



Congregational Morning Prayer Movement: A Political Movement or a Spiritual Movement?

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Abstract

The congregational morning prayer movement in Indonesia aims to promote the importance of prayer and build a sense of community among Muslims. However, the emergence of the phenomenon of the morning prayer movement in the congregation occurred ahead of the North Sumatra Governor Election in Medan City, Indonesia. It is important to understand how the morning prayer movement in congregation is a spiritual movement or an identity politics movement. This study used a qualitative research method with a desk research approach. Primary data were obtained from reports, documents, websites, and various sources from previous studies. Analysis techniques were through data reduction, data presentation becomes conclusion. The study results show that the morning prayer movement in congregation gathers a



spiritual momentum capable of moving individuals to form a brotherhood and to thus forge unity. This movement encourages the emergence of views about individual involvement capable of building emotional closeness, which is the culmination of human relations. In political situations, this movement is used as a method of approach to building emotional brotherhood and unity in building realizing political goals. Regional head candidate pairs make this movement a form of presenting themselves as leaders with emotional closeness towards Muslims. The intensity of carrying out the morning prayer movement in the congregation can influence one's decision to choose. It must be admitted that identity political sentiment through the morning prayer movement in the congregation has clearly had a broad impact on social and political life in Indonesia.

Introduction

The congregational dawn movement is a communal movement in Indonesia that invites Muslims to perform the congregational dawn prayer. This movement aims to promote the importance of prayer and build a sense of community among Muslims. This movement was organized by various groups, including educational organizations and religious organizations (Siadeka, 2017; Ristekdikti.go.id, 2015). However, most candidates for regional heads in Indonesia use mosques for political campaigns, which can hinder improving the quality of elections because they do not encourage the public to be more rational in supporting candidates (Tempo.co, 2019). Moreover, there have been several controversies surrounding the movement, including allegations of candidate campaign violations that lead to the politicization of religion (Fachri & Lukihardianti, 2018; Saptowalyono & Nababan, 2023).

In Islam, the morning prayer has many virtues; moreover, it is carried out in a congregation at the mosque. Those who carry it out will get rewards and the formation of individual character is one of these. The challenge is fatigue, carried out before morning, leading to many arguments saying that those who carry out the orders for morning prayers in congregation are considered to be avoiding hypocritical behaviour. Hypocritical behaviour is always synonymous with individuals who are not trustworthy and honest and behave with different hearts at different times. In general, prayers have many roles in bringing victory over 'the enemy'. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, many victories were achieved by Muslims after performing the morning prayers. Rasulullah SAW believed that prayer time was the most likely time the prayer would be answered (Husain, 2006). This means that the morning prayer movement in the congregation as a strategy and priority is interpreted as a form of struggle and unity.

Then many emerging phenomena of the "Congregational Morning Prayer Movement" have occurred in Regional Head Elections, especially in Medan City (Sumutprov.go.id, 2018). The movement was led by the candidate for Deputy Governor of North Sumatra, Musa Rajekshah, who invited the public to pray together at dawn. Several sources state that this movement significantly influenced the victory of Edy Rahmayadi and Musa Rajekshah in the North Sumatra Governor Election (Detik.com, 2022). However, previous research shows the politicization of identity and religion during the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election in Medan City (Chaniago & Sardini, 2020; Siregar et al., 2022) .

Concerning worship, this is often interpreted as a form of individual activity in places of worship. The reproach of this regulation places various religious activities as being inseparable from political life. Confirmation of Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning the prohibition of election participants from campaigns in places of worship, education and government facilities (Mantalean, 2023). There are differences of opinion about whether political campaigning is permissible in places of worship. Some argue that political activities are allowed in places of worship because political ideas originate from religion (Abdillah, 2015). At the same time, others



argue that the use of places of worship for political campaigns is a deviation from the true purpose of places of worship (Asarah & Nofialdi, 2022).

Practical political activity in congregational morning prayers raises polemics related to spiritual activities, which are considered not to show a vertical relationship but rather horizontal movements among fellow Muslims in forming associations. The intersection of politics and places of worship shows that during election years, many Americans hear at least something about politics in their places of worship (Gecewicz, 2020). Another study reinforces previous statements that there has been an impact of stopping political campaigns on church donations and finds that the stopping increases donations (Hungerman et al., 2018). Meanwhile, candidates' politicization of religion in mosques is one of the phenomena inherent in the general election process. This phenomenon does not only continue after the election because politics in Islam cannot be separated. Religion's impact on the birth of identity politics cannot be justified because it creates political polarization. This polarization makes the practices of congregational morning prayer movements considered normative and do not violate regulations. It is important to see how the morning prayer movement in congregation is a spiritual movement or an identity politics movement.

Literature Review

Islam recognizes the term politics as a form of regulating one's behaviour. Politics in Arabic is known as "*siyasa*". Al-Siyasa also means governing, controlling, managing, or making decisions, governing people, governing, and leading them. The meaning of Siyasa contains two dimensions. The goals to be achieved through the control process and how to control these (Zawawi, 2015).

Meanwhile, the mosque is the centre of religious activity that deals not only with vertical relations but with fellow human beings (horizontal). The mosque is a strong religious symbol; on the other hand, the morning prayer has priority over other prayers. This virtue requires the effort of each individual in carrying out worship activities. This means that the morning prayer in the congregation at the mosque becomes a momentum that determines individual character in vertical and horizontal relationships. The morning prayer movement in congregation is not only interpreted as a form of individual worship but as a determinant of the attitude of the individual character and unity of Muslims in life.

Previous studies have shown the relationship between religion and political involvement by testing the impact of various religious factors (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2018). In addition, religion can be political, and it has been claimed that religion can influence political decisions (Ivanescu, 2010). The increasing availability of data for examining various aspects of religion and political mobilization demonstrates the type of activity of an effective religious and political movement (Birbir & Overos, 2019), as previous studies show that religion influences seven types of political participation, including signing petitions, participating in boycotts, participating in demonstrations, participating in informal strikes, and others (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2018). In terms of political engagement, there are significant differences between religious and non-religious people and between people associated with religious traditions in America (Beyerlein & Chaves, 2003).

Religion significantly influences the results of regional head elections in Indonesia (Aspinall et al., 2011; Jafar, 2022; Azizah, 2023). Political parties often use religion in their campaign tactics, and religious narratives are used as a populist strategy to mobilize voters (Assyaukanie, 2019). Even though Indonesia is a secular state with a separation of religion and state, religious regulations are used as a political tool, especially in the regions, to strengthen support among constituents of incumbent leaders before elections (Widian et al., 2022). The politicization of religion is a recurring



issue in Indonesian politics, especially in regional head elections, and can have a destructive impact on social cohesion. Religious leaders also influence interfaith tolerance considerably, and religion is used to convey hope and also to influence voters (Ahnaf & Lussier, 2019).

Method Employed

This study used a qualitative research method with a desk research approach. Desk research, also known as information gathered from various sources of previous studies on the morning prayer congregational movement: spirituality or identity political movements in Indonesia, is a type of research that is based on information that has been published in reports and documents, websites, and other written materials (Moore, 2006). Analysing the results of literature or internet searches or conducting research reviews, it is necessary to adopt an approach that relies heavily on qualitative research. Desk research analysis requires questions about the authority and reliability of the material being worked on. Several specific approaches to analysing qualitative data include identifying recurring themes and linking the codes into cohesive and overarching themes (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Data analysis techniques are done through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion (Ridder, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Ideology of the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement

The basis for the primacy of the morning prayer in congregation is stated in the Al-Qur'an Al-Isra verse 78, which emphasizes the reward for performing the dawn prayer. The reward obtained is the priority of the morning prayer compared to other prayers.

Establish the prayer from after the sun has set until the darkness of the night and (also establish the prayer) Fajr. Verily, the Fajr prayer is witnessed (by angels). (Qs. Al-Isra': 78)

Morning Prayer is also a marker that distinguishes hypocrites (speech and heart are different). This refers to the Hadith of the History of Bukhari-Muslim, which shows that the morning prayer will be difficult for hypocrites to perform. This condition allows people involved in congregational morning prayers at the mosque to be considered individuals who avoid hypocrisy.

There is no prayer that is more difficult for a hypocrite to perform than the morning and evening prayers. If they knew the virtues contained in it (dawn and evening), surely they would come to it even if they crawled. I really wanted to order the muezzin to establish (iqama) prayer, then I ordered someone to lead the (congregational) prayer, then I took burning coals and burned (houses) of people who did not go out to pray in congregation at the mosque (without good reason). (Narrated by Bukhari-Muslim).

Confirmation of Hadith from Bukhari-Muslim history is considered a determinant of individual and character in worship. If this is contextualized in leadership to be a trustworthy leader there must be conformity between words and actions. Leaders carrying out congregational morning prayers are considered to be role models and ideal for Muslim groups.

The Congregational Dawn Movement is closely related to spiritual activities because it is a movement that encourages Muslims to perform the Fajr prayer in a congregation at the mosque. The movement is seen as a way to increase the practice of congregational prayers and build a sense of togetherness among Muslims. The congregational dawn prayer movement in terms of



spirituality has two sides; the vertical spiritual movement of the congregational dawn prayer establishes a relationship with the creator through worship in the form of congregational prayer. Then from the horizontal side, through this movement, it can become a gathering place for fellow Muslims (Murti & Heryanto, 2022).

The Fajr prayer is considered one of the most important prayers and is believed to have spiritual benefits for those who perform it in the congregation. The virtues of the morning prayer include; getting richer and with wealth increasing, blessed sustenance being abundant, the soul becomes calm, rewarded with a big reward, one gets protection, one is also being witnessed and respected by angels, being prayed for by angels, and one's sins are forgiven, Fajr prayer in congregation in the mosque is better than the world and its contents. Finally, one's faith is guaranteed and kept away or protected from hypocrisy (Sasongko, 2022). These virtues make the morning prayer in the congregation one of the aspects of seeing one's piety. Not least, political actors take advantage of the congregational dawn movement to attract sympathy at the political level. The dawn congregation movement around the mosque can contribute to vertical and horizontal public awareness. The practice of congregational dawn prayers is highly recommended in Islam and has many benefits and virtues.

Several ideologies of the congregational morning prayer movement have had an important influence on people's lives. First, this movement is seen as a way to increase obedience and religious education among Muslims. This is manifested in several movements after the morning prayer as a form of Muslim obedience in fighting the fatigue of resting. After the morning prayer, there are many Muslim activities while waiting for the next service in the mosque while also discussing various developing topics. Second, it is a means of increasing religious awareness. Religious awareness is not only interpreted as a form of practising religious teachings but also self-awareness in shaping one's character in life, including perspectives in making good choices. There are three manifestations of spiritual movement. The congregational Morning Prayer is often interpreted as a community movement, not an individual movement. This encourages increasing awareness of brotherhood and religious ties. Not least, the manifestation of the morning prayer movement in congregation extends to political, social and economic movements as well.

Fourth, the congregational dawn movement is considered to be a form of concern for the people. This context refers to the leader who launched various congregational dawn prayer programs to increase unity in building through the Muslim movement. Few leaders made this movement a form of mass action to support the running of the government. The sense of unity and oneness of Muslims is considered capable of increasing collective awareness, which gives rise to various forms of nationalistic ideas. This movement is considered a movement to create ideal leadership in for Muslims. This ideology is believed to broadly affect various forms of life, including when selecting leadership.

The Mosque and Alliance Movement for the Dawn Prayer Congregation

The influence of the central doctrine of all Muslim activities, being the basis for congregational prayers at the mosque, is important in shaping the people's consciousness. Public awareness is interpreted as political representation, which is the basic form of this movement (Nasution et al., 2023). This makes the morning prayer in the congregation a starting point in determining movements in life that represent Islam. The mosque's doctrine became the starting point of the struggle in religious, political, and social life. A mosque is a place for people to gather and pray in congregation, to increase solidarity and hospitality among Muslims (Rosadi, 2014). According to Quraish Shihab, there were ten roles of the Prophet's mosque at the time of the Prophet, including a place of worship, a place for consultation and communication, a place for education, a place for



social assistance, a place for military training, a place for treatment, a place for peace and justice, a hall and a place for receiving guests, a place for prisoners war, and a centre for information and defence of religion (Shihab, 2006). The central function of the mosque is to connect worship activities and aspects of social life.

This condition was emphasized by the Edy Rahmayadi-Musa Rejakshah (Eramas) pair in the North Sumatra Governor Election, making the morning prayer in congregation at the mosque a symbol representing a form of religious, political and social life. This affirmation was demonstrated by Eramas' invitation to strengthen unity and integrity, especially for young people. A sense of unity and political movement can be realized if the morning prayers in the congregation become a people's movement that can encourage a sense of mutual solidarity in advancing Muslims. These calls made Edy Rahmayadi-Musa Rejakshah play identity politics, which makes the ideal leadership in North Sumatra involved in the morning prayer movement in the congregation at the mosque. The mosque as the centre of the movement is inseparable from the primacy of the mosque as a holy place and a symbol of the Islamic struggle. This will later be used as the basis for the political movement for the morning prayers in the congregation. This means Islamic politics, or "*siyasa*", which aims to control the process and how to control it can be realized.

Religious Movements Influence Decision-Making Processes

The mobilization of the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement had a significant impact on vote acquisition in the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election in Medan City. Not only representing the spirituality movement but leading to local election action. The momentum of the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement is not limited to increasing the practice of worship (religious orders) but also strengthening friendship as a form of human relations. The religious doctrine in the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement focuses on worship that shows obedience and moves a sense of strengthening unity and oneness, manifested in the form of selecting leaders. In the Hadith of Bukhari's history, the morning prayer is the key to victory in war. This exemplary spirit became a strong impetus for the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement, symbolizing shared victory. "When the Messenger of Allah wanted to attack a people, he postponed it until dawn" (Al-Bukhari, 2013).

This condition places Muslims to influence the decision-making process. Based on BPS data (2017), Medan City residents embraced Islam and as many as 1641401 people are Muslim, Protestant Christians are represented by 520767 people, Catholics 126676, Hindus 25443 people, Buddhists 205326 people, others 1371 people. These conditions strengthen religious movements to attract sympathy by mobilizing religious movements. Based on the vote recapitulation of the General Election Commission (KPU) based on the religious distribution (see map figure 1) in line with the high intensity of governor candidates in the highest Muslim areas, with the morning prayer movement in congregation they are able to encourage votes. Edy Rahmyadi and Musa Rajekshah have found support in the predominantly Muslim region.

High religious sentiments can encourage the majority of Muslims to grow in solidarity and in choosing leaders who participate in the congregational dawn movement. Edy Rahmyadi and Musa Rajekshah focused on religious symbols and movements to attract voters. At the same time, the another pair, Djarot Saiful and Sihar Sitorus, had difficulty stemming religious sentiments synonymous with non-Muslim support. This means that religious sentiment is an issue that can stem voters' voices. Furthermore, according to data from the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Islam is the largest religion being in North Sumatra Province, with 10.12 million adherents, with the capital city of Medan having the majority of people being Muslim.



For Islam, the morning prayer time is a special time. In the political context, the congregational morning prayer is not only used as a form of worship but as a political momentum idea that is considered important. The morning prayer movement in the congregation was constructed as a symbol of militancy and it helped strengthen the solidity of Islamic groups for political purposes. This is the starting point of a movement that shows solidarity in politics; trust in the value of supporters' beliefs will be difficult to change compared to material rewards. This makes the morning prayer movement in the congregation ahead of the election very effective in warding off the attacks of money politics. The main momentum became the determination of the struggle in congregational morning prayers.

Voter Mobilization Through the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement in the Election of the Governor of North Sumatra

The congregational Morning Prayer movement is considered a momentum maker in determining leaders and representatives of the Islamic movement. This refers to the calls and movements of young people to choose leaders involved in the congregational morning prayer movement. The involvement of the couple Edy Rahmyadi and Musa Rajekshah (Eramas) in the congregational dawn movement in various sub-districts in Medan City helped encourage the emergence of a movement supporting the pair in regional head elections (Idris, 2018). This means there are efforts to politicize religion in the morning prayer movement in the congregation (Siregar et al., 2022). The emergence of the mobilization of calls for the congregational morning prayer movement before election day strengthens the form of covert campaigns in houses of worship (liputan6.com, 2018).

The program for the morning prayer movement in a congregation ahead of voting day strengthens the image of Islam in Eramas, which targets 66.09% of the composition of the Muslim population in Medan City with a ratio of 30.01% combined between Protestant Christians and Catholics (Junita, 2018). As a result, the image of Islam in Eramas through congregational morning prayers became the pair's winning strategy (Abdulsalam, 2018). It even gave rise to the morning prayer alliance movement in Medan. This alliance consists of community organizations and Muslim groups. Eramas's politicization of religion was strengthened by a dialogical and religious approach in the form of a sermon before the election (Yusri, 2018). This pattern is similar to what happened in the DKI Jakarta Governor Election. When Anies Baswedan was present at a congregational dawn prayer nicknamed "Action 212", which was organized by the Islamic Community Forum (FUI) (Junita, 2018). It has been proven that this step does not represent the contestation of the general election but rather shows a form of Muslim unity by supporting the pair.

The Morning Prayer Movement in congregation is a form of religious politicization. The tendency of people to look for the closest point is a common habit. Religion has always been a sensitive issue capable of forming a trust to get closer to people. This form of trust can be manifested in supporting candidates. Governor-elect Edy Rahmayadi acknowledged this as one of the factors in the victory. The morning prayer in congregation is analogized as a form of unity and brotherly spirit to encourage the majority of Muslims to support so that "After they finished their morning prayers, all went straight to the polling stations (TPS), that's why I won," (Idris, 2018).

Meanwhile, Islamic leadership is described. First, the values of taqwa, deep spirituality, good behaviour, and character are identical. Second, justice and equity are ethical leadership values and important characteristics of Islamic leadership (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2022). Third, an Islamic leader must clearly articulate a goal or vision and demonstrate personal conviction for it, inspire a group of people to follow it and evaluate the group's progress (Monjur, 2010). Fourth, Islamic



leadership is based on personalism, idealism, great expectations, and a culture that Muslim leaders can adapt to (Rafiki, 2020). Finally, from an Islamic perspective, leadership is social contact between leaders and their subordinates and a form of psychological contact between leaders and their followers (Na'imah & Muhibbin, 2020).

The dawn prayer in congregation is one of the movements that can reflect this Islamic leadership. As mentioned, implementing morning prayers in the congregation can increase the value of deep spiritual piety, which shows good character, individual beliefs and views of idealism, hope and individual culture. Meanwhile, the congregational morning prayer movement in social life can contain the content of just leaders and leadership values. Its social impact can increase the psychological attachment between actors (Eramas) and supporters. It must be admitted that in contestation in the election for the governor of North Sumatra, religious interpretation is unavoidable in politics. The congregational dawn prayer is not only interpreted as a spiritual aspect but also as a political interest point starting from getting support from the community or showing one's piety so that one is considered to represent an ideal leader. Fajr prayer in congregation is often considered an ideal goal for gaining political influence because it has several influences.

First, the momentum of the morning prayer in the congregation can unite the community and strengthen the bonds between its members. This factor is important in building trust, which encourages loyalty growth. Second, it increases unity and brotherhood among community members. The positive impact of brotherhood with a large community can have a broad effect, including attracting people outside the community to join. Third, it can provide an opportunity for the community to get closer by sharing knowledge and experiences that can encourage the creation of trust. The fourth is building common goals for both community interests and political actors. Eramas' success in playing with religious issues helped strengthen the position that represents Islamic leaders. The strong influence of religious issues can cover up the quality of the experience of rivals and the promised programs. This morning prayer in congregation becomes a political tool capable of achieving political goals. The ideological complexity of the congregation's morning prayer means spirituality and political contestation. As mentioned, after being elected governor, he encouraged the morning prayer movement in the congregation (Sentralberita.com, 2020). The movement is considered as a form of spiritual and intellectual movement.

Implications of Mobilization of the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement on the Vote Results

The congregational dawn movement's mobilization has significantly impacted vote acquisition in the 2018 North Sumatra Governor election. It does not only represent the spirituality movement but leads to local election action. The momentum of the congregational dawn movement is not limited to increasing the practice of worship (religious orders) but also plays a role in strengthening friendship as a form of human relations. The religious doctrine in the congregational morning prayer movement focuses on worship that shows obedience and creates a sense of strengthening unity and oneness, manifested in electing leaders. Based on BPS data (2017), 1641401 Muslims in Medan City, 520767 Protestant Christians, 126676 Catholics, 25443 Hindus, 205326 Buddhists, and 1371 others. This condition strengthened the religious movement to attract sympathy by organizing the morning prayer movement in the congregation ahead of the 2018 North Sumatra Governor Election in Medan City.

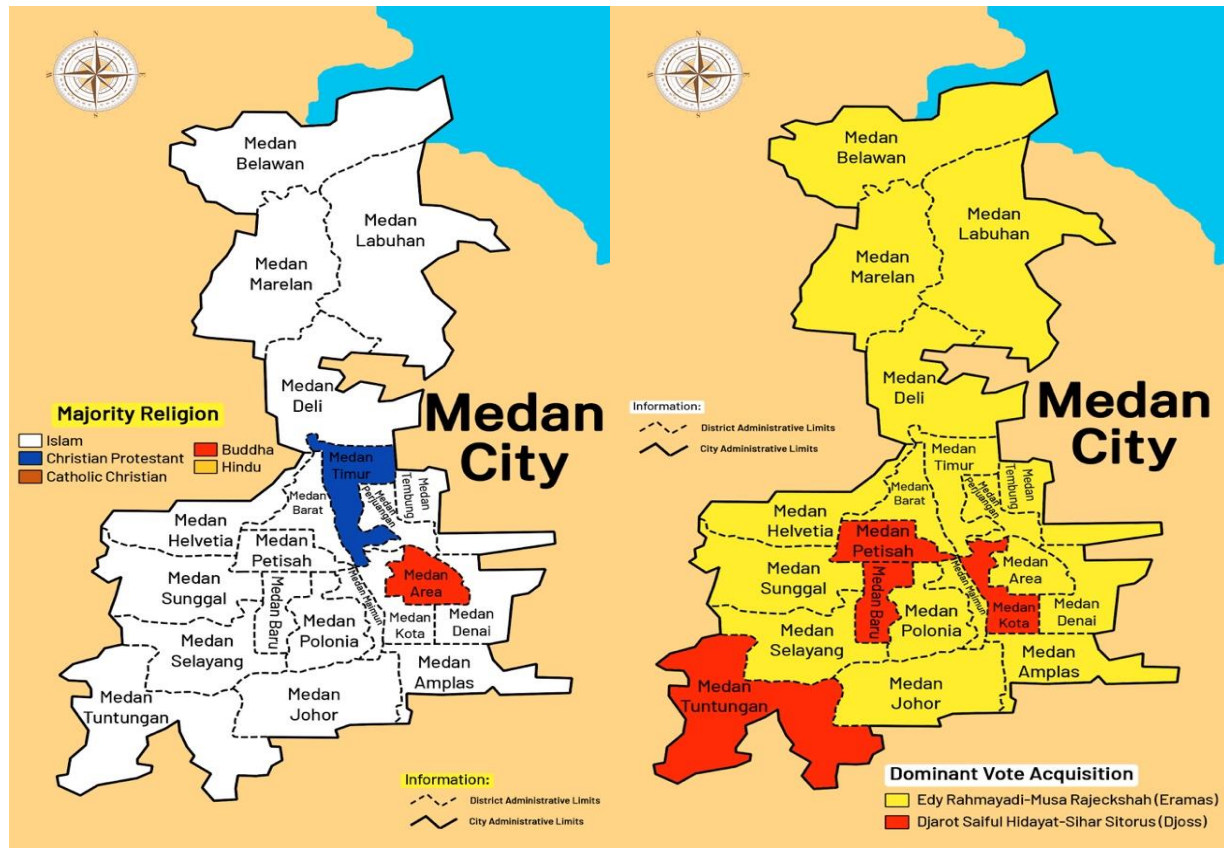


Figure 1. Map of the Majority of Religions and the Domination of Vote Acquisition in Medan City

Based on the recapitulation of the general election commission (KPU) votes between the spread of religions (see map figure 1) in line with Eramas' high intensity in carrying out morning prayers in congregation. As a result, the vote prolean for the pair Edy Rahmyadi and Musa Rajekshah gained support in an area with a Muslim majority population. The effect of the morning prayer movement in the congregation can encourage voters to choose Eramas partner. Nevertheless, not all Muslim-majority areas chose Eramas's partner, including some such as Medan Tembung, Medan Petisah, Medan Baru, and Medan Kota chose Djarot and Sihar (Djos). Identity politics in the congregational dawn movement has an advantage in playing up issues in the North Sumatra local election; the congregational dawn prayer is clearly a point of movement of issues that influence voting decisions.

High religious sentiment can encourage the majority of Muslims to grow in solidarity in choosing leaders who participate in the congregational dawn movement. The Edy Rahmyadi and Musa Rajekshah couples focused on religious symbols and movements to attract voters. In contrast, the Djarot Saiful and Sihar Sitorus couples had difficulty stemming religious sentiments identified with non-Muslim support. This means that religious sentiment is an issue that can stem voters' voices. Moreover, according to data from the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Islam is the largest religion in North Sumatra. There are 10.12 million people in the province, with the capital city of Medan, who are Muslims.



Conclusion

The morning prayer movement in the congregation gathers a spiritual momentum that can move individuals to form brotherhood and unity. This movement encourages the emergence of views about individual involvement capable of building emotional closeness, which is the culmination of human relations. The primacy of the morning prayer, in which one can see individual character, becomes a symbol of individual obedience. In political situations, this movement is used as a method of approach to building emotional brotherhood and unity in realizing political goals and objectives. The Eramas couple made the morning prayer movement in the congregation to build themselves up as leaders who have emotional closeness with Muslims. The intensity of carrying out the morning prayer movement in the congregation can influence the decision to choose. It must be admitted that identity political sentiment through the Congregational Morning Prayer Movement broadly impacts upon social and political life. A recommendation for future research on the politicization of religion in regional head elections is that one can investigate the influence of the majority's religious beliefs on political participation. This study can help one to utilize the appropriate measurement of various religious attitudes, traditions, and beliefs in order to examine their influence on political participation.

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