THE POLITICIZATION OF SECURITY ISSUES IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: A STUDY ON THE "ASING DAN ASENG" NARRATIVE IN INDONESIAN ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT. This study investigates the politicization of security issues in Indonesian electoral politics through the construction and mobilization of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative—a rhetorical strategy that depicts foreign influence and ethnic Chinese communities as existential threats to national sovereignty. The research aims to understand how political actors strategically use this narrative to mobilize voter support and legitimize their leadership. Using the theoretical lens of securitization and the politics of fear, the study applies a qualitative method based on critical discourse analysis of purposively selected campaign speeches, media coverage, and propaganda materials from the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. The analysis reveals three dominant narrative frames: the portrayal of foreign economic control, ethnic scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians, and the betrayal of national interest by political elites. These narratives are conveyed through speech acts, media framing, and disinformation, transforming political competition into perceived national emergencies. The findings indicate that while effective in galvanizing electoral support, this strategy intensifies political polarization, delegitimizes opponents, and reinforces exclusionary populist nationalism. The study concludes that the instrumentalization of fear and identity in electoral politics poses serious threats to democratic integrity, social cohesion, and institutional legitimacy, calling for greater media literacy, counter-disinformation efforts, and democratic safeguards.

Keywords: Security politicization; politics of fear; electoral strategy; populism; political legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

Security is a central aspect of state governance, closely linked to political and social stability. As a fundamental issue, security is not only understood as protection against external physical threats but also encompasses non-traditional threats of a social, economic, and political nature that can jeopardize a country's internal stability (Hampson et al., 1998). The complexity and broad dimensions of security make it highly susceptible to politicization by political leaders seeking to achieve specific objectives, such as strengthening legitimacy, gaining electoral support, or dominating public political discourse (Williams, 2003).

Political leaders often employ security rhetoric to create or reinforce perceptions of threats that can mobilize the public both emotionally and politically. This process, as described in securitization theory, illustrates how an issue that was previously not perceived as an existential threat is transformed into a top priority requiring immediate action beyond normal procedures (Balzacq, 2005; Hampson et al., 1998). In this context, security narratives become strategic tools for mobilizing public opinion and even justifying controversial policies to secure political support or consolidate a leader's power base.

The politicization of security is also closely related to the concept of the politics of fear, in which leaders exploit public anxiety as a means to build political loyalty and expand their authority (Hoffmann & Robin, 2005). By socially constructing threat narratives, political leaders can manipulate public emotions and perceptions to direct support toward themselves or divert it away from their political opponents. Such security politicization has proven effective in various global political contexts, from post-9/11 America to Europe amidst the migration crisis (Huysmans, 2006).

However, using security narratives as a political instrument is not without consequences. Studies indicate that security politicization can have detrimental effects on democratic quality, exacerbate social polarization, and pose new challenges in domestic political management (Huysmans, 2006; Vuori, 2008). In Indonesia, political campaigns have repeatedly invoked the "Asing dan Aseng" (Foreigners and Ethnic Chinese) narrative, especially during the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections. This study identifies this pattern as a key rhetorical strategy to mobilize voter sentiment and consolidate claims to political legitimacy.

In the Indonesian political landscape, one of the most frequently politicized security issues is the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative. This narrative constructs the perception that foreign actors (typically referring to Western countries or specific global powers) and certain domestic ethnic Chinese groups ("Aseng") pose a threat to Indonesia's sovereignty and national interests. Although not always based on tangible or factual threats, this narrative has successfully captured widespread public attention

and has repeatedly emerged in national political moments, particularly during presidential elections (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

Since the Reformasi era, the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative has become a recurring theme in Indonesian political campaigns. For instance, in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, this issue was intensively deployed as a central component of certain candidates' political rhetoric to discredit their opponents and rally support from voter groups sensitive to nationalism and economic protectionism (Warburton & Aspinall, 2018). Campaigns employing this narrative generally seek to shape public opinion by portraying particular candidates or political groups as not entirely representative of national interests but rather as proxies of foreign influence or collaborators with external forces threatening national integrity (Mietzner, 2015).

The resonance of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative appears to be partly grounded in its appeal to emotional and identity-based concerns among segments of Indonesian society. This includes collective memories of colonial subjugation and persistent ambivalence in majority–minority relations, especially concerning the ethnic Chinese community (Nugroho, 2023). During the colonial period, Indonesia endured exploitation by foreign entities, leaving historical trauma embedded in the nation's collective memory. Simultaneously, the relationship between the Indonesian population and the ethnic Chinese community has experienced tensions due to various political and social events (Coppel, 2002; Hoon, 2006). Consequently, political leaders can strategically exploit these societal fears as an effective tool for securing voter support, particularly in highly competitive political contests.

The relevance of the politicization of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative in contemporary Indonesian politics is evident in several empirical cases in recent years. During the 2014 presidential election, this narrative was intensively used to attack presidential candidate Joko Widodo (Jokowi). He was accused of being a candidate backed by foreign interests and ethnic Chinese business groups, portrayed as threats to Indonesia's economic sovereignty (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014). This narrative was amplified through social media, informal communication networks, and direct campaign efforts, creating sharp political polarization among voters.

The narrative intensified further during the 2019 presidential election, again targeting incumbent President Jokowi. This time, the "Asing dan Aseng" rhetoric was not only prevalent on social media but also openly voiced by national political figures in public campaign speeches. For example, Prabowo

Subianto, a key political figure, explicitly stated that Indonesia's national wealth was being controlled by foreign powers and certain domestic groups—an assertion implying a threat to national sovereignty (Warburton & Aspinall, 2018). This narrative attracted significant public and media attention, influencing the political opinions of voters with strong nationalist sentiments.

Beyond the presidential elections, the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative was also employed in regional elections (Pilkada), such as the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. In this contest, the ethnic Chinese issue was strategically leveraged to undermine the legitimacy of a particular candidate, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok). Ahok was portrayed as an individual who did not fully represent Indonesia's national identity and was even framed as a threat to religious and national values, further exacerbating political and social polarization within Indonesian society (Mietzner, 2018).

These examples illustrate that the use of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative is not merely a situational phenomenon but rather part of a broader pattern in Indonesian political strategy, consistently emerging during crucial political moments. This study is thus relevant for understanding the strategic implications of security issue politicization on domestic political dynamics, social stability, and the broader development of Indonesian democracy.

The politicization of security narratives such as "Asing dan Aseng" is a compelling and significant research topic as it directly relates to fundamental issues in democracy, namely how political discourse can shape public perceptions, political legitimacy, and socio-political stability in a given country. In Indonesia, the use of this issue has been proven to have serious implications, such as increasing societal polarization, escalating social tensions, and even posing threats to democratic integrity (Mietzner, 2018; Warburton & Aspinall, 2018). By understanding the mechanisms behind the construction of this narrative, research can provide new insights into the relationship between political rhetoric, national security, and voter behavior in the context of a complex democratic state like Indonesia.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is also significant as it integrates and enriches the understanding of several relevant theoretical frameworks, namely securitization theory (Balzacq, 2005; Hampson et al., 1998), the politics of fear (Hoffmann & Robin, 2005), and Max Weber's theory of political leadership concerning legitimacy and authority (Weber, 2008). The application of securitization theory will aid in understanding

how certain issues are deliberately constructed as existential threats through political speech practices. Meanwhile, the politics of fear approach will explain the effectiveness of security rhetoric in mobilizing public emotions, while Weber's political leadership theory will provide an analysis of how political leaders utilize security narratives to build or maintain their legitimacy.

By situating the "Asing dan Aseng" phenomenon within this theoretical framework, the research not only contributes to empirical studies on contemporary Indonesian politics but also significantly enriches academic literature on the global politicization of security. Amidst the rising trend of populism and identity-based politics in various countries, this study offers crucial insights into the dynamic interaction between political leaders, security issues, and the public in modern political landscapes.

METHOD

This study is grounded in the critical paradigm, which views knowledge not as neutral or value-free, but as deeply embedded within power relations and ideological structures. The critical paradigm assumes that social realities—such as national identity, security, and political legitimacy—are not fixed entities, but socially constructed through discourse, contested in political struggles, and often manipulated by dominant actors to maintain hegemonic control. Research within this paradigm seeks not only to interpret social phenomena but to expose underlying structures of domination and open possibilities for emancipation and democratic accountability.

Accordingly, this study employs a qualitative approach using the desk research or literature review method. Desk research, or secondary data-based research, involves the systematic analysis of data and documents that have been previously collected by researchers, media institutions, or government bodies rather than through direct fieldwork (Bryman, 2015). This method is relevant because it allows for a critical and interpretive exploration of how political narratives are constructed through publicly available discourse, including political speeches, news reports, campaign materials, and academic publications.

Desk research was selected due to its efficiency and accessibility to diverse sources in both printed and digital formats (Hox & Boeije, 2005). It is particularly suited for research questions that require discourse-level interpretation, such as the investigation of securitization narratives in political campaigns (Johnston, 2014). In this study, the secondary data include transcripts of presidential campaign speeches, media coverage from national outlets, political commentary, and scholarly analyses focusing on the 2014 and 2019 Indonesian presidential elections, as well as the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election.

Following the typical stages of desk research—identifying, selecting, and evaluating relevant documents, conducting thematic analysis, and interpreting discursive patterns—this study applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its primary analytical technique. Rooted in the work of Fairclough (2003, 2020), CDA views language as a form of social practice and seeks to uncover how discourse functions to produce and legitimize power asymmetries in society.

In this context, the use of CDA aligns with the theory of securitization, which posits that security is not an objective condition but a rhetorical and political act: political actors construct threats through language in order to justify exceptional responses (Balzacq, 2005; Hampson et al., 1998). The analysis assumes that narratives such as "Asing dan Aseng" are not passive reflections of reality but active constructions designed to mobilize identity-based fears, delegitimize opponents, and reinforce the legitimacy of dominant political forces. Through this framework, the study aims to reveal how discursive practices in Indonesian elections serve as instruments of ideological control and political mobilization, shaping voter perceptions and contributing to broader patterns of democratic erosion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Construction of the "Asing dan Aseng" Narrative as a Threat to National Sovereignty

The analysis of the construction of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative as a threat to Indonesia's national sovereignty illustrates how the securitization process is strategically executed through various political communication acts. Referring to the securitization theory proposed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), an issue becomes a security threat through speech acts that frame it as an emergency situation, thereby justifying extraordinary attention beyond normal political mechanisms. In the case of Indonesia, political campaign speeches, public statements by political figures, and the dissemination of provocative content on social media serve as concrete examples of speech acts that transform economic and identity issues into matters of national security.

This discussion draws on a thematic analysis of publicly available secondary data, including

approximately 12 political campaign speeches, major national media articles (from sources such as CNN Indonesia, BBC Indonesia, Kompas, and Tempo), and political propaganda materials such as the Obor Rakyat tabloid circulated during the 2014, 2017, and 2019 elections campaign. These sources were selected purposively based on their frequency of citation in academic studies and their prominence in shaping electoral discourse. Using discourse analysis, the materials were coded to identify recurrent securitization strategies, rhetorical themes, and speech acts related to the construction of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative. While the number of documents analyzed is indicative rather than exhaustive, the patterns that emerge reflect dominant communicative practices in Indonesia's 2014, 2017, and 2019 elections.

Specifically, this threat construction relies on deliberate word choices and framing strategies that effectively instill a sense of threat within the collective consciousness of society. Political rhetoric such as "foreign domination of the economy," "threats to national sovereignty," and "the dominance of certain groups over national resources" is systematically used to shift public perception from seeing these as ordinary economic or social issues to viewing them as urgent existential threats (Warburton & Aspinall, 2018). A critical analysis of speeches and campaigns during the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections reveals that opposition candidates explicitly or implicitly framed the ruling government as acting as an agent of, or at least sympathetic to, foreign interests, thereby positioning them as a tangible threat to national sovereignty.

Furthermore, this analysis finds that the construction of this narrative does not occur in a vacuum but deliberately exploits historical sentiments and pre-existing collective anxieties in Indonesian public memory. In this context, Robin's (2005) politics of fear theory provides an important perspective: a constructed threat does not need to be empirically real to be effective. Its effectiveness stems from its ability to evoke emotional responses—such as fear, anger, or suspicion—that can politically mobilize voter support. Deep-rooted anti-foreign sentiments in Indonesia's history, particularly those associated with colonial memories and past foreign dominance, along with anxieties over a minority ethnic group perceived as economically powerful, provide a highly effective socio-political capital that can be politically exploited (Coppel, 2002; Hoon, 2006).

Moreover, the dynamics of politicizing this security narrative also have significant implications

for electoral democracy in Indonesia. A more in-depth analysis indicates that the use of security narratives in this manner contributes to social polarization and reinforces exclusive identity politics (Mietzner, 2018). This practice strengthens the boundary between "us" and "them," which ultimately intensifies socio-political conflicts and weakens the quality of democracy. By politicizing security issues in this way, public debate is shifted away from substantive issues such as economic policy, healthcare, or education toward emotionally charged discourse based on identity and fear.

Thus, the analysis of the construction of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative not only demonstrates how securitization operates in Indonesia's electoral politics but also opens a critical discussion on the long-term impact of security politicization on social cohesion, political leadership legitimacy, and the overall quality of democracy. This research is relevant not only within an academic context but also carries practical implications for public policy formulation, particularly in managing socio-political dynamics in a democratic country like Indonesia.

The analysis of Indonesia's political dynamics shows that the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative does not emerge in isolation but is systematically shaped during various electoral moments. Empirical cases from the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, as well as the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, illustrate how this issue is constructed and used as a political strategy to create polarization and influence public opinion. In each of these instances, the narrative developed not only emphasized economic and political aspects but also capitalized on historical sentiments and ethnic stereotypes to build political legitimacy for certain actors.

During the 2014 presidential election, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) became the primary target of the politicization of the "Asing dan Aseng" issue in an attempt to undermine his credibility as a presidential candidate. A widespread negative campaign, including through the tabloid *Obor Rakyat*, accused Jokowi of having close ties to foreign interests and ethnic Chinese groups. This narrative was reinforced by claims that Jokowi was not of native Indonesian descent and was part of the "Aseng" interest seeking to dominate the national economy (Warburton & Aspinall, 2018). Although this campaign was later proven to be baseless, its impact was significant in shaping public perception and creating polarization among voters.

From the perspective of securitization theory, this campaign demonstrates how a political narrative can be constructed as a security threat through

systematic speech acts. By portraying Jokowi as a figure perceived as lacking commitment to national interests, his political opponents sought to create the perception that his victory would pose a threat to national sovereignty. This strategy successfully solidified the narrative that encouraged voters to view politics through the lens of nationalism versus "a new form of economic colonization" by foreign powers and certain domestic groups.

During the 2019 presidential election, the same narrative was reused, with even greater intensity. The issue of Jokowi's alleged alignment with foreign interests was further reinforced by accusations that his administration was overly favorable to foreign investments, particularly in infrastructure projects involving Chinese capital. Additionally, narratives about the "Asengization" of the government were widely circulated through social media, accompanied by hoax campaigns claiming that foreign economic dominance posed a major threat to Indonesian citizens (Mietzner, 2018).

The politicization of this issue was further amplified through the use of nationalist symbols in campaign rhetoric. Opposition candidates positioned themselves as figures who would "restore national sovereignty" and "save the national economy from foreign control" (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). In the context of the politics of fear (Robin, 2004), this strategy illustrates how fear can be manipulated to build political loyalty and reinforce an exclusive collective identity. By framing the narrative in terms of "us" versus "them," Jokowi's political opponents successfully created sharp antagonism in society, leading to increased political polarization.

The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election provides a concrete example of how the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative was utilized in a broader context, extending beyond economic and sovereignty concerns to include religious and ethnic identity dimensions. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), an incumbent candidate of Chinese descent and a Christian, became the primary target of identity-based politicization, exploiting long-standing anti-Chinese sentiments in Indonesia (Mietzner, 2018).

This narrative was constructed through two main approaches. First, Ahok was portrayed as a representation of ethnic Chinese economic dominance, allegedly threatening the economic position of indigenous Indonesians. Second, religious political rhetoric was employed to assert that a non-Muslim leader was unfit to govern Jakarta, a city with a Muslim-majority population. This negative campaign was further reinforced by mass mobilization efforts that leveraged religious sentiments to sway public opinion against Ahok (BBC News Indonesia, 2017; CNN Indonesia, 2019).

From the perspective of securitization theory, this phenomenon demonstrates how threats to the majority's identity can be constructed for political purposes. The threat presented is not material but symbolic, in which certain political groups capitalize on fears of "losing political dominance" to build legitimacy during elections. As a consequence, social polarization deepens, persisting long after the election concludes.

The politicization of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative in various political moments in Indonesia serves not only as an electoral strategy but also has broader implications for the quality of democracy and social cohesion. The polarization resulting from fear-based and identity-driven campaigns has weakened the space for healthy political deliberation. As Huysmans (2006) argues, the use of security narratives for political gain can lead to exclusionary practices that restrict the political participation of certain groups. The long-term consequence is the erosion of democratic norms, where fear and identity politics overshadow rational policy debates, ultimately undermining democratic governance and societal harmony.

Moreover, the politicization of security narratives also contributes to the delegitimization of government institutions, particularly when the government faces populist pressure demanding excessive responses to politically constructed threats (Vuori, 2008). In the Indonesian context, this pattern is evident in how government policies often have to adapt to public opinion pressures shaped through fear-based campaigns. This demonstrates that the long-term use of security politicization strategies not only benefits certain political actors but can also weaken the overall foundation of democracy.

An analysis of various real cases reveals that the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative is not merely a phenomenon that emerges in a single election cycle but has become a recurring political strategy across multiple electoral moments in Indonesia. By adopting the perspectives of securitization theory and the politics of fear, this narrative is not just part of ordinary political competition but has evolved into a systematic tool for shaping public perception, mobilizing political support, and, in some cases, undermining social cohesion and democratic quality.

In the process of constructing and politicizing the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative, at least three main actors play significant roles: political leaders, the mass media, and state institutions. These three

actors have different interests and strategies in using or responding to this narrative, ultimately shaping public perception and national political dynamics. By understanding the role of each actor, it is possible to analyze how this narrative is not only employed as a political tool in electoral contests but also contributes to social polarization and the overall quality of democracy in Indonesia.

Political leaders serve as key actors in the production and dissemination of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative. In the context of electoral politics, political leaders frequently use identity issues as a strategy to build political loyalty and increase their electability. The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election serves as a concrete example of how identity-based narratives were exploited to influence public opinion. During the political campaign, incumbent candidate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) became the primary target of this narrative, with his ethnic and religious identity constructed as factors allegedly misaligned with the majority of Jakarta's population. Accusations that his leadership favored certain groups, particularly ethnic Chinese businessmen, were reinforced by the narrative that "Aseng" had taken control of Indonesia's economy and government (Mietzner, 2018). This narrative gained further traction after his speech was selectively quoted in a religious context, sparking massive protests and shaping the perception that Ahok's leadership posed a threat to the majority's identity.

The mass media plays a central role in disseminating and framing this narrative. In modern politics, the media is not only a channel of information but also a tool for political actors to shape public opinion. Various media outlets, both mainstream and social media, indirectly reinforced the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative by providing space for discourses emphasizing identity and threats to national sovereignty. Studies on media coverage during the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections indicate that certain news portals selectively framed government policies in a pro-foreign or pro-China context, thereby strengthening negative sentiments among specific segments of society (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). Additionally, social media played an even greater role in spreading disinformation and political propaganda. Black campaigns circulating on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp massively propagated the narrative that Jokowi was a foreign puppet with ties to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), despite the lack of factual evidence supporting these claims (Hakim & Asril, 2018; Jingga, 2018; Kholid, 2018; Riana, 2018). The spread of this narrative illustrates how media can be utilized as a political instrument to shape public perception in ways not always based on facts.

Beyond political leaders and the media, state institutions also play a crucial role in responding to the politicization of this issue. However, the effectiveness of state institutions in addressing identity-based issues is often questioned, particularly when security and identity politicization become deeply embedded in broader political structures. Law enforcement agencies, for example, frequently face dilemmas when dealing with hate speech cases linked to the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative. On one hand, the government attempts to curb the spread of hoaxes and hate speech that foster social division, but on the other, such actions are often perceived as repression against political opposition (Fikri, 2017; Laksana et al., 2020; Lestari, 2017). This phenomenon underscores that the politicization of identity issues affects not only individual political actors but also state institutions that should function as stabilizers in democratic dynamics.

The interaction between political leaders, the media, and state institutions in constructing the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative reflects the complexity of identity politics in Indonesia. Political leaders use this narrative as an electoral strategy, the media serves as a channel that amplifies or disseminates it, while state institutions struggle to respond to the evolving dynamics, often with limited capacity. This situation has broader consequences for political stability and social cohesion. The polarization generated by this narrative does not only impact elections but also has long-term effects on social fragmentation and government legitimacy. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the roles of these actors is crucial in designing policy strategies that can mitigate the negative effects of identity-based political narratives and safeguard the integrity of Indonesian democracy.

Strategies for Mobilizing Support and Political Legitimacy

After understanding how the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative is constructed as a threat to national sovereignty, the next step is to analyze how this narrative is used as a tool to increase political support and strengthen leadership legitimacy. In electoral politics, security-based narratives are often an effective strategy for candidates to build voter loyalty, consolidate their support base, and undermine the legitimacy of political opponents (Mietzner, 2015).

In the Indonesian political context, the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative has become a strategic instrument for constructing the image of a leader as a defender of national interests while simultaneously creating a division between "us" (native/indigenous citizens) and "them" (foreign actors and certain minority groups). This strategy can be explained through three main mechanisms: (1) reinforcing exclusive nationalism, (2) delegitimizing political opponents through external threat rhetoric, and (3) creating voter loyalty through the politics of fear (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019).

One of the primary functions of politicizing the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative is to rally nationalist sentiment among voters. Political leaders who employ this strategy often present themselves as "defenders of the people," fighting against foreign exploitation and protecting national resources from external interventions (Heryanto & Hoesterey, 2016). In several presidential election campaigns, particularly in 2014 and 2019, opposition figures actively used economic protectionist rhetoric, emphasizing that the incumbent administration was overly submissive to foreign interests, particularly China (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

Such rhetoric is effective in shaping the perception that certain leaders are more qualified to govern due to their strong commitment to national interests. By associating themselves with nationalism and economic sovereignty, candidates employing this strategy successfully create an identity divide between leaders who are "pro-people" and those perceived as "pro-foreign" (Warburton, 2020). In Weberian leadership theory, this mechanism can be linked to charismatic authority, where leaders build their appeal by claiming to protect the nation from external threats (Weber, 2008).

Moreover, in Indonesia's identity politics, exclusive nationalism is often linked to ethnicity and religion. Candidates who use the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative frequently attempt to portray themselves as representatives of the majority population entitled to leadership, while their opponents are depicted as being closer to foreign interests or certain minority groups (Mietzner, 2018). This pattern was evident in both presidential and regional elections, such as the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, where ethnic and religious identity was used to cast doubt on a candidate's legitimacy (Hoon, 2006).

The politicization of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative also serves as a strategy to delegitimize political opponents. According to securitization theory, political actors can transform an issue into an existential threat, making it more justifiable to override normal political rules (Hampson et al., 1998). In various campaigns, opposition candidates have frequently framed the incumbent government as a threat to national sovereignty by linking government policies to foreign interests (Balzacq, 2005).

For instance, in the 2014 presidential election, negative campaigns against Joko Widodo (Jokowi) focused on accusations that he was a puppet of foreign interests and certain minority groups. This issue was reinforced through widespread disinformation on social media, including claims that Jokowi was not of indigenous Indonesian descent or had affiliations with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). Although these claims had no factual basis, the narrative successfully planted doubts among certain voters, particularly those with conservative nationalist political tendencies (Mietzner, 2018).

The political polarization resulting from this narrative also forced opponents to take defensive measures, which in some cases only strengthened the effectiveness of the narrative. In the 2019 presidential election, for example, Jokowi's administration attempted to counter these issues by intensifying nationalist rhetoric in its policies, including emphasizing infrastructure development and strategic national projects as symbols of its commitment to the people (Warburton, 2017). However, the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative continued to be used by the opposition to question the independence of the government's economic policies and foreign relations.

By shaping the perception that political opponents pose a threat to national interests, candidates who employ this narrative not only strengthen their support base but also create conditions in which voters are more likely to accept policies or political strategies framed as necessary for "saving the country from foreign threats" (Hoffmann & Robin, 2005).

Beyond increasing political support, the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative also functions to maintain voter loyalty by fostering collective fear. In the theory of the politics of fear (Hoffmann & Robin, 2005), threat rhetoric is used to create a condition in which the public feels that the only way to avoid danger is to support a particular leader.

During presidential campaigns, this narrative is often combined with rhetoric about the dangers of foreign infiltration, threats to the national economy, or the dominance of certain groups in strategic sectors (Huysmans, 2006). These fears are reinforced by the spread of sensational news

on social media, which often lacks factual basis but has a strong emotional impact on the public (Kholid, 2018).

The "Asing dan Aseng" narrative is not merely ordinary political discourse but a security politicization strategy with significant impacts on increasing political support and strengthening a leader's legitimacy. Through the reinforcement of exclusive nationalism, the delegitimization of political opponents, and the politics of fear, this narrative influence's public opinion and creates conditions favorable to the political actors who employ it.

However, the effectiveness of this strategy also has long-term consequences for democracy, including increased social polarization, declining trust in state institutions, and the weakening of policy-based political debates.

Comparison with Similar Political Campaigns in Other Countries

The phenomenon of security politicization through external threat narratives, such as the "Asing dan Aseng" rhetoric, is not exclusive to Indonesia. Many other countries have employed similar strategies to consolidate political support and build leadership legitimacy. By comparing the Indonesian case with political campaigns in other countries, a broader understanding can be gained on how security politicization operates in different political contexts. Some relevant cases for comparison include (1) Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States, (2) the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom, and (3) anti-immigration politics in European countries, particularly in France and Hungary.

In the 2016 and 2020 U.S. presidential elections, Donald Trump actively employed security rhetoric similar to the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative in Indonesia. Trump constructed a narrative that immigrants, particularly those from Latin America and Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, posed a threat to the U.S. economy and national security (Mudde, 2019).

One of his main slogans, *"Build the Wall"*, underscored the need to strengthen the U.S.-Mexico border to prevent the entry of illegal immigrants who were claimed to bring crime and take away jobs from American citizens. This narrative was reinforced with negative stereotypes, such as labeling Mexican immigrants as "rapists" and "drug dealers" (Bonikowski, 2017).

Similar to how the "Asing dan Aseng" rhetoric is exploited in Indonesia, Trump's rhetoric was used to construct his image as a leader protecting national interests and "native" Americans from foreign intervention. This rhetoric proved effective in rallying support from conservative groups, white working-class voters, and those anxious about globalization (Hochschild, 2016).

However, the use of this strategy also led to sharp societal polarization. Discrimination against Latin and Muslim communities increased, and white supremacist groups gained a sense of legitimacy from Trump's political rhetoric (Larres, 2021). This is comparable to the political polarization seen in Indonesia due to the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative.

The 2016 Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom also demonstrated how security politicization was used to gain political support. The pro-Brexit campaign used the slogan *"Take Back Control"*, aimed at fostering fear that the UK was losing national sovereignty due to its membership in the European Union (Goodwin & Heath, 2016).

One of the main narratives used was that the EU exerted excessive control over the UK's economic and immigration policies, thereby threatening jobs and the welfare of native British citizens (Clarke et al., 2017). This rhetoric was further amplified by concerns that immigrants from Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania) and refugees from the Middle East would flood the UK and overburden the social welfare system.

Similar to the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative, this campaign used a *"us versus them"* strategy, in which pro-Brexit politicians portrayed themselves as defenders of national sovereignty, while their opponents were accused of being EU loyalists betraying the interests of the British people (Hobolt, 2016).

The consequence of this strategy was the deep political and social division in the UK. Polarization emerged between pro-Brexit and pro-EU groups, even causing rifts within major political parties like the Conservative and Labour parties. Additionally, the campaign reinforced anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK, leading to a rise in discrimination cases against minority communities after the referendum result was announced (Ford & Goodwin, 2014).

In Europe, security narratives are also frequently used in electoral politics, particularly regarding immigration issues. In recent years, right-wing parties such as the *National Rally* (formerly *Front National*) in France and Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary have utilized fear-based politics to strengthen their political support (Wodak, 2015).

1. France: Marine Le Pen and Anti-Islamism

Marine Le Pen, leader of France's *National Rally*, has often used the narrative that Muslim immigrants and EU policies have eroded France's culture and national identity (Mudde, 2019). She portrays herself as the only leader capable of *"protecting France from Islamization"*, using language similar to the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative that associates Chinese economic dominance with a national security threat in Indonesia.

2. Hungary: Viktor Orbán and Anti-Refugee Rhetoric

Meanwhile, in Hungary, Viktor Orbán has built his political strategy around the rhetoric that *"Hungary must resist the refugee invasion."* He portrays Middle Eastern refugees as a threat to Christian European culture, claiming that the EU has imposed policies that undermine Hungary's national interests (Molnár & Urbanovics, 2020).

Both in France and Hungary, security politicization has been used as a tool to build exclusive nationalism, instill fear of *"outsiders"*, and consolidate political support. The effects are similar to those in Indonesia, including increased social polarization, discrimination against certain groups, and the weakening of deliberative democracy due to the dominance of fear-based politics.

From these cases, it can be concluded that security politicization through external threat narratives is a common political strategy across different countries. The key similarities between Indonesia, the U.S., the UK, and Europe are:

1. **Constructing fear against external groups** → Immigrants in the U.S., the EU in Brexit, Muslims in France, and Chinese economic actors in Indonesia.
2. **Using exclusive nationalism as a political mobilization tool** → *"Make America Great Again," "Take Back Control,"* and *"Protect national sovereignty from Asing dan Aseng."*
3. **Creating sharp political polarization** → Increasing societal division in each country that employs this strategy.

However, there are differences in political outcomes. In the U.S., this rhetoric helped Trump win the election but also heightened racial tensions. In the UK, the strategy led to the Brexit referendum, which had a profound impact on the country's foreign policy. In France and Hungary, security politicization further strengthened the position of right-wing parties in national politics. In Indonesia, this strategy fueled ethnic and religious polarization, repeatedly used in elections and regional contests.

Observing these global patterns, it is evident that fear-based security politicization affects not only electoral dynamics but also has long-term consequences on democratic stability, intergroup relations, and state policies concerning security and national identity.

CONCLUSION

The construction of the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative as a security threat in Indonesian electoral politics reflects more than a strategic communication tactic—it reveals the operation of power through the politicization of identity and fear. This study demonstrates that through speech acts, historical trauma, and media amplification, political actors do not merely respond to public anxieties, but actively shape and manufacture them to serve ideological and electoral ends. By invoking the language of national survival and cultural purity, these actors legitimize exclusionary politics that favor dominant ethno-religious identities while marginalizing minorities perceived as "foreign" or "other." From a critical perspective, the securitization of ethnic Chinese and foreign economic presence illustrates how dominant political forces construct artificial emergencies to justify exceptional political practices and maintain power asymmetries. This process not only distorts democratic deliberation but also embeds structural biases into public discourse—where opposition is equated with betrayal, and difference is construed as danger. The effectiveness of such narratives lies in their ability to obscure material inequalities and divert attention from structural issues, thereby preserving elite interests under the guise of populist nationalism. Therefore, beyond its electoral utility, the "Asing dan Aseng" narrative operates as a mechanism of ideological control, reinforcing hierarchical power relations and posing enduring challenges to democratic inclusivity, institutional integrity, and pluralistic citizenship in Indonesia.

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