

Crisis Studies of The Discourse of Identity Politics in Indonesia from The Perspective of *Asabiyah* Ibn Khaldun

Muhamad Fajar Pramono

University of Darussalam Gontor, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, Jl. Raya Siman, Dusun
I, Demangan, Kec. Siman, Kabupaten Ponorogo, 63471
E-mail: mfpramono@unida.gontor.ac.id

Mohammad Latief

University of Darussalam Gontor, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, Jl. Raya Siman, Dusun
I, Demangan, Kec. Siman, Kabupaten Ponorogo, 63471
E-mail: ahmadlatief@unida.gontor.ac.id

Humaira Agam Putri

University of Darussalam Gontor, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, Jl. Raya Siman, Dusun
I, Demangan, Kec. Siman, Kabupaten Ponorogo, 63471
E-mail: humairaagam99@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper critically analyzes Indonesia's discourse on identity politics through Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyah* (social solidarity). It aims to diagnose issues surrounding the weaponization of identity for political ends that have polarized society and eroded unity. A qualitative approach scrutinizes empirical evidence on divisive identity politics before theoretically examining it via *asabiyah*. Recent history shows Indonesian identity politics exacerbating intergroup intolerance and discrimination by fracturing communities along ethnic and religious lines for power consolidation, violating *asabiyah's* emphasis on cohesion. However, moderate identity politics can enable democratic representation of societal diversity. Moving forward requires recalibrating identity discourse by fostering the unifying religious and nationalist solidarity underpinning *asabiyah* to balance inherent identity affiliations with preserving pluralistic national harmony.

Keywords: identity politics; *asabiyah* theory; critical analysis; national unity; intergroup intolerance.

INTRODUCTION

Identity politics harbours manifold definitions and perspectives within political and social theory. Substantively, identity politics links to the interests of minority social groups who perceive exclusion within a nation and thus endeavour to propagate notions of justice deemed personally relevant (Sulaeman, 2022).

Within the burgeoning domain of political identity in Indonesia, Agnes Haller delineates identity politics as a political strategy centralized upon the cleavage and manipulation of primordial attachments (e.g. religion, ethnicity, race, group) as its cardinal categories (Kauffman, 1990). Consequently, identity politics can yield both tolerance and verbal or physical conflict in intergroup relations (Rozi, 2019).

The political identity of the Indonesian state is officially nationalism rather than religion, despite the populace being deeply religious and cultural. Nonetheless, religious political developments have unfurled since the colonial era, spanning Communism, Islamic parties like Masyumi, and democratic socialism. Amid anti-colonial resistance, the dominance of Islam cannot be ignored. Thus, beyond rhetoric, Muslim desires to entrench religious identity within state order have historical validity, as Indonesian nationalism and Islam share aligned values rather than contradiction (Soenjoto, 2019).

As we approach the 2024 elections, acute issues around political identity increasingly consume Indonesia. As Syamsul Arifin outlines, this links to identity politics being aimed toward Muslims as the nation's largest entity (Sulaeman, 2022). Islamic parties allegedly leverage religion to boost votes. Quarrels catalyzing the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial and 2019 general election political identity crises were triggered by the Jakarta Governor's inflammatory reference to the Quranic passage Al-Maidah 51 (Basri et al., 2022). The Indonesian Ulema Council's resultant religious blasphemy fatwa against the governor (Abdullah, 2022) ABA culminated in criminal prosecution.

Political issues about identity elicit disagreement among politicians and society. Detractors fear threats to Indonesian national unity from political identities alongside dangers to the nation's cultural-religious hallmarks (Harahap, 2014). Moreover, they argue identity politics obstruct Indonesian democracy.

Conversely, democracy upholds political freedom. As Munir Fuady delineates in “*Konsep Negara Demokrasi*”, democracy constitutes a system with policies determined by the majority, effective electoral oversight of representatives, principles of political equality, and guaranteed civil liberties (Anam, 2019). Democratically, identity politics faces scarcely any taboos, inevitably suffusing practical politics provided the system can reasonably accommodate the interests of all groups (Sulaeman, 2022). Given democracy's accommodation of identity politics, scrutinizing the authentic objectives of Indonesia's identity political movements is warranted.

The Muslim philosopher Ibn Khaldun formulated the theory of *asabiyah* (social cohesion) (Khaldun, 1978; Rabie', 1967), noting that enduring social solidarity is essential for any human enterprise, including politics and state formation. Although stemming from 14th-century Arab-Islamic contexts, the theory bears relevance in illuminating social and political dynamics surrounding identity politics across contemporary societies.

The application of the *asabiyah* theory to understanding identity politics in Indonesia can provide insight into social and political dynamics in a local context. Although this theory was developed by Ibn Khaldun in an Arab-Islamic context, its principles can be applied more generally to understanding the formation and development of political identity in different societies.

Asabiyah's theory spotlights the role of social solidarity in shaping societies. In Indonesia, concepts like "*gotong royong*" (mutual assistance) and familial ties represent crucial forms of solidarity (Mugiyono, 2014). Regarding identity politics, solidarity based on tribe, religion, or ethnicity can critically determine political identity. Moreover, *asabiyah* provides a lens to analyze inter-group relationships and tolerance levels. Where groups' political identities clash, tensions or outright conflicts can emerge. Thus, promoting social harmony may necessitate balancing diverse groups' interests and solidarity (Lestari, 2018).

Viewed through the lens of *asabiyah* theory, practical identity discourse in Indonesia proves deeply problematic, bearing negative societal impacts. Misappropriated identity politics, such as the exploitation of SARA (ethnicity, religion, race and group) cleavages to leverage votes (Sulaeman, 2022), contradicts *asabiyah* values. Consequences include Muslim versus non-Muslim leadership polarization, eroded governmental legitimacy, and religious community fragmentation (Lestari, 2018).

This study utilizes Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyah* to critique identity politics discourse and practice in Indonesia, which tends to blame Islam as the most significant entity, thereby threatening interfaith harmony. Hopefully, this analysis can address current identity politics' failures and negative political impacts.

Several studies have explored identity politics and Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyah* theory. Agus Saputro (2018) applies descriptive analysis in "*Agama dan Negara: Politik Identitas Menuju Pilpres 2019*" to argue that politics and religion are inextricably linked in Indonesia's 2019 presidential elections. Meanwhile, Leli Salman (Al-Farisi, 2020) warns in "*Politik Identitas Ancaman Terhadap Persatuan dan Kesatuan Bangsa dalam Negara Pancasila*" that weaponized identity politics threatens Indonesian national unity and the Pancasila state philosophy.

Furthermore, Haikal Fadhil Anam (2019) argues in "*Politik Identitas Islam dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Demokrasi di Indonesia*" that Islamic identity politics has divided Indonesia, as political Islam ignores minority groups, thereby eroding Pancasila democracy. Finally, Fahmi (2022) analyzes in "*Islam dan Politik*

Identitas: Konflik pada Gerakan 212 dalam Perspektif Sejarah Indonesia" how the 212 Movement transitioned from resisting religious oppression to promoting Islamic identity politics, generating socio-political conflicts.

However, none of these studies offers solutions to address problematic identity politics. This study contributes an Ibn Khaldun-inspired analytical perspective to diagnose and mitigate divisive identity politics in Indonesia.

The preceding studies have aptly elucidated identity politics issues in Indonesia, encompassing pertinent political developments, theoretical frameworks, and adverse societal impacts. However, they have yet to propose concrete solutions. This study contributes an analytical perspective rooted in Ibn Khaldun's concepts of *asabiyah* to address this gap.

Several studies have also explored Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyah* without connecting it to identity politics. For example, Widayani (2018) uses descriptive analysis in "*Asabiyah Ibnu Khaldun Dan Relevansinya Dengan Nasionalisme Di Indonesia*" to argue that *asabiyah* builds national consciousness. Meanwhile, Sholihah & Yumitro (2022) details *asabiyah* as the tribal solidarity which galvanizes state formation.

Additionally, Saumantri & Abdillah, (2020) analyze *asabiyah* epistemologically in "*Teori Asabiyah Ibnu Khaldun Sebagai Model Perkembangan Peradaban Manusia*" to unpack the enduring communal ties fueling civilizational development. Finally, Mulia (2019) concludes in "*Teori 'Asabiyah Ibn Khaldun dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam*" that while *asabiyah* strengthens Muslim political communities, unchecked tribal fanaticism contradicts Islamic justice.

However, none of these studies interpret *asabiyah* specifically regarding contemporary identity politics. This study contributes an analytical framework tethering *asabiyah* to identity politics, diagnosing and addressing sources of societal division in Indonesia.

From several articles discussing Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyah*, researchers have yet to discover interpretations analyzing *asabiyah* about contemporary identity politics, especially within Indonesia's context. This study will elucidate the unfolding of identity politics in Indonesia by examining it through Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyah*, determining appropriate manifestations of identity politics within a democratic system.

METHODS

This research employs critical analysis using a qualitative approach and library research methods. Qualitative methods collect data and reference news media from scholarly books, academic journals, and verified online sources (Brannen, 2005). The phenomena then undergo analytical dissection by parsing patterns emergent from field evidence and discussing them. The analysis scrutinizes

empirical data and facts concerning problematic identity politics in Indonesia, seeking causes underlying divisive ethno-religious tensions and polarization.

Specifically, descriptive-analysis methods describe unfolding identity politics in Indonesia before analyzing the issue through the theoretical lens of Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyah*. Library research compiles this qualitative critical analysis, assimilating data and insights from pertinent academic books, journals, and credible online platforms.

In summary, a qualitative critical analysis lenses empirical data on identity politics in Indonesia through Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyah* theory via rigorous scholarly library research methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Etymologically, “politics” is derived from the Latin words *politicus* and *politicos*, denoting affairs concerning citizens. The root word “*polis*” translates to “city” in Greek (Budiardjo, 2007). Hence, politics constitutes strategies and systems involved in governance and state administration.

Meanwhile, “identity” etymologically originates from the English term signifying attributes or conditions making an individual or group distinct from others (Sulisworo, 2012). Lexically, identity represents one’s conception and expression of the self (Bhakry, 2020). Theoretically, identity encompasses multifaceted constructs, from self-conceptualizations to shared social categorizations.

According to Manuel Castells (2003), identity represents individuals’ cultural attributes shaped by experiences. He delineates identity formation factors, including legitimizing identities derived from societal institutions and resistant identities forged through opposition (Sulaeman, 2022). Fundamentally, identity remains ingrained within humans.

As a scientific concept, identity has several underlying theories. Sheldon Stryker's identity theory views identity as embedded within an individual's social structural position (Stets & Burke, 2000). Contrastingly, Henri Tajfel’s social identity theory examines intergroup relations, explicating how shared in-group identity drives prejudice, discrimination, and conflict via social categorization (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Identity thus denotes an innate, organic derivation of interactive social and personal developments.

The politics of identity has been defined variously. Shafii Maarif and L.A. Kauffman describe it substantially as interests of a social group feeling marginalized by larger entities in a country (Maarif et al., 2010; Sulaeman, 2022). It has also been conceptualized as a strategy exploiting primordial attachments as an umbrella categorization, allowing both tolerance and conflict (Rozi, 2019).

Fundamentally, identity politics constitutes groups asserting political interests through identity actualization.

According to Anam (2019), identity politics represents efforts to influence policies based on similar identities and characteristics. In religious contexts, it denotes attempts to codify faith values within governance. As Kemala Chandakirana expounds, identity politics chiefly serves as rhetorical manipulation by self-interested leaders seeking power consolidation (Lestari, 2018).

Political Identity in Indonesia

Social identity encompasses religious, class, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual facets, determining individuals' positions within social relationships and interactions. Meanwhile, political identity, including nationality and citizenship, denotes one's place within a community through belonging and differentiation from others (Lestari, 2018). As such, political identity is frequently a rhetorical tool for power consolidation.

Failures in effecting just governance alongside relentless power retention efforts have rendered identity politics a potent political vehicle for garnering votes (Hasan & Abubakar, 2011). Meanwhile, divisive media narratives on diversity and nationalism have fragmented national unity (Wingarta et al., 2021) despite the majority religion's lasting adherence to nationalism in governing the pluralistic Indonesian system codified in the state philosophy of Pancasila.

Contentions around political identity in Indonesia have intensified ahead of the 2024 presidential election. Tracing back, embryonic pre-independence identity discourses emerged through debates between Indonesian leaders Soekarno and Mohammad Natsir over Turkey's secularization under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923 (Iskandar, 2015; Widyawati, 2021). As Indonesian independence neared, deliberations within the Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI) sparked divisive charter proposals before arriving at the integral yet secular 1945 Constitution and Pancasila state philosophy (Natsir, 2014).

Post-independence Islamic secessionism via Darul Islam and the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) in 1949, which sought Islamic theocracy, further highlighted religious-secular tensions (Lestari, 2018; Muliati, 2015). Fundamentally, the 1998-1999 Reformation era constituted another pivotal moment, enabling societal groups to overtly articulate identities, including religious ones. This sparked mushrooming Islamic organizations and parties seeking to institute Shariah law. Myriad emergent parties embodied these societal undercurrents, spanning the Justice Party, United Development Party, Crescent Star Party, United Nation Party, Islamic Umat Party and more (Kuntowijoyo, 1997).

Most recently, the divisive 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections highlighted religious identity contentions. As candidates deployed religious rhetoric during

campaigns, "I am Muslim, I choose Muslim leaders" narratives mobilized masses nationwide (Fahmi, 2022), fueling debates over Islam's political identity (Firdaus & Andriyani, 2021). To many observers, the elections underscored political identity's disruptive potential.

These chequered historical developments have sparked controversy regarding identity politics. Detractors argue such divisive politics threaten Indonesian unity and national ideology (Kuntowijoyo, 1997), fracturing religious blocs and polarizing leadership preferences.

As a culturally and religiously diverse nation, Indonesia's founding fathers crafted a unifying Pancasila state ideology to supersede primordial attachments (Azman, 2017). Yet the sizeable role of Muslims, specifically in securing independence, challenges notions that bestowing religious identity primacy contradicts nationalism (Natsir, 2016). Indeed, Indonesian history has demonstrated synergistic links between Islam and nationalism rather than zero-sum tension.

***Asabiyya* on Ibnu Khaldun**

Etymologically, "*asabiyah*" stems from the Arabic term "*asaba*," which denotes ties or bonds. As a concept, *asabiyah* refers to the sociocultural solidarity underpinning communal cohesion, emphasizing shared awareness, unity and group identity (Esposito, 2001).

The theory of *asabiyah*, also known as social solidarity, was formulated by the 14th-century Muslim historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun. He considered *asabiyah* the pivotal factor enabling state formation (Khaldun, 1978). Khaldun argued that human social enterprises, including politics, necessitate solidarity to construct the governing apparatus of states that sustain collective existence.

Asabiyah constitutes the blood ties breeding affection amongst kin and those sharing aligned interests (Rodli et al., 2021). Such bonds are embedded firmly within human nature. Closer familial ties engender more vital solidarity impulses (Khaldun, 1978). Fundamentally, *asabiyah* represents an innate social solidarity encouraging mutual concern and collective purpose.

Asabiyah has also been described as a unifying zeal to achieve communal objectives. As verse 63 of Surah Al-Anfal notes, divine assistance remains vital for religious purposes (Rais, 2001). Yet earthly efforts also require cohesion; progress follows when people unite behind shared goals while rejecting worldly distractions (Khaldun, 1978).

Governments buttressed by religious solidarity can overcome material disadvantages against opponents, as initially, Arab Muslim armies defeated larger Persian and Byzantine forces during the early Islamic expansion (Azhar, 1996). Such solidarity constitutes the indispensable moral backbone for religion itself; without fervent communal adherence, faith rings hollow (Khaldun, 1978).

Beyond kinship, racial, religious, and environmental factors also catalyze *asabiyah* (Rodli et al., 2021). Ibn Khaldun posited religion as the most vital driver, governing all facets of existence.

Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyah* harbors religious and moral underpinnings. *Firstly*, it necessitates conviction and rejection of sacrilege, reflecting Islamic notions of God's remembrance. While communal Muslim solidarity stems from faith, unchecked zeal borders on fanaticism; Ibn Khaldun cautioned against blind group allegiance overriding ethical concerns (Ilham, 2016).

Secondly, *asabiyah* spotlights solidarity and unity as moral imperatives spurring cooperation towards shared objectives. Thus awakened, groups preserve their defining traditions and ethics (Muhammad Khaldun, 2011).

Thirdly, respect for leadership and authority cements stability and order (Widayani, 2018).

However, while engendering cohesion, unchecked *asabiyah* risks chauvinism, injustice and intergroup intolerance. Consequently, interpretations must align with specific sociocultural contexts.

In summary, Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyah* refers to an innate social solidarity that fosters cohesive communities and overrides tribalistic divisions. By binding groups to shared convictions and goals under respected leadership, *asabiyah* can enable political state development and religious community building.

However, the religious morality underpinning *asabiyah* also risks breeding self-righteous zealotry and intergroup tensions if not carefully translated across diverse sociocultural contexts. Consequently, while *asabiyah* offers means for engendering solidarity, harnessing its constructive power requires mitigating potential excesses via ethical, context-specific applications.

Criticism of *Asabiyah* Theory on Political Identity in Indonesia

In contemporary contexts, identity politics frequently catalyze political tensions, especially between majority and minority factions (Lestari Sri, 2018). Despite Indonesia's pluralism, stunted interpretations of secular democracy position religion as threatening diversity, culminating in identity-based conflicts that undermine harmony (Hifni et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, misguided identity politics have spawned mainly issues related to ethnicity, religion and race (SARA). By fracturing society and fueling polarization, intolerance and discrimination ensue. Several salient examples demonstrate the risks of unchecked identity politics.

Firstly, extreme identity politics can yield social polarization as groups splinter into conflicting sub-identities. The 2017 Jakarta elections and ensuing 212

Movement protests demonstrated such dynamics, as the majority of religious positions sponsored intolerant acts against minority groups and individuals (Mason, 2015).

Secondly, exclusive conceptions of identity politics can propagate discrimination against particular groups, infringing rights and access. Long-standing cultural and religious tensions in Papua have involved identity issues, with subjugation and violence targeting certain Christian ethnic groups amid denied autonomy and independence claims (Martiny & Rubin, 2016).

Thirdly, beyond social impacts, misguided identity politics can destabilize government and politics when exploited for partisan ends rather than justice (Klandermans, 2014).

Indeed, identity politics need not inevitably yield adverse outcomes; in moderation, it can enable groups to express interests. However, risks arise when identity becomes exploited or misappropriated, breeding division. Based on the preceding evidence, Indonesian identity politics have followed mainly this deleterious path.

Analyzed through Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyah* theory, recent Indonesian identity politics have overridden unity, solidarity and cohesion within society and governance.

Asabiyah posits religion as the firmest foundation for unity. When grounded in religious morality, identity politics that allows democratic religious expression need not disrupt democracy (Khaldun, 1978). Some Indonesian Islamic parties have realized this principle. However, safeguards remain necessary.

Apart from religion, nationalist fervor constitutes another potential wellspring of *asabiyah*, bonding communities to preserve national integrity and prosperity (Stryker & Burke, n.d.). Such patriotism and unity echo religious values.

Thus, identity politics aligned with *asabiyah* could mitigate negative manifestations in Indonesia. However, this requires a conscious individual and col.

CONCLUSION

This study finds Indonesian identity politics emerges as reactions to perceived government contraventions of religious guidelines, polarizing society and enabling discriminatory policies that erode unity and tolerance, violating the moral values of cohesion in Ibn Khaldun's *asabiyah* theory. While democracy requires accommodating identity interests, harnessing *asabiyah* means calibrating their expressions to balance innate identity inclinations with imperatives to preserve national solidarity.

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