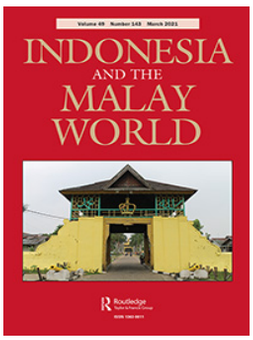

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Some considerations from the 2019 election in Indonesia

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ARTICLE

POLITICAL LANGUAGE AND FAKE NEWS
Some considerations from the 2019 election in Indonesia

Timo Duile and Sukri Tamma

ABSTRACT
This article outlines political symbolism and language in the 2019 election in Indonesia and aims to situate fake news narratives within them. By analysing official election campaign posters (*spanduk*), it is argued that Islam and nationalism are the only ideological references and are applied by both camps, leaving no room for other forms of ideological contestation. The article suggests understanding this phenomenon as a hegemonic, Gramscian 'common sense' which creates a notion of unity of the nation. This unity, however, is disturbed by hoaxes as in fake news. But instead of referring to hoaxes only as a threat to Indonesian politics, we argue that hoaxes are an integral part of the 'common sense'. Hoaxes are a means to make the ideological framework of Islam and nationalism accessible for the popular masses, applying a *kasar* (rough) approach, contradicting the *halus* (soft) language of the political elite. They are also inevitably a means to create the impression that the camps are distinct. As hoaxes refer to the constitutive outside of the nationalism-Islam complex (as Islamists suggest that Jokowi has ties to the outlawed Communist Party or that Prabowo aims to establish an Islamic state, for instance), they serve the function of maintaining the ideological order in post-New Order Indonesia.

KEYWORDS
Gramscian common sense; election campaign banners; fake news; Indonesian elections; political language

Introduction

Hoaxes as a form of fake news, are usually represented as the 'dirty' part of politics. Rather than adding valuable information, they are usually designed to discredit political opponents, relying more on emotions instead of reason. As some political scientists have argued, emotions in the form of passions have a legitimate place within politics (Mouffe 2000; Walzer 2002). However, it has also been shown that that emotions often play a significant role in fake news and that they can represent a serious threat to democracy (Bakir and McStray 2018). This is now especially taken into account in Western countries where right-wing populism is on the rise. Populism as a tool for reactionary politics is also an increasingly important issue in Southeast Asia (Kenny 2018). Indonesia is no exception here. In the Indonesian presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019, hoaxes spread on social media and many Indonesians, including politicians, viewed them as a serious threat to democracy. But, politicians did little to stop fake news about their competitors. By analysing the overall

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political language of the 2019 elections, this article argues that hoaxes are an integral part of this political language as they are explicitly present in political utterances and symbolism. Due to the absence of clear ideological competition, hoaxes serve the aim of creating distinctions between the two presidential candidates, and thus between the Jokowi and Prabowo camps. Since hoaxes discrediting both Jokowi and Prabowo refer to the same commonly acknowledged signifiers as the norm (Islam and nationalism), they do not express actual ideological difference but rather tighten the political frame and narrow the discursive spectrum of politics in Indonesia.

This article deals with the question of the role hoaxes played within the political language of the 2019 election. Drawing on this example, we aim to demonstrate that there is not polarisation in the sense of distinct alternatives with profoundly different ideologies regarding how society should be organised, and what political means should be applied to that end. Rather, polarisation can play out through unofficial social media battles in order to draw imaginary lines between political foes, whereas there is an overarching (conservative) consensus between these political camps maintaining the current political order and its economic foundations.

In a first step, the article explores political language and symbolism in post-New Order Indonesia and in the recent election, summarising that in democratic Indonesia, the political signifiers of Islam and nationalism are the only acknowledged tools one can apply to enter the political discourse. Islam and nationalism are, however, not contradictory binary terms but are rather used in combination and balance. Both provide a means for gaining political capital. This is demonstrated in the article by analysing official election campaign posters (*spanduk*) according to their symbolism and language. Referring to Antonio Gramsci (1999), it is suggested that political symbols of Islam and reactionary nationalism be understood as the 'common sense' of Indonesian politics. This 'common sense' is applied by almost all social groups and provides the frame for an inter-class alliance led by the oligarchy.

In a second step, the article explores the narratives of widespread hoaxes in Indonesia and situates these narratives in the ideological framework of the 'common sense'. It is thus argued that, while official political articulation rarely made references to hoaxes explicitly, official political articulation is the precondition for hoaxes, and hoaxes in return influence official political articulation by driving an emphasis on Islamic signifiers. Hoaxes are political representations of common people making sense of the political coordinates of nationalism and Islam. As 'dirty' narratives, they represent the *kasar* (harsh, rough) element of political expression. However, official political representation found on election campaign banners or in televised debates often use the formal acknowledged signifiers of the harmony state, that is, a state based upon discursive formations of social harmony. It uses the *halus* (smooth, soft) language of political Islam and the nation, and thus blurs class distinction in stressing the supposed unity of the harmony state. In contemporary Indonesia political discourse is dominated by Islamic nationalism, leavening little room for other ideologies.

Ideology, political language, and symbolism in New Order and post-New Order Indonesia

In order to understand the common language and to analyse it as a hegemonic force, it is helpful to draw on Gramsci's considerations about what he called the 'common sense'.

For Gramsci, the 'common sense' is what ensures the ruling of a social bloc, usually an inter-class alliance (Crehan 2016 38). This alliance of distinct social groups is bound together by shared views on politics and society in general. These emerge as supposedly natural features of the political, i.e. common premises that are not been questioned. For Gramsci, the 'common sense' is a crucial feature of the everyday philosophy of the popular masses who do not (yet) have their own independent political consciousness. 'Common sense' is an often rather incoherent set of general assumptions concerning the way politics or society in general work or should be arranged. While 'common sense' appears as something that transcends classes, it is actually the hegemony of a certain class ideology applied to all classes. The alternative would be what Gramsci labelled 'good sense', which is also part of the 'spontaneous philosophy' of the masses (Gramsci 1999: 626). However, 'good sense' cannot become hegemonic as long as the 'common sense' is the main source of making sense of the political. As a crucial problem, Gramsci (1999 638) is concerned about the process of 'preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify'. The social bloc here denotes the dominant class formation with a historic bloc, usually an inter-class alliance. It is a social formation, but the term also includes its ideological expressions and the reproduction of political and economic processes (Murphy 2005: 46–47). 'Common sense' is thus an ideological expression of a dominant class that has achieved hegemony over the other classes.

We argue in the following that in Indonesia, nationalism and Islam depict the main features of the 'common sense'. Even though subaltern classes could articulate themselves through the political language of nationalism and Islam to a certain degree, in practice nationalist and Islamic signifiers have successfully maintained the status quo, characterised by social inequality and class divisions. The concept of 'common sense' thus points towards the oligarchy as the dominant class formation and its alliance with ideological state apparatuses such as religious organisations.

We suggest understanding the term 'ideology' within the Gramscian context of the 'good' and 'common sense'. While the 'common sense' consists of ideologies that stress notions of identity (as they indicate what it means to be a good nationalist, a good Muslim, a pluralist in the cultural sense, and so on), they tend to turn a blind eye to economic issues and even take huge social inequalities for granted. Within the 'common sense', we argue, there are no fundamental ideological splits. What we observed as polarisation are subsidiary issues within the frame of the 'common sense', not a challenge to it. An ideological challenge through a 'good sense', in contrast, would relate the everyday experiences of the popular classes to assessments of the economic foundations of society. This would bring issues such as, for instance, class, oligarchy, and property relations into focus – issues that seldom or never appear in official political discourses.

The recent 'common sense' in Indonesia was particularly shaped during the so-called New Order (*orde baru*) under Suharto from 1967–1998 as well as during the anti-communist massacres before power was officially transferred to Suharto. During the struggle for independence, the liberal period, and under Sukarno's 'guided democracy' (*demokrasi terpimpin*), populist political expressions combining nationalism, communism, and leftist interpretations of political Islam formed a common base between politicians such as Sukarno and the (mostly rural) popular classes. This era was also characterised by a populist indigenism (Bourchier 1998: 206) as the common ideological frame.

Socialist concepts of mass mobilisations were, for instance, expressed in indigenous terms such as *gotong royong* (mutual help).

However, right-wing intellectuals and parts of the military also used indigenous concepts for their depoliticising and demobilising approaches during the New Order. Social harmony within a hierarchic society became the new frame of a 'common sense'. Initially, this frame was filled with signifiers of nationalism and indigenist notions such as the *azas kekeluargaan* (family principle) as the architects of the New Order relied on the reactionary, organicist ideologies of Western and fascist Japanese discourses already present in Indonesia during the struggle for independence (Bourchier 1998: 205). Organicism was brought in again, and from the late 1970s onwards a depoliticising, reactionary interpretation of the national ideology of Pancasila was taught in schools throughout the country (Bourchier 2015: 187–216). A crucial feature of this depoiliticisation was the denial of the concept of conflicting classes in the Indonesian context. Instead, the nation appeared to be a harmonious family with Suharto as the caring but strict father of development (*bapak pembangunan*). This depoliticising nationalism was supplanted from the early 1990s by notions of Islamic politics when orthodox concepts became more prevalent in politics (Amir 2012: 54). Given the ideological frame of the family state's depoliticising nationalism and the growing political aspirations of political Islam, in 1998 Indonesia embarked on a process of electoral democratisation. However, the discursive frame remained and other ideologies such as liberalism or socialism did not find support in electoral processes and nor were political or economic elites interested in such alternatives. The 'common sense' in democratic Indonesia continued the legacy of the New Order, now unfolding in an electoral framework. It excluded communism as well as the 'extremities' of radical Islam (portrayed as being at odds with the Indonesian nation as a religious but plural state) and Western liberalism.

In the course of democratic transition, the military, which had been so powerful during the New Order era, had to accept the reduction and eventual termination of their representation in national and local parliaments in 1999 and 2004 respectively. On the other side, active and retired military members remained influential in politics (Mietzner 2009: 361–362). However, the state and its institution in post-New Order Indonesia had to maintain its power not primarily as a 'state of fear' (Barker 1998) but to an increasing degree in discursive manners. Therefore, it was necessary to create the impression among ordinary people that politicians actually represented them, that the political order was also in the interest of people actually excluded from political influence. It is true that repression by the armed forces, the police, and vigilante groups, working together with state institutions still occurs in Indonesia and is a serious problem for the quality of democracy in the country. Also, the New Order did not entirely rely on fear as it sought to utilise nationalism and, especially in the 1990s, Islam as an important source of legitimation (Rudnyckyj 2010: 60–61; Salim 2015: 139). It is furthermore true that the Indonesian Army started to regain influence in state and society, for instance by applying their 'defend the nation programme' (*bela negara*). This is a programme launched by the Defence Council of the Republic of Indonesia (Dewan Ketahanan Republik Indonesia), designed to provide military training and patriotic indoctrination for volunteers (Lischin 2018; Damarjati 2019). However, the military is no longer in a position to portray itself as the saviour of the nation with

almost unlimited demands for power. This is why legitimation from discourses, applied through language and symbolism, became increasingly important.

While the protests against Suharto triggered hopes of a democratic yet religious Indonesia (Hefner 2000), it has been convincingly argued that democracy in Indonesia has been in decline in recent years (Hadiz 2017a). For example, President Joko Widodo (commonly referred to as 'Jokowi' in Indonesia), once an icon of progressive politics, has subscribed to authoritarian approaches (Power 2018). Likewise, parts of large moderate Muslim organisations have engaged in democratic breakdown, willing to sacrifice civil liberties for actions against blasphemy, and allegedly deviant religions and individuals (Menchik 2019). Religious issues became a crucial part of political contestations, especially as a tool to trigger emotions among voters on social media (Lim 2017). Some observers and scholars have argued that the 2019 election saw a return to ideological competition with the Prabowo camp attracting pious Muslims (*santri*), and Jokowi supporters drawn from all walks of life, representing a more tolerant and inclusive Indonesia (Aspinell 2019). However, others have pointed out that Islamic support for Prabowo was not as strong as often assumed, indicating tensions within the Prabowo alliance (in particular between PKS and Gerinda) and the fact that many pious Muslims saw Prabowo merely as a lesser evil compared to Jokowi who they accused of being anti-ulama and anti-Islam (Fachrudin 2019).

It has been demonstrated for the 2014 election that, in ideological terms, Indonesian politics referred to encompassing signifiers rather than to a field of ideological competition. Nationalism and Islam are signifiers of a political consensus, whereas conflicting interaction and competition over a distinct set of ideological orientations within a conflicting consensus is largely absent (Duile and Bens 2017). In the recent 2019 election, the emotional debates between the camps engaging in fake news and the fact that both candidates applied similar approaches led to a 'polarisation paradox' (Tapsell 2019a). This argument fits nicely in what Vedi Hadiz (2017b) describes as the 'bigger picture' of oligarchy, Islam and nationalism with Islam and nationalism properly understood as within the context of political economy. As the oligarchy is much more decentralised in post-New Order Indonesia, the factions within it engage in struggles for resources and thus in supposed ideological struggles, eager to portray themselves as distinct alternatives. However, the factions within the oligarchy do not submit to distinct political ideologies. They rather manoeuvre pragmatically within the given 'common sense' of nationalism and Islam.

Especially since the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Islam has been incorporated into the project of national stability and economic development by referring, for instance, to Islamic ethics (Williams 2015). Slater (2018) has argued that political parties behave rather opportunistically when forming cartels. Since Jokowi is ready to share power with potentially every party, there is no opposition in the sense of an ideological alternative. However, others have argued that ideology plays a role, describing the 2019 election campaign as being polarised between traditionalist Muslims concerned with pluralism and nationalism, and modernist Muslims stressing the importance of Islam within the nation (Fossati et al. 2019). Fossati (2019) argued that ideology, in the form of the *aliran* (currents) inherited from Indonesia's democratic era in the 1950s, became important again. In the following, we argue that polarisation only takes place within the frame of an overall narrow 'common sense'. Our findings rather suggest the

absence of ideological struggles. What appears as polarisation might take up legacies from Indonesia's history, but overall there are no profoundly different concepts of how Indonesia should be in official political campaigning. The 'common sense' is a consensus of the elite and keeps challenging ideologies at bay.

This Gramscian 'common sense' in the context of Indonesia is a combination of Islam and nationalism. Both Islam and Indonesian nationalism appear as signifiers, as terms within the political language and as symbols constituting the legitimate frame of political discourse. However, these signifiers are what Laclau (1996: 40–46) called 'empty signifiers' as they are not grounded in objective reality and lack both subjective and objective meaning. The field of the 'common sense' thus needs the openness of the signifiers, but at the same time it broadens the legitimate meaning; the signifiers, as we argue below, are often applied without further context. However, in hoax narratives, their respective meaning is the subject of restriction. Islam cannot mean, for instance, an Islamic state since it would reject the complementary signifier of nationalism. Conversely, nationalism cannot rely on communism or secularism since they are opposed to religion. This complex does, however, leave room for subsidiary issues such as the question of whether sharia law should be introduced or what status religious minorities should have in Indonesia. But whereas such subsidiary issues fuel polarisation, the overarching frame of the 'common sense' appears to be solid and provides no room for ideological alternatives.

The official political language: the Islam-nationalism complex

In this section, we first analyse how this field of political expression of the 'common sense' works in political contestation. This serves the aim of mapping the ideological coordinates in contemporary Indonesia. In a second step, the hoax narratives are situated within the ideological field of political symbolism and language. We aim to illustrate the issues of political language and symbolism as the foundation of the 'common sense' with a case study of election campaign banners. The main reason why election campaign banners are an ideal tool for analysing the 'common sense' is that they are the most widespread tool in political campaigning. In the weeks before elections they are omnipresent in public spaces, especially in urban areas where the banners reach virtually everyone who leaves his or her house. They address all social groups. However, for a more detailed analysis of the 'common sense', other forms of political mass communication such as, for instance, televised debates, the online presence of the candidates on social media, and parties' manifestos, are also interesting. Analysing *spanduk* is a limitation, but it nevertheless provides a good insight into the symbolism of the 'common sense' as the political elite communicates through them to common people.

There has not yet been much research conducted on Indonesian election campaign banners. The most outstanding and comprehensive research was conducted by Colm Fox and Jeremy Menchik (2011) who gathered and analysed more than 4,000 campaign banners between 2009 and 2011 in different provinces. The study suggests that appeals to identity are common and distinct religious symbolism was applied in areas where two or three different religious groups live. Kesari and Made's (2014) account of election campaign banners in the 2013 Bali elections investigated the phenomenon from the vantage of speech act theories. Referring to Barthes' semiotic analysis, Anugerah et al. (2013)

argued that 'black' campaigning was present in the *spanduk* of the 2012 Jakarta election, but conducted by anonymous perpetrators. Ermawati and Nusarini (2014: 64), who investigated the election campaign banners of the 2014 election in Bantul regency in the Yogyakarta Special Region, among others, point to 'norms of interaction' based on norms commonly shared among distinct political parties. Duile and Bens' (2017) post-Marxist account of election campaign banners in Pontianak in West Kalimantan, stresses that the language of *spanduk* unfolds within a discursive frame of consensus rather than competition. All this research contains interesting insights. Our aim here, however, is to investigate the semiotics of election campaign banners within the context of fake news.

For this case study we analysed 124 election campaign banners in South Jakarta. They were collected in February and March 2019 at four different sites, namely at Jalan Pengadegan and Cawang train station (first site), Jalan Pasar Minggu and Jalan Pahlawan (second site), Jalan Duren Tiga and Jalan Pengadegan Selatan (third site) and at Jalan Kemang Raya (fourth site). The first three sites are middle and lower middle class neighbourhoods. The nearby apartment complex of Kalibata City is one of the biggest middle class apartment complexes in Jakarta, and the sites are dominated by food stalls and simple restaurants (*warung*). In contrast, Jalan Kemang Raya is an upper middle class and upper class area with more expensive boutiques, restaurants and cafes.

Our aim was to investigate the language and symbolism of the election campaign banners. The majority of *spanduk* in our case study are from the Jokowi camp (69, while 51 are from Prabowo or candidates whose parties supported Prabowo, and 6 from independent candidates). Aside from banners directly devoted to Jokowi and/or his running mate Ma'ruf Amin, in the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin camp we included candidates and party banners from Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P), Golongan Karya (Golkar), Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), Nasional Demokrat (NasDem), Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat (Hanura), Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI), Partai Persatuan Indonesia (Perindo), Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia (PKPI), and Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB). Those from the Prabowo-Sandiaga Uno coalition consisted of Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra), Partai Demokrat (PD), Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), Partai Berkarya (PB) and Partai Garuda (PG).

The banners were analysed for their symbolism and language. Some nationalist symbols and language were identified, such as red-and-white national flags; references to nationalist terms such as Pancasila, the national ideology; national symbols such as the *monument nasional*; or portrayals of Sukarno, first president and one of the founding fathers of Indonesia; but also the frequently used notions of 'the people' (*bangsa, rakyat*). We also found Islamic language and symbolism, for instance expressed in Islamic clothes (*jilbab* for female candidates, white collarless shirts for male candidates), Islamic greetings, Arabic letters, Islamic symbols such as the *kabah* and the Crescent, or terms such as *ummah* or *ummat* (the community of Muslims) or Islamic clerics (ulama). Some candidates also depicted themselves in the company of ulamas to demonstrate that they had the blessing of acknowledged Islamic authorities. Other topics and symbolism were rarely found on the banners. There were no references, for instance, to environmental or labour issues and even the strongly debated topics of corruption and intolerance were found on only 5 (4%) of the banners.

We found nationalist symbolism and language on 49 (71%) of *spanduk* from the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin camp, and the same number that contained references to Islam. A higher proportion of references to each category were found in Prabowo-Sandiaga Uno banners (90% contained nationalist and 94% Islamic references). In the latter camp, more references to nationalism were made through the use of the notions of *rakyat*[1] and *bangsa* (31%, compared to 23% of banners from the Jokowi camp), and this was often connected to terms such as *ummat* and ulama.

However, the same patterns could also be found in the Jokowi camp, especially among candidates from the PBB, who applied the slogan *bela Islam, bela rakyat, bela NKRI* (defend Islam, defend the people, defend the Unitary State of the Indonesian Republic (see Figure 1). Candidates from non-Islamic parties also relied on the discursive connections of 'Islam' and 'the people'. A banner for a Golkar candidate, for instance, reads *membangun ummat dan bangsa* (develop the *ummat* and the people, see Figure 2), and the candidate is dressed in Muslim clothes in front of an Indonesian flag. Unsurprisingly, candidates from the Prabowo camp also made reference to the people, the *ummat,* and Islamic clergy as they utilised the discursive format from the 2016–2017 protests against then-governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, commonly referred to as Ahok (who is a Protestant and of Chinese descent), in which Islamic organisations also mobilised nationalism for their purposes (Duile 2017). Some *spanduk*, even contained direct references to the vigilante FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Front of the Defenders of Islam), which played an important role in the protests against Ahok, and its chairman Rizieq Shihab (see Figure 3). However, in these cases nationalist symbolism was also present. Whereas references to the FPI were only used by the Prabowo camp, the rhetoric of *ummat,* ulama and Islamic symbolism in general were common features of many *spanduk* in both camps.

In terms of symbolism, the banners in the poorer and wealthier neighbourhoods were similar, but one interesting difference could be observed on the *spanduk* in the upper class neighbourhood of Kemang. Not only were banners associated with the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin camp more common, most of the camp's banners were directly dedicated to Jokowi and/or his running mate Ma'ruf Amin, and almost all of them contained strong references to Islam. On one banner (see Figure 4), for instance, Jokowi was referred to as *umara* (an Arabic term for a political leader), and Ma'ruf Amin as ulama. Both were portrayed as the choice of the *ummat* (*pilihan ummat*). The terms *umara* and ulama refer to proper Islamic leadership. The PBB, a party in Jokowi's coalition, even applied the slogan *bela Islam* (defend Islam), which had originated from the anti-Ahok protests. Other banners in the Kemang area stressed the support of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) for Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin, connecting NU identity to identification with Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin (see Figure 5). In other areas, the banners stressed the candidates' different features. Near Cawang, a lower middle class area known for the presence of vigilante groups, for instance, some candidates from the Prabowo camp highlighted their closeness to the FPI, while in contrast the Pancasila Youth (Pemuda Pancasila), a notorious anti-

[1]The signifier *rakyat* was a widely applied term during the Sukarno era when it was used by leftist parties. Under Sukarno's depoliticising New Order, it was replaced by the apolitical term *masyarakat*. The term *rakyat* is now more common again, but rather than referring to the commoners, the notion of *rakyat* now points to the unity of the nation and the ordinary people as a part of it.

Figure 1. Campaign banner in south Jakarta of a Partai Bulan Bintang candidate claiming to defend 'Islam, defend the people, defend the Unitary State of Indonesia' (*bela Islam, bela rakyat, bela NKRI*). Photo by Sukri Tamma, January 2019.

Figure 2. Campaign banner of a Golkar party candidate seen in south Jakarta, claiming to develop the community of Muslims (*umat*) and the people (*bangsa*), with the nationalist symbol (the Indonesian flag), south Jakarta. Photo by Sukri Tamma, February 2019.

Figure 3. Campaign banner of Prabowo's Gerindra Party seen in south Jarkarta, displaying the candidate's support from the vigilante Front Pembela Islam (FPI), with its chairperson placed in the centre and visually higher than Prabowo and his running mate Sandiaga Uno. Photo by Sukri Tamma, March 2019.

communist protection racket (vigilante gang), set up a huge banner in support of Jokowi (see Figure 6).

Among candidates belonging to parties said to be nationalist rather than Islamic, 71% applied Islamic language and symbolism on their banners, against 92% for candidates belonging to Islamic parties. Nationalist symbolism was applied less by both camps:

Figure 4. A political banner of the Jokowi camp in south Jakarta, asking people to vote for a ruler (using the Islamic term of *umara*) and for the ulamas. Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin appear in Islamic attire as the 'choice of the Islamic community' (*pilihan umat*). Photo by Sukri Tamma, March 2019.

69% among candidates from nationalist parties and 82% in the Islamic camp. This indicates that Islamic parties felt it necessary to stress their nationalism. However, notions of the nation were more often expressed by the Islamic camp through references to the terms *rakyat* or *bangsa*.

There was not a single *spanduk* that accused other camps of using hoax narratives. Only two *spanduk* made reference to hoaxes in order to counteract them, in particular the accusation that Jokowi is not a pious Muslim, but rather a secret member of the outlawed Communist Party (see Figure 7). The banners mention Jokowi's achievements for Indonesian Muslims and portray him as a clean leader from whom all false accusations rebound.

Despite the absence of hoaxes in the public sphere, it is nevertheless important to analyse political language used in public to better understand them. Public political language reacts to hoaxes, for instance by stressing Jokowi's Islamic identity or Prabowo's commitment to Indonesia's national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (United in Diversity, or more literally, 'There are many, they are one'), which he referenced in televised debates and often on his Facebook account. However, the *spanduk* have shown that both camps situated themselves around the acknowledged signifiers of nationalism and Islam. They thus constructed the outside of the nationalist-Islamic frame; on the one hand Islam without nationalism (terror organisations such as ISIS, the now outlawed Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia or HTI, or any notion of Islamic state referred to as *khilafa*), and on the other hand, the idea of an Indonesian nation without Islam (secularism and, moreover, communism/atheism and its connotations, for instance communist China).

Whereas the research by Fox and Menchik (2011) focused on differences due to issues of particular cultural identities, we found that commonalities were stressed in the context of Jakarta. That might be due to the multi-ethnic environment where nationalism and, in

Figure 5. This banner seen in south Jakarta displays the Nahdlatul Ulama's support for Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin with the words, 'I, my father, my grandfrather, my teachers are members of the NU, so I choose number 1 [duo candidate]: to build the nation with honesty and faith.' Photo by Sukri Tamma, March 2019.

Figure 6. A political campaign banner seen in south Jakarta, of the urban right-wing paramilitary organisation Pemuda Pancasila, supporting Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin. Photo by Sukri Tamma, April 2019.

Figure 7. This campaign banner seen in south Jakarta depicts Jokowi as a pious Islamic leader. Jokowi's white shirt serves as a protection shield against the hoaxes. All hoax claims are shown rebounding from his white shirt. Photo by Sukri Tamma, March 2019.

many cases, Islam, provide a common ground to articulate belonging as Indonesian citizens and thus constitute an ideological realm of common political expressions. In the sphere of official political communication, the frame of the Gramscian 'common sense' in Indonesia is set by Islam and nationalism. These signifiers appear rather vague in their content but as entirely 'good'. As the governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil, said, people require a balance between Islam and nationalism. They demand a combination (Tapsell 2019a). Islamic and nationalist signifiers are thus not only applied on election campaign banners but also on social media, and are reproduced by supporters of the respective camps. Organisations such as the FPI, NU, or Pemuda Pancasila express their belonging to one of the camps by applying their signifiers. which are commonly shared signifiers. No real ideological split between the camps is found on the election campaign banners, and what might emerge as distinct ideologies are rather ascriptions from the given camp's opponents, locating it outside the frame of the 'common sense' described above. Here, hoaxes fulfil a crucial function as they do not only rely on the frame of the 'common sense' but also reach beyond it. Accusations of being outside the 'common sense' reinforce the very frame of the 'common sense' rather than challenge it because the accused camp counteracts the hoaxes by applying the 'common sense' with a strong emphasis, thereby reproducing it.

It can be argued that the presence of nationalist and Islamic signifiers throughout the two camps is due to strategic reasons. In the wake of *reformasi*, political parties in Indonesia have become catch-all parties (Tanuwidjaja 2012). Generally, there is a huge number of swing voters due to a low degree of personal identification with specific parties (Fossati et al. 2019). Thus the political expression of parties needs, in this context, a clearly defined 'common sense' expressed in an ideological field filled with commonly acknowledged signifiers. Strategic political thinking is only possible within the very frame of the 'common sense'. Referring to the 'common sense', the banners indirectly counter 'black' campaigning and hoaxes (accusations that a party or a politician is against either Islam or Indonesian nationalism), as well as downplay extreme positions within their own camp.

Hoaxes in the 2019 election and their ideological content

In the 2019 election both camps realised the importance of social media campaigning. Ross Tapsell (2019a) argued that the polarised online discourse was due, to a large extent, to the creation of partisan 'buzzer' teams. As in the case of the Philippines (Ong et al. 2019), hyper-partisan platforms and influencers emerged with different reaches, from celebrity 'buzzers' (social media influencers) to micro-influencers, engaged in campaigning. Not all 'buzzers' spread fake news, and some such as Denny Siregar or the partisan news site Seword (both supporting the Jokowi government), often spread biased information appealing to the reader's emotions, sometimes verging on fake news. Irsyad (2019) noted that while the Indonesian government block many web pages – 70,000 in 2018 – enforcement power is very limited when it comes to social media. With that in mind, it is not surprising that political actors try to exploit social media for their benefit, and this includes the spreading of fake news, mostly spread through instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp (Nadzir et al. 2019: 4). This decentralised spread of misinformation makes it more difficult to control.

However, fake news seeking to exploit emotional issues is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Hoaxes are regarded as a threat to democracy, and the police and the state apparatus have taken some action against the perpetrators in recent years as hoaxes have begun to spread rapidly on social media. In September 2015, online activists established the Forum Anti Fitnah, Hasut, dan Hoax (Forum Against Slander, Incitement and Fake News, FAFHH) with the support of the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) in order to monitor news shared on social media. Kominfo regularly issues statements identifying hoaxes. Between September 2018 and February 2019, Kominfo identified 181 hoaxes aiming to discredit either Jokowi or Prabowo (Hutabarat 2019). Spreading fake news is punishable (with both fine and prison sentence; see: Tapsell 2019b) in Indonesia but cases are seldom taken to court. In February 2019, however, the case of three women in West Java drew public attention. They were arrested after they declared publicly that Jokowi was aiming to legalise same-sex marriage and would outlaw the Islamic prayer call (*azan*). The women were arrested and arraigned (Permadi 2019). This hoax made sense to many Prabowo supporters, since it relied on larger narratives very common among the popular classes. It fits, for instance, into the narrative that Jokowi is a secret member of the outlawed PKI as well as of Chinese descent – and therefore associated with the Communist Party of China (Hadiz 2019).

Despite all efforts to counteract hoaxes, fake news was a crucial feature of the 2019 election campaign (Lamb 2019). In April 2019, a team of researchers from various universities in Indonesia launched a quantitative study on hoax narratives which gives an important insight into the narratives the hoaxes rely on. The study was presented publicly but a published version is not available. It was, however, covered in newspaper articles both on- and offline, and it provided interesting insights into hoax narratives during the 2019 election campaign. According to the survey, the five most common narratives were: that Jokowi has links with the outlawed Indonesian Communist Party (*Jokow anak PKI*), a narrative that 20.8% of respondents had heard of, and 36.8% believed it; that Jokowi was seeking to criminalise the *ulama* (heard by 33.8% of respondents and believed by 19.8%); that Jokowi wanted to ban the Islamic prayer call (*azan*) was known by 25.5% and believed by 19.5%). However, there were also narratives discrediting the Prabowo-Sandiaga Uno camp. The narrative that radical Islamic groups such as the outlawed HTI stood behind Prabowo was known by 22.2% of the respondents and believed to be true by 25.8%. The rumour that Prabowo, together with the exiled head of the FPI, Rizieq Shihab, aimed to establish sharia law throughout Indonesia (*NKRI bersyariah*) was familiar to 20.8% of respondents and 36.3% considered it to be true. Other hoax narratives against Jokowi included the accusation that he was selling Indonesia to China, for instance by letting illegal Chinese workers into the country, or that Jokowi wanted to legalise same-sex marriage. Another narrative against Prabowo claimed that he was collaborating with the so-called Islamic State in the Middle East (ISIS). Sandiaga Uno was also reported by fake news that he had had extra marital affairs (Irawanto 2019; Maharani 2019).

In a survey conducted by LIPI (Lembarga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, Indonesian Institute of Science) (Nadzir et al. 2019), three narratives were identified as the most widespread fake news, namely the presence of millions of Chinese labourers in Indonesia, the resurgence of the outlawed PKI, and the government's intention to criminalise the ulama. The survey, conducted in nine provinces, also revealed that educated people are more susceptible to hoaxes since they tend to have a higher exposure to

misinformation through various internet devices. Contrary to the popular opinion that education immunises people against misinformation, the study found that education alone does not have an effect on how people perceive hoaxes. Whereas, for instance, 45% of people who had only elementary school education believed that the PKI was about to re-emerge, 53% of those who had undertaken tertiary education (MA or PhD) believed this. The hoax narrative regarding Chinese labourers was more popular among people with lower education while belief that the ulamas were to be criminalised was high in all groups, albeit higher among more educated people (Nadzir et al. 2019: 7). There were differences between rural and urban areas concerning the specific narratives at play. In urban areas people especially tended to believe the anti-Chinese hoaxes, the anti-communist narrative of PKI resurgence was especially popular in rural areas (Nadzir et al. 2019: 9). The overall survey results can be interpreted as a sign that certain dominant narratives are widespread across distinct social groups.

It has been stressed that the campaign battle on social media mostly took a rather personal approach (Irawanto 2019). Because of the lack of ideological competition, the personal features of the candidates were highlighted. Jokowi portrayed himself as a humble politician, simply as a 'good person' (*orang baik*), while Prabowo emphasised his military background and aimed to appear as a strong, nationalist leader. Similarly, hoaxes usually referred to the personal features of the candidates. However, we argue that behind the personalised misinformation is the Gramscian 'common sense', the narrative that the accused candidate is not in line with the way politics in Indonesia should be. With regard to hoaxes about Jokowi, the 'common sense' suggests that proper politicians act in harmony with Islamic values. Indonesian-ness, as it is constructed within the hegemonic discourse, is inevitably connected to Islam, and the national ideology of Pancasila is pivotal here. Pancasila is not solely Islamic, but the concept of the almighty God (*Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*) as the first principle (*sila*) justifies Islam's position within society in general, and within the political realm in particular. Indonesian-ness is both applied and reproduced in hoaxes with reference to its constitutive outside, to what it is not and to what threatens it. For instance, some hoaxes suggested that Jokowi sought to criminalise the ulamas, at the same time reinforcing the connection between Islam and Indonesian identity, and thus aiming to portray Jokowi as un-Indonesian. The same is true for the accusation that Jokowi had ties with the PKI. As the PKI is an allegedly atheist organisation, this hoax also relies on the symbolic connection between Islam and acknowledged religions in general on the one hand, and the Indonesian nation on the other. Hoaxes about Jokowi's secret cooperation with China drew on anti-Chinese resentment, applying petty bourgeois populism which suggests that wealthy Chinese were plotting against the indigenes (*pribumi*). These resentments were also applied as a tool of the political elite in New Order Indonesia (Robinson and Hadiz 2004: 132) and are still present within the 'common sense' of ordinary Indonesians. Here the 'common sense' suggests that nationalism is a threatened identity and that politicians have to protect it.

On the other side there is the *kebhinekaan* (diversity) narrative. This narrative is also a constitutional feature of Indonesian nationalism, as it represents the national motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (United in Diversity). However, Islam and diversity are not simply in opposition to each other. They usually emerge as compatible, and only occasionally in conflict, as for instance when the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) issued a fatwa that pluralism is haram (Kersten 2015: 1). But it is important to

note here that the MUI did not declare *kebhinekaan* to be haram but *pluralisme*. Whereas *pluralisme* appears to be a Western concept, *kebhinekaan* also can refer to a plural society[2] in which all religious groups stay within their social units to ensure the purity of their religious doctrines. Diversity, as declared haram by the MUI, was seen as a means to threaten the purity of the various religions. However, the diversity narrative as a nationalist expression is used both by Islamic and opposition groups including groups like the FPI (Duile 2017).

However, an alliance with Islamic forces creates leverage for political enemies as occurred fake news suggesting that Prabowo would establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. These hoaxes aim to depict the relation between nationalism and Islam as unbalanced in Prabowo's political agenda. Indeed, observers noted that Prabowo's rallies attracted *santri* expressing their Islamic identity (Aspinell 2019), and similarly, the *spanduk* from his camp often contained Islamic tenets. Hoax narratives drive these Islamic beliefs to the extreme so that they appear to be outside the legitimate framework. Other hoaxes turned Islamic principles against the Prabowo-Sandiaga Uno camp. The accusations that Sandiaga Uno had extramarital affairs portrayed him as not living in accordance with Islamic moral norms, and rumours that Prabowo is actually a Christian aimed to delegitimise him within the Islamic narrative. The latter hoax arose after he joined a Christmas celebration with his family. However, Prabowo's connection to Christianity – his mother was of Protestant faith – provided discursive capital to counter hoaxes claiming that Prabowo wanted to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia (Anatasia 2019).

In other words, political capital ('Islam' in the Prabowo camp and 'pluralism' in the Jokowi camp) can easily be transformed into obstacles through hoax narratives. But in order to do so, the features of the political capital of each camp must be pushed to its extreme, and thus into the realm of the constitutive outside of Indonesian-ness. The 'common sense' in Indonesian politics suggests that politics is less a competition of distinct alternative ideologies and more a contest between people applying the same principles. It sets the frame of Indonesia as a harmony state, relying on sameness rather than ideological distinction. In the current historical formation, harmony (*kerukunan*) is an ideal that all political groups agree on. That harmony is achieved when state and society – often seen as a single unit following the New Order era (cf. Bourchier 1998: 210) – all subscribe to the political language of Islam and nationalism. Competition only emerges when it comes to the question of who best fulfils the requirements.

Official campaigning versus hoaxes: the political language of *halus* and *kasar*

If we look at the *spanduk* or other official media of political communication we can indeed see how hoaxes indirectly shape this transmission. Direct references to hoaxes are rarely made, but the widespread use of Islamic signifiers by the Jokowi camp can be interpreted as a means to counteract hoaxes suggesting that Jokowi is anti-Islam. The same is true for nationalist and inclusive stances articulated by the Prabowo camp. As candidates in the Prabowo camp emphasised their association to Islamic

[2]This term was originally introduced by John Furnival (1967: 446–459) to describe the late colonial society of the Netherlands Indies to denote a society under a single political unit but with distinct social groups which only meet in the market place but do not develop common political demands.

organisations such as the FPI, Prabowo himself stressed the *kebhinekaan* approach, for instance by using greetings from religions other than Islam on his social media accounts or during the televised debates with Jokowi.

Hoaxes mostly spread on social media among exclusive groups, a phenomenon also found during the anti-Ahok protests and labelled as 'algorithmic enclaves' (Lim 2017). Neither Prabowo nor Jokowi posted any hoaxes concerning their rival. However, we suggest that hoaxes have the important function of expressing the supposed ideological distinction between the camps in language accessible to the popular classes. The political elite represents itself differently to how it is represented within the popular classes. In order to understand these distinctions, it is useful to refer to the *halus-kasar* dichotomy in Javanese thought (also common among other groups in Indonesia). We do not suggest that this dichotomy is paramount in essentialist Javanese or Indonesian culture. Rather, we propose applying the concept as a tool for people to think about and make sense of power relations as these very relations that shape political perception. The dichotomy helps shed light on the feudal settings of Javanese sultanates and the legitimising of the elite's position. It also played out in the ideology of the supposedly indigenous, hierarchic nation of the New Order.

Within this dichotomy, *kasar* (rough, coarse, rude, impolite) is the domain of the common people, the elite (*priyayi*) are *halus* (smooth, soft) as a means of exercising power. *Halus* itself means power (Anderson 2007: 39). The domain of *halus* is also the absence of conflict. Benedict Anderson (2007: 38) explains:

> The quality which the prijaji have traditionally stressed as distinguishing them from the rest of the population is that of being halus. The meaning of this term, which eludes precise definition in English … is to a certain extent covered by the idea of smoothness, the quality of not being disturbed, spotted, uneven, or discolored. Smoothness of spirit means self control, smoothness of appearance means beauty and elegance, smoothness of behavior means politeness and sensitivity. Conversely, the antithetical quality of being kasar means lack of control, irregularity, imbalance, disharmony, ugliness, coarseness, and impurity.

Accusing Jokowi, for instance, of being a member of the PKI, saying that Sandiaga Uno has had extramarital affairs, or claiming that Prabowo wants to destroy Pancasila and replace it with Islamic law are *kasar* political utterances since they are inevitably designed to cause conflict and disharmony. However, hoaxes are a way for ordinary people to make sense of what it means to be Indonesian by identifying the un-Indonesian and projecting it onto a part of the political elite. The realm of social media as a realm of *kasar* communication, as communication among the ordinary people (we exclude the candidates' official accounts here) is the place in which the hoaxes spread. This realm appears as independent from official political communication that comes directly from the elite. However, it does not represent an independent sphere of communication for the subaltern classes. On the contrary, it provides the means for factions within the political elite to communicate with commoners and gain political capital by spreading hoaxes.

Hoax narratives are not found directly on *spanduk* or on official social media accounts, but the two rivals nevertheless refrained from publicly explaining that some narratives about the other camp were hoaxes. They could have done so, for instance, in the televised debates, if they genuinely intended to remove hoaxes from the election campaign. They did not do so for perhaps two reasons. Firstly, dealing with the issue would be an unusual

and inappropriate step for the elite whose practice is to keep silent about the *kasar*. Secondly, the hoaxes might be 'dirty', even *kasar*, but they fit well into their campaigns and provided a form of political communication with the popular masses and created a notion of distinction between the camps. Hoaxes are therefore part of both Indonesian politics and its 'dirty' outside.

Although hoaxes are not found on official campaign banners, the latter are nevertheless designed to indirectly respond to hoaxes as they apply the 'common sense'. The Jokowi camp applied signifiers of Islam and the Prabowo camp depicted itself in nationalistic terms. This shows that the *kasar* realm of the hoaxes and the *halus* realm of official political communication are not isolated from each other but relate to each other through the 'common sense'.

Conclusion: common sense, hoaxes, and the politics of reconciling the nation

Vedi Hadiz (2019) pointed out that 'Indonesia's long election year has rarely been about contests between outright reformers and outright reactionaries, given the continuing dominance of oligarchic interests. Nor have the contests been between outright secularists and outright Islamists'. As we have argued in this article, the election further tightened the status quo. The political language of Islam and nationalism kept alternative political languages such as leftist approaches at bay. This is, however, nothing new in Indonesian politics. The new element is the strengthening of the supposed polarisation due to algorithmic enclaves on social media. This article has argued that hoaxes are not just false political accusations designed to discredit political rivals. Concerning the lack of ideological competition, they were an inevitable means of creating the impression that the camps competing in the 2019 election were substantially distinct from each other. They were an important reason why people felt that a polarisation took place during the campaign, regardless of the fact that the candidates appeared to be so similar – a phenomenon labelled the 'polarisation paradox' (Tapsell 2019a). But as hoaxes refer to commonly acknowledged signifiers within the public sphere, they produce a radical difference since they place the accused outside the realm of Indonesian-ness.

As the hegemonic 'common sense' consists mainly of the empty signifiers of Islam and nationalism, these signifiers are also adopted by the popular classes. These classes have not possessed a political language of their own since the bloody eradication of the Indonesian left in 1965–66. As they lack their own political expressions, political representation via the language and signifiers of Islam and nationalism creates a sense of unity, and hoaxes aim to destroy that very unity. This pattern is why we suggest labelling the signifiers found in hoaxes (such as 'communism' or 'Islamic state') as 'constitutive outsides',[3] as discursively constructed Other, and enemies that are said to have no common ground with the 'inside' of Indonesian-ness.

When we argue that hoaxes rely on that constitutive outside, we suggest that they are in a certain way necessary for the political identity of nationalism and Islam as a complex. Communism, secularism, as well as the spectre of an Islamic state are threats people

[3]On the term 'constitutive outside', see Thomassen (2005: 110).

usually talk about. They are referred to in official political communication because they threaten the purity and unity of the 'common sense'. These constitutive outsides appear in the *kasar* ways of political communication whenever it is applied to official politics. However, the way to disturb the unity of the Islam-nationalism complex is by referring to it as the norm. Not surprisingly, many Indonesians voted in the 2019 election for what they believed to be the lesser evil. Progressive people voted for Jokowi because he would at least not turn Indonesia into an Islamic state. Religious people voted for Prabowo because they said that he would at least not criminalise the ulamas (Fachrudin 2019). This is how voters were mobilised though hoaxes. Thus, on the inside, this ideological constellation works by suggesting a balance between nationalism and Islam. Tapsell (2019a) wrote that consensus between nationalism and Islam is preferred, and this means incorporating 'opposition' forces rather than making a stand against the respective other camp. Signifiers from both Islam and nationalism are usually combined but also point towards the outside. In the case of Islam, it is 'radical' Islam as represented by the outlawed organisations of ISIS, HTI and, to a certain degree, the concept of *NKRI bersyariah* (the Unitary State of Indonesia under Islamic law). Nationalism, on the other side, includes the concept of diversity (*kebhinekaan*) but also points to the constitutive outside of Indonesian-ness. Pluralism, even though associated with *kebinekaan*, is potentially an outside since MUI issued its fatwa against pluralism in 2005. Further outsides are the ideas of secularism, and thus atheism, communism and anything foreign, especially China as an influential communist country.

Hoax narratives are part of what Gramsci (1999: 626) called 'spontaneous philosophy', the everyday concepts and general assumptions of the popular classes. Arranged around the signifiers of the harmony state, hoaxes are a part of the political economy since they are a means for the factions within the oligarchy to struggle for power, yet they match the 'spontaneous philosophy' of many ordinary people. A common symbolic frame and its subsequent outsides both create the illusion of an ideological struggle between the camps and set the condition for reconciliation which appears as a reconciliation of the nation itself. After Jokowi and Prabowo decided to establish a coalition, Erick Thohir, oligarch and currently Minister of State Enterprises, announced that there are no longer tadpoles (*cebong*) and bats (*kampret*) – derogative terms for Jokowi and Prabowo supporters respectively. 'There are no differences anymore, because we are one people (*satu bangsa*) and one nation (*tanah air Indonesia*)' (Brata 2019, translation by the author).

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