

# Dhikr Policy: Elite and Populism in Banda Aceh, Indonesia

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**Abstract---** *Islamic populism trend is increasing in Indonesia. One of them is the dhikr policy in Aceh after the tsunami. Dhikr was and is used by elites both during the election as a campaign strategy, as well as a populist policy in running the government in the city of Banda Aceh. This study uses a qualitative approach through in depth and snowball interviews in the city of Banda Aceh. The results of this study explain three main findings. First, the dhikr policy is not just a ritual of worship, but it merely serves an entertaining dhikr, which involves the government in terms of implementing and budgeting. Second, the motive of the political elite in the dhikras a populist policy is to form an elite figure, because it aims to display the symbol of faith, political compensation, means of communication and public clarification. Finally, the zikr policy has not been able to solve the problems of individual and social welfare in Banda Aceh. Thus, increasing populism along with the birth of populist policies have formed an elite Indonesian figure(s) amidst the establishment of democracy today.*

**Keywords---** *Dhikr Policy, Elite, Populism.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Dhikr is a common ritual worship in Aceh. It started to go for public and emphasized the mass of mobilization especially after tsunami (around the year of 2007). Dhikr becomes a collective public worship ritual in Aceh lately. It means that dhikr before tsunami was mostly practiced as a personal worship, ora certain people of group without public announcement or massive mass mobilization. In traditional or classical practices, people do dhikr by disguising their faces from public unlike what we generally observe in Aceh, and in Banda Aceh in particular.

A ritual of worship which becomes more popular recently is Sufismdhikr which shows a new pattern of one's sense of obedience and religiousness in Indonesia and Aceh. This trend is dominantly influenced by urban society's life style. Sufism forms within urban society are religious programs practiced in certain forms, such as training of tasawuf, seminar about spirituality, television program, and dhikr(Ardiyaningrum, 2017).

Having said that, elites start to use dhikr as a politics of communication to the media, before and after election. Several disputes of election show a tendency of using the media by the local or national elites. For instance, in the local context of Banda Aceh, IllizaSa'aduddinDjamal-FaridNyak Umar useddhikr as a campaign media which is able to mobilize massively (Hasyim, 2017). Illiza as the incumbent candidate (as a Mayor of Banda Aceh until 2017 period), have held several dhikr events on behalf of Banda Aceh government. This is also followed by their opponent, Aminullah Usman-ZainalArifin, who organized dhikrduring their pre-election campaign.

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Afterwards, the elected mayor; Aminullah-Zainal Arifin also decided dhikr as the official policy in Banda Aceh. The dhikr policy that is led by *Majelis Dhikr and Pengajian Gemilang* has been launched by Aminullah (Humas Aceh, 2017). The program was meant to support the implementation of *Syari'at Islam* (Hafid Junaidi, 2018). Dhikr, as a policy is supported by means of budget allocation and organizational aspect. A dhikr event is held weekly, especially in Friday night in Banda Aceh Mayor's Pavilion. Likewise, several events in Banda Aceh also include dhikr as a one of the activities. For instance, during the anniversary of Banda Aceh' city, dhikr is included as a part of the events which was celebrated in Blang Padang city square of Banda Aceh, in 20<sup>th</sup> April 2018 (Perkim, 2018) and in The Islamic New Year celebration. Looking at these occurrences, dhikr can become a media which creates elites' images, and to gain public's support. The political motives has more or less become the main considerations which force elite to think that dhikr is not only about the ritual of worship, but also a rational public policy.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some recent studies discuss about dhikr as a religious ritual practice within the modern society. As Akbar (Akbar, 2018) stated that the narrative of dhikr and certain contexts among citizens have affected dhikr to be welcomed as the main ritual for its believers. He stated that dhikr is pleasantly welcomed among modern people who live side by side with so many conflicts and distortions of human values facing the tension of modernity. Dhikr, therefore, increases Muslim's love to their God (Allah SWT). The love creates a joy and comfort in life and it is expected that they finally able to anticipate stress (concolation) in their life.

Similar with Zamhari statement (2007) that dhikr trend as a form of an Islamic spirituality derives from the popularity of the *Majelis Zikir* Group in Indonesia, especially in Java island, including both in urban and rural areas. More and more followers in the group affected by religious performance by *Majelis Zikir* groups among Indonesian moeslem. They also want to show that the groups can be the alternative in improving their sense of spirituality, especially, for ritual practice of Islamic Sufism.

In addition, Hasan (2012) stated that dhikr developed as a main way to emphasize and negotiate new public space. He highlighted that the biggest event of dhikr can be best used in formulating personal and social identity which becomes a new form of religiousness. The activity (dhikr) becomes an activity that unites communality and religion expression, meet the politics of relation, and hopefully improves social and economics within the community. Therefore, the elite claims that dhikr can be a powerful strategy to create electability and popularity of the elites for political purposes, because dhikr is used in a political campaign. In this light, very little research addresses their focuses on the controversion between the dhikr dimension and politics through public policy and then, how elite's motives can form their own images and popularities in the context of Banda Aceh, the capital city of Aceh with its sharia implementation.

Internationally, there are several examples of the politicization of religion in political activities. First, in US, mixing religion in politics activities is still used widely although it is claimed negatively. As researched by (Campbell & Putnam, 2012) they found that the relation between religion and politics become "common to uncommon" thing in the most of American's social movements, for progressive or conservative movements. This escalation in US has affected the youth to withdraw from the political process.

The American youth withdrawn because of the cause effect not coincidental. It means that they withdrawn from the politics process because it is suspected to be a cause that was happened long time ago and not in sudden.

In Europe, especially in Germany, the politics of religion has been widely become the main topic in political discussion for last few decades, especially in social science. It was proven by the control of the ruling party in Germany named CDU (Christian Democratic Union) under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel. Another comparative study which was conducted by Altinordu (2010) compared Catholic Christian Politicization, Turkey Islamism, and Protetanism in Germany in different periods of time. By purposing revival-reaction-politicization theory, he found facts that successful religious parties are the parties which can handle the awakening of religion in facing the force of country and other religions' mobilization. However, the religious parties in Germany did not effectively represent "religiousness" and their defense toward religions.

A study from Laliberté (2015) concluded that Chinese communist parties use several religion approaches in their political administration. He confirmed that it is one of their strategies in deciding a religion as a political issue for public in relation to the wider political issues. In his perspective, the Chinese communist parties used two approaches; coersive and cooperative, especially in categorizing officially accepted and forbidden religions.

In the current Jakarta election 2017, there were several important facts which were necessary to be put on concern. As Prayogi's (2018) highlighted that identity and imagination of Islam politics was spontaneously studied by critical interviewing for Laclau and Mouffe and the Populism concept by Vedi R Hadiz, from a massive mobilization until a polarization supporter. This study tried to see how the massive mobilization which was happened spontaneously in responding Ahok's case and then became the massive public emotion in the *Bela Islam 212* (Defending Islam 212) movement. This movement becomes one point and the main center for Islamic mobilization or movement in a national political context. The other study was conducted by Hamdi (2011) about politic religion and the dispute of authority of *Nadhlatul Watanin* autonomous Lombok administration. This is interesting due to the populist policy is seen from local and regional autonomy factors which gives a space for structural and cultural changing in Lombok during electoral and democratization processes. This study also explored about how elites of *NadhlatulWathan* won the strategic position in the government through the election.

In the context of Aceh, Novinggi's study (2014) is still relevant. She saw that one of strategies for legislative candidates in 2014 election for Aceh Tamiang district is dhikr. Dhikr is one of the ways to be introduced in political campaign. Through purposive sampling method of qualitative study, Novinggi confirmed that the political communication strategy of dhikr is helpful to increase the votes of women legislative candidates among citizen is colossal worship, such as dhikr, oration, and massive campaign in public.

As mentioned above, although most of studies have not yet explored about the specific context of dhikr as a populist policy, but the populism works through the dhikr policy to form elites' images because dhikr is welcomed as a worship ritual in public spaces. Religious politicization can be done structurally by using religious or communal rituals as an approach. Therefore, this study used two approaches: populism theory and public policy.

Populism phenomenon in Southeast Asia was predictably happened after monetary crisis 1997. In the crisis, elites took part to be the dominant force as a strong leader, charismatic and not only focusing on program and

ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populism leader emphasizes on personal strength; top-down and no specific ideological influence. The countries of Asia and Latin America were explaining about the movements of populism classic form because a figure from deactivated country was born. In Indonesia, recently, populism tendency is going to move on formulating it to cover elites' weaknesses to create innovative policy to citizen welfare (Mietzner, 2015). Therefore, populism become a strength to mobilize people, further, in certain condition, it was supported by communitarian people of Indonesian (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

The politicians' dependency with populism and charismatic leadership relation between voter and politician becomes seriously increasing (Acemoglu, Egorov, & Sonin, 2013). Earlier, populism which has essence of a well-being have moved to operandi mode of authority (Pratikno & Lay, 2011). Kenny (2017) responded that populism becomes a threat for democracy and will increase for future. In recent contexts, populism is not only used by the elites in an electoral party campaign level but also become a state official policy, in which religious issue was purposively used. Islamic populism is led to influence the general discourse relating to the head of districts whose negatively solved the cities' problems because they do not have clear religious identity with the majority. A boundary between "elites who committ corruption vs. the oppressed community" claimed the head of districts' faces because they dont have any allignments for the oppossed community. In Knight's writing (1998), he called it as neo-populism which means that the elite politics style by manipulating the formulation of mentality of "we and they". It is similar to a fear which is conditioned to a massive fearness. The fearness was used by the elites to cover economics problems, eagerness or governor ability to give social services for public. Therefore, there is a strong temptation to find an issue to attract all classes to get massive support.

However, the concept of public policy in this study is public choice theory which leads to the populist elite tendency. They claimed to take collective decisions by integrating economics ideas and politics which benefit each other. He says it is like the John Locke social contract whereby the deal shall benefits each others and they have to obey for punishment and governor support in obligation by giving life-protection, freedom, and ownership (Dye, 2013).

A public choice theory helps to explain why political parties and their candidates who failed to offer alternative policy while election campaign. Parties and candidates did not have strong interest to develop principles but they are more interested in winning the election. They formulated their policy position to win the election and at the same time developed principles for winning the election which can be extremely the opposite. It is no wonder that the candidates' campaign userethorics and narrative, so they candidate can gain more votes. This phenomenon has tendency with dhikr policy adopted by Banda Aceh government as a political choice to make a positive impact toward the policy which concerns on the process and political actions.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study used qualitative research to understand the dhikr phenomenon as a political elites' policy in Banda Aceh. According to Mason (2017), qualitative study makes researcher able to see a wider dimension from social phenomenon, life, experience and relation between those things. Mackey and Gass (2015) support this statement and believe that qualitative descriptive does not use statistical procedures and numbers.

Accordingly, the qualitative approach can create a method which is able to provide data, develop, analyze, and communicate the result for readers (Tracy, 2019).

The study is located in Banda Aceh. The method to decide participants in this study depends on relevant information from the sources which is related to the formulated research questions (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Therefore, the process for discovering research object was used purposive sampling or judgment sampling. In this technique, the most important participants or informants were carefully selected based on their relevance to the information that they have about the research. The purposes of it is to find out the information to explain the phenomenon as a concern (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The data of this study was gained through the main informants from each dhikr whose similar characters and relevant to their own roles in the dhikr activity in Kota Banda Aceh. They are the mayor of Kota Banda Aceh, politic consultant of the elected Mayor, manager of *Majelis Zikir* and *Gemilangdhikr*, the committee of dhikr event, Islamic Syari'ah Department in Aceh, Ustadz and lecturer, police officer, Islamic mass organization, tourism office, academia, and the community of dhikr in Banda Aceh.

The study used analysis thematic reflective data method. Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2019), explained that data thematic analysis reflective is depending on the explicit conceptual evidence to make the room for participants' perspectives in the study. Data collected through interviews would be transcribed and be selected as relevant information. Then it would be selected and categorized for analyzing by using open coding (Corbin, 2008). It means the data selected would be themes which are gained through "repetition, similarity, difference, and categorization or specific typology (Silverman, 2016)", or it could be found from the discovery of "themes that come up several times through patterns and concepts" (Nassaji, 2015).

A source-triangulation model through interview is used to validate the qualitative study (Flick, 2011). Qualitative data analysis was conducted in three ways according to Miles, Huberman & Huberman (1994). First is data reduction by categorizing, directing, discarding unused data, and organizing data for conclusions. Second is data provision. It is conducted to form constructed pattern systematically to take a conclusion. The data is numbers, words, sentences, or paragraphs would be provided in text narratively. Third is finding the conclusion from data analysis as a final say to draw a general pattern from the study concerns and try to provide future recommendation.

## **IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### ***4.1 Re-identifying Dhikr as a policy in Banda Aceh***

Dhikr for the Acehnese has been implemented since years ago publicly. However the form which was used by the ulema and citizens needs to adapt with the condition and the people around the city. According to Prof. Yusny Saby in an interview:

...dhikr education by the previous ulama through *tariqah*, ... no worry, to medium, introduction or learning media for religious to people, art, poetry, rhyme, and proverb is quite fast.. Through poetry, rapa'i, dance, it is good but nowadays it becomes entertainment (PYS, 25 Sept 2019).

In Aceh, dhikr is performed by means of cultural dances, such as Saman, Seudati, LikokPulo, or RatohDuek. All the dances are dhikr to Allah swt which appear in lyrics that is sung together to the audience. Prang Sabitale or saga is also sung enthusiastically with all of the Acehnese freedomfighter forces against the Dutch Colonial invaders. The tale was easier to be remembered. Indeed, *shalawatan* is commonly heard in wedding party, dhikr*samadiyah* following one's mourn or circumcision proceedings. All of these activities represent the historical view of dhikr in Aceh on how to integrate a religion and remembering God in daily activities which without needing formal consent from government authority.

Although dhikr activity has a little difference from a common activity, after Aceh conflict and tsunami, people welcome a large-scale dhikr as a way to show a gratitude, at least in the 15<sup>th</sup> of August (Helsinki's agreement) and 24<sup>th</sup> of December (Tsunami) in the province mosques'yards, districts, or sub-districts. Dhikr is then becoming more and more popular and started to be broadcasted in TV shows in a local or national television, or aired regularly by radio and to be published massively in local and national newspapers.

Several dhikr programs later are facilitated by the government; ranging from budgeting for a venue, meals, and other logistics needed. It is also widely open for public. Governor will mobilize people through the departments or offices in government, but also from civil servants to be included as participants. As stated by Tgk. Samunzir, the leader of Zikrullah Aceh admits that "Tsunami is a push-point" of the dhikr movement in Aceh.

Banda Aceh government starts to implement dhikr as one of mayoral priority's programs following the stepdown of the former mayor Illiza Sa'aduddin Jamal. Banda Aceh, during Illiza administration proposed "*Kota Madani*" (roughly translated as Civilized/Modern City) which becomes a large-scale campaign activities that provide spaces for moslem groups to explore themselves, for examples, building a stage for Friday regular preaching sessions and also invited famous Islamic national preachers like Yusuf Mansur, Arifin Ilham, Peggy Melati Sukma, and others. Dhikr is also used in Islamic moments and government agendas.

In Aminullah Usman's government, replacing the former mayor Illiza, with the new tagline of "*Banda Aceh Kota Gemilang*" (Banda Aceh: The Thriving City), he plans one of his excellent program is Banda Aceh as a *Kota Zikir Gemilang* (The Thriving Dhikr City). Thus, dhikr has been realized in two ways, large scale dhikr and weekly routined dhikr. A large-scale irregular dhikr is a dhikr which is carried out in important iconic moments in Banda Aceh or to celebrate the big holy days of Islam, for instance, for *Maulid Nabi* (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Celebration), *Isra Mi'raj* (The Prophets Muhammad Ascending Celebration), or Banda Aceh City's anniversary. Generally, dhikr is programmed regularly to commemorate the special moments. A large-scale dhikr is commonly organized in famous city squares of *Taman Ratu Safiatuddin*, *Blang Padang*, or *Raya Baiturrahman* Grand Mosque. However, weekly routined dhikr is a dhikr that is prepared weekly every Friday-night and received financial support government budgeting under The Office of Sharia of Banda Aceh City. They have allocated almost 1 billion IDR in Islamic lecturing division. This type of dhikr mobilized people by providing operational transportation for the dhikr group members and its students of their Islamic traditional boarding schools from the Islamic Traditional Boarding Schools Office in Banda Aceh, especially for people affiliated to several Islamic traditional boarding school (*dayah*) in Banda Aceh such as *Zikir Gemilang*, *Zikrullah Aceh*, *Zikir Zawiyah Nurun Nabi*, *Zikir Mujiburrahman*, *Rateb*

*Siribe Dhikr, and Zikir Arafah.* All of those dhikr assemblies become a leader of dhikr for every meeting. For three weeks, daily dhikr is organized in Mayor's pavilion led by Ust. TgkJumaris S. Ag. Meanwhile, since early 2019, 18<sup>th</sup> Of January 2019 in BaitulMusyahadah mosque, Banda Raya sub-district. Since then, one of the four weeks routine weeklydhikr will be held in sub-districts mosques which is later named as "*safari dhikr*". Each sub-district, can now propose the regular dhikr to be held in their mosques as stated by Ust. Jumaris: to expand thedhikr program, sub – districts mosques are used, such as *Geuchiek Leumiek* mosque, *Baitussalihin* mosque..." (JU/13<sup>th</sup> of July 2019).

There are two departments responsible for the organization of this weekly regulardhikr. First is The Sharia Islam Office of Banda Aceh (*DinasSyariah Islam*). They support and provide financial matters, details of events, mobilization of government officials and employees, Forkopimda, district-chief, and other government agencies and bodies in Banda Aceh. This allocation is used for snacks or meals, for committees' honorary. Second is the Office for Islamic Education ofTraditional Boarding School (*DinasPendidikanDayah*) responsible for participant's mobilization of roughly 500-700 people. Therefore, dhiks was defined as a governor policy due to facilitate by the government, in allocating or realizing the event, including mobilization for the participants.

#### **4.2 Dhikr as a populism policy: Elite Motive in "Banda Aceh for a Bright City" era**

Dhikr, if it is facilitated by the city and becomes a policy, it has several motives in creating policy planning. The motives are categorized in social-culture (religious) motive, economy and politic motives as the following details:

##### ***Social-culture motive: A religioun becomes a social system in Banda Aceh people***

Socio-cultural motives in dhikr policy purposes to create a religion to be a part of social system for people in Banda Aceh. Banda Aceh has vision of "*Menuju Kota Gemilang Banda Aceh dalam Bingkai Syari'ah*". This means that Banda Aceh wants to have a bright and prosperous city through three main things; religion, economy, and education.

These goals is bettered by putting more focus on gender-fairness. Meanwhile, the syari'ah frame is based in the whole process of governmet, development, and social-life among citizen based on sharia implementation of Islam. To realize the vision, there are seven missions that can be done, one of them are improving the sharia implementation in three main aspects of *aqidah* (faith), *syariah* (law) and *akhlak* (morality). This mission means the attempts to ensure that governance process, development, and social-citizen are always in accordance to the sharia values.

Dhikr becomes a populist policy held by the government of Banda Aceh toachive these goals. This policy is welcomed because theAcehese are very committed in implementing the sharia law. The main poin of dhikr is the closeness between people and their God. Religion in Aceh has become a social system of life. The obedience to Allah becomes one of social systems which affected the safety and comfortability among people in Aceh.

Aminullah Usman and ZainalArifin team claimed that an enforcement of syariah law focuses onsubstantial presence within the people. They see dhikr as a strategic policy to prevent substantial loss of human safety and the overall social environment. As the consultant team statement:

Fulfilling the human right is important, but the enforcement of shariah law is also important. But before Mr. Amin, the implementation of shariah law is merely concentrating on curing the illegal action, but nowadays, it is on substantive prevention. The result of the discussion with campaign party-team, the enforcement of shari'ah law is still substantial. It means, whipping one is a catch, whipping is a part of punishment and things that must be done are proposing programs to prevent, one of them are public dhikr activities. (RJ/ 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2019).

### ***Economy Motive: as an Islamic Tourism***

The elite in Banda Aceh formulated dhikr as a policy to reach the target of Islamic tourism destination. They want to create halal tourism as a role model and earn economic benefits and increase the people welfare. Dhikr held by the Banda Aceh governance is not only a worship or ritual, but also a superior policy in Banda Aceh governance. Seeing on that, dhikr is published to attract public, local, national, and international attention. Therefore, a mosque located in UleeLheu will be built as a dhikr center to attract tourism. The weekly dhikr also aims at growing support to Banda Aceh as an international dhikr city and at the end as a role model for halal tourism, as explained by the Tourism Department in Banda Aceh:

Through those Islamic programs which are developing, dhikr, Islamic lecturers, and others, it leads to the Banda Aceh as a halal tourism city (IS/ 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2019).

Although it has been explained that this plan of building of mega dhikr center has little relation to the Tourism Officer responsibilities, but this is one way to realize the mission. Multiplier economic motive from elite from this project is the hope that dhikr can increase the citizen income from tourism because it can enhance economic transaction in Banda Aceh.

### ***Political motive: Increasing Popularity through populism policy***

Dhikr can be seen as a populist policy that is patterned by the elite to enhance their electability. There are several political motives as a dhikr policy as follows:

#### ***1) A Dhikr policy as A Symbols of Faith or Faith Securitization?***

After reformation, the religion issue significantly become the focal point in Indonesia. The issue becomes a basic for policies in Indonesia.

Some areas create policies based on religion values. According to LIPI study, between 1994 and 2014 only, there are 443 local sharia regulations in Indonesia<sup>6</sup>. Such as, local regulations in Aceh, South Sulawesi, West Java, and others and perhaps the total number is more than the figure showed here. This trend increases in the current local election in 2017 and in 2019.

Aceh also becomes a part of districts that has tendency for a policy of religious values, such as dhikr. In details, dhikr and the program is allocated formally by Banda Aceh government. Referring to RPJMD (Government Mid-Term Planning Document), dhikr becomes a part of first mission to uphold the Islamic values of Banda Aceh people by focusing on increasing people awareness to implement Islamic the sharia values. The dhikr programs are executed by The Office of Sharia Islam. It is stated by the chief of HRD division, Dinas Pendidikan Dayah Banda Aceh:

...dhikr is definitely stated in a RPJM as a strategic issue of the Mayor, as his first mission in shariah and education and was signed by syari'ah department because I attended some discussion at that time, including RPJM meetings.

(SY/ 8<sup>th</sup> of July, 2019).

The same thing is also confirmed by one of DPRK's member:

If he is proposing a program, it can be vision and mission bounded which is put on RPJM. One of them is shariah law implementation which interprets from dhikr (IR/ 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

According to RPJMD document explanation, several years ago, Banda Aceh citizens worried of the social phenomenon, such as the existence of punk community, LGBT, and prostitution<sup>1</sup>. Looking at the phenomenon, Banda Aceh governance claimed that the problem is on implementing the regulations. The phenomenon encourages the city government to enforce the sharia through dhikr. Dhikr is claimed as an effort and movement to implement *amarma'rufnahimungkar* (upholding the good deeds, and restraining from the bad deeds). Several problems related to the strategic issues in The Sharia Office are<sup>2</sup>:

- a. *there is infringement towards Qanun Syariat (Qanun Number 6/ 2014 about Jinayah Law)*
- b. *Lack of the implementation of Islamic program publicity*
- c. *a few program in mosque lead by the young generation which affected non active program*

As a policy and dhikr as an Islamic program publicity implementation, it has three levels. According to Yusni Sabi, dhikr is a way to remember Allah, as an awareness to Allah and Islam, as a warning and as obedience to Allah (29 September 2019). Then, dhikr has three level, oral (*lisan*) as the first level, *qalbi* (understanding) as the second one, and action (*amali*) as the last level of dhikr.

A religion is comprised by two aspects: symbols and substance. Symbols is a part of *syiar* to attract people to remember Allah, and it is not in substance level to make people understand and implement Islam in their daily behaviors. Interview with elites have revealed that the main reasons of Banda Aceh mayor to do this are:

About dhikr program, it is our priority program because we want Banda Aceh as a unique city compare to other cities in Indonesia. Aceh has Islamic law so everything that relate to the essences of Islam is still on process to be developed, such as dhikr and other religious things (IS/ 10th July 2019).

However, making Banda Aceh special to other cities is not substantial, as a parliament member of Banda Aceh stated:

Dhikr as a *syiar* that has been implemented well, but, dhikr is not certainly the only thing in line with syariat Islam implementation because dhikr program should have given impact to other things. For example, dating time for young generation, cafe shops is still opened until midnight. They are contradictory to the values of Sharia Islam implementation. Some remarks from interviews above stated that elites did not describe the actual condition in Banda Aceh and dhikr becomes one way to solve problem. The elites did not explain about the reasons behind dhikr program which is happening because of the decreased level of faith of people in Banda Aceh, as stated by the manager of ZikirGemilang coordinator:

This pavilion is a center for program, people's home, mayor's home, so we want to do it from here, we are getting closer to Allah and wish will be gotten His blessing for this city. Definitely, it seemed as Mecca in which the supplication is sent all the time. However, it is not ideal yet, but at least we want to do it in the leader of Banda Aceh's mayor residence.

Furthermore, dhikr policy has turned to be the main consideration for populist policy that can form politician's electability because the program is addressing the religion issues and it can create a politician image. As a result, dhikr becomes a popular policy as stated by an advisor of Zikir Gemilang:

At that time, dhikr is famous, such as Ustd Samunzir with his Majelis Zikrullah Aceh, and other dhikr groups, resulting Banda Aceh people to welcome dhikr and it becomes a program for Kota Banda Aceh governance which is a part of a mission. (JR/ 11 July 2019).

The statement above talks about a faith as a symbol. The policy can be a symbol that can give way for a popular policy which has not produced substantial improvements. A popular policy creates politician figures.

## **2) Dhikr as a Form of Commitment Fulfilment to Political Campaigns and Political Compensation**

Dhikr has become one of superior program offered by the candidate (Aminullah Usman and Zainal Arifin) at the local election 2017. This is such a "political marketing" war between candidates at that time. Incumbent (Illiza Sa'aduddin Jamal) was a vice-mayor period 2006-2012 and a Mayor 2012-2017. When she was leading the governance, she focused on implementing Syariah law through taking serious actions and measures for violators, such as whipping, raiding in cafes or karaoke places, etc.

Some citizens were said to be disrupted by such approach. This made Aminullah as a competitor did a different way and concerned on preventive actions, Aminullah's statement as follows:

One of our exact analysis which caused the landslide win was the fact that Illiza did not implement syariah laws substantively. She focused on patrolling, arresting people, and others, while we focused on *taushyiah and dhikr*.

The strategy increases Aminullah Usman's popularity:

The campaign of fulfilling basic needs of the citizen is important to win the competition, but in implementing the syariah law, it was not right to be more focused on action instead of preventive actions, so we do prevention in substance as a strategy of the campaign. So, the discussion resulting in the campaign team are varied, implementing syariah is still substantial and relevant, unlike canning. A whipping or canning is a part of punishment, however thing that is necessary to do now is preventive action and we make it into our programs, and one of them is dhikr (RJ/4 July, 2019).

According to one of the Government Office in Banda Aceh, dhikr becomes a marketable program of elected mayor since campaign as the rules:

A large-scale dhikr is a common program, not a priority program. The main program in the governance is dhikr because it was a promise of the elected Mayor in his campaign (smiling), we can't deny that it is a main program to be realized (IS/ 10 July 2019).

Further, Mr. Aminullah is a mayor who likes organizing big event. An event creates his images as a philanthropical person.

Mr. Amin prefers to do *kenduri* in Lampaseh (his private house). There always crowd in Lampaseh, people were getting boring of having the feast only (*kenduri*), so they wanted dhikr instead. Dhikr promotes good relationship, strengthens spirituality, and realizes the program. Before becoming a Mayor, he was frequently held dhikr and *mauled* in Lampaseh, however, *mauled* can even be held five to seven times a year. Thus, dhikr is not only about the marketable program, but also about his character (RJ/ 4 Juli 2019).

With regard to the election effect, dhikr is the political compensation from the elected Mayor with his relations. Islamic organization groups supporting the elected mayor in the political campaign make a political promise that support would be given if he wanted to do incorporated dhikr program in Banda Aceh governance if he would be elected.

At least, ulama who are members of dhikr groups from *dayah* in Banda Aceh supported Aminullah Usman in campaign. Some of them are included in the winning team, such as Ust Tgk. Umar Rafsanjani, a leader of Dayah Mini Aceh and Tgk. Mustafa Woyla, are the chief and vice-chief in *Majelis Pengajian and Tastaqidhikr* group in Banda Aceh. Mr. Aminullah Usman strictly stated that *dayah* (traditional Islamic boarding school) and TASTAFI community are partner to implement sharia in Banda Aceh, including dhikr group. He reassured that both of them contributed in implementing *Banda Aceh Gemilang* vision within Sharia Frame, as stated by Ust SJ:

Mr. Amin and I are partner because I had been a candidate at that time. I can't be a candidate because citizens' identity cards to support my candidacy were insufficient. I didn't pass verification, so I became Mr. Aminullah supporters. He has his own reason for a better government because he has good experience with the prior government as explained below:

If we looked at a basic reason why I want to be a candidate, it was not my main purpose, but many problems occurred in our *dayah*. *Dayah* located in Banda Aceh city. When Madam Illizawas in charge, without coordination, our *dayah* was evicted due to illegal building.

### **3) Means of public communication and Clarification of Mayor Policies**

Dhikr, in its implementation, placed on mayor's Pavilion. It is a way to make a Mayor's pavilion serves as a public space, as Banda Aceh mayor team's statement:

Dhikr is a policy. It purposes to make pavilion became more inclusive. We do not want that only certain group of people who have exclusive access to mayor's pavilion by creating a beneficial program for entire people relating to our vision and mission. We make *kenduri* everyday is impossible, *mauled* and others are impossible, so we have to make dhikr in Banda Aceh starting from mayor's pavilion (RJ/ 4 July, 2019).

When dhikr has become a space that can be accessed by the public, aside for being campaign promises, it is also Mayor's public communication and clarification forum. The dhikr program was carried out in Banda Aceh was made by elite to facilitate direct communication with people, beside car free day program held every Sunday, as stated by the *Zikir Gemilang* assembly team:

I saw dhikr moment is one door to share their complains and aspirations to the Mayor of Banda Aceh mayor informally. But, if people has complains or something to say, they can share it in this kind of moments. (SJ/ 11 July, 2019).

Besides, dhikr has also become a mobilization for civil servant widely. Because of the dhikr, as mentioned earlier, the participants are mostly from government officials and agencies.

The participants attended is almost fifty-fifty. Recently, the mayor appeals to the government offices and employers to attend dhikr. They will attend because they can'tdissappoint their leader. (SJ/ 11 Juli 2019).

Then, mobilization is also organized by youth organizations:

Youth organizations are included, we mobilized them. The youth leader has organizations, namely MPKP or PPG (*Persatuan Pemuda Gemilang*). FuadRahmatillah is one of the member when he was a *kopelm*leader. So, through the mass organizations, women mass organization, such as MPI, etc. mobilization is easier if civil servants or ASN can be the role model for the people.

Although having direct communication and gaining aspiration with the mayor. Dhikir can naot guarantee the solution forproblems. At least, dhikr can be a way to meet directly with people and confirm for policy in Banda Aceh. Then, dhikr is a mobilization way to make relations and supports. As a statement below:

Dhikr groups are influencing people so it can mobilize and move people from communities supporting the sharia implementation. Realistically, it is a very strategic because it si not only aboutdhikr but also preserve relation.

When we observed the dhikr, apart from public participation, religious organizations and groups. The activitybegan with speech from the Mayor or vice-mayor. They explained or confirmed the condition happened in Banda Aceh, such as water and trash management, electricityand others. Therefore, the three things serves as the mainissues discussed in the dhikr as a popular policy held by Banda Aceh governance.

#### ***4.3 Dhikr: Impact from a populist policy***

When dhikr becomes a public policy, there is an impact which is expected by the governance. According to the motives mentioned above, there are three aspects, are social-culture, economy, and politic.

##### ***Social-culture Impact***

Talking about socio-culture impact, dhikr becomes a policy to formulate *aqidah* (faith), *syariah* (law), and *akhlak* (morality) within the implementation of sharia and halal tourism. It is because dhikr is claimed as a mainstream approach, and as an evidence of commitment of the city governance to support sharia implementation. However, according to the Sharia court, *qanunjinayah*violatorshas steadily increased, especially from 2017 until 2019. In 2017 the violation cases found in the Sharia court were 32 cases while in 2018 were 31 cases, and 60 cases were found in 2019 respectively<sup>1</sup>.

##### ***Economy Impact***

Banda Aceh city planned to hold megadhikr center which leads to the Islamic tourism role model for the region. By having Islamic tourism or halal tourism, it has a big hope that the tourism project can give benefits in

economically and finally improve the Banda Aceh's people welfare. Dhikr which is adopted by Banda Aceh governance can not solve all the three problems mentioned above. But it can be one type of promotion and has publicity impact (syiar). Dhikr is definitely expected to have other functions, such as making Banda Aceh as a dhikr city which represent indirectly the Mayor's program to grow economics impacts and to promote Islamic tourism.

.. we have plan to make a dhikr location for international level. We had a land acquisition with amdal had done, and the process of development will be started next year. Dhikr is a part of tourism because tourism means other people come to Aceh, do transaction, it included tourism activities. It is seemed as international dhikr events and also increases economy.

Dhikr as a ritual or worship, at the end, provides other benefits which are not only on spiritual aspects but also on the economy growth of the people. One of the interviewees stated that dhikr can attract tourist enthusiasm and promote Banda Aceh as a tourist destination. Dhikr is expected to change economic condition to be better. From multiplier effects, it can impact to the macro level of economic improvement built around the dhikr events.

In this light, data showed that averagely, the durarion ofstay at hotels for foreigners are longer than local tourism. In 2018, foreigners who stayed in Banda Aceh hotels and other accomodations were 3, 57 days and 3, 84 days. Meanwhile, averagely local tourists spent 1,69 days and 2,12 days respectively to stay in Banda Aceh.

Based on the data above, the enhancement due to dhikr event is predictable. Comprehensively, from the economic side, dhikr does not yet provide any systematic impact to increase for example the income of the people. In line with the chief of Tourism department in Banda Aceh, he stated that a role of dhikr is to generate economic growth and promote culture proved to be very little.

### ***Political Impact***

Populism, is a phenomenon in which ellites created policies as things to maintain their electabilities. Electability is used to cover the policy which does not benefits people because there are still problems in providing public servicesin the last two years. The first problem is about providing clean water which is claimed to have serious issue in the process of distribution and infrastructures. Second is the energy problem in Banda Aceh (electricity). It was promised that it can be covered through building a power plant from garbages relocation center, but it is still up in the air. Blackouts are frequently occurred in Banda Aceh. For those problems, ellites use dhikr to maintain their electabilityand keep clarifying to public about such problems.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

This study explored about a dhikr which becomes a populist policy, which is no more than a ritual or worship. As a policy, dhikr is expected to support the spirit for shariah implementation and to promote halal tourism. It isparticularbecause dhikr is claimed as a mainstream approach for people as a consistency of governance to support syariah law implementation. Besides, there are three motives of ellites to organizedhikr, thye are socio-cultural, economy, and political motives. Dhikr is social-system control and it is expected to increase people welfare. The most significant motive found is political motive to increase their own popularity and electability. Therefore, dhikr, in fact, is placed to be face some rational choices against the backdrop of socio political settings in Banda Aceh.

Furthermore, it is necessary to have an evaluation of the dhikr policy, so it can be more applicable as a policy which is not only show the symbolic effect, but also implement it in a level to substantial change for the citizen of Banda Aceh .

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