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Shifting from Religious Populism to Authoritarian Populism: Two Decades of Identity Politics Dynamics in Indonesia

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Abstract: This article aims to answer the question of whether identity-based movements are free from tendencies in political economy. By analyzing the actions and orientations of the militant Islamic group from the New Order to the Reform era, we show that social movements based on cultural identities are far from representing the demands of groups of recognition. Rather, these movements are leveraged as political tools for the executive group in determining dominant issues among the public to increase voter preferences and bring economic benefits to militant Islamic groups. This is insisted upon through a shift in political trends from religious populism to authoritarian populism. We argue that a possible solution could be prioritizing democratic values that lead to performance and integrity, not sectoral interests that can create fragmentation in society.

Keywords: identity politics; political economic interest; religious populism; authoritarian populism; critical hermeneutics



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1. Introduction

One of the striking images in the 2024 presidential election was the Constitutional Court's approval of the eligibility criteria for presidential and vice presidential candidates. This ruling mandates that candidates must be at least 40 years old and must have prior experience as regional heads at the provincial, district, or city level. Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who at that time served as the mayor of Solo, could easily occupy the position of vice presidential candidate paired with Prabowo Subianto. The film "Dirty Vote", starring three constitutional law experts, Bivitri Susanti, Zainal Arifin Mochtar, and Feri Amsari, shows and identifies a number of structured, systematic, and massive frauds carried out by the Jokowi administration to increase the number of supporters for the pairing of Subianto and Raka, known as the Prabowo-Gibran.

The peak of the practice of dynasty politics in the 2024 presidential election was a number of demonstrations in various regions in Indonesia on 22 August 2024 to oppose the Regional Election Bill, which had been ratified by the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court changed an article of the Regional Election Law, particularly paragraph 1 of Article 40, which initially emphasized the requirement that political parties could nominate regional head candidates if they had representation of at least 20% of the number of seats in the Regional People's Representative Council or 25% of the accumulation of valid votes in the general election for members of the Regional People's Representative Council in the relevant region to 7.5%. The Constitutional Court also set the age limit for regional head candidates through Decision Number 60/PUU-XXII/2024, which is 30 years at the time of registration. These two decisions received a response from the Legislation Committee of the Regional Representatives Council by holding a meeting to draft the Regional Election Bill.

The Legislation Committee of the Regional Representatives Council wanted to restore the requirements for party representation in nominating regional head candidates and the age limit for regional head candidates, which is 30 years at the time of inauguration, referring to Supreme Court Regulation Number 23P/HUM/2024. The Regional Election Bill drafted by the Legislation Committee of the Regional Representatives Council was considered to harm democracy. The expectation of the Legislation Committee of the Regional Representatives Council was that, if party representation remained aligned with the old Constitutional Court regulations, it was likely that regional head candidates supported by the Advanced Indonesia Plus Coalition would compete against an empty box. On the other hand, when the age limit for regional head candidates is 30 years old during the inauguration, the Advanced Indonesia Coalition's plan to nominate Kaesang Pangarep, Jokowi's youngest son, as a candidate for Governor of Central Java, can be realized.

A series of events to perpetuate dynasty politics has diminished the prominence of identity politics in the current political contestation. Previously, the issue of identity politics started to emerge in the 2014 presidential election (Mietzner 2019). Identity politics also gained considerable prominence in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada (Hadiz 2018; Setijadi 2019; Aspinall and Mietzner 2019), which resulted in the largest demonstration in Indonesian history (Aspinall and Mietzner 2019). The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), a militant Islamic group under the leadership of Habib Rizieq Shihab, initiated the 411 movement and continued with 212 as a response to the alleged blasphemy by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, or Ahok, against the surah Al-Maidah verse 51. At that time, many terms were directed by Shihab at Ahok, such as infidel, crocodile, blasphemous, and Chinese butt.

The prominence of identity politics continued to rise until the 2019 presidential election (Bajari et al. 2021; Fossati 2019; Afrimadona 2021). Jokowi, a presidential candidate who supported Ahok in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada, was called a communist, a foreign lackey, a Chinese lackey, and a member of The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The emergence of identity politics in the two contestations was in the context of political interests between Shihab and Subianto to win Anies Baswedan in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018; Burhani 2020) and help Subianto as president in 2019. Meanwhile, the economic interests desired by the FPI were for funding the 411 and 212 movements and financing Shihab's overstay fine while in Saudi Arabia.

By contrast, identity politics was largely absent among voters or political elites in the 2024 presidential election. The reason was partly because of the economic and political interests between political elites and militant Islamic groups. As reported in nasional.tempo.co.id (2024), there was a political affiliation between the leaders of the Gerindra Party, Sufmi Dasco Ahmad and Habiburrakhman, with Shihab, the chairman of the FPI. Not only political interests but also economic interests. Based on the report from liputan6.com (2023), during his nomination as president in 2024, Baswedan told Gus Yusuf, chairman of the Central Java PKB DPW, that to manage a movement such as the FPI, the costs were remarkably high. Only Subianto could afford it. Suryana (2024) also acknowledged that unlike previous elections, Shihab did not organize or participate in any movement to support his chosen candidates, Baswedan and Muhaimin. This may indicate a pattern that when there are political economic interests between political elites and militant Islamic groups, the issue of identity politics will strengthen and vice versa.

Scholars have extensively examined identity politics, particularly its dynamics in Indonesia and the political affiliations that have developed between militant Islamic groups and political elites to increase voter preferences. However, fewer studies have focused on the correlation between the dynamics of identity politics and political economic interests and how this has an impact on shifting political trends. Scholars such as Bouchier (2019), Ahmad (2022), and Widian et al. (2023), discuss the use of identity politics among political

elites to increase voter preferences. Other scholars, including [Mietzner and Muhtadi \(2018\)](#), [Afrimadona \(2021\)](#), [Sumaktoyo \(2021\)](#), and [Toha et al. \(2021\)](#), have also penned similar articles on identity politics, but from an electorate perspective, how identity politics are used by society to attack other partners.

Meanwhile, research on Islamic militant groups has looked at the role of Shihab as the leader of the FPI. Works by [Seto \(2019\)](#), [Rakhmani and Saraswati \(2021\)](#), [Sumadinata et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Amaruli et al. \(2022\)](#), for example, extensively discuss the role of Shihab in the promotion of identity politics. Research on Shihab and the movement of Islamic militant groups has not produced significant insights regarding their intentions for such actions. The tendency for political economic interests has not been seen as a factor that causes the dynamics of identity politics and its impact on political trends in Indonesia.

An important note to consider is that, apart from the related works above, no work has examined the political economic interests behind the use of identity politics by militant Islamic groups and how this has an impact on shifting political trends in Indonesia. In order to develop the argument, this article conducts a critical hermeneutics of Shihab's preaching text and the history of the formation of the FPI at the beginning of the Reform era.

This article wants to show that the political economic interests behind the movement of militant Islamic groups are directly proportional to the strengthening of identity politics in Indonesia. To investigate this issue, we emphasize several points of discussion. The first is identity politics at the end of the New Order as a historical context for the emergence of militant Islamic groups. The second is political dynamics in Indonesia in the Reform era that provided space for political elites to affiliate with militant Islamic groups, and as a result, there was a shift in political trends from religious populism to authoritarian populism. This phenomenon indirectly rejects democratic values and supports authoritarian practices. Shifting political trends do not prioritize the principles of justice that originate from people's aspirations but are formed based on an oligarchic system that favors certain groups.

2. Research Methods

The approach used was Paul Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics as a theory of meaning, a theory of action, and a theory of experience ([Roberge 2011](#)). As the focus of the research, we emphasize more on critical hermeneutics as a theory of meaning by studying the identity politics of Shihab on YouTube before the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election to the 2024 presidential election and making it relevant to political economic interests. By analyzing the pattern of identity politics, it is possible to identify political trends in Indonesia, which may lead to religious populism or authoritarian populism.

The reason for using the critical hermeneutics method is that this research emphasizes the historical aspect of a text ([Kinsella 2006](#)). We not only studied the momentum of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election but also previous periods until the 2024 presidential election. Considering the political economic interests explained earlier, the critical hermeneutic approach is more relevant compared to ontological and epistemological hermeneutics. This is because it views behind the historicity of a text, as it is necessary to see the power of relations that shape the text ([Kinsella 2006](#)). Therefore, we analyze Shihab's preaching videos starting in 2000 during the Abdurrahman Wahid administration. It is important to note that no videos of Shihab's preaching were found on YouTube before this year. The analysis extends up to the 2024 presidential election that showed elements of identity politics.

Not all narratives of *da'wah* were assessed in this study. This study emphasizes thematic analysis based on elements of identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality or gender, and religion. In addition, we also looked at Shihab's gestures and tone of voice when conveying the issue of identity politics to determine his seriousness in influencing society. Overall,

there were 21 videos that were examined. These videos may represent the landscape of identity politics in Indonesia through the figure of Shihab, who is considered to be one of the main figures behind the advancements of identity politics (Seto 2019; Rakhmani and Saraswati 2021; Sumadinata et al. 2020; Amaruli et al. 2022).

3. What Is Identity Politics?

Before discussing identity politics, it is necessary to understand what political identity is. Identity politics and political identity are two different concepts. Jung and Mittal (2020) explain that political identity can be defined as a person's self-concept based on their ideology regarding the goals and ideals that underlie how a social and political system should work. In other words, political identity as a broader concept represents a series of beliefs about the desired and adopted social order and goals and how they can be achieved. Political identity functions as a cognitive heuristic that enables a person to determine their self-concept, allowing them to identify political participation and the social community they will follow. It is also important in constructing political information and determining what kind of information is considered credible (Slamet and Hidayat 2018; Malin et al. 2019; Chen and Urminsky 2019).

This political identity subsequently becomes the basis for an individual to enter or involve themselves in the realm of identity politics. Identity politics is a form of political activity based on collective experiences and attitudes of injustice that affect identity-based social groups (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006; Bliss 2013; Simaibang and Bajari 2019). Iris Marion's understanding of identity politics suggests that social differences as political resources can mobilize the experiences of disadvantaged social groups (Balfour 2005). Hekman (2007), quoting Alcoff's statement, asserts that although identity is an important starting point for the subject, identity must always be understood as a construction, not a fixed entity. Therefore, he argues that identity politics is a branch of post-structuralist rejection of fixed and essential identities.

Identity politics is a concept that describes the various backgrounds of each actor's identity used for political interests. Initially, identity politics was a social movement against injustice and discrimination against minority groups in the United States in the 1960s, such as Blacks, Native Americans, women, gay men, and disabled groups. In its development, the subject of identity politics does not only refer to subordinate groups but also includes subjects who have considerable political capital. Currently, the identity categories for identity politics include ethnicity, religion, class, family, work, and other identities (Minan and Rizki 2019). This is reinforced by Kobayashi (2020), who states that "identity politics" is full of ideology that refers to social movements to gain recognition for historically oppressed ethno-cultural or racial groups. Some theorists also refer to these movements as "difference politics". Marginalization of groups can be based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion (Kaya 2007).

Regarding the inclusion of cultural components into the study of identity politics, in the Neo-Marxist view, identity politics politicizes areas of life that are not previously defined as politics, including "sexuality, interpersonal relationships, lifestyle, and culture" (Bernstein 2005). Identity politics is assumed to be cultural not only because identity is unrelated to institutional structures and political economy but also because experts see identity groups as an effort to recognize and respect their cultural differences, which originate from different group identities (Bernstein 2005).

In his study, Klandermands (2014) identified identity politics in the realm of social identity that leads to collective identity. According to Khamdan (2022), collective identity arises because of common interests. A person's identity cannot be separated from a sense of awareness or collective relationship. This awareness is always attached to each individual

and community as a characteristic that distinguishes one from another. Individual personalities can have different characteristics, either through the process of experience, belief, or identification. According to [Klandermans \(2014\)](#), collective identity can be linked to political context, resulting in the emergence of the term politicized collective identity. This relationship is based on the concept of identity politics, which focuses on social movements. Thus, politicized collective identity is a form of collective identity that underlies the willingness of group members to “engage”, as a conscious and self-aware collective (or as its representatives), in a struggle for power. Because they know that in the context of a wider and more inclusive society, this struggle occurs and needs to be regulated accordingly.

Furthermore, [Klandermans \(2014\)](#) explains that politicized collective identity can be seen when there is a power struggle. Social groups are often involved in power struggles because they try to build, change, or maintain power structures. Politicized collective identity is not a life-and-death phenomenon. Instead, the politicization of collective identity and the underlying power struggle unfold as a series of politicized events that gradually change the group’s relationship with its social environment. This process generally begins with an awareness of shared grievances. Then, a political actor is blamed for the group’s difficulties, and demands for compensation are directed at the actor. Unless adequate compensation is provided, the power struggle will continue. If in this struggle the group tries to gain support from third parties such as more powerful authorities, for example, the central government, or the general public, identity is completely politicized.

Historically, if we look at the development of the concept of identity politics from initially having a social goal in fighting injustice, it has actually developed into a political and economic interest for subjects who have significant political capital. This is because identity politics is the result of social construction that plays a key role in how identity is interpreted and used ([Gergen 1999](#)). Therefore, unlike the emergence of social movements in America, in the context of Indonesia, the meaning of identity leads to elements of primordialism and sectarianism.

In Indonesian society, where the majority of its population are Muslim, regional or state leaders must also be Muslim. Besides that, the idea of “indigenous” society develops alongside the increasing prominence of ideological factors. Baswedan, in his victory speech as Governor of DKI Jakarta in 2017, emphasized that colonization in Indonesia was over. Therefore, it is time for “indigenous” people to become hosts in their own country. The speech was a direct satire on Ahok, who is of Chinese descent. Although Baswedan is not a full representation of “indigenous” society, because he is of Arab Hadhrami descent, it is more acceptable on the basis of religious similarities. Meanwhile, Ahok is ethnically and ideologically very different from the general characteristics of Indonesian society.

By voicing identity politics based on religious and ethnic factors, militant Islamic groups represent their identity as adherents of Wahhabism or fundamentalism. This is influenced by the figure of Shihab as a descendant of Arab Hadhrami. Although not representing Islamic society as a whole, the Wahhabi group wants a sharia-based Republic of Indonesia with a fantasy of power that aims to revive the Jakarta Charter ([Kusman 2019](#); [Barton et al. 2021](#)). At a glance, the inclusiveness built by militant Islamic groups to determine in-groups and out-groups is in line with the concept of fascism or ethnocentrism, looking down on other nations or cultures and favoring their own group ([Allardyce 2017](#)). However, the social movement initiated by this militant Islamic group is more relevant to the concept of identity politics.

As explained by [Alcoff and Mohanty \(2006\)](#), identity politics can be interpreted as a form of political activity based on collective experiences and attitudes toward injustice that influence identity-based social groups. This can be exemplified in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, where Ahok, a non-Muslim political elite of Chinese descent who

faced allegations of blasphemy, was elected as the Governor of Jakarta. In the view of the militant Islamic groups, it was an injustice that was not in accordance with the values and ideology of the nation. This injustice is the basis for consideration in determining the social movement of the militant Islamic groups as a form of representation of identity politics and not other concepts such as fascism or ethnocentrism.

4. Identity Politics and Populism

Noury and Roland (2020) explain that populism is a concept that is still a subject of debate, and its definition is not always clear. There are various concepts of populism, including ideology, political communication style, political renewal project, and political strategy. Of the many concepts offered, the minimal idea of populism comes from Mudde, who calls it “ideational”. Populism is defined as an “ideology that divides society into two groups, namely homogeneous and antagonistic, ‘pure people free from all interests’ versus ‘corrupt elites with all their dominance’”. This concept is in line with Mueller’s (2019) that populism is a confrontational anti-establishment political movement that aims to displace the elite. Thus, using Mudde’s approach, Mueller (2019) also identifies that populism can be a movement that opposes the elite either on a conservative or progressive scale, based on culture (horizontal conflict) or on a non-elite versus elite (or ‘bottom’ vs ‘top’) scale based on class or economy (vertical conflict). Müller (2017) added that populist groups will persist with their representative claims because they are considered to hold moral and symbolic importance. Populist groups will certainly doubt institutions that produce policies or systems that are “morally wrong”. Based on this ideology, populist groups are known as enemies of institutions. They will be enemies of the representation of government mechanisms that fail to maintain morality.

Identification of the concept of populism produces a variety of approaches to populism, namely populism with a structural, economic, ideological, and political-institutional approach (Devinney and Hartwell 2020). Structural populism sees populism as an attempt to form a “cross-class coalition” to implement a series of reformist policies that should catalyze economic development without producing explosive social conflict. Meanwhile, economic populism emphasizes a series of policies that “provide short-term benefits and income redistribution” among interest groups, often at the expense of long-term productivity growth and prosperity.

Different from the other two approaches, according to Devinney and Hartwell (2020), ideological populism emphasizes a simple representation that “opposes a virtuous and homogeneous society with a group of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are collectively depicted as depriving the rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice of the sovereign people. The last approach is institutional politics. The political-institutional approach focuses on political institutions, party organizations, and certain mobilization strategies used by populist movements to enact anti-elite policies or prejudices.

According to Müller (2017), populism is always a form of identity politics, although not all versions of identity politics must be populist. For populists, only some people are truly the people, while others are excluded. Based on this classification, identity politics in Indonesia is included in populism with an ideological approach and institutional politics. Identity politics is an effort to implement a patron-client system through the polarization of society based on religious and ethnic factors. In the context of this research, the 212 movement initiated by Shihab became a form of confrontation over the alleged blasphemy committed by Ahok. Moreover, the movement also highlighted Ahok’s ethnicity as a non-Muslim Chinese descendant. This indicates that Shihab is advocating for an inclusiveness based on religious factors, positing that in a predominantly Muslim Indonesian society, the leader must be a Muslim. Furthermore, leaders should originate from the indigenous

community and not from other ethnicities. Failure to comply with these provisions is considered a form of social deviation.

The ideological and political-institutional approaches in Indonesia lead to religious populism. Zúquete (2017) divides religious populism into an open understanding that leads to the politicization of religion and a closed understanding that indicates the sacralization of politics. According to Mezzanotti and Løland (2024), religious populism is closer to the politicization of religion than the sacralization of politics. The politicization of religion not only seeks to control politics but also seeks to monopolize the general will of the people discursively with religious ideas that also influence the religious realm. This type of populist makes claims of truth about religion, which always clash with the religious views of adherents of religious traditions and their leaders. Therefore, religious leaders who have different views from the populist group can always be considered to be siding with political enemies. Thus, the politicization of religion can form exclusivity among political elites (Hoelzl 2020). The concept of the politicization of religion was narrowed down by Apahideanu (2014) into religious politics and political religion. Religious politics is the populist use of religious symbols by politicians, while political religion emphasizes the politicization of religious figures in the political realm.

Political sacralization is more directed at efforts to secularize or the separation of state and religion. The term 'political sacralization or political religion (Mezzanotti and Løland 2024) refers to the formation of a religious dimension in politics that is different from, and autonomous from, traditional religious institutions. Political sacralization occurs when politics is understood, lived, and represented through myths, rituals, and symbols that demand belief in a sacred secular entity, devotion among the community of believers, enthusiasm for action, fighting spirit, and sacrifice to secure its defense and victory (Mezzanotti and Løland 2024).

Every type of religious populism occurs in every regime change. Basically, religion cannot be separated from politics. Religion has become political capital for a number of populists to distinguish between "we" and "others" (DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Yilmaz and Morieson 2021). In addition, Yilmaz and Morieson (2021) explain that religion has become a major component of populist discourse throughout the world. From India and Turkey to Indonesia and the United States, populist political actors use religious language and concepts to strengthen identity politics and rally support.

Unlike religious populism, authoritarian populism not only attacks policies based on core institutional pillars but also challenges the foundations of the liberal order itself (Bugarcic 2019). Authoritarian populism is a degraded version of democratic politics that seeks to limit political competition while maintaining popular legitimacy through multi-party elections (Adam 2018). Authoritarian populism also combines economic protection or is oriented towards left-wing social policies, promising to protect civil society abandoned by the liberal elite (Bugarcic 2019). In general, authoritarian populism has several indicators, including centralistic leadership, an opposition to pluralism, an adherence to nationalism and national identity, the degradation of democratic values through restrictions on freedom, and the manipulation of the system in order to maintain power (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Müller 2017; Wodak 2015).

Moreover, authoritarian populism has become a symbol of the movement towards a dominant and "authoritarian" form of democratic class politics. Authoritarian populism directly refers to the modality of political and ideological relations between the ruling bloc, the state, and the dominated class. Authoritarian populism often avoids, destroys, or controls democratic institutions, even while using them to legitimize its dominance, centralize power, and destroy or severely limit dissent. Authoritarian populist leaders are

characterized by the charismatic personality and the emergence of a nepotistic, familial, or kleptocratic government (Scoones et al. 2022).

Considering these characteristics, authoritarian populism is categorized within the political-institutional approach. Social mobilization to implement anti-elite policies or prejudices is not only carried out by promoting identity politics but also through authoritarian, dominant, and coercive efforts. As explained by Morelock (2018), authoritarian populism is marked by a conflict between the 'people' and the 'elite' to expel, destroy, or dominate the other party. In general, authoritarian populism involves social movements driven by prejudice and led by charismatic leaders who seek to increase the power of the government to combat differences or, in other words, achieve social uniformity through coercion. It is common for governments to condense and centralize authority, which leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a few people.

The shift in political trends in Indonesia, moving from religious populism rooted in identity politics in political contestation to authoritarian populism arising from the void of identity issues, certainly has consequences for the political landscape in the future, shaped by the characteristics of each type of populism. The intended consequence is that the political contestation taking place in Indonesia is not influenced by substantial factors or rational thinking about the competence of a political elite but rather is determined by clientelism, not on primordial ties but on profit and loss calculations. Profit and loss calculations, or political economic interests, in fact degrade normative values and result in uncertainty in the assessment of certain candidates.

5. Soeharto's Identity Politics

Identity politics has a long history in political contestation in Indonesia. During the guided democracy era, Isa Anshari, the chairman of Masyumi, used a strategy of identity politics against Soekarno, Indonesia's first president, by calling the chairman of a non-Muslim political party a hypocrite and an infidel (Feith 1971). According to van Bruinessen (2002), in the late 1950s, Masyumi became increasingly dissatisfied with Soekarno's leadership style and his cooperation with the communists.

After the 1955 election, identity politics did not show any significant influence on voter preferences. This was due to the change of government from the old order to the new order. In the New Order era, according to Liddle, Emmerson and Jackson, the political system formed was not based on identity politics or streams but rather prioritized clientelistic patronage networks (Robinson 1981). State repression at that time was implemented to fulfill the goals of national autonomy, economic development, and bureaucratic reconciliation. Liddle (1985) described Soeharto's efforts in carrying out state repression as a form of institutionalization of the "New Order Pyramid", which involved the repression of organized opposition, performance legitimation, and symbolic legitimation. This approach not only had an impact on the social order in general but also on the socio-political aspects of religion.

Hakim (2016) said that in this political context the process of depoliticization of Islam took place. The method was by removing Islamic symbols from political activities, eliminating Islamic political parties, and clearing the political arena of Muslim politicians. In terms of political vehicles, the depoliticization of Islam reached its peak in 1973 with the integration of all existing Islamic political parties into the United Development Party (PPP). In terms of political ideology, in 1985 it was mandated that all political parties and mass organizations adhere to Pancasila as the sole guiding principle. Amir (2007) stated that during the New Order, the aspirations of modernist Islamic politics were marginalized, and Islam was considered an enemy of the state.

The strong state repression of Islamic groups resulted in many vigilante groups taking the law into their own hands. These groups led to radical Islamic movements such as

Masyumi and Darul Islam. Behind their movements, [van Bruinessen \(2002\)](#) stated that several radical groups or fundamentalists, such as Masyumi and Darul Islam, could not be separated from foreign funding. There were several radical groups funded by sponsors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Pakistan. The nature of the Muslim political movement in Indonesia seems to be a response to changes in the political environment and the availability of foreign funds, rather than inherent internal dynamics. This is evidenced by the influence that the puritanical Wahhabi of the Arabian Peninsula, or known by its followers as 'Salafi Islam', had on several campuses in the 1990s. This influence was mediated through the Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies (LIPIA), funded by the Saudi Arabian government in Jakarta ([Allès and tho Seeth 2021](#); [van Bruinessen 2002](#)).

Along with the increasing influence of Wahhabi, towards the end of his term, Soeharto began to respond positively to demands from various Islamic organizations and spokesmen for policy changes and other actions on a variety of issues. For example, the Ministry of Education and Culture abandoned a decades-long policy banning the wearing of the jilbab, or Islamic head covering, by female students in state schools. The Ministry of Religious Affairs submitted to the Indonesian parliament a bill regulating Islamic courts and also published a codification of Islamic family law. A Catholic editor of a popular television tabloid was found guilty of insulting the Prophet Muhammad and sentenced to a long prison sentence. A national sports lottery, opposed by devout Muslims as condoning gambling, was discontinued ([Liddle 1996](#)).

This is further confirmed by [van Bruinessen \(2002\)](#), who states that during the early part of Soeharto's rule, Islamic groups received little attention. However, with foreign funding, they began to penetrate several campuses in Jakarta and made Soeharto act accommodatingly towards Islamic groups through the formation of ICMI under the leadership of BJ Habibie, increasing the number of Muslim ministers in the cabinet and the establishment of Bank Islam ([van Bruinessen 2002](#)). Nevertheless, Soeharto's accommodating attitude did not immediately make his government run well. The rising prevalence of Muslim street politics that received support from one faction in the Soeharto government, foreign funding, increasing riots and violence, and the advent of an economic crisis resulted in an increasingly unstable condition for the government. The peak was the movement of the KAMMI student organization affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*). Soeharto's bias towards Muslim groups at the end of his reign suggests that Soeharto's leadership style did not always lead to authoritarianism. But it can also be classified as religious populism, through political strategies and political affiliations that were built.

6. The Tide Turns of Identity Politics and Tendency of Political Economic Interest

Religious populism did not only occur at the end of the Soeharto government but also during the change of regime from the New Order to the Reform era. All forms of religious populism in the Reform era, whether in the form of the use of religious symbols or political affiliation with religious figures, occurred along with political economic interests.

The end of the New Order government and the transition to the Reform era saw various controversies, especially from militant Islamic groups and several figures from the secular wing of the ICMI reform, who considered Habibie as part of the New Order government. According to [Wilson \(2006\)](#), this controversy led to a decrease in violence from state-sponsored patronage networks, but at the same time, it resulted in an increase in the number of non-state groups using violence and intimidation as political, social, and economic tools. This can be seen in the creation of Pam Swakarsa by General Wiranto and Kivlan Zein at the end of 1998 to stem student demonstrations. The composition of the Pam Swakarsa troops showed an alliance of militant Muslim groups, most of whom

sympathized with Habibie. One of the members of the radical Islamic group network was the FPI under the leadership of Shihab (Lim 2005).

Wilson (2014) explained that groups such as the FPI do not represent a clearly articulated school of Islamic thought or religious practice, with members coming from relatively diverse Islamic backgrounds. Although sometimes in conflict with state and legal interests, Islamic militant groups are also an important element in the strategy of political elite control, and as power brokers, they sometimes open conflicts with the authorities or work in “partnership” in maintaining a certain social order. Furthermore, Wilson (2006) indicates that the momentum of the formation of the FPI coincided with the economic crisis of 1997 which contributed to an increase in the number of urban poor population, forcing them to commit crimes and violence. On the basis of ethnicity and religion, they controlled public spaces such as bus terminals, markets, and food stalls.

The tendency of political economic interests of the FPI takes a pattern similar to that of the Masyumi Party and Darul Islam. According to Petru (2015), during the Reformation era from 1999 to 2001, the FPI had connections with and most likely received funding from prominent politicians and high-ranking police officials, including the Jakarta Metro Police Chief, Nugroho Djajusman. Meanwhile, information derived from Wikileaks indicates that a collection of files has revealed that Sutanto, a former assistant to Soeharto (1995–1998), who also served as Chief of Police (2005–2008) and Head of the Intelligence Agency (2009–2011), compared the FPI to a “watchdog” and suggested that it was necessary to use it in certain circumstances. It appears that the organization has received gifts from the Indonesian police and intelligence agency (Facal 2019; Barton et al. 2021).

After the leadership of Habibie was replaced by the Abdurrahman Wahid government, Shihab used identity politics as an effort to politically destabilize the Wahid government. They were angry at the democratization carried out by Wahid in Indonesia through his efforts to bring the military under civilian control and the dismissal of Wiranto from his position as TNI Commander in February 2000. They considered Wahid a traitor to Islam for rebuilding relations with Israel, Christians, and the Chinese in Indonesia and reconciling with former communists. Mietzner (2009) notes that not only was Wiranto removed from his role as TNI Commander, but Hamzah Haz, chairman of the PPP, was also dismissed from the cabinet just one month after his appointment. Additionally, Jusuf Kalla from Golkar and Admiral Sukardi from PDI-P lost their ministerial positions in April due to unspecified corruption allegations. This was conducted by Wahid because he directly admitted that the alliance was formed only for the sole purpose of facilitating his election. Wahid was confident in his superiority and omniscience that his five-year term would run smoothly with or without legislative support.

Wahid’s political stance then triggered reactions from a number of political elites. They collaborated with the militant Islamic group, the FPI. It is widely recognized that the FPI, under the leadership of Shihab, received considerable support from Habibie, Wiranto, Haz, and Amien Rais (Wilson 2006; Petru 2015). They did not mind being exploited by others, and they would also exploit others to uphold morality and eliminate evil (Wilson 2006). This can be illustrated by Shihab’s video on YouTube in early 2000, where he used identity politics to criticize Wahid, popularly known as Gus Dur, by saying that *Gus Dur did not see where his faith is from. People who do not see can get their faith from. Gus Dur saw from where? Gus Dur is blind and heartless. And now Gus Dur is a Jewish lackey.* When Wahid’s government failed to last for five years, Megawati was appointed by acclamation by the MPR in 2001, marking a period in which identity politics in Shihab’s preaching tended to be unidentifiable. According to Barton (2001), this was because there was fear from militant Islamic groups towards Megawati. In addition, prominent figures from the Golkar Party and the Golkar Party military actively opposed the Wahid government.

Militant Islamic groups had an intention to coerce the government to withdraw from prosecuting corruption cases and past human rights violations. They did not hesitate to use their large financial resources to influence the media and fund radical Islamic groups. Conservative religious and political groups that blocked Megawati's rise to the presidency in 1999 used it to overthrow the Wahid government in 2001 (Barton 2004; Fealy and White 2008). In addition, Haz, as one of the main supporters of FPI, was inaugurated as vice president. His support included funding, political support, and advocacy for cases faced by militant Islamic groups (Mietzner 2009).

Identity politics during the first and second terms of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) administration was largely absent. In fact, during the second term of the SBY administration, Shihab provided his support. He stated that they should not fight the government unless the government had deviated from Islamic law. *We were not terrorists, not rebels; we were not fighting the government and never wanted to overthrow the government except in emergency conditions.* This is relevant to the results of research by Ufen (2009) and Trihartono and Patriadi (2016), which show that there was a decline in identity politics during the SBY administration compared to the 1955 election. Trihartono and Patriadi (2016) refer to it as melting "frozen" cleavages, in which people become more rational in determining their choices. Meanwhile, Ufen (2009) notes this phenomenon with the terms professionalism and commercialism, where identity politics is not dominant in shaping voter preferences.

Despite expressing support for the government, Shihab also expressed his criticism over the operation of brothels in Kendal, Central Java. The criticism was conveyed through hate speech and not identity politics. This situation exists within a context where SBY showed a soft attitude towards the FPI by complying with all their demands even with little protection (Petru 2015). SBY's accommodating attitude was evident in the creation of laws supported by militant Islamic groups. Notable examples include the anti-pornography bill that was halted by Megawati and the maintenance of the Blasphemy Law in 2010. He also provided funds and institutional support to the increasingly conservative Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which functions as a liaison between radical groups and the state. Furthermore, he adopted a hands-off approach regarding intensifying attacks by militant Islamic groups on minority religious groups and the agreement to disband the Ahmadiyah organization (Tomsa 2018).

Bourchier (2019) highlights SBY's accommodating attitude towards militant Islamic groups, pointing out that he supported the reorganization of the MUI, which allowed pro-Sharia groups, including the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), to have a position comparable to that of larger and more moderate Islamic organizations, such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. As a result, support from Islamic groups and conservative Muslims became one of the factors that helped SBY easily secure re-election in 2009 and maintain political stability until the end of his term in 2014 (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018). After SBY's leadership, the first period of Jokowi's government witnessed a resurgence of identity politics in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election contest. During this time, the Shihab's identity politics specifically targeted Ahok, referring to him as an *infidel*, a *blasphemer*, a *crocodile*, and *Chinese buttocks* as expressed in one of his *da'wah*:

"Many political figures, national figures came to him in a state of despair. According to them, we will not be able to beat Anies. I asked, why can't we win? They answered, this infidel governor who is on the successful team is the state. The country's leaders from top to bottom are members of his team".

As a supporter of Ahok, Jokowi was also subjected to a range of pejorative nicknames, including claims of being linked to the PKI, a communist, a foreign lackey, and a Chinese lackey, as indicated in Shihab's *da'wah*:

“Ready to defend the country? Ready to defend the Republic of Indonesia? Ready to crush the PKI? Ready to crush blasphemers? If the government is good, the government punishes blasphemers, if the government does not sell the country to foreigners, if the government cares for the people. No need for a revolution. So, we are not rebels or anti-government. But anti-injustice, anti-destruction. If the government is good, we are ready to respect and obey. But the question is, if the government protects blasphemers, the government sells the country to foreign and foreign powers, it creates hardship for the people. We are not willing to do that. If that is the condition, we must revolt. Ready for revolution?”

Identity politics in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election was used in the context of political interests between Shihab and Subianto to win Baswedan (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2018; Burhani 2020). From this affiliation, the terms Islamic populists and secular populists emerged (Bourchier 2019). The decrease in conservative and radical sentiments from the FPI during the 2010–2016 period, as noted by Bourchier (2019), was not solely motivated by the ambition to win Baswedan. This was largely due to a cooperative pact with SBY and Subianto. After Jokowi became president, FPI’s position was threatened, and they chose other options to carry out political mobilization among the community. This mobilization became a momentum to show the existence of the FPI, which could be recognized and accommodated through the formation of a political party.

In addition to political interests, economic interests were also present. A notable example is a case of embezzlement of funds from the Justice for All Foundation (YKUS), which were used in the 411 and 212 actions. In that case, Bachtiar Nasir, chairman of the GNPf MUI, an organization that has close ties to the FPI, is a suspect (liputan6.com 2019). The chairman of YKUS, Adnan Armas, explained that the foundation’s account that he managed was temporarily borrowed by GNPf MUI to accommodate donor funds. They donated to fund the actions on November 4 (411) and December 2 (212), 2016. The account was then handed over to GNPf MUI because they heard that many donors would donate to the Islamic Defense Action at that time. The total was around IDR-3.8 billion (liputan6.com 2019).

Although it is not fully explained regarding who the donors were contributed to the action to defend Islam at that time, we only tried to link some information related to Prabowo’s gratitude to Habib Rizieq and the Head of GNPf MUI who helped make Anies-Sandi a success as Governor and Deputy Governor of DKI Jakarta (tempo.co 2017), a statement from the Gerindra Party Expert Council, namely Bambang Haryo Soekartono regarding Prabowo’s order to each member of the Indonesian House of Representatives of the Gerindra Party Faction for the 2014–2019 Period to collect donations for the victory of Anies—Sandi of at least IDR-1 billion per member (rmol.id 2014) and the recognition from the Prabowo-Gibran National Campaign Team (TKN) Expert Council, Dradjad Wibowo that the Gerindra Party has spent a lot of money to make Anies’ journey a success in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada (Kompas.com 2024). From the information above, the tendency of economic interests suggests a flow of funds to the militant Islamic group, which is the driving force behind the action to defend Islam. Notably, one of the donors to his funding is a member of the Gerindra Party.

Shihab’s identity politics in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election continued in the 2019 political contest. Similar to the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, his identity politics continued to frame Jokowi as associated with the PKI. As explained by Aspinall and Mietzner (2019), in the 2019 contest, Jokowi was once again targeted by militant Islamic groups, who accused him of being a communist, a lackey of China, and an enemy of Islam. Meanwhile, many of his supporters accused Subianto of planning to liquidate the Indonesian state and dissolve it into an Islamic caliphate. In his *da’wah*, Shihab stated:

“My friends and I are conducting a massive campaign to anticipate the rise of the PKI in Indonesia. Even since January 2015, it has been heard from the palace. Ready to fight the PKI? Ready to crush the PKI? But the PKI is protected. But later we will be blamed, later we will be arrested. Later the president will not like us. Later we will be considered extreme. We will be considered terrorists”.

The emergence of identity politics in the 2019 political contestation (Masduki et al. 2021) is in a context where there is a tendency of political economic interests between Subianto and Shihab. Shihab was arrested in 2017 on suspicion of pornography. The process was stopped in 2018, although he never appeared in court (nasional.tempco.co 2018). In addition, he was also reported by Sukmawati Soekarnoputri for allegedly insulting Pancasila (Kumparan.com 2017).

Because of several cases that ensnared him, Shihab chose to live in Saudi Arabia in 2017 on the grounds of undertaking Umrah. During this time, particularly in mid-2018, his visa expired. However, he continued to live there with four other people. As a result of the incident, he had to pay a fine of \$7099 for each person. Thus, the agreement made with Subianto at that time, as stated by the spokesperson for the 212 Alumni Association, was that Subianto had to help Shihab return to Indonesia by giving him money or urging other governments to pay the fine for overstaying in Saudi Arabia. Shihab would support him when, within 100 days of being appointed president, Subianto was able to fulfill his promise (Ivana 2021).

This political economic agreement was the reason behind Shihab’s support for Subianto. Wilson (2022) explained that the movement of community organizations, starting from the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada to the 2019 presidential election, not only gave rise to identity-based polarization but also gave rise to patterns of patronage, political economic interests, and changing and conflicting ways of authority. Various sources showed the closeness of Shihab to Baswedan. When Subianto, who previously supported Baswedan to become the Governor of DKI Jakarta in 2017, also advanced as a presidential candidate in 2024, Shihab’s support for Prabowo began to wane with Prabowo’s entry into Jokowi’s government coalition. Nevertheless, during this election, Shihab stated:

“If you still have a choice, I don’t agree with 04, I still want to choose another party. That’s your right. No one should force you. No one should curse you, no. Oh, you’re wrong, you’re misguided, you’re an infidel, because you’ve chosen a party that is not supported by the ijtimia’ ulama’. No. Because leadership is a matter of furu’uddin and not ushuluddin. We may be different. Maybe people have different views. So don’t be surprised. In other pairs, there are kyai too. In other pairs, there are habibs too. In other pairs, there are santri too. So don’t call each other infidels. Habib, if I want to choose 02, I want to choose 03, that’s your right. I can’t force you, watch out, if you change your choice you’re disobedient. No, no, no. All the candidates are Muslims. I don’t need to comment on all the candidates. You have the right to choose anyone”.

In fact, if examined carefully, Gibran Rakabuming Raka is Jokowi’s son who was appointed as Subianto’s deputy. Identity politics was aimed at Jokowi in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election by demonizing him as a communist, a foreign stooge, and a stooge of China, while also linking him to the PKI. In fact, it could also be used to attack Raka in this election, but it was not.

The difference in the use of identity politics in the 2024 presidential election compared to previous elections can be analyzed through the statement of Shihab, who was interviewed by Refly Harun, a constitutional law expert, on his YouTube account regarding his political stance and the role of the *ijtimia’ ulama’* in the 2024 presidential election. Shihab noted that the political situation between the 2019 and 2024 presidential elections was different. *The*

ijtima' ulama served not only to support a certain pair but also to determine who their deputy was. Whereas now, the political parties that previously united have separated. The coalition that is now formed has been determined in advance by the party. They compete to enter a particular coalition. So, it is no longer the area of the ulama' to determine the candidate. If the party already has its own candidate, the ijtima' ulama' only considers the best candidate.

The results of some studies regarding the differences between Shihab's use of identity politics and several previous political contests were supported by [Suryana \(2024\)](#). He explained that in the 2024 presidential election, the support of Islamic parties was fragmented. The Prabowo-Gibran pair received support from the PBB and the National Mandate Party (PAN). Meanwhile, the Anies-Muhaimin pair and the Ganjar-Mahfud pair were supported by the PKS and PPP. As a result of the three-way competition and the fragmented support of Islamic parties, identity politics became a weapon that could not be used. This resulted in little demand among candidates to engage with Islamic groups in order to mobilize the masses.

In addition, [Suryana \(2024\)](#) noted that perhaps because he was bound by parole regulations, Shihab appeared less critical of the Jokowi regime and discussed more general topics related to the presidential election. He finally declared his support for Anies-Muhaimin. However, unlike previous elections, Shihab did not organize or participate in any movement to support his chosen candidate.

The difference in Shihab's use of identity politics might have economic interests. As reported by [liputan6.com \(2023\)](#), Gus Yusuf Chudlori, chairman of the Central Java PKB DPW, made a surprising statement indicating that Baswedan acknowledged the continued presence of HTI, FPI, and the 212 leadership, all of whom continued to support 02 (Subianto). Based on Baswedan's assertion, Gus Yusuf said that the 212 group did not want to show their support for Prabowo. "*Still being told to lie down first, don't show up. Because managing the movement costs a lot, I (Baswedan) am not strong, honestly Gus, the strong one is him (Subianto)*". The difference in coalition between Baswedan and Subianto caused funding directed towards Anies to be lower than that of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Consequently, the mobilization of Shihab's movement was not as massive as it had been.

Religious populism that occurred in the Reform era was the opposite of the perspective of democratic cosmopolitanism put forward by [Bourchier \(2019\)](#). [Bourchier \(2019\)](#) observed that after the end of the New Order, the oligarchic government and the dual function of the military changed into democratic cosmopolitanism through the installation of Pancasila values on democratic rights, pluralism, and political participation. Democratic cosmopolitanism is defined as an effort to produce democratic governance at various levels. This requires providing opportunities for citizens to participate in world politics in parallel and independently from their own country's government. Therefore, the goal of democratic cosmopolitanism is to create global, local, national, and regional transformations, each of which aims to increase anti-violence, political equality, and popular control ([Archibugi 2004](#); [Archibugi and Held 2011](#)).

The goal of democratic cosmopolitanism to realize political equality is certainly not relevant to the emergence of religious populism movements. The politicization of religion, both in the form of the use of religious symbols and the involvement of religious figures, has highlighted the presence of dominance and structures in society. It appears that society is being urged to choose certain political elites based on their identity without prioritizing logical considerations. In addition, [Bourchier \(2019\)](#) highlighted democratic cosmopolitanism during Habibi's era. Habibi was considered capable of restoring egalitarian, participatory, and anti-discriminatory democratic values. In fact, as explained earlier, Habibi's election was inseparable from the Pam Swakarsa incident involving militant Islamic groups. Political economic interests at that time were packaged in the rationalization of state repression

in the New Order era, which severely restricted the movement of Muslim groups. With this pretext, the game of identity politics was considered a natural thing.

7. Authoritarian Populism: Political Dynasty vs. Identity Politics

The ebb and flow of identity politics reached its climax in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election. In the 2024 presidential election, the popularity of identity politics waned and was replaced by dynasty politics. The movement of militant Islamic groups, notably led by Shihab and the FPI, was considered to be not particularly prominent, even though they supported the Anies-Muhaimin pair. Shihab's statement asking not to accuse anyone of being infidels in the 2024 presidential election could be linked to the political affiliation between Shihab and Gerindra Party cadres, Dasco and Habiburrahman.

In his interview with Kompas TV, Gun Gun Heryanto, a political observer, explained that this effort was a precondition to secure the running of the Prabowo-Gibran government. Meanwhile, the short term was linked to the implementation of the 2024 local election contest. The Indonesia Maju Plus Coalition nominated a certain pair that required support not only within the party but also from external parties. This suggests that the figure of Shihab and concerns about the emergence of identity politics in the 2024 Pilkada remain important political considerations for a number of parties.

Similar to the PDI-P's movement to appoint Pramono Anung as the 2024 Jakarta gubernatorial candidate. In his interview with Najwa Shihab, Pramono Anung explained that the reason Megawati chose him as the gubernatorial candidate was his ability to communicate with various parties. This may indicate that, unlike Baswedan, Anung was a pluralist figure who did not emphasize identity politics. Apart from the ideological differences between Baswedan and PDI-P, it is important to consider the largest demonstration in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Megawati was disappointed with Baswedan, who had caused Ahok, the PDI-P DPP chairman, to be detained for an alleged case of blasphemy. On 22 August 2024, in front of all her cadres at the PDI-P DPP office, Megawati said, *"That's fine. Why should I support Mr. Anies. Does he really want to be with PDI-P? If he wants to be with PDI-P, don't be like that. Yes, it's just a matter of whether he wants to or not, he has to obey. Yes, of course. I was scratching my head. It's so good. Now we are looking for support. Then where were you yesterday afternoon?"*

Megawati's rejection of Baswedan to run as a candidate for Governor of DKI Jakarta in 2024 from PDI-P could be motivated by various factors, including ideological differences, history from the case in the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada, or efforts to reduce issues of identity politics that might arise in the contestation by choosing a more pluralistic figure without highlighting a particular identity. Burhanuddin Muhtadi, a political communication expert, explained that the reason Megawati did not choose Baswedan as a candidate for Governor of DKI Jakarta was clearly due to ideological factors (viva.co.id 2024).

When identity politics is more prevalent among political elites, dynasty politics dominates public discussion. Raka's election as vice president with the help of his "uncle" becomes a narrative that appears on various media platforms, in addition to the emergence of #peringattandarurat, which triggered demonstrations in a number of regions. There was a series of events that were reinforced by various evidence of fraud in the 2024 election. The number of political parties in the Advanced Indonesia Plus Coalition increased to 15 parties, even though initially there were several parties that were in opposition to Subianto in the 2024 presidential election, such as PKB, Nasdem, and PKS. Airlangga Hartarto suddenly resigned as chairman of the Golkar Party before the implementation of the national conference, along with Bahlil Lahadalia's mention of the "King of Java", who was subsequently elected as the new chairman of the Golkar Party. The public considered the practice of

dynasty politics to be systematically and massively arranged by Jokowi by using the law and political parties as instruments of legitimacy of power. Conceptually, dynasty politics is defined as a situation where elected officials who are currently in office have relatives in elected positions in the past or the current government. Therefore, members of the same family occupy elected positions either sequentially in the same political jurisdiction in the municipality, district, or province, or simultaneously in various positions (Dal Bó et al. 2009; Mendoza et al. 2016).

The dynasty politics that Jokowi has systematically arranged is a form of authoritarian populism. Authoritarian populism often avoids, destroys, or dominates democratic institutions, as it uses them to legitimize its dominance, centralize power, and crush or severely limit dissent (Scoones et al. 2018). Authoritarian populism often manipulates populations by creating isolation, separating people from each other, destroying their capacity for critical thinking, and reducing their power to resist, something that is usually achieved through a divisive narrative of 'us versus them' (Scoones et al. 2018).

According to Power (2018), Jokowi's authoritarian attitude had already emerged at the end of his first term. Jokowi acted in an illiberal or anti-democratic manner. Politicization of legal institutions and law enforcement became Jokowi's strategy to weaken the opposition coalition. The first cabinet reshuffled by appointing Nasdem politician Muhammad Prasetyo as Attorney General. Under his leadership, the prosecutor's office immediately took action to arrest a number of opposition party members on charges of corruption. In addition, in the period 2015–2016, the Ministry of Law and Human Rights used its control over the legal verification of party councils to manipulate factional divisions within the Golkar Party and PPP and force them to enter the government coalition.

Power (2018) further noted that Jokowi's authoritarian attitude was evident in the arrest of government critics on the eve of the 212 demonstration on charges of treason, which were quietly dropped after the case had passed. Several criminal cases aimed at clerics in the 212 movement also confirmed that Jokowi and his political advisors saw law enforcement agencies as a tool to tame the power of the opposition. On 19 July 2017, Jokowi issued Perppu Number 2 of 2017 concerning mass organizations. It regulates the dissolution of mass organizations considered to be contrary to Pancasila. As a result, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia was officially disbanded, and the Islamic Defenders Front was also banned on 30 December 2000. Jokowi's attitude during his two terms of government emphasizes the authoritarian religious populist style. Authoritarian religious populists use religious populism as a catalyst for undemocratic political actions (Apple 2001; Yilmaz 2023).

In contrast, at the end of his administration in 2024, Jokowi's authoritarian religious populism changed to authoritarian populism based on dynasty politics. This attitude was not observed during the Reform era under the Habibie and SBY governments. Habibie tried to restore the values of Pancasila as a pluralist ideology, while Wahid highlighted the significance of tolerance and multiculturalism. Megawati was a secular nationalist political figure who never dissolved religious organizations, and SBY maintained an accommodating attitude towards militant Islamic groups during his two terms of government. In the change of regime in the Reform era, no legal institutions and regulations were used as instruments of legitimacy and domination of power. This indicates a decline in democracy in Indonesia due to both identity and power conflicts.

8. Identity Politics and Shifting Political Trends: Global Context

Not only in Indonesia, but also in several other countries, cases show that identity factors can be used as catalysts in social transformation that result in changes in a country's political trends. Notable examples are Hindu nationalism in India, the role of the Orthodox Christian Church in Russia, Christian evangelicalism in the United States, and Israel's

policy on Palestine. With a background of economic-political interests, the catalyst can have positive and negative outcomes. Positive aspects emerge when a social movement effectively addresses and resolves problems faced by the community. On the other hand, negative aspects can occur when the movement causes polarization and centralization, or hegemony, of power by certain parties.

In the United States, an evangelical movement emerged demanding the “Christianization of America” (Smith 2000; Kyle 2017). With a background of Puritan Christian ideology, the Methodist group wanted a change in ideological indoctrination. When initially Puritan Christians considered society as a passive group in accepting the teachings of the gospel, the Methodist group wanted individual freedom and a spirit of national democracy (Conniry 2008). Their intention was that the gospel messages did not remain confined to a single individual; rather, there should be an effort to spread religious teachings to others (Noll 2014), such as visiting the sick and prisoners, supporting unmarried mothers, efforts to improve working conditions for industrial workers, and other (Conniry 2008). The emergence of the Christian evangelical movement in America brought about a change in political trends from religious conservatism to evangelical nationalism that integrated American national identity with Christian beliefs (Zhou 2023).

Social activities carried out by Christian evangelical groups in America confirm their role as positive catalysts in social transformation. However, instilling influence on each individual on the basis of religion is not without any interests. In this context, every individual who has been elected president of the United States since 1976 has always been affiliated with the evangelical movement. Evangelical groups are able to become the driving force in every issue initiated by the American government (Lindsay 2007). In addition, according to Schäfer (2012), political scientist Stephen Monsma said that giving taxes to sectarian organizations remains one of the best-kept secrets in the United States. Although conservative Protestants have traditionally been the most vocal opponents of the funding relationship between church and state, along with the rise of evangelical politics, there has been a fairly strong political and financial relationship between the two.

The evangelical movement in America has been driven by political economic interests and resulted in a shift in political trends. Similarly, religious populism in India has also experienced an ideological change from secularism to Hindu nationalism. After its independence from Britain in 1947, India declared itself a secular state with the support of its first president, Jawaharlal Nehru. The idea of secularism is to make India united by giving equal opportunities to all groups, including religious groups, to practice their own values and culture. Behind this idea, the National Congress became the most influential political party in India until the 1980s. However, the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Modi’s leadership led to a Hindu nationalist movement in India, and as a result, the influence of secularism became less dominant (Varshney et al. 2021; Saggu 2021, 2023). The Hindu nationalist movement also had an impact on the nation’s sectarianism on the basis of religion. Islam, as the largest minority religion, became the “enemy” of Hindu society. They wanted to exclude Muslims from place and power, as they had carried out to the lower-class Hindus (Saggu 2021). Clearly, religious polarization may result in a negative catalyst with efforts to discriminate against marginalized groups.

The Hindu nationalist ideology initiated by the BJP cannot be separated from the economic-political context that surrounds it. As reported by Carnegieendowment (2018), the BJP does not only campaign for the ideology of Hindu nationalism but also adheres to a strong foreign and national security policy. This party is generally more pro-business compared to most political parties in India, which tend to lean to the left. This is evidenced by funding for the BJP, which comes not only from individuals but also from several companies or political elites who want to increase voter preferences (Chandra and Walton

2020; [deccanherald.com 2022](#)). In fact, according to a report by [newindianexpress \(2024\)](#), the BJP is the political party with the largest receipt of funds from private companies. Overall, there are more than 100 officially registered companies and groups, and 76 of them have contributed to the BJP, totaling Rs 2448 crore, or the equivalent of IDR 25 billion.

In Russia, religious populism has resulted in a shift in political trends from secularism to indoctrination of traditional values. Before the two terms of Vladimir Putin's governance, Russia experienced an ideological vacuum. Initially, the Soviet Union (USSR) still adhered to communist ideology. The thoughts of Karl Marx, Friedrich Angel, and Lenin, who considered religion as false consciousness, still dominated the government system at that time. Finally, in 1991, the Soviet Union (USSR) was officially dissolved, and communism as an ideology and economic model began to lose its appeal ([Kolodiy 2024](#)). Following the government of Mikhail Gorbachev, who began to introduce the process of democratization in Russia, Boris Yeltsin filled the transition of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Russian Federation with an ideological vacuum. The old ideals and values have been lost, and new ideals and values have not been developed. However, after Putin was inaugurated in 1999 due to Yeltsin's resignation, traditional values through church orthodoxy began to develop. Putin uses the church as an anti-Western campaign ([Amarasinghe 2021](#)).

According to Putin, embedding Russia's national identity in conservative religious values will strengthen the country's identity as the vanguard of an anti-Western coalition committed to opposing international human rights norms ([Kolodiy 2024](#)). As a result, the church has become the leading supporter of all government policies, including those related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is considered immoral or unethical ([Kilp and Pankhurst 2022](#)). On the one hand, church orthodoxy is a positive catalyst for affirming traditional Russian values, but on the other hand, it is also a negative catalyst with unlimited support for government policies. Full support for the government may result in failure to distinguish between positive and negative outcomes.

Behind the Russian Orthodox Church movement are political and economic interests, such as funding for the ROC, which reached \$5.7 million from various religious ceremonies, sales of religious literature, and donations from several donors. According to unofficial data provided by sociologist Nikolai Mitrokhin, the total annual income of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 2000s was estimated at RUB500 million (\$7 million) ([www.rbth.com 2016](#)). The Russian Orthodox Church received funding not only from the private sector but also from the state. Between 2012 and 2015, the church received RUB14 billion (\$183 million) in government funding. In 2016, the state allocated RUB 2.6 billion (\$34 million) for the church. This money was allocated in the form of developing spiritual education centers, as well as efforts to preserve and restore churches ([meduza.io 2016](#)). On the other hand, the political benefits obtained from this funding were the legitimacy of Putin's power, which is ultimately considered the protector of traditional Russian values. Therefore, in the 2012 and 2018 Russian presidential election campaigns, Putin was known as a figure who built three nationalist narratives: the worship of military power, social conservatism, and the existential struggle against the West ([Agadjanian 2017](#); [Burrett 2025](#)).

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has also become a momentum for economic-political interests that have resulted in the emergence of religious populism movements at the global level. It should be noted that the emergence of this conflict is not simply on the basis of religion, but there are geopolitical interests for the expansion of territory and the legitimization of areas of power for Israel and its supporting countries, such as the United States. In addition to these interests, there are also economic interests that surround it. The United States has provided military funding, joint research, and technology transfer to Israel ([Sandoval 2021](#)). [Bilmes et al. \(2024\)](#) explained that US spending on Israeli military

operations and US-related operations in the region amounted to at least \$22.76 billion and continues to grow.

Identity politics as a result of social construction can develop along with the construction of identity in society. Identity politics, which initially played a role as a social movement to fight injustice or discriminatory attitudes towards marginalized groups, can develop into a pragmatic construction to gain legitimacy of power. This issue is evident not only in Indonesia but also across the globe. However, although there are political economic interests behind the use of identity politics that have negative outcomes, it must be acknowledged that there is positive social transformation through community activities.

9. Conclusions

The existence of a political economic tendency behind the use of identity politics can be the basis for re-examining the concept of identity politics as a social movement. The reason is that this tendency is oriented towards practical political interests by ignoring democratic values. The public has the right to justice regarding objective assessments of political elites based on their performance and integrity. However, this can be manipulated through dominant issues that are formed based on political economic interests between political elites and militant Islamic groups. This has resulted in a political shift that initially led to religious populism and authoritarian populism. This shift has an important role in analyzing the sustainability of subsequent political contestations.

In short, despite a shift in political trends in Indonesia, one aspect to take into account is the portrayal of the strong tendency of political economic interests behind the dynamics of identity politics. Identity politics will become more prominent along with the strengthening of political economic interests that are intertwined with political elites and militant Islamic groups. Therefore, in reviewing the concept of identity politics, it is necessary to return to the essence of identity politics itself as a social movement that accommodates marginal groups to gain recognition and not as a political tool for gaining or maintaining power.

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