hidayat, 2018).

So far, there has been no study that specifically discusses the correlation between sponsorship and the results of surveys. However, Aspinall and Mietzner (2014) noted that in the 2014 presidential election, the indicative correlation between these two things was relatively clear. In contrast to other pollsters, LSN, for example, has released surveys that were consistently favoring Prabowo Subianto and his party, the Gerindra party. In 2009, LSN also predicted that the Gerindra party would get 15.6% of the votes in the parliament, but it got only 4.5% of the votes. In 2014, LSN also released a prediction that the Gerindra party would win the Legislative Election with 26.1%, but the party took third place with 11.8% of the votes. Lastly, two days before the 2014 presidential election, LSN also predicted Prabowo-Hatta's victory with a comfortable gap of 9% compared to their rivals, while other pollsters predicted Jokowi-JK's victory by a 2-4% gap.

Elsewhere JSI (*Jaringan Suara Indonesia*—the Indonesia Voice Network), in the 2012 Jakarta Governor Election (*Pilgub*), missed predicting Fauzi Bowo's victory, which was actually won by Jokowi-Basuki. In the same year, the JSI also claimed that Prabowo gained 64% of the votes if the Presidential Election was held on that day. Meanwhile, Indonesia Research Centre (IRC) which is owned by Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the owner of the MNC group who is a supporter of the Prabowo-Hatta, in June 2014, without a detailed explanation of the polling method, the IRC predicted Prabowo-Hatta's (48%) victory over Jokowi-JK (43%). The comparison of pre-election polls among the pollsters can be seen below in Table 1:

Table 1. Comparison of Pre-Election Polls for the 2014 Presidential Race Source: Data taken from www.bisnis.com, Thursday (10/7/2014)

Name of Pollsters	Vote Share of Prabowo-Hatta (%)	Vote Share of Jokowi-JK (%)	Margin of Error
Populi Center	49.05	50.95	+/- 1 %
CSIS-Cyrus	48.1	51.9	+/- 1 %
Litbang Kompas	47.66	52.33	+/- 0.11 %
Indikator Politik	47.05	52.95	+/- 1 %
LSI	46.43	53.37	+/- 1 %
RRI (Radio Republik Indonesia)	47.32	52.68	-
SMRC (Saiful Mujani Research & Consulting)	47.09	52.91	+/- 0.68 %
Puskaptis (Pusat Kajian Kebijakan & Pembangunan Strategis)	52.05	47.95	+/- 1 %
IRC (Indonesia Research Center)	51.11	48.89	-
Poll-Tracking Institute	46.63	53.37	-
JSI (Jaringan Survei Indonesia)	50.13	49.87	+/- 1 %
LSN (Lembaga Survei Nasional)	50.5	49.9	-

Aspinall and Mietzner's analysis accurately captures public suspicions about polling results issued by several pollsters. The public suspicion got stronger precisely when some pollsters refused to be audited by Persepi (*Perhimpunan Survei Opini Publik Indonesia*—Indonesian Public Opinion Survey Association). Rather, they resigned from membership in the association. Instead of raising an explanation to Persepi, the Director of Puskaptis, Husin Yazid,

confidently pointed out that his pollster is ready to be dissolved if their quick count results differ greatly from the official count of KPU (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*—General Election Commission) (GATRAnews, 2014). In fact, by attending the ethical trial, the pollster can not only clarify against the public suspicions but also defend their data.

Similar to this, during the 2009 presidential election, the Indonesian Research Institute (LRI) published polling results that were different from other pollsters. LRI released the SBY-Boediono victory with 33% of votes, followed by JK-Wiranto with 29% and Megawati-Prabowo in the range of 20%. This release is different from the release of five mainstream pollsters that favored SBY-Boediono with 60-62% of votes, then Megawati-Prabowo with 21-27%, and followed by the JK-Wiranto in the range of 12-16%. Interestingly, as mentioned by the director of Puskaptis, the director of LRI also confidently stated that he would dissolve his pollster if his predictions differed from the official count from the KPU.

As emphasized above, polling is an expensive activity. This means, that to meet a gold standard method and to guarantee the quality of the polls, adequate financial support is needed. If not, method corruption may arise. We can easily find the corruption through, for example, reducing the number and distribution of samples from the proper number. This is cheaper and implies inexpensive interviewing techniques, but it reduces the degree of reliability. On several occasions, an organizing agency may claim to be an official pollster, but we can easily find out that what they run is not a survey, but a pseudo-survey.

One example of pseudo-polling is a survey conducted by mass media. As understood, mass media and surveys are like a husband who shares a bed with his wife. To enjoy its popularity, a surveyor needs mass media to publish its polling results and at the same time the mass media needs a kind of 'shocking' data which is then processed to increase its popularity among the readers. Due to this motive, mass media often chooses to use less reliable methods, such as using the internet, SMS, and telephone to gather public opinion.

Internet-based polling was conducted by inviting readers of certain media to answer several questions presented in the survey package. Readers can freely answer even with real or unreal answers. In fact, in some surveys, readers can also participate more than once in a survey. In terms of cost and time required, this method is more efficient (see table below) but, of course, it lacks adequacy and is laden with the partisan interpretation of data.

Table 2. The Cost and the Types of Polls

Source: Agus Trihartono (2013)

	Tools	Cost	Duration
Mass media based polling	SMS	< IDR 10 billions	1-3 days
	Tele-polling	< IDR 100 billions	3-5 days
	Online	< IDR 10 billions	1-5 days
Interview based polls	National level	IDR 300-500 millions	10-21 days
	Provincial level	IDR 200-300 millions	3-14 days
	District level	IDR 50-150 millions	3-14 days

However, beyond the advantages of this kind of survey, Trihartono (2013) notes at least two problems. *First*, it is related to the issue of representation. Because the sample is not selected proportionally and randomly, the survey does not “represent” the surveyed population. Hence, claims of generalizations as public opinion cannot be made. *Second*, survey with the internet, SMS, and telephone is also not representative because not all population members have access to these communication channels. This channel is mostly owned by residents in urban areas (read: urban bias), and thus, the reliability is low and it is not sufficiently representative to describe the public voice (*vox populi*).

Bandwagon Effects and Political Mobilization

In some cases, non-scientific problems are usually correlated with scientific problems. Data manipulation and the corruption of the scientific method that initially occurred in the scientific area, for example, turned to continue with exploitation. In other words, data exploitation is usually, if not entirely, a continuation of data manipulation. Let's look at what happened in the 2014 presidential election when four pollsters released various results from opinion polls. In such a situation, it would be difficult for us to ignore the common thread linking the pollsters with the Prabowo-Hatta camp.

Moreover, when the chairman of the National Winning Team for the Prabowo-Hatta, Mahfud MD, stated, 'this is part of cyberwar' (*Pikiran Rakyat Daily*, 2014). The implicit meaning of the statement 'cyberwar' is that the difference between polling releases is part of 'psywar' rather than 'competition over the data' to fight over the claim of who wins. With the same lens, Mahfud MD also wanted to convey a message that Prabowo-Hatta's victory claim which was based on an internal poll had to be aligned with the polls carried out by other pollsters that so far had credible track records. At this stage, it can be seen that what happened was the exploitation of data from the Prabowo-Hatta's camp to defend their proclaimed victory.

This strategy has been linked to Prabowo's campaign consultant, Rob Allyn, who is an expert in making confusion among the public through the 'muddy statistical waters' project (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014). The target of making the polling market 'muddy' is to discredit mainstream pollsters and to let partisan pollsters be equally treated. It is expected that a weak candidate can be considered competitive and supposed to be favored by the voters. Of this, pollsters in Indonesia transformed from behind-the-scenes actors to more partisan to particular political camp (Tomsa, 2020).

On a narrower scale than the Presidential Election, the exploitation of polling was also carried out in several *Pilkada*. A study conducted by Trihartono (2014) confirms that polling in the arena of local political contestation in Indonesia is no longer

considered an instrument to 'capture public voices', but it is instead exploited by politicians to get the ticket for candidacy. Data gathered from polling is used for bargaining in buying and selling political support. In this case, polling is seen not only as a tool to boost its image during the campaign period but also as a tool for obtaining political vehicles, a bribery map, a voter mobilization map, and to generate an indirect 'bandwagon effect'.

Elsewhere, Buehler and Tan (2007) shared in the conclusion. Departing from the practice of negotiation in terms of 'political dowry', they then emphasized that the direction of party recommendations is largely determined by how much political dowry the candidate can give to the party. In other words, a candidate can pay a political dowry to the party elite with the party recommendation compensation awarded to him/her. The greater the dowry, the greater the chance of getting a recommendation from the party. Having this kind of context, data surveys on the electability of certain candidates can be exploited to seek this recommendation.

CONCLUSION

To maintain the quality of democracy in Indonesia and elsewhere, we need to consider the fact that pre-election polls have had a demonstrable twofold positive tool impact on electoral campaigns. On the one hand, the pre-election polls can ultimately help the public consider which candidate is more favored than another. On the other hand, the polls can also take a significant role in the development of democracy. Political actors become more open to the voice of the public. However, pre-election polls are susceptible to data manipulation and mobilization. This brings the polls into a tool to improve personal image instead of to provide an accurate policy solution, so ethical consideration is therefore urgent in the medium and long term to provide further insights into the polls manipulation.

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