



By the way...

When we are too political, for better or worse ?

The recent regional elections confirm one important point for the country's political landscape: the increasing political maturity of voters.

The election results in West Java, Central Java and South Sulawesi, to mention just a few, suggest that specific candidates had more individual influence on voters than their affiliation with certain political parties did.

I believe that the last regional elections, in the lead-up to the 2019 presidential election, have pushed us to one inevitable fact: that we are now much too political.

Everything has a political tone, despite their irrelevance. The people's reaction to the election results, whether in rejecting or accepting them, have driven them to associate everything with politics.

Social welfare is seen from a political instead of an economic perspective. Cultural issues are defined from the viewpoint of political advantages. Even worse, religious matters such as one's piety depends on political preferences.

The misuse of this political rhythm has aggressively swayed non-political experts. I once watched a talk show on a certain TV station that featured a prominent economist with a PhD in economics from a certain overseas university. As a lecturer, I expected to be enlightened by his responses and comments on the country's economic issues such as the fuel price hike, rupiah depreciation, or soaring staple food prices.

It turned out that my expectations were too high. Rather than taking an economics approach, he suddenly alluded to the history of the nation and radicalism, in which he was much less knowledgeable, unclear and hazy.

There is nothing wrong if someone, whether an expert or an ordinary member of the public, is interested in politics. But despite one's passion for politics, when an economic expert is invited to a TV station for a public talk show, viewers hope that they will share their expertise on what is happening with the country's economy. It is ironic that a scholar would discuss things beyond their field of expertise.

This widespread passion for politics became prevalent before the regional elections. Many people metaphorical on social media into impromptu advocates, instant scholars and amateur political experts in favor of certain candidates.

Of course, it is their individual right to suddenly choose a new "profession". However, what started and disappointed me was that they failed to come up with fresh insights, as these "instant experts" simply copied and pasted or shared certain political messages. Taken from social media – or sometimes ended up with the same conclusion.

The political distinctions inspired by the elections have boded ill for individual relationships. It has reduced people into conflicting binary positions: friend and foe, black and white. A "friend" is one who shares a similar political preference, while a "foe" stands against it. Unfriending someone on social media or unnecessary domestic debates for or against certain candidates or political parties.

Instead of shaping political maturity, the public's political literacy is increasing in line with growing intolerance and sensitivity to personal choices.

I also experienced how dissimilar political preferences were affecting my social media work and even high school started to leave one by one on Facebook and WhatsApp.

The yearning we shared during our high school period, the grief we shared at university and camaraderie at the office vanished simply because of the different political choices we made at the polling stations. Friendships have ended because of the elections. What a shock.

We cannot blame people for caring about politics that more. A major contributing factor to the current political awareness is the interminable graft and bribery cases that involve politicians, high-ranking officials and public figures. People are becoming more political as they become more furious about corruption. Civil politics have been damaged

by corrupt politicians and public officials. The people's increasing political literacy by way of rampant political scandals should be seen as fostering their frustrations with the country's war against corruption.

Along with the political castration of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the people's frustration is justified, as many judges hesitate to hand down severe penalties for corruption and bribery convicts.

The heavy punishment that Supreme Court Justice Arifidjo Alicatar and his fellow justices handed down to graft convicts – or the so-called *Artidjo Effect* – has not inspired other judges at the Corruption Court to follow suit.

Political participation is necessary to strengthen democracy, prevent corruption and understand public services. Nonetheless, overreacted politics among voters and supporters will be counterproductive, as they will be preoccupied with discrediting allegations to diversity and leave tolerance behind.

- Doreen Sycuan