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Identity Politics and Polarization in Contemporary Muslim Countries: The Impact of Elections, Social Media, and Global Dynamics

Abstract: This article examines the growing influence of identity politics and polarization in contemporary Muslim countries, focusing on the impact of elections, the widespread role of social media, and global dynamics. As political systems in the Muslim world become more fragmented, identity-based movements—often rooted in ethnic, religious, or sectarian affiliations—have gained significant prominence. These dynamics have heightened political polarization when intertwined with electoral processes, shaping voter behaviour and policymaking. The rise of social media has further transformed political engagement, both as a platform for grassroots activism and a tool for spreading misinformation that deepens societal divisions. This research uses a qualitative approach with literature analysis to explore the relationship between identity politics and polarization in contemporary Muslim countries, focusing on elections, social media, and global dynamics. The findings highlight the urgent need for effective strategies to reduce polarization and promote inclusive governance. Often fueled by identity-based divisions and amplified by social media, polarisation poses serious threats to political and social stability. In today's interconnected world, these divisions extend beyond local and national politics, influencing international relations and regional security. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that fosters open dialogue, strengthens democratic institutions, counters misinformation, and raises public awareness to bridge societal gaps. Inclusive governance also demands policies that engage marginalized groups, ensuring fair representation and addressing the root causes of polarization. By adopting these measures, Muslim-majority countries can work toward more excellent political stability and social cohesion.

Keywords: Identity Politics, Global Dynamics, Muslim Countries, Social Media, Polarization.

INTRODUCTION

Identity politics and polarization have become central issues in the context of contemporary politics in many countries, including in Muslim countries. In identity politics, voters and political actors often identify themselves based on specific ethnic, religious, or social group characteristics. Polarization occurs when these differences are getting sharper, dividing society into two opposing camps. In Muslim countries, the phenomenon of identity politics is often closely related to religion and sectarianism.¹ Conflicts between majority and minority groups, both based on ethnicity and religion, are often the fuel for political divisions. This phenomenon affects not only domestic stability but also regional and international aspects. This article will examine how identity politics is developing in contemporary Muslim countries, focusing on the influence of elections and social media. Elections are often a turning point in the identity politics movement, where political parties use issues of religion or sectarianism to win votes.²

Identity politics conceptually refers to how people position themselves in the political landscape based on specific identity characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion, or cultural affiliation. Identity politics theory includes an approach that views identity as the primary basis of political interaction, especially in fragmented societies. In Muslim countries, religion is the main determining factor in identity politics. Sectarianism, like the rivalry between Sunnis and Shiites, often shapes political dynamics in some countries. Ethnic identities, such as the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, also play an essential role in political conflicts in the region.³

In the context of polarization, these theories suggest that the stronger the identity politics, the greater the potential for polarization. Political polarization creates distance between different groups and creates social tensions that can erupt into open conflicts. In

¹ Henky Fernando dkk., "The de-existence of Islamic political parties in general elections: A case study of Indonesia as a Muslim-majority country," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (31 Desember 2023): 2225838, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2225838>.

² I. Putu Sastra Wingarta dkk., "Pengaruh Politik Identitas Terhadap Demokrasi Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Lemhannas RI* 9, no. 4 (29 Desember 2021): 117-24, <https://doi.org/10.55960/jlri.v9i4.419>.

³ Jonny Ricardo Kocu dan Guno Tri Tjahjoko, "POLITIK IDENTITAS DALAM BIROKRASI DI KABUPATEN MAYBRAT," *Journal of Indonesian Rural and Regional Government* 6, no. 1 (25 Juni 2022): 74-90, <https://doi.org/10.47431/jirreg.v6i1.176>.

countries with Muslim-majority populations, this issue is often amplified by historical and cultural factors that influence socio-political interactions. In addition, a literature review on the role of social media in political contexts in developing countries shows that social media can profoundly influence political dynamics. Social media algorithms often reinforce confirmation bias, increasing users' political polarization. Globalization theory is also essential for understanding how changes at the international level, such as economic pressures and foreign interventions, interact with domestic political dynamics. Globalization creates a reciprocal relationship between local identity politics and global issues, which affects the perception of identity and political loyalty.⁴

The gap identified in previous studies is the lack of research that comprehensively integrates the impact of elections, social media, and global dynamics on identity politics and polarization in contemporary Muslim countries. Previous research has tended to focus on one of these elements separately. For example, several studies explain issues related to Islam and Identity Politics Ahead of the 2024 Election (*Taufiq Yusuf and Miftahul Hidayah*)⁵, while others discussed the role of social media in social movements during the Arab Spring (*Howard & Hussain, 2013*)⁶, or the influence of globalization in the formation of Muslim identity (*Roy, 2004*).⁷ However, very few studies have linked how these three factors – elections, social media, and global dynamics – interact and shape and deepen political polarization in Muslim countries. This gap points to the need for more holistic research to understand the complexity of the relationship between local factors, communication technologies, and global influences in shaping identity politics in the modern Muslim world. The novelty of this study is its comprehensive approach to exploring how these three elements (elections, social media, and global dynamics) simultaneously influence political polarization and identity construction in contemporary Muslim countries. Thus, this research offers a new perspective on understanding the complexity of interactions between

⁴ Suswanta, "Politik Identitas Dan Identitas Politik," *The Journal Publishing* 5, no. 1 (28 Mei 2024): iv+185-iv+185.

⁵ Taufik Yusuf dan Miftahul Hidayah, "Islam Dan Politik Identitas Menjelang Pemilu 2024," *Asketik: Jurnal Agama Dan Perubahan Sosial* 7, no. 2 (2023): 267-83, <https://doi.org/10.30762/asketik.v7i2.1163>.

⁶ Muzammil M. Hussain dan Philip N. Howard, *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2013), <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/117564>.

⁷ Gertjan Dijkink, review of *Review of Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*, oleh Olivier Roy, *GeoJournal* 67, no. 4 (2006): 377-79.

local, national, and global actors in shaping the political landscape in the modern Muslim world.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach⁸ with a literature research method to explore the relationship between identity politics and polarization in contemporary Muslim countries, especially in elections, social media, and global dynamics. Relevant literature will be collected from academic sources such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus, using keywords such as *identity politics*, *polarization*, *Muslim countries*, *elections*, and *social media*. This research focuses on studies that address these three factors concerning identity politics in Muslim countries since 2000. In addition, reports from international institutions and non-governmental organizations will also be used to broaden insights into the role of social media and its global influence on political polarization.

After the collection of literature, this research will apply thematic analysis to identify the main themes that emerge from various studies. This analysis will highlight how elections, social media, and global dynamics influence identity politics and deepen polarization in Muslim countries. The study will also critique gaps in previous literature, highlight areas not widely researched, and offer recommendations for further research. With this qualitative approach, the research is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the complex interaction between local and global factors in shaping identity politics and polarization in the contemporary Muslim world.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Elections on Identity Politics

Elections play an essential role in strengthening identity politics in Muslim countries. In each election cycle, political parties often use identity narratives to attract support from certain groups, primarily based on religion or ethnicity. These identity issues become particularly prominent in competitive elections where victory requires strong support from specific segments of society. In Indonesia, religious identity politics has become increasingly

⁸ Helaluddin dan Hengki Wijaya, *Analisis Data Kualitatif: Sebuah Tinjauan Teori & Praktik* (Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jaffray, 2019).

prominent in recent elections, where candidates have used religious symbols to strengthen their support base. Something similar happened in Turkey, where President Erdoğan combined Islamic narratives and nationalism to consolidate his power amid a polarized political landscape.⁹

In Pakistan, sectarian politics between Sunnis and Shiites is often the decisive element in elections, with political parties exploiting these differences to gain votes. In addition, elections usually deepen political polarization by dividing society based on sectarian or religious identity. The electoral system also affects the way identity politics develops. In countries with a majoritarian system, such as Egypt, political parties tend to take advantage of a narrow and segmented support base, while in a proportional system, polarization is more moderate but still felt. Election analysis shows that when identity issues are overused in campaigns, the result is increased tension and potential post-election conflict. This worsens the stability of democracy and deepens the chasm of division within society.¹⁰

Identity politics in Muslim countries significantly impact the electoral process, as it is often the main base for political parties and candidates to gain support. In this context, identity, especially religious identity such as Islam, becomes a significant political force. Islamic parties, for example, often use religious narratives to mobilize voters by promising policies that are in line with Islamic teachings. In some countries, such as Turkey and Indonesia, Islamic-based parties have won massive support by offering platforms that champion religious values that resonate with conservative Muslim groups. This shows how identity politics can mobilize the masses and influence the outcome of elections.¹¹

However, using identity politics in elections also has a negative impact, increasing political polarization.¹² When parties or candidates prioritize identity as the basis of their

⁹ Rara Triana dan Rahel Liska, "Politik Identitas: Apakah Politik Identitas Akan Mempengaruhi Popularitas? (Kajian Politik Identitas Dalam Pilkada Kalteng)," *Wacana: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Interdisiplin* 7, no. 2 (4 Desember 2020): 163–172.

¹⁰ Sirajudin Fikri, "Politik Identitas dan penguatan Demokrasi Lokal (Kekuatan Wong kito dalam demokrasi lokal)," *Tamaddun: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Sastra Islam* 18, no. 2 (28 Desember 2018): 167–81, <https://doi.org/10.19109/tamaddun.v18i2.2701>.

¹¹ Toguan Rambe dan Seva Mayasari, "Politik Identitas Dan Krisis Identitas: Mengungkap Realitas Praktek Politik Di Indonesia," *Jurnal EL-QANUNIY: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Kesyarahan Dan Pranata Sosial* 8, no. 1 (13 September 2022): 91–105, <https://doi.org/10.24952/el-qanuniy.v8i1.5608>.

¹² Ansar Abbas, et.al., "Human Capital Creation: A Collective Psychological, Social, Organizational and Religious Perspective," *Journal of Religion and Health* 63, no. 3 (Juni 2024): 2168–2200, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01665-8>.

campaigns, this often deepens divisions between groups in society. This polarization occurs because each group feels that their identity—religion, ethnicity, or sect—is embodied in the political party they support. In countries like Egypt, sharp differences between Islamist and secular groups exacerbate political conditions, creating tensions that are difficult to manage. This makes politics increasingly fragmented, making it difficult for society to reach a consensus.¹³ One of the reasons why identity politics is so practical in elections is its ability to mobilize voters. Groups that feel their identity is threatened or marginalized tend to be more loyal to parties or candidates they think can fight for their interests. For example, in Pakistan, religion-based identity politics has mobilized a large number of voters who feel that Islam should be the foundation of government. Voters who feel represented by this identity narrative become more attached to parties that offer policies that support their identity, thereby increasing political participation in elections.¹⁴

However, while it can strengthen solidarity among majority groups, identity politics often has an impact on the marginalization of minority groups. When identity is the main focus in elections; usually minority groups, such as non-Muslim ethnicities or religions, feel marginalized or threatened. In countries like Pakistan, minorities such as Ahmadis and Hindus experience more significant discrimination when Islamic parties put forward their identity narratives. This is not only detrimental to minority groups but can also weaken democracy as a whole, as identity-based elections tend to ignore the principles of inclusivity and equality.¹⁵

Global influences also affect the dynamics of identity politics in Muslim countries. In the era of globalization, social media and international networks reinforce the spread of moderate and extreme identity ideas. Through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, political ideologies and narratives from abroad, including transnational political Islamic movements, can influence voters at home. This exacerbates polarization, as these

¹³ Aryojati Ardipandanto, “Dampak Politik Identitas Pada Pilpres 2019: Perspektif Populisme [The Impact of Identity Politics On President Election 2019: Populism Perspective],” *Jurnal Politika Dinamika Masalah Politik Dalam Negeri dan Hubungan Internasional* 11, no. 1 (24 Juli 2020): 43–63, <https://doi.org/10.22212/jp.v11i1.1582>.

¹⁴ T. Koellner, “Religion and politics in contemporary Russia: Entanglements, identity making, and nation building,” dalam *When Politics Meets Religion: Navigating Old Challenges and New Perspectives*, 2024, 8–23, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003422976-2>.

¹⁵ S. Mrduljaš, “The Croat-Bosniak Interrelationship in Identity and Politics,” *Nova Prisučnost* 22, no. 2 (2024): 317–32, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.22.2.5>.

external narratives often reinforce sectarian sentiments and deepen group tensions. This influence is increasingly complex, as technology allows identity groups to connect and share information faster.¹⁶

Overall, the impact of identity politics on elections in Muslim countries is enormous and can lead to political instability. When identity politics becomes the centre of election contestation, the democratic process becomes hampered, and society becomes more divided. The sharp polarity between groups can lead to conflict, social tensions, and political violence. Therefore, while identity politics can provide a mobilization force, Muslim countries need to create a more inclusive political system that prioritizes national unity. This will help reduce polarization and encourage dialogue between different groups.

The Role of Social Media in Promoting or Exacerbating Polarization

Social media has become an essential tool in strengthening identity politics in Muslim countries. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow individuals and political groups to spread identity messages quickly and widely, deepening social divisions. Social media algorithms that amplify user engagement often prioritize content that triggers emotions, including polarization messages. In many Muslim countries, politicians and religious groups have used social media to spread narratives that highlight differences in identity, often intending to rally political support. For example, political campaigns in Egypt and Pakistan have used social media to magnify issues of religion and sectarianism, exacerbating divisions within society.¹⁷

In addition to being a platform to spread political messages, social media is also a tool for mass mobilization. Social movements, such as the Arab Spring, show how social media can facilitate mass protests and rapid political change. However, in many cases, this also triggers a backlash in the form of repressive actions and strengthening polarization. Disinformation and fake news are also a significant problem affecting political stability in Muslim countries. Disinformation campaigns often take advantage of sensitive identity

¹⁶ E.J. Aboi, "Religious, ethnic and regional identities in Nigerian politics: a shared interest theory," *African Identities*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2394181>.

¹⁷ G.J. Brisbane, "Religious Identity, Politics, and the Media: What White Evangelical Christian Women's Religious Identity Reveals About Their Endorsement of Donald J. Trump and Distrust of News Outlets," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 48, no. 1 (2024): 46-70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221120060>.

issues to exacerbate tensions and create more profound polarization. An analysis of social media data from Muslim countries shows that users tend to get stuck in "echo chambers," where they are only exposed to views that reinforce their own beliefs while disparate or challenging opinions are ignored. This strengthens extreme attitudes and deepens political polarization in society.¹⁸

Here is a table that summarizes the role of social media in promoting or exacerbating polarization in Muslim countries:

Table 1. The Role of Social Media in Polarizing Identity Politics

Aspects	The Role of Social Media
Identity Message Deployment	Social media strengthens identity politics by allowing the rapid and widespread dissemination of narratives highlighting religious and ethnic differences, deepening social divisions.
Algorithms that Trigger Polarization	Social media platforms' algorithms often prioritize content that triggers emotions, including messages that contain polarization, as such content increases user engagement.
Mass Mobilization	Social media is used to rally political support and mobilize the masses, as seen in the Arab Spring, but it also triggers repressive and polarizing actions.
Disinformation and Fake News	Social media has become a means of disinformation that exploits sensitive identity issues, exacerbates tensions, and deepens political polarization in Muslim countries.
Echo Chambers Effect	Social media users are often trapped in "echo chambers," where they are only exposed to views that align with their beliefs, reinforcing extremism and polarization.

Source: Author's interpretation

¹⁸ F. Wilfred, "Religious identities by choice and the politics of conversion," *New Approaches to Religion and Power*, 2021, 223-45, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60738-8_10.

This table illustrates how social media can play a dual role in strengthening or exacerbating polarization, especially in the context of identity politics in Muslim countries. Social media plays an essential role in enhancing or exacerbating the polarization of identity politics in Muslim countries. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allow for the rapid spread of identity narratives, which often highlight religious and ethnic differences, deepening social divisions. Social media algorithms prioritizing content that triggers emotions exacerbate the situation by spreading polarizing messages. In addition, social media is also used as a tool to mobilize the masses in political campaigns, although this often triggers repressive backlash. Disinformation and fake news on identity issues further exacerbate tensions, while the "echo chambers" effect exposes users only to views that reinforce their beliefs, deepening political extremism and polarization.

Global Dynamics and International Influence

Political dynamics in Muslim countries cannot be separated from global influence. Factors such as foreign intervention, economic aid, and international political alliances play a crucial role in shaping the domestic political landscape.¹⁹ In this context, globalization has created a reciprocal relationship between local identity politics and global political trends. One notable example is the normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel driven by international geopolitical interests. This has triggered different responses in different Muslim countries, with some groups supporting it, while others see it as a betrayal of Palestinian solidarity, which has subsequently deepened polarization within the country.²⁰

In addition, global economic pressures often affect domestic policies that can exacerbate polarization. For example, in Turkey, a financial crisis triggered by international tensions and domestic monetary policies has increased nationalist and Islamist rhetoric used by the government to maintain power amid an increasingly difficult situation. Global influence is also seen in the context of foreign aid and military intervention. In countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, foreign interference has played a significant role in shaping

¹⁹ B. Tibi, "Islam: Between religious-cultural practice and identity politics," dalam *Conflicts and Tensions*, 2007, 221–31, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446214671.n16>.

²⁰ Putri Rahmah Nur Hakim, Irwan Abdullah, dan Lina Marlina, "Aceh and the Politics of Islamic Identity: Implications for Social and Political Dynamics," *Jurnal Politik Profetik* 12, no. 2 (25 September 2024): 98–115, <https://doi.org/10.24252/profetik.v12i2a1>.

domestic political dynamics. However, these interventions often exacerbate pre-existing identity tensions and sectarianism.²¹

In global politics, international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are essential in responding to polarization and conflict in Muslim countries. However, their effectiveness is often questioned due to political and bureaucratic constraints. Finally, the interaction between domestic and global politics creates complex challenges for Muslim countries in managing political polarization. Reliance on international alliances and global dynamics complicates efforts to promote stability and inclusivity at the national level.

Case Analysis of Ideological Politics in Muslim Countries

Identity politics in Muslim countries is often a central element in political contestation, with religious, ethnic, or sect-based groups playing a significant role. In some countries, such as Turkey, Egypt, and Indonesia, spiritual identity, especially Islam, is a tool for mobilizing voters. In Turkey, for example, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has managed to garner massive support from Muslim conservatives by promoting Islamic values in government policies. It shows how identity politics can strengthen political power and increase polarization between secular and religious groups.²² Identity politics has shaped Egypt's political map, especially after the 2011 Arab Spring. Post-revolution, Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood gained power and sought to implement more Islamic-based policies. However, the changes have caused tensions with secular groups and the Coptic Christian minority. These tensions culminated with the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in 2013, which the Muslim Brotherhood supported. In this case, identity politics has exacerbated polarization, weakened social cohesion, and deepened political instability.²³

²¹ Ahmad Ash Shiddieqy, Padlan Padil Simamora, dan Dinda Difia Madina, "Contemporary Islamic Politics in Tunisia: The Journey of Islamic Democracy Post-Arab Spring," *MILRev : Metro Islamic Law Review* 3, no. 1 (11 April 2024): 119-40, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v3i1.8976>.

²² J. Haynes, "Politics, identity and religious nationalism in Turkey: From Atatürk to the AKP," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64, no. 3 (2010): 312-27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357711003736477>.

²³ Yalda Bahrapour, Abolghasem Taheri, dan Mojtaba Maghsoudi, "Politicization of Ethnic and Religious Identities from Perspective of Political Stability in Egypt after Arab Spring (2011-2022)," *International Studies Journal (ISJ)* 20, no. 4 (1 Januari 2024): 245-69, <https://doi.org/10.22034/isj.2023.370911.1954>.

In Pakistan, identity politics is also very dominant, with faith-based parties such as the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) Party and the Tehreek-e-Insaf Party (PTI) relying on Islamic identity narratives to attract voters. Sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims have further exacerbated polarization in the country. In addition, relations between the government and extremist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban create challenges to political stability.²⁴ Identity politics in Pakistan often brings religious issues as a priority, leading to the neglect of minority rights and inequality in the democratic process.²⁵ Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population, also experiences identity politics dynamics, albeit more moderate than other countries. Elections in Indonesia often show the critical role of faith-based parties, such as the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the United Development Party (PPP). However, Indonesia's moderate Islamic identity is often tested by more conservative and extremist groups. Issues such as direct elections, the implementation of sharia, and the rights of religious minorities are the main focus of identity politics in Indonesia, which can affect social stability.²⁶

In Algeria, identity politics has also exacerbated social and political tensions. After the civil war of the 1990s, caused by divisions between secular governments and Islamist groups, identity politics remained a central issue.²⁷ The Islamique du Salut Front (FIS), the Islamic-based party that was popular at the time, struggled to replace the secular system of government with a sharia-based government. Although the conflict has subsided, identity-based political tensions remain, with Islamist groups continuing to seek to influence government policy.²⁸

Overall, cases of identity politics in Muslim countries show that social and political polarization often arises when group identity is used as the primary basis in politics. While identity can mobilize voters and give power to a particular party, its impact on political

²⁴ Raja Qaiser, "Nationalism and Political Identity in Pakistan: The Rise and Role of Indigenous Identities," *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015): 105-16.

²⁵ H. Yew-Foong, *Encountering Islam: The politics of religious identities in Southeast Asia*, Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia, 2012.

²⁶ Djayadi Hanan, "Identity Politics In The 2019 Indonesian General Elections: Its Significance And Limitation," *JWP (Jurnal Wacana Politik)* 5, no. 1 (4 Maret 2020): 15-25, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jwp.v5i1.27710>.

²⁷ Sofiane Baba, Omar Hemissi, dan Taïeb Hafsi, "National identity and organizational identity in Algeria: Interactions and influences," *M@n@gement* 24, no. 2 (1 Oktober 2021): 66-125.

²⁸ James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria, Second Edition* (University of Nebraska Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21fqjnn>.

stability and social cohesion can be devastating. In many cases, identity politics exacerbates tensions between groups, increases discrimination against minorities, and weakens democracy. Therefore, Muslim countries must develop a more inclusive political system where identity differences are valued and considered in a broader context to maintain social stability and cohesion.

Political Polarization and Identity Construction in Contemporary Muslim Countries

Political polarization in contemporary Muslim countries is often rooted in solid identity constructions, be it religious, ethnic, or ideologically based. In many countries, identity is the focal point of political contestation, which divides society into groups with opposing views. This identity politics can encourage sharp polarization, creating tensions between majority and minority groups, as well as between conservative and secular groups.²⁹ In Egypt, for example, the conflict between Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and secular groups after the Arab Spring showed how differences in identity can exacerbate political and social polarization.³⁰

Political polarization has intensified in Turkey after the Islamic-based Justice and Development Party (AKP) government came to power. As a party that promotes conservative Islamic values, the AKP has managed to attract massive support from conservative Muslim groups, but it has also provoked an intense backlash from secular groups who feel threatened by its religious-based policies. These tensions create two large opposing camps in society, with each group feeling its identity and political views are threatened. This exacerbates polarization at the societal and political levels.³¹

Identity construction is also significant in shaping the dynamics of political polarization in Muslim countries. Identity, often built through religious and cultural narratives, is used by political parties to mobilize the masses. In a country like Indonesia, although it is known as a country with a moderate Muslim majority, there is a shift in identity politics along with the growth of conservative groups that are increasingly vocal. In recent elections, faith-based

²⁹ Cecep Wahyu Hoerudin, "The Influence of Language in Forming Political Identity in Indonesia," *Endless: International Journal Of Future Studies* 7, no. 2 (6 Agustus 2024): 66-76.

³⁰ Nicola Pratt, "Identity, Culture and Democratization: The Case of Egypt," *New Political Science* 27, no. 1 (1 Maret 2005): 69-86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140500030832>.

³¹ K. Delibaş, "Religious identity and participatory individual: Identity politics and the rise of political Islam in Turkey," *Amme Idaresi Dergisi* 41, no. 2 (2008): 131-59.

parties have grown in popularity, and issues such as the implementation of sharia and minority rights have become particularly relevant, giving rise to debates that further exacerbate social and political polarization.³²

In addition, social media plays a crucial role in identity construction and exacerbates polarization. In the digital age, identity-based information, both moderate and extremist, can quickly spread and reinforce existing views. In countries like Pakistan, radical and conservative groups often use social media to spread narratives that exacerbate sectarian tensions, for example, between Sunni and Shia Muslims. This creates space for identity narratives to evolve rapidly, increasing polarization and deepening societal divisions.³³

Identity construction is also seen in how political groups utilize religious symbols and values in their campaigns. In some countries, such as Algeria, Islamist parties use religious symbols to reinforce their image and appeal to voters who prioritize religious values. These parties often focus on issues affecting the majority religious group, while minority groups feel ignored or marginalized. These tensions create a divided political environment where identity-based conflicts become very real.³⁴

Polarization also affects political and social stability in Muslim countries. Conflicts become more challenging to avoid when society is divided into two large groups with conflicting identities. In a country like Yemen, identity-based political divisions between pro-Houthi groups and pro-government ones have led to a protracted civil war. This kind of polarization damages political structures, threatens social cohesion, exacerbates tensions between groups, and prolongs cycles of violence.³⁵

In addition, identity construction often leads to the marginalization of minority groups. In predominantly Muslim countries, groups that are not in line with the mainstream, such

³² Cucu Nur Hayati, A. Bakir Ihsan, dan Muhammad Farras Shaka, "The Influence of Social Media on Religious Identity Politics among Indonesian Millennial Generation," *Simulacra* 5, no. 2 (24 November 2022): 57-70, <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v5i2.16621>.

³³ Abdul Majid dan Said Amirulkamar, "Identity Politics Approaching the 2024 Election through Social Media Through Sociology of Religion Perspective," *Journal of Governance and Public Policy* 10, no. 3 (6 Oktober 2023): 274-87, <https://doi.org/10.18196/jgpp.v10i3.18088>.

³⁴ Eid Mohamed, Aziz Douai, dan Adel Iskandar, "Media, Identity, and Online Communities in a Changing Arab World," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 5 (1 Mei 2019): 1035-42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818821360>.

³⁵ Adeb Abdulelah Abdulwahid Al-Tamimi and Uddagatti Venkatesha, 'The Main Factors of Yemeni Conflict: An Analysis', *JDP (Jurnal Dinamika Pemerintahan)* 4, no. 2 (31 August 2021): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.36341/jdp.v4i2.1912>.

as Coptic Christianity in Egypt, Ahmadiyya in Pakistan, or Shi'a in some Sunni countries, often experience discrimination or violence. When identity is the primary basis in politics, these minority groups are usually victims of non-inclusive and discriminatory policies. This further exacerbates polarization, creates social injustice, and weakens social integration.³⁶

Finally, to reduce the negative impact of political polarization and identity construction in Muslim countries, serious efforts are needed to build a more inclusive and inclusive political system that respects diversity. Countries such as Tunisia and Morocco have shown that polarization can be better managed with dialogue between different political groups and a commitment to maintaining pluralism and equality. Although significant challenges remain, building strong institutions and equality-based policies can reduce identity-based tensions and strengthen social cohesion in Muslim countries.

Solutions to Reduce Polarization and Identity Politics: Building Social Inclusion and Equity

Identity-based political polarization is one of the biggest challenges faced by many contemporary Muslim countries. Tensions between majority and minority groups, as well as between conservative and secular groups, often exacerbate social and political situations. Designing strategies to promote social inclusion and equality is important to address this issue. One of the first steps that can be taken is to build a dialogue between different groups. In countries like Tunisia, dialogue between Islamist and secular groups has proven to ease tensions and create space for mutual understanding. Open and inclusive dialogue allows various parties to voice their opinions, build trust, and prevent more profound polarization.³⁷

The next step is educational reform that prioritizes the values of diversity and tolerance. Education based on respect for differences, whether in terms of religion, ethnicity, or ideology, will prepare future generations to live in a pluralistic society. In countries with cultural and religious diversity, educational curricula that teach the importance of mutual

³⁶ Diah Handayani, "Political Identity, Popular Culture, and Ideological Coercion: The Discourses of Feminist Movement in the Report of Ummi Magazine," *Jurnal Pemberdayaan Masyarakat: Media Pemikiran Dan Dakwah Pembangunan* 5, no. 1 (18 Juni 2021): 191-218, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpm.2021.051-08>.

³⁷ Didik Hariyanto dkk., "The Hyperreality of Identity Politics on Social Media," *Communicatus: Jurnal Ilmu komunikasi* 8, no. 1 (28 Juni 2024): 19-38, <https://doi.org/10.15575/cjik.v8i1.28356>.

respect and cooperation can reduce the potential for identity-based conflict. For example, countries like Malaysia have sought to integrate multicultural values into their education systems, creating a more tolerant and inclusive society. In addition, strengthening laws and policies that guarantee minority rights is crucial in creating social balance. Muslim countries need to design policies that not only accommodate the majority but also protect the rights of minority groups. Protection of freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and cultural rights for minority groups must be guaranteed by law. Policies that accommodate this diversity will reduce the marginalization experienced by groups that have been victims of discrimination while creating space for better social integration.³⁸

The role of social media in building or exacerbating polarization also needs serious attention. Social media is often a channel that exacerbates conflicts by spreading narratives that fuel hatred and intolerance. However, social media also has the potential to be a tool that encourages inclusion and equality if appropriately managed. Muslim countries must develop regulations that encourage the media to present objective information, promote a message of tolerance, and provide space for constructive discussion. The media, both conventional and digital, must act as a unifying agent that supports diversity, not as a source of division. Reforming a more inclusive and representative political system is also essential to reducing polarization.

Identity politics is often exacerbated by electoral systems that do not represent all groups fairly.³⁹ Countries with ethnic and religious diversity need to consider a more proportional electoral system so that all groups, both majority and minority, can benefit from fair and equal governance. This system will reduce the dominance of the majority group and open up opportunities for minority groups to participate in the political process, strengthen social cohesion, and reduce identity-based tensions.⁴⁰

³⁸ Isrofiah Laela Khasanah dan Fadli Zumadila Wawuan, "Polarisasi Politik dan Upaya Rekonsiliasi melalui Halal Bihalal," *Jurnal Ilmiah Muqoddimah : Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik, dan Humaniora* 7, no. 2 (3 Agustus 2023): 420-29, <https://doi.org/10.31604/jim.v7i2.2023.420-429>.

³⁹ Badri Munir Sukoco dkk., "Empowering leadership and behavioural support for change: the moderating role of a diverse climate," *International Journal of Educational Management* 36, no. 3 (2022): 296-310.

⁴⁰ Abdul Gaffar Karim, "Mengelola Polarisasi Politik dalam Sirkulasi Kekuasaan di Indonesia: Catatan bagi Agenda Riset," *Politika: Jurnal Ilmu Politik* 10, no. 2 (31 Oktober 2019): 215-28, <https://doi.org/10.14710/politika.10.2.2019.200-210>.

Civil society involvement is also crucial in promoting social inclusion and equality. Non-governmental organizations focusing on diversity, human rights, and peace can drive change. By holding campaigns that emphasize the importance of tolerance and cooperation between groups, civil society can help defuse existing tensions and build collective awareness of the importance of social integration. For example, in Jordan and Lebanon, several NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) have successfully built communication bridges between different groups, thereby increasing cross-religious and ethnic cooperation.⁴¹ Inclusive and moderate political leadership is essential in creating a more peaceful and harmonious society. Leaders who can lead reasonably, encourage policies prioritizing equality, and build a national narrative that embraces all groups will catalyze positive change. Leadership that values diversity and creates space for dialogue between different political groups will be able to reduce tensions and promote social integration. In countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, moderate and inclusive leadership has succeeded in creating a constructive dialogue between Islamist and secular groups, setting an important example for other Muslim countries.⁴² Developing an inclusive national identity is also a strategic step in reducing polarization. Muslim countries need to emphasize national identity that is not solely based on one particular religion or group but on the principles of equality and diversity.⁴³ In this context, the national narrative must include all elements that exist in society so that all groups feel recognized and valued. Countries like Indonesia, with significant ethnic and religious diversity, have shown the importance of building a national identity that prioritizes unity and diversity as a foundation for creating social stability and peace.

By combining these efforts, Muslim countries can reduce identity-based polarization and create more inclusive and equitable societies. Social inclusion and equality reduce tensions between groups and build stronger societies where differences are seen as strengths rather than threats. Building a system that values diversity and creates space for all groups

⁴¹ O. Leirvik, "Religious education, communal identity and national politics in the Muslim world," *British Journal of Religious Education* 26, no. 3 (2004): 223–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141620042000232283>.

⁴² Elsa Kristina Hutapea dkk., "Tantangan Dan Upaya Penanganan Politik Identitas Pada Pemilu 2024," *Jurnal Kewarganegaraan* 7, no. 1 (10 Mei 2023): 424–34, <https://doi.org/10.31316/jk.v7i1.4811>.

⁴³ D. Michael Lindsay, "Politics as the construction of relations: Religious identity and political expression," dalam *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, vol. 2, 2011, 305–30.

to participate in social and political life will result in a more harmonious and prosperous society.

Here is a table summarizing key points related to solutions to reduce polarization and identity politics by building social inclusion and equality:

Table 2. Solutions to Identity Politics Polarization

Solution	Detail
Intergroup Dialogue	Building open dialogue between different groups, such as in Tunisia, helps defuse tensions and create mutual understanding.
Education Reform	Education that teaches the values of diversity and tolerance will prepare future generations to live in a pluralistic society.
Protection of Minority Rights	Strengthening laws and policies that protect minority rights, such as freedom of religion and culture, is essential to creating social balance.
Social Media Regulation	Social media needs to be regulated to spread messages of tolerance and inclusion, preventing the spread of hate narratives that exacerbate polarization.
Electoral System Reform	More inclusive electoral systems, such as proportional systems, allow for fair representation for all groups, reducing the majority's dominance.
Civil Society Engagement	Non-governmental organizations can promote diversity and peace through tolerance campaigns and group cooperation.
Inclusive and Moderate Leadership	Inclusive leaders can encourage policies prioritizing equality and building a national narrative that unites all groups.
Building an Inclusive National Identity	As in Indonesia, a national identity that emphasizes equality and diversity helps create social stability and peace.

Reducing Identity-Based Polarization	Combining social inclusion and equality strategies helps build stronger societies, with differences seen as strengths, not threats.
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Source: Author's interpretation

This table provides an overview of solutions that can be implemented to reduce polarization and identity politics in Muslim countries with an inclusive and equitable approach. Solutions to minimize polarization and identity politics in Muslim countries can be achieved through a variety of strategies that focus on social inclusion and equality. Intergroup dialogue, as implemented in Tunisia, opens up space for mutual understanding, while educational reforms that promote diversity and tolerance prepare future generations to live in pluralistic societies. Legal protections guaranteeing minority rights are vital in creating social balance, reducing marginalization, and encouraging integration. In the digital era, regulation of social media is essential to prevent the spread of hate narratives and promote inclusion. Political system reforms, particularly more proportional electoral systems, can ensure fair representation for all groups, reduce majority dominance, and encourage minority political participation. The role of civil society is also significant, with non-governmental organizations helping to create a collective awareness of the importance of tolerance and cooperation across groups. Inclusive and moderate political leadership is crucial in embracing all groups and building a cohesive national narrative. Muslim countries also need to develop an inclusive national identity, emphasizing the principles of equality and diversity to create social stability and peace, as exemplified in Indonesia. Combining these measures will result in a more robust and harmonious society, where differences are seen as strengths, not threats.

CONCLUSION

This article concludes that identity politics and polarization have become serious problems in contemporary Muslim countries, especially in the context of elections, social media, and global dynamics. Elections often exacerbate polarization as political actors use religious and ethnic identities to gain votes, while social media accelerates the spread of narratives that divide society. Global dynamics, such as foreign intervention and geopolitical changes, are essential in exacerbating the situation. Conflicts between domestic

and international actors often utilize identity politics to achieve their goals, further deepening the chasm of division.

This study emphasizes that more inclusive policy strategies are needed to address this polarization problem. Electoral system reform, social media regulation, and more inclusive civic education are necessary steps that can help reduce polarization. Finally, it is essential to remember that Muslim countries are not monolithic, and solutions to the problem of political polarization must be tailored to the context of each country. Further research is needed to explore these countries' most effective strategies for managing social and political divisions. With the right policies in place and a commitment to inclusivity, Muslim countries can overcome the challenges of political polarization and build more stable and tolerant democracies in the future.

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