



## Stop using Islam to win votes, says Indonesia's largest Muslim body

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Politicians in Malaysia and Indonesia are exploiting the religious sentiments of Muslim voters by using Islam and this can lead to conflict in multi-religious societies, warns Nahdlatul Ulama.

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Yahya Staquf

KUALA LUMPUR: Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has ticked off politicians in Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia who use Islam to win votes.

Yahya Staquf, the secretary-general of NU, said it would inevitably result in discrimination of minorities, provoke intolerance and possibly lead to religious conflict.

Malaysia's Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS), too, says exploiting Islam to win votes would lead to intolerance.

"There are political actors who have used Islam as a weapon and have succeeded (in winning elections). Using religion in a heterogeneous society (ends up) discriminating against people of other faiths," Staquf told *Channel NewsAsia* (CNA).

This, he was quoted as saying, had the potential to trigger conflict – including possible violent conflict – with other faiths. "We cannot afford any more religious conflicts," Staquf added.

Staquf was in Kuala Lumpur as a keynote speaker in the Istanbul Network 5th International Conference on Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World which ended on Nov 28.

The CNA report said NU was the latest organisation to be concerned about some politicians in Indonesia and Malaysia using religion to win votes.

NU, with about 50 million followers, is seen as a moderate Islamic body.

"I speak about Islam because I am Muslim. I know what is happening in the Muslim world. But that doesn't mean other religions don't have problems.

"This is not a problem of Malaysia and Indonesia. This is a problem of our civilisation. We need to give attention to the security of our entire civilisation. Do we want to have peace or do we want the world to end quickly?" asked Staquf.

He told CNA: "We need a global consolidation to deal with this problem. The key is to build awareness... don't allow Islam to be used to trigger conflict."

Massive demonstrations, led by Islamist groups, were held to protest against Jakarta's former ethnic Chinese Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known by his nickname Ahok, in the run-up to the May 2017 gubernatorial elections which he eventually lost.

Islamist parties and hardline Islamic groups told Muslims it was forbidden to vote for Ahok as he is not a Muslim.

Similar sentiments have been professed by a few in Malaysia. Some foreign Islamic preachers who frequent Malaysia and Indonesia have been reported as saying that Muslims should vote for Muslim leaders.

According to the CNA report, the Jakarta-based Setara Institute said on Dec 1 that religious populism would lead to a loss of rationale among believers.

“People should be aware that such movements are a danger to social cohesion in a multi-ethnic nation,” said Setara.

The report quoted IDEAS chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan as saying exploiting religious sentiments to win votes had become part of the political strategy of politicians.

“Identity politics works especially in countries where public policy, good governance are not the mainstream discussion that’s taking place,” Wan Saiful had said at the Istanbul Network 5th International Conference.

“There are irresponsible people who are failing to provide leadership and exploiting the weaknesses of human beings by exploiting those emotional issues.

“I have been going round the country asking people what they are most concerned about... and people are most concerned over “what will happen to Islam, what will happen to our ethnic group,” said Wan Saiful.

Exploiting religion for political votes would lead to intolerance, he said.

<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/12/05/stop-using-islam-to-win-votes-says-indonesias-largest-muslim-body/>