

Islamic Populism in The Public Sphere and Interest in 212 Action

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to examine the importance of Islamic populism against the “212 Action” in Indonesia using qualitative methods. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with several informants and analyzed using the analysis offered by Miles and Huberman. The results showed three interests of Islamic populism towards the 212 Action. First, it had been used as a space for a parade of forces to rally the masses and unite militant religious organizations. Second, it made a space to break down the stereotypes against this group. Third, it had been used to instill unity ideology and strengthen the people’s strength. In conclusion, Islamic populism had made the 212 Action a space to convey some of its private interest agenda to the public sphere.

Keywords: 212 Action; Interest; Islamic Populism; Public Sphere

1. Introduction

Action to Defend Islam, known as the ‘212 Action’, is a space of concern for Islamic populism in Indonesia. Since the case of Ahok as a blasphemer of religion, Islamic populism has taken advantage of several Defense Actions. These have occurred multiple times known from late 2016 to early 2017. The first Action to Defend Islam I, or 1410 Action, was carried out by the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) at City Hall. The second Action to Defend Islam II, known as 411 Action, was initiated by the National Movement for Defending Fatwa Indonesian Ulama Council (GNPF-MUI) at the State Palace. The third Action to Defend Islam III, or 212 Action Volume 1, was initiated by the GNPF-MUI at Monas. The fourth Action to Defend Islam IV, or 112 Action, was conducted by the Islamic Community Forum (FUI) at Istiqlal Mosque. Furthermore, the fifth Action to Defend Islam V, or 212 Action Volume 2, is at the People’s Representative Council. The sixth Action to Defend Islam VI, or 313 Action, was carried out at the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs in front of the Monas horse statue (Kusumo & Hurriyah, 2018).

The end of 2017 is the beginning of the Action to Defend Islam enshrined in the form of an annual moment known as the 212 Reunion Action. In the first year (2017), it was held at Monas on Saturday, December 2, 2017, with the theme “Caring for Al Maidah 51 Energy for the Awakening of the Ummah for the Glory of the Indonesia” with the tagline #Maulid Agung and #Reuni Akbar Alumni 212. In the second year (2018), it was conducted on Sunday,

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December 2, 2018, with the theme “Putihkan Monas Bela Tauhid, Bela NKRI” and tagline #Reuni Akbar Mujahid 212. In the third year (2019), it was organized with the theme “Munajat & Maulid Akbar” tagline #Reuni Mujahid 212. Furthermore, in the fourth year (2020), it was held virtually with the theme “Revolusi Akhlaq: Solutions for a Dignified Indonesia” tagline #Spirit212DialogNasional100Ulama&Tokoh (Vermonte, Perkasa, Fachrizal, & Satria, 2020).

The same action was conducted by Islamic populism, such as the Tamasya Al Maidah on April 19, 2017, Guard the blasphemy trial on Sunday, May 5, 2017, Bela Baitul Maqdis on Friday, May 11, 2018, Bela Tauhid I on Friday, October 26, 2018, the Action to Guard the Ummah’s Choice on May 22, 2019, and the Action to Guard the Prime Session of the Application for Dispute over Prabowo-Sandi Election Results on Friday, June 14, 2019, with the tagline #Kawal TPS DKI, #Aksi 55 Kawal Kasus Ahok, #SavePalestina&SaveUlama, #2019GantiPresiden and #2019DukungPrabowo, #2019GantiPresiden, and #KawalSuaraUmat, respectively. Furthermore, other actions include Halal bi halal held on Thursday, June 27, 2019, with the tagline #KawalPutusanMK; the pick-up of Grand Imam Habib Rizieq Shihab carried out on Tuesday, November 10, 2020, with the tagline #AhlanWasahlanHBS; Maulid Akbar with the theme “Imitating the Leadership and Heroism of the Prophet in Building a Plural Society Through a Moral Revolution” conducted on November 14, 2020; and Uphold Justice Save the Unitary State of Indonesia or commonly known as Action 1812 held on Friday, December 18, 2020 (Muzayyin Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019).

Various research were trying to read Islamic Defending Action with several focuses. The first is about discourse construction, the meaning of the 212 Action (Fariansyah, Hidayat, & Basith, 2020), and the utilization of 212 Reunion as a political campaign space (Ardiyansyah & Subekti, 2021). The second is on the elements of the movement (Vermonte et al., 2020) consisting of conservative (Woodward & Nurish, 2016) coalition of moderate Islamic, hardline Islamic, secular (Kusumo & Hurriyah, 2018), and the urban Muslim middle class (Yusuf, Afrizal, & Alfiandi, 2022) who are educated and moderate-minded (Wildan, 2016). The third involves the mass mobilization of the 212 periods (Fuadi & Tasmin, 2019), heavily influenced by social media (Jubba, Baharuddin, Pabbajah, & Qodir, 2020). The fourth concerns the impact of 212 Action (Rofiah, 2020), such as the religious authority split after the (M Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019; Sholikin, 2018) inter-ethnic inclusiveness becomes smaller (Hamudy, 2019). The fifth includes the changes in the 212 Action into social, economic, and political institutions (Argenti, 2019), while the sixth is about the media framing of the movement (Achfandhy, 2020a, 2020b; Mujibuddin SM, 2018; Pamungkas & Octaviani, 2017; Simorangkir, Kamalludin, & Yono, 2019; Zakiah, 2018). The visualization of the research using Vosviewer tools can be seen in Figure 1 below.

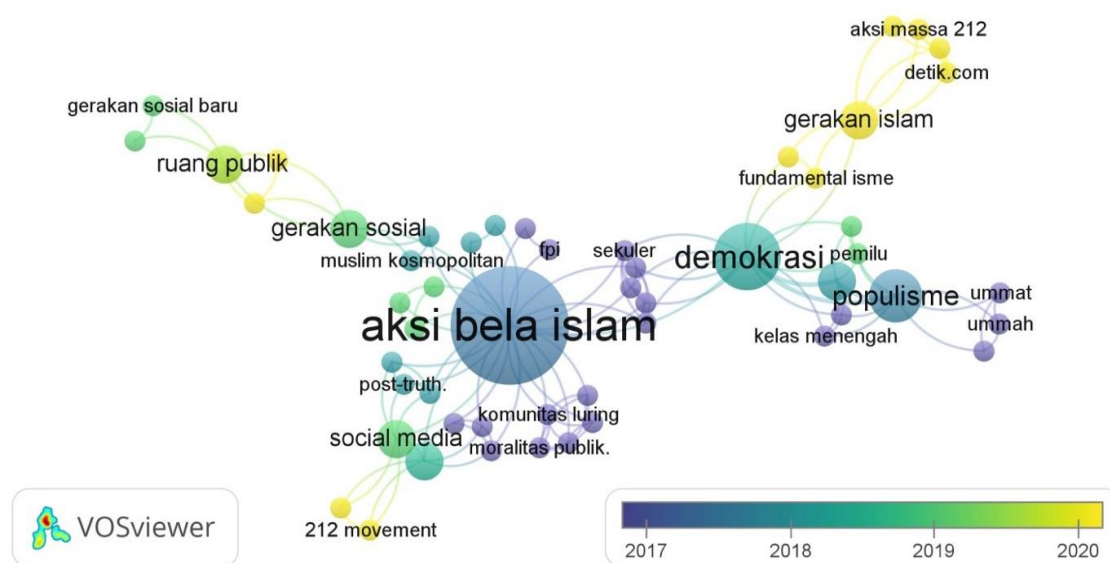


Figure 1. Keywords Study of Islamic Populism in Indonesia

Figure 1 shows that the research on Action to Defend Islam is linked with several indicators such as social movements (2019), Islamic movements (2020), mass organizations (2017), democracy (2018), public spaces (2019), ummat and ummah (2017), middle

class/cosmopolitan Muslim (2018) and media (2019). This complements the existing research concerning the Action to Defend Islam movement or 212 Action. This research focuses on how Islamic populism uses the concept in Indonesia.

The Islamic Defend Action has been utilized for consolidation, counter-stigmatization, and ideological planting. There are several kinds of aspirations that Islamic populism aspires to attain. This has enabled Islamic populism to unite very different groups of people with the ability to seize authority to master symbols, terminology, and imagery related to religious identity. However, both experience a process of modernity, marginalizing them socially, politically, and economically (Hadiz, 2019).

2. Review of Islamic Populism

Islamic populism is a variant form of populism, which incorporates aspects of cross-sectoral social class interests, aspirations, and grievances, specifically the urban poor, middle class, and marginalized bourgeois groups for the movement's interests. According to Hadiz (in Garadian, 2017a), The Middle East believed Islamic populism can be interpreted as an alliance between the dominant and subordinate classes where a narrative about the same destiny unites the two (Putra, 2019). This can cause internal vulnerabilities and contradictions to maintain its continuity due to differences in class alliances. The power constellation of certain figures in each society determines these variants. For the term "cultural resource pool", political language should be created as the glue of the various classes (Hadiz, 2019).

This differs from the old populism rooted in the lower society with a more diverse base. However, it is not a refusal to find similarities between the two movements apart from the differences. Islamic populism mobilizes and homogenizes different "mass" discontents against certain "elite". It prefers to use the "ummah" branding in every movement to unite very different groups of people. Furthermore, the word "ummah" is identified with pious people who face the elite and are described as immoral and greedy for power actors (Hadiz & Robinson, 2017).

Accordingly, Islamic populism seeks to achieve various desires to seize power and resources. It unites different groups of people with its ability to seize authority to control symbols, terminology, and imagery related to religious identity. The populism experiences a process of modernity that marginalizes them socially, politically, and economically in different sizes (Hadiz, 2014). The feeling is manifested in the form of movement when there is marginalization and injustice for Islam. Hadiz, (2019) in the Islamic populism movement, used cultural footings/references that have meaning in a particular context. Wickham (in Hadiz, 2019) argued that Islamic social agents could be successful due to the ability to adapt their respected cultural 'repertoire' for new purposes. Furthermore, Halliday (in Hadiz, 2019) explained that Islam has a treasure trove of values, symbols, and ideas translated into a political system. Similar with other major belief systems, it has the potential to provide a cultural resource for expressing grievances over social conditions conflicting with common understandings of good deeds (Hadiz, 2019). Therefore, Islamic populists argued that Islam can be made democratic, apart from entirely religious and scriptural issues, according to Bayat (Bayat, 2011).

The difference between populism and Islamic aspect underlined that the region should grow and emphasizes the aspect of religious activists. Globally, the rise can be divided into the European zone, namely America, the Netherlands, France, Russia, Germany, and the UK (Elbert, Li, Galbraith, & Saave-harnack, 2019; Gusti, Madung, & Mai, 2022; Kusumo & Hurriyah, 2018; Madung, 2018), and the Asian, including Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Australia, Turkey, Egypt, and Indonesia (Kusumo & Hurriyah, 2018; Madung, 2018).

Emerging populism has its trajectory in the Asian zone in predominantly Muslim countries, which have recently experienced significant social, economic, and political changes (Garadian, 2017). Stated that Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East had different trajectories of populism in Islamic countries, such as Turkey, Egypt, and Indonesia (Hadiz, 2019; Luthfi, Fathy, & Asadi, 2019). For Turkey, the political trajectory can be stated to be successful. Therefore, the Justice and Development Party can occupy and control the country. In this case, Islamic populism can coexist with democracy and the government system. Capitalism has the characteristics of selling liquor and sex or promoting the practice of usury, which in turn causes the backwardness of Muslims socio-economically related to Western colonialism. The Muslim Brotherhood can control civil society in Egypt but fails to manage the state (Budiharjo, 2019). As for the trajectory of Islamic populism in Indonesia, the two

countries mentioned have failed since the Old Order. Therefore, it has not been able to control the state and civil society (Hadiz, 2019).

3. Method

This research uses a qualitative method with informants and documents data sources. In-depth interviews were a data collection technique to select informants using the purposive sampling method. Analysis was conducted using the Miles & Huberman (1994) to present empirical material, and conclusion equipped with (Cresswell, 2015) data management, memoing, description-classification-interpretation, and data visualization (Shalihin, Hasibuan, Yusuf, & Muliono, 2021).

4. Islamic Populism in Indonesia

The Action to Defend Islam has been exploited by Islamic populism to consolidate various factions. This utilization can be proven by the three interests of populism to show force, break stereotypes, as well as instill and nurture ideology.

First, Action to Defend Islam shows its strength through the power of populism in mobilizing the masses and uniting different religious organizations. The power of populism to mobilize Muslims proves that it plays a major role in the movement. Several participants who attended from various regions became the basis of the action force (Ahmad, 2016). Therefore, the Action to is an act of the aspirations of the voices of Muslims in Indonesia. The accumulated disappointment and anger were exploited by Islamic populism in promoting the masses to make Ahok a suspect in the blasphemy case in Al-Maidah verse 51. Sentiments of religious harassment and racism became issues and the basis for moving the ummah to sue Ahok's leadership (Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta for the 2014-2017 period).

"At that time, Ahok had to be overthrown and defeated, and they were allowed to continue, it would grow. By Ahok's side with China at that time, it was as if they were in power. Therefore, the issue of dropping China emerged. They were mostly supported by the younger generation and were also brave because of the function of the FPI at that time. Ahok was in power, and this action would not have happened while out of power" (Participant Action, M.Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021)."

Even though the actors came from different backgrounds, Islamic populism turned the participants into a solid, peaceful, and well-maintained mass. Dressed in all white and chanting "Allahu Akbar", the masses united in one goal and command for religious jihad, which was insulted by Ahok during Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta for the 2014-2017 period.

Besides having the power to mobilize and unite Indonesian Muslims, Islamic populism can also bring together different religious organizations. The Action to Defend Islam is a space for populism to consolidate the strength of various religious organizations, including the Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Forum Umat Islam (FUI), Hiztbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), National Movement for Defending Fatwa Indonesian Ulema Council (GNPF-MUI) and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) (Nugroho, 2020). This consolidation aims to form the power to try Ahok as a religious blasphemer. The narratives of the movement began to be developed and disseminated when various components of Islamic organizations were brought together in the PA 212 forum. The narratives, such as "Muslims should unite," "Do not be willing when our religion is insulted," "we should fight and defend religion," and "should be aware of our rights as Muslims" Militant Islamic Organizations (FPI, FUI, GNPF-MUI) were able to unite under PA 212. The unity and strength built in 2016 are transformed yearly into reunion action. Even though the nuances for the participants in the 212 and the Reunion Action were different, remembering the struggle to defend their beliefs is important. The traces of struggle are recorded at Monas as the central point of the 212 Action.

"The 212 Action is not an Islamic mass organization but invites all components of Indonesian Islam to build awareness of the people's rights which in the end obtains great support. Therefore, the 212 Action voices the people's heart by saying (212) and acting" (Founder of FUI, M.Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021)."

The power of mass organizations is the capital of Islamic populism to show the strength of Muslims. The FPI has become an organization that dominates the participants and the initiators of the Action. For the participants, FPI is seen with ammunition, strong religious

authority, and militant members/sympathizers. The spirit of jihad to defend religion becomes an important essence and a commitment to religion in a state of martyrdom.

"After the 212 Action was over, the name 212 Alumni was born. Yes, these sympathizers were not part of the committee, but we are grateful that this committee exists. Yes, at the Reunion event, the committee also handles this. I have participated in the action several times. Therefore, without thinking about the Reunion Action, it always reminds the people of the struggle, hence, they are always vigilant and defend our faith as Muslims. Of course, when compared between the first action and the Reunion Action, it is different. In the first action, the feeling of being "called" is felt, while in the Reunion Action, it is not" (Participant Action, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

The success of the ummah force, which was commanded by the 212 Action Committee and other Islamic organizations, in making Ahok a suspect in the blasphemy case, is not a sign that the action is over. PA 212, which stood for the 212 Action Committee, changed to 212 Alumni Brotherhood, organized neatly and systematically from the chairman to the spokesperson. The momentum of December 2, 2016 (212 Action), attended by millions of people, has been commemorated every year since 2017. This phenomenon shows that the Brotherhood has strengthened in maintaining the stability of the masses of Muslims.

Second, space breaks stereotypes. The Action to Defend Islam manifested received much negative stigma from various groups. This stigmatization arises due to religious symbols, which are considered to have an ideology contrary to the state's basis. The LSI survey showed that "the 212 Action was not the peak of radicalism, but it opened the faucet to rising intolerance". In terms of numbers, it showed that when a non-Muslim was elected President, 59% of Muslim citizens declined (Wardah, 2018). According to Anas Saidi in the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), "The Action to Defend Islam shows the phenomenon of strengthening community groups who understand religion based on text. The process of Islamization turns out to be textualist religious, which are the seeds for radicalization" (Gumilang, 2016). The 212 Action could break the various stigmatizations and demonstrate many practices maintaining order, sincerity, inclusiveness, and tolerance.

One of the things that were admired was the matter of order in every action. Millions of people from various professions could consolidate the 212 Action to become more orderly and peaceful. Every time an action is held, it can protect the environment around the National Monument (Sindo News, 2016), and one FPI member conveyed that:

"The 212 Action makes people amazed. At that time, it was very orderly, millions of people were present, and it created itself. Furthermore, the grass is not damaged, and after the action, the National Monument is clean of garbage" (FPI Member, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

The accusation against the participants that they were paid masses was refuted by several masses willing to walk from the area to the National Monument. This walking action occurred due to the unavailability of transportation to convey people to the National Monument due to intervention from outsiders (Suryarandika, 2016).

"Participants in the 212 Action were not paid, and people were willing to sell their possessions, while some even walked. Meanwhile, this phenomenon was rarely seen, and people were seen marching on foot. They are probably from Ciamis, famous for their religious fanatics" (FPI Member, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

Apart from showing sincerity in fighting for and defending religion, the 212 Action at National Monument also showed they are not anti-diversity. In the movement, this diversity is not only seen from the Islamic mass organizations, but the diversity of interfaith also participated. Many non-Muslim figures were also present and united, and for the participants, it was a portrait of religious harmony. Therefore, Muslims and non-Muslims were called upon to put Ahok on trial for voicing the demands of the 212 Action. It was also stigmatized as a radical anti-diversity and anti-difference movement. The circulating issue could also be resolved by demonstrating its action of helping non-Muslim wedding receptions. This is as stated by one of the FUI founders.

"Some occurrences went viral, for example, during the mass action of 212 people helping the wedding ceremony at the Cathedral Church, they were given access to the road. It is a form of tolerance among Muslims and does not need to be asked. This is an example of Muslims not being asked to be tolerant" (FUI Founder, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

This act of tolerance went viral on various social media, and the 212 Action gives access to brides who want to have a wedding reception at the Cathedral Church. For the founder of FUI,

this is a form of tolerance practiced by Muslims, and there is no need to doubt the Muslims who participated in the 212 Action. Third is room for ideology. The 212 Action is similar to the Islamic and Religious Defense Action. It is not only an arena of euphoria but emotional unification for millions of Muslims. This is an externalization of collective action from the awakening of Indonesian Muslims. With the spirit of jihad built, this action left a track record of positive emotions, making Ahok a suspect in the blasphemy case with the spirit of jihad built. However, the 212 Action also produced a wave of ideological strengthening continuously carried out and maintained. The two principles treated by Islamic populism in the 212 and Reunion Action are the ideology of unity or ukhawah Islamiyah and struggle or jihad fisabilillah.

The existence of the Action to Defend Islam is a sign that Indonesian Muslims are defending their religion. In the 212 Action, the call for people to unite and uphold justice is the basic values and principles of religion to be upheld. Therefore, Indonesian Muslims universally benefited from the 212 Action.

“When Muslims defended their religion, the Action to Defend Islam was born. These invitations to unite are calls from Islam, unity, and upholding justice. Muslims obtain benefit, not the FPI, which is only an element of 212” (Informan X, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

The action carried out by Islamic populism has differences, ranging from variations in interests to elements such as mass organizations, groups, and social classes. In the 212 Action, the differences could be brought together and unified by the concept of Ukhawah Islamiyah.

“This value can unite these mass organizations, namely ukhawah Islamiyah. Even though these mass organizations have different understandings, the desired position is selected. The spirit of Ukhawah Islamiyah made colleagues from the regional area attend. This attracts people since our religion has been shattered” (FPI Member, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

The ideology of unity and Ukhawah Islamiyah was shown in the 212 and Reunion Action. There were two factors that maintained these concepts in the 212 Reunion Action. First, the Muslims present were the masses who desired the action in 2016. Second, they represented the masses that cannot attend the 2016 212 Action movement. From these factors, the ideology of ukhawah Islamiyah was maintained differently. For the participants, the 212 Action has a mission to save religion, where the authorities are considered to have discriminated against Indonesian Muslims. The act of fighting to defend religion is obligatory.

“The aim is to save religion, and when we remain silent, Islam will certainly be weak. Moreover, the government is deliberately doing it to weaken the creed of the Muslim community. The Muslim population was simply colonialists made to appear fools, and the government would be more flexible if we were ignorant. Furthermore, when the action is not held, I think Islam will be destroyed with Pancasila will be damaged. There are also Muslims who are not like that and are afraid. This is a noble cause, such as martyrdom in Islam, and the value of jihad is number one, specifically regarding matters of religion” (Participants Action, M. Yusuf, Interview Personal, 2021).

5. Islamic Populism and Interest in 212 Action

The findings above show that Islamic populism has exploited the 212 Action for the personal interests of its group. In this movement, the 212 Action is used as a moment by Islamic populism to consolidate various religious factions or different groups, which is then capitalized as a basis for resistance against power. Based on this, it is not excessive to say that the 212 Action is not solely an action to make Ahok a suspect of religious blasphemy, but rather the action is exploited by various interests of Islamic populism, as mentioned above. So why does Islamic populism use the 212 Action as a space of interest for its group?

The presence of the 212 Action provides an opportunity for Islamic populism to display their power in front of millions of Muslims and the Indonesian government. It must be acknowledged that the emergence of Islamic populism is not a new phenomenon, but its power has been absent from Indonesian politics for a long time. According to the (Garadian, 2017) and (Hadiz, 2019), prior to independence, the Islamic populist movement already existed, but the presence of populism at that time was solely for the purpose of fighting against the colonizer, united with a nationalistic spirit. One representation of Islamic populism in that context was the Islamic movements that resisted colonization, such as what was done by the Sarekat Islam (SI). According to Hidayatullah (2014) records, the

presence of SI, which brought religious identity, strengthened solidarity among Muslims to rally national power in fighting against Dutch colonization.

The present-day Islam populism uses religion in the 212 Action as a unifying symbol for different factions to resist and possibly take over power. The movement implies to the powers that be its ability to resist opposing forces. Hence, as the majority religion in Indonesia (Marpuah, 2019), Islam is not just a guide for religious rituals and values, but also a tool for gaining power and showing dominance by certain groups (Welak, 2022). Studies on the phenomenon of Islamic populism in Indonesia indicate that the strong religious sentiments in the 212 Action indicate that identity politics is sweeping Indonesia (Ardipandanto, 2020; Welak, 2022; Wisnu, 2019).

Since then, the success of Islamic populism in consolidating various factions in the 212 Action has opened the door for inserting various personal interests from their group. Latently, Islamic populism not only showcases its strength in mobilizing masses, but it also succeeds in showing that its activities are not as described by the government, which in this article is referred to as the stereotype-breaking space. Negative claims from many parties circulate, justifying the 212 Action as an indicator of the strengthening of radical and intolerant acts of Muslims post-Soeharto's New Order in Indonesia (Van Bruinessen, 2002). Such justification by Islamic populism is used as a stimulus to scenario various antithesis actions, so that the government's constructed argument can be discredited. It is interesting to observe that if previously Islamic populism did not have the space to refute all narratives from the government, then with the 212 Action, it can express its emotional desires by using religious sentiment to break down negative stereotypes that have not been answered.

The meeting of two entities, Islamic populism and the 212 Action in the public space, turns out to not only be limited to countering the arguments of power, but another face is that Islamic populism actually uses the 212 Action as a space of interest to transform ideological values among the Muslim society who participated in the 212 Action at that time. The gathering of Muslim society in the 212 Action has become an ideological subject for Islamic populism in the 212 Action. For Islamic populism, the 212 Action is a "fertile field", that must be sown to spread its ideology. Rationally, the interest in spreading ideology in the midst of a gathering of Muslims from various regions must be done. Because moments like the 212 Action, which can gather millions of Muslims, is a religious agenda that is very rare to happen in Indonesia. In the midst of the high emotions of the Muslim community, who feel that their religion has been insulted by Ahok, Islamic populism easily transforms the 212 Action into a space of ideological interest for its group. As stated in the study by Adjisakti et al., (2021) that when individuals are in an emotional state, the tendency that emerges is difficulty in adjusting to the activities carried out in the 212 Action.

Thus, it is clear that Aksi 212 is a space used by Islamic populism as a medium to convey various interests, ranging from political propaganda to ideological interests. This situation may occur because Aksi 212, as a public space, will be distorted if there are groups dominating it. In this context, this article firmly states that Aksi 212 has become a space of interest for Islamic populism in Indonesia.

6. Conclusions

This research concluded that the 212 Action was a space used by Islamic populism for political propaganda, truth justification, and ideological interests. Furthermore, it enriched the reading and analysis of the Islamic populism's action.

7. Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare there is no conflict of interest in writing this manuscript.

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