FRAMING ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT AND ITS IMPACTS ON TWO MUSLIM COUNTRIES:
A Preliminary Analysis

Wasisto Raharjo Jati

Research Center for Politics–National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia
wasisto.raharjo.jati@brin.go.id

Corresponding Author: Wasisto Raharjo Jati

Abstract

The term "anti-American" sounds debatable in analyzing the relationship between Islamic world and United States. This term arguably stems from Huntington's thesis on clash of civilization, which argued that the culture is the main belligerent instead of countries in the conflict. Two main cultures: the contrast between the West and Islam often eventually shapes the rivalry relationship between these two civilizations. Investigating the persistence rivalry between the two through critical literature review method, this article tries to answer the question of why Muslims are still hostile to American culture. It further argues that that media, which are mostly from Middle Eastern countries, have essential in shaping the fluctuated trend of anti-American sentiment among Muslims. This heavily depends on the impact of US foreign policy on Arab that might precipitates anti-American sentiments.

[Istilah "Anti-Amerika" mengundang perdebatan ketika menganalisa relasi antara dunia Islam dengan Amerika Serikat. Istilah tersebut kurang lebih berasal dari "clash of civilisation" (benturan antarperadaban) yang pernah diargumentasikan oleh Samuel Huntington. "Benturan" tersebut bukan lagi berfokus pada konflik antarnegara, tapi lebih pada persaingan antarbudaya Barat dan Islam. Kedua kultur yang saling berkontestasi itu, pada akhirnya mempengaruhi persepsi umat Islam terhadap Barat dan khususnya Amerika Serikat. Sehingga tujuan dari

artikel ini adalah untuk menganalisis mengapa umat Islam masih bersikap oposisi terhadap Amerika dalam berbagai alasan tertentu. Artikel ini dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kepustakaan kritis, berusaha menganalisis relasi kausalitas antarargumen dalam melihat faktor-faktor di balik sentimen tersebut. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa peran framing media— terutama dari Timur-Tengah— berperan dalam isu naik turunnya sentimen anti Amerika tersebut. Terlebih lagi tren fluktuasi sentimen juga tergantung dari dampak kebijakan luar negeri Amerika Serikat.]

Keywords: *Anti-America, Muslim countries, Media, Muslims, Framing*

Introduction

The state of the art of this article attempts to show why anti-Western particularly anti-American remains matters in some Muslim countries. Anti-American sentiment has been ingrained in Muslim countries since the September, 11th attack. Previously, this sentiment only applies in numerous cases particularly how western culture likely tend to jeopardize Islamic values. It has been theorized by Samuel Huntington who argued that Islamic societies make efforts themselves to resist and balance with Western civilization.[1]

Moreover, the way Muslims balance its position with westerns sometimes meet the fluctuated terms, mainly when it comes to the issues related to Palestinians. This makes Muslim public opinion perceiving western culture in somber understanding since the beginning. Most importantly, since the United States unanimously declared the so-called global war against terrorism with which some Muslim countries were targets of this campaign. Certainly, some Muslim media based on gulf region have been responding that with a new discourse. As a result, the news resonates profoundly toward Muslims.

---

[1] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, pp. 32.

In addition, to media framing that corners western, anti-American sentiment and its implication to public opinion have its own definition. In this regards, anti-American sentiment is understood as negative psychological tendencies to see the impact of the United States' influence in home country. In addition, public opinion often describes personal reflection on issues that become common interests. For the sake of this study, I would like to focus on the impact of Middle Eastern media on public opinion making among Muslims.

The discourse "Anti-Americanism" by media eventually aims at strengthening identities as a Muslim and build solidarity among Muslim world against the western power. This intention certainly sparks debate on the role of media in shaping hostile discourse. Some say that media independently has a responsibility to construct most Muslim public opinion to being cynical to American. This former discourse heavily puts media to promote anti-Americanism for some reasons. Meanwhile some disagree and say Anti-American sentiment in media discourse has been part of red herrings from the government to gain support from its citizen.

For this latter reason, some predominantly Muslim countries, which are mostly from the middle eastern attempt to scapegoat the United States and its western allies to gain domestic popularity. This article is concerned about to what extent media can play a role in shaping anti-American discourse among Muslims? Do they act independently or promote the government's stance by scapegoating the United States and western countries?

How Arabic Media Shapes Anti-Americanism around Global Muslims

The one way we can see the growing trend of anti-American sentiment is by examining media effect and elite competition in masterminding public opinion amid Muslim countries. These two often blames the foreign force that might intervene domestic affairs. This

accusation, however, sometimes is just a disinformation. It may be argued that both entities have shaped Muslim public opinion process. It has been established within the literatures that Arabic media framing on American involvement in Middle East could be biased. Interesting research conducted by Nisbet and Myers show that Arabic media exposure on public opinion exposure about American has an impact on the political salience competition between nationalist, Islamist, and also state-centric political identities.[2] These finding clearly shows that western influence on middle eastern politics has delved into deepening polarization. Media itself frequently captures that situation within their framing.

Two prominent Arabic media here to mention are *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya News*. These two media frequently focus on western involvement on gulf politics. However, the way two media put Americans on their news publication becoming subject to discussion here. Both news agency has a different stance on influencing their audiences. *Al Jazeera* vigorously present information based on inside Arabian view to against predominant western journalism work. This stance makes *Al Jazeera* promoting the genuine Arab voice when it comes to dealing with Western's interests. Although it sounds brave and heroic, many critics address *Al Jazeera* which might show the negative side of western to escalate their popularity.

Unlike their news counterpart, *Al Arabiya News* has been modest and balanced in news publication because this new agency spreading less unfavorable opinion with anti-American sentiment and tend to promote state interest and regional political.[3] This stance is related to Saudi's foreign policies who seek friendly and balanced with the western power. As a result, this bilateral relationship eventually affects the way *Al Arabiya News* put America on their news.

One important study by Shibley Telhamy from the University of

---

[2] Erik C. Nisbet and Teresa A. Myers, "Anti-American Sentiment as a Media Effect? Arab Media, Political Identity, and Public Opinion in the Middle East," *Communication Research*, Vol. 38, No.5, October 2011, pp. 686.

[3] *Ibid.,* pp. 701.

Maryland attempts to analyze the stance of *Al Arabiya News*. He used datasets collected between 2004 and 2009 from Zongby International to investigate the media framing by *Al Arabiya News*. His key question is to what extent media effect anti-American sentiment among Arabic people in Middle East. This kind of question specifically narrow down the Anti-Americanism that polarize identities. The key findings mainly focus on political identities attached with news in making public opinion about the United States for example *Al Jazeera* exposure attract attention from Islamist nationalist group whereas *Al Arabiya News* exposure incline to attract Arab nationalist and state-centric supporter groups. These different result of two main media framing on anti-Americanism is something worth to be elaborated.

One thing to note here, the way *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya News* affect the Muslim public opinion depending on news contents. Here, *Al Jazeera* reaches out the Muslim across their sects. This enables the tone of anti-Americanism could be greater depending on the issue. By contrast, *Al Arabiya News* might reach out the Muslims only in one sect, particularly Sunnis. This particularly makes American or Western either friends or foes in the eye of Muslims.

Some prominent issues such as Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Sunni-Shiite conflict often captured by these major two Muslim major media. For the first issue, since Israel represents US' interest on Arab and discrimination against Palestinian has been major theme for anti-American campaign for Arabic media and Muslims at larger level. For the second issue, the Sunni-Shiite could be theological rival but since Iranian influence could challenge the gulf nation. It results in the modest way to mention Anti-American within this issue. More specifically, the friendly support of western allies to Sunnis to corner Shiite making media, especially *Al Arabiya News* lower the "anti" tone toward US and western allies.

In this respect, reliance on media effects eventually led to how

identity cleavage become greater in the middle east regions. Overall, their arguments are plausible to understand primordial factors that shaping public opinion. However, there are some limitations on their work particularly datasets were outdated. Furthermore, the kind of anti-American sentiment and the kind of media exposure also were unclear in their study. Therefore, their findings potentially debated by recent studies on the same field. But their studies contribute to understand media discourse rigorously wide social cleavages.

Anti-American Sentiment from non-Media Framing

Non-media framing here means the public opinion of Muslims from their independent stance. It also means the way Muslims understand American and its western allies, which based on their own evaluation. One important study but different angles conducted by Blaydes and Linzer who emphasized their anti-American sentiment analysis based on what American does rather than what American is.[4] Their propositions attempt to infer the US foreign policies and its implications toward Muslim countries especially middle east region and the intense level of religiosity among Muslims directly perceive great anti-American sentiment.

In addition, they also theorize that elite opinion and mass media have played a role in constructing their sentiment. Their finding is akin to previous research that observes the role of media discourse in persuading public opinion. However, the main different from the prior study is the public attitude to combine endogenous factors such culture and exogenous factors such as media and elite opinion to make up their stance. By used dataset from *Pew Global Attitudes* in 2017 to test individual religiosity level and country level, their findings are very interesting: *first*, religious Muslim are consistently more anti-American sentiment than less pious Muslim. *Second*, anti-American sentiment much more prevalent in

---

[4] Lisa Blaydes and Drew Linzer, "Elite Competition, Religiosity, and Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2, 2012, pp. 225.

countries who have the strict competition between secular and Islamist and predominant Muslim countries.[5]

These two interesting findings basically show that identity play an important role in shaping anti-American among Muslims. The thing we can infer about public opinion about anti-American sentiment from their research are Muslim have pre-existing knowledge to label themselves as the religious than American who labelled as the infidel people. Therefore, anti-American sentiment has been entrenched before 9/11 and become greater since then. For the second reason, it has been part of an ongoing dispute between western and Islam dispute in Muslim world. The limitation from this research is an unclear explanation about secular and Islamist group competition in making public opinion. What kind of debate point they made about Anti-American sentiment. It is more likely proxy opinion wars among intra-elite competition in their countries. However, two studies here were vital to understand media's role in the growing hatred to United States.

In sum from two prior studies, public opinion about Anti-American sentiment consistently focused on the way of media had a bias view in constructing the United States and using American as exogenous factors to glue competition among Muslim states. Media discourse have played a vital role to imbue elite competition that led to social cleavages. Most importantly both studies show us there has been triangle mutual connection between media discourse, identity politics, and also elite led-opinion making to persuade public opinion making.

While elites rigorously use identity politics and anti-American sentiment to fortify their political strongholds, media use anti-American sentiment to increase their selling rate and gain political protection from government elite due to their news discourse convince the constituent at the grassroot level. One missed thing from prior studies is how to define anti-American is unsure. Also, regional analysis may be too wide

---

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 233–34.

to measure precisely how people address anti-American sentiment from themselves.

Anti-American Sentiments in Lebanon

The case of Lebanon, would like to tell about how deepening anti-American within predominantly Muslim countries. This country case also would like to talk about how Muslims have love and hate relationship with US and Western allies. Unlike previous studies, anti-American sentiment was described by Corstange in his research about anti-American behavior in Lebanese society. In this respect, Lebanese society perceive information about the United States more balanced than their Arabian counterparts. The rest of Arabian holds negative opinion persistently especially American foreign policies and its special connection with Israeli people. Corstange divided public opinion about anti-American sentiment into two terms: political-anti-American sentiment and generalized-anti-American sentiment. For the first view, it has been contingent with US foreign policies that similarly with previous studies.[6]

However, Corstange broaden the anti-American view not only based on policies but also western diplomatic bases. The idea behind this view because the Lebanese perceived the US embassy is part of US involvement into domestic politics.[7] For the second reason, generalized-anti-American is more moderate in way people perceive anti-American is. Arguably, the Lebanese people have been distrusting unsuitable with American culture but still welcoming the people. His research worked on behavioral test of Lebanese society information and perception about anti-American sentiment. By using a dataset from *Pew Research Centre* and in-depth interview with random Lebanese respondent, his findings show two symptoms: *first*, generalized anti-American sentiment more prevalent than political because Lebanese people incline to accept American

---

[6] Daniel Corstange, "Anti-American Behavior in the Middle East: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Lebanon," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 78, No. 1, 2016, pp. 312.

[7] *Ibid.,* pp. 317.

culture in certain extent especially educational purposes. *Second*, the way Lebanese people make up their opinion based on their sect-neighborhood communities such as Sunni, Shia, and Christian. It is worth to note from Corstange's findings is the behavior test outcome determines public opinion because he examines the impact of the emergence of American values in daily life.

The aspect of behavior test including whether boycott still prevalent in expressing anti-American view among Lebanese society. Unlike previous studies, Corstange narrowed focus from the region to a country so that easy to understand. However, some limitations of his study such as the explanation about sectarian and religion entanglement in Lebanese is not provided much in the research paper. In this regard, it is important to know different standing on each sectarian about anti-American sentiment. Because each sectarian has capricious view about The United States. For example, Sunni and Shia always involve US in their proxy wars and Christian also less favorable in public opinion about American. Despite this research still incomplete to generalize all the Lebanese people about American because the author only focused on Beirut as the main example. Nevertheless, his study is salient to investigate public attitude and opinion in perceiving foreign influence in their daily life.

Anti-American Sentiments in Turkey

Another country level research about anti-American sentiment conducted by Rachel Thacker. Her study taken place in Turkish society to investigate to a certain extent political ideologies shaped Turkish opinion about the United States. The term of anti-American definition is understood as the increased violence against the United States' economic and political interests in Middle East and Southwest region.[8]

---

[8] Rachel Thacker, "Explaining Anti-Americanism in Turkey: A Study of the Patterns of Anti-American Sentiment Among Turkish Citizens," *Honors Research Projects*, Vol. 207, 2016, pp. 7-8.

Her definition is basically similar with Corstange's notion who emphasized the emergence of a foreign mission in home country. However, Rachel have more focused on public political view in a way understanding anti-American sentiment. Likewise, with previous studies, her research also used *Pew Global Attitudes* 2013 to examine public opinion about the United States in Turkey. The research results are very stark with prior studies. The most important findings from her studies are, Turkish who identified as Islamist has been an unfavorable opinion of anti-American sentiment whereas leftist and secular people are more likely to pro-anti-American in their life.[9]

Concerning with these result, perhaps there are huge political identities difference in public opinion making between Turkey and the rest of Arabian states. In previous studies, Islamist groups have strongly condemned every American policy including culture, but it is totally different when compared with the Turkish. One alternative explanation to infer this phenomenon is the state system. While Turkey has been a secular state since 1923, most of Arabian states adopted Islam as the system since its inception. Moreover, Turkey often labelled as secular countries because these state abolished sharia law even though the vast majority of Turkish Muslim is Sunni like most Arabian.[10] The limitation of her study about anti-American sentiment in Turkey is the reliable degree of the data because there were 663 respondents in the dataset that mostly based on an urban area. It seems unbalanced observation to map all the Turkish public opinion.

These problems also similar in Lebanese when the data sample in not equal between capital city and the rest. In this regard, generalization about public opinion still possible as the helicopter view in different countries. However, Thacker's research has contributed to the reverse public opinion-based identity politics because Islam is hostile to American,

---

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

10 Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 14.

but not in Turkish case. Another contribution from her work is rejection about pious and infidel in making anti-American from previous studies. Therefore, we put Turkish case in special example over the Muslim in Arabian countries.

From Turkish case, we can learn that the most important thing is datasets because statistical data taken in a different space and period that may affect in the result. The lesson-learned we have from both countries level studies is the qualitative explanation should be enough to cover up the quantitative data. Two previous studies used *Pew Global Attitudes* that may bias when examine the people religiosity because the religiosity measurement is not only frequent praying but also how they engage with their neighborhood community. When we compare with Turkish and Lebanese as the main examples, the identity and ideology politics are the entrenched factors why resistance against the United States still prevalent. Media effects presumably applied in those countries who have a high degree of social cleavages. Therefore, media discourse can work effectively to heat up public opinion about America and its influence.

Unlike with the previous studies that mainly focused on media effect and political identity in conceiving anti-American sentiment, Jamal and his colleagues have conducted research based on *Twitter*. Compared with the mass media, social media imposed personal opinion virally among netizens. Of course, it could be true or fake opinion about a certain issue but basically people have and read information based on their own preferential. Regarding to anti-American sentiment here, their findings firmly confirmed with Nisbet and Myers who argued that there has been the double standard opinion view–the resentment of US foreign policies in the Middle East and the admiration of stable economic and political development in the US simultaneously.[11]

These propositions consistently with the existing theories and

---

[11] Amaney A. Jamal, et.al., "Anti-Americanism and Anti-Interventionism in Arabic Twitter Discourses," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2015, pp. 57.

findings before, but Keohane also argued that anti-American sentiment also used as the red herrings such dislike of Iranian regime and express negative way toward Iranian. In their research, datasets from *Pew Global Attitudes* and posting on *Twitter* being used to examine a relation between anti-American sentiment and public opinion making. In doing so, they conducted a regression analysis based on a country level and Crimson-Hexagon to see tweeting trend among Arabian.

Arguably, their findings are more and less similar with the previous and may even be truthful to depict real public opinion through social media than conventional media. However, some limitation should be addressed such as how data gained from social media can be trustworthy. This problem derived from following series of *Twitter* trend in Arab Spring, Syrian Civil War, and ongoing Israeli–Palestina conflict that posted huge diverse of personal opinion making spontaneously without substances.

Conclusion

All in all, this article has addressed some significant issues regarding how public opinion perceives anti-American sentiment in developing countries, particularly Muslim countries. The term of "clash of civilization" has been prevalent in mentioning archaic rivalry between Muslim and Westerners until now. These propositions are being used to investigate how public opinion concerned with a negative view about American. This article already mentioned some masterminding issues behind those sentiments such as identity politics, media effects, and behavioral test to determine to what extent they distressed the United States. Region and countries level are the control variables in all the mentioned studies here. In this context, identity politics are the main factors in almost Arabian states because it has been part of a conflictual dispute between Jewish/Christian–Islam Sunni–Islam Shia sectarian.

Acknowledgment

Bibliography

Blaydes, Lisa, and Drew A. Linzer, "Elite Competition, Religiosity, and Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2, 2012.

Cagaptay, Soner. *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* London: Routledge, 2006.

Corstange, Daniel, "Anti-American Behavior in the Middle East: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Lebanon," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 78, No. 1, 2016.

Huntington, Samuel P., "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993.

Jamal, Amaney A., Robert O. Keohane, David Romney, and Dustin Tingley, "Anti-Americanism and Anti-Interventionism in Arabic Twitter Discourses," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2015.

Nisbet, Erik C., and Teresa A. Myers, "Anti-American Sentiment as a Media Effect? Arab Media, Political Identity, and Public Opinion in the Middle East," *Communication Research*, Vol. 38, No. 5, 2011.

Thacker, Rachel, "Explaining Anti-Americanism in Turkey: A Study of the Patterns of Anti-American Sentiment Among Turkish Citizens," *Honors Research Projects*, Vol. 207, 2016.