
***SOCIAL IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY IN ELECTORAL
DEMOCRACY: AN ISLAMIC MODERATION PERSPECTIVE FROM
SOUTH SUMATRA'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY***

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Abstract

This study examines the role of social identity and ethnicity in shaping electoral democratic practices within Muslim societies, positioning Islamic moderation as a socio religious perspective that explains how the values of justice, balance (wasathiyah), and social cohesion limit the politicization of identity in political contests. The primary issue examined is how the mobilization of ethnicity-based social identity influences the quality of democracy and social cohesion. The objective of this study is to analyze the implications of social identity and ethnicity on electoral democracy within the framework of Islamic moderation. This study employs an empirical qualitative approach through in depth interviews with community leaders, religious figures, and Muslim voters, as well as field observations in the ethnically diverse region of South Sumatra, and analysis of documents related to general elections. Research subjects were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in socio-political dynamics and experience in the electoral process. The findings indicate that social identity and ethnicity play a dual role in electoral democracy: they both encourage political participation and have the potential to trigger social polarization. This study found that Islamic moderation functions not only as a normative value but also as a social mechanism that actively limits the politicization of ethnic identity and restores social cohesion post-election, thereby making a significant contribution to strengthening the study of Islamic social dynamics within the context of electoral democracy.

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti peran identitas sosial dan etnisitas dalam membentuk praktik demokrasi elektoral di masyarakat Muslim, dengan menempatkan moderasi Islam sebagai perspektif sosial-religius yang menjelaskan bagaimana nilai-nilai keadilan, keseimbangan (wasathiyah), dan kohesi sosial membatasi politisasi identitas dalam kontes politik. Isu utama yang diteliti adalah bagaimana mobilisasi identitas sosial berbasis etnisitas memengaruhi kualitas demokrasi dan kohesi sosial. Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk menganalisis implikasi identitas sosial dan etnisitas terhadap demokrasi elektoral dalam kerangka moderasi Islam. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif empiris melalui wawancara mendalam dengan para pemimpin masyarakat, tokoh agama, dan pemilih Muslim, serta observasi lapangan di wilayah Sumatera Selatan yang beragam etnis, dan analisis dokumen terkait pemilihan umum. Subjek penelitian dipilih melalui pengambilan sampel bertujuan berdasarkan keterlibatan aktif mereka dalam dinamika sosial-politik dan pengalaman dalam proses pemilihan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa identitas sosial dan etnisitas memainkan peran ganda dalam demokrasi elektoral: keduanya mendorong partisipasi politik dan berpotensi memicu polarisasi sosial. Studi ini menemukan bahwa moderasi Islam tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai nilai normatif tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme sosial yang secara aktif membatasi politisasi identitas etnis dan memulihkan kohesi sosial pasca pemilu, sehingga memberikan kontribusi signifikan untuk memperkuat studi dinamika sosial Islam dalam konteks demokrasi elektoral.

Keywords: Electoral democracy; Ethnicity; Islamic moderation; Social cohesion; Social identity.



INTRODUCTION

Electoral democracy in Indonesia, particularly in South Sumatra as a region with strong ethnic diversity, develops within a complex social context, characterized by the interaction between social identity, ethnicity, and political practices in the public sphere.^{1 2} In practice democracy functions not only as a formal political mechanism but also as a social arena where identities are negotiated, mobilized, and contested.^{3 4} These conditions make social identity and ethnicity crucial factors in determining both the quality of democracy and social cohesion within society.

The main issue that arises is how the mobilization of ethnic-based social identities in electoral democracy can influence social cohesion.^{5 6} In South Sumatra which is inhabited by a multi-ethnic Muslim population such as the Malay, Komerling, and other ethnic groups, ethnic identity is often used as a tool to build political support.⁷ This practice is ambivalent: on the one hand, it can increase political participation and group solidarity, but on the other hand, it has the potential to trigger social polarization, widen the gap between groups, and weaken the principle of inclusivity in democracy.^{8 9}

In the context of Muslim society, this issue cannot be separated from the role of Islamic values as a system of social ethics.¹⁰ Islam is not merely a demographic identity but also a source of values that govern social and political relations.^{11 12} The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of constructively managing diversity, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat [49]:13 regarding the creation of humanity in diversity so that they may come to know one another (*lita'arafu*), as well as Surah An-Nahl [16]:90, which emphasizes the principles of justice (*al-'adl*), benevolence (*al-ihسان*), and social

- ¹ Yus Hermansyah, "Local Identity Politics in Indonesia's Democratic Process," *Madani Journal of Politics and Social Affairs* 14, no. 02 (2022): 139–58, <https://doi.org/10.52166/madani.v14i02.3236>.
- ² "Identity Politics and the Politicization of Religion in the Context of Elections in Indonesia | Dialektika Sosial Sociology Journal," accessed January 9, 2026, <https://ojs.unimal.ac.id/dialektika/article/view/12590>
- ³ Sonia Bhalotra et al., "Religion, Political Identity, and Development Outcomes: Evidence from India," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, Economics, Religion, and Culture, vol. 104 (August 2014): 4–17, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2013.09.006>.
- ⁴ Angela X. Ocampo et al., "The American Muslim voter: Community belonging and political participation," *Social Science Research* 72 (May 2018): 84–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.02.002>.
- ⁵ Irwan Abdu Nugraha and Muhammad Noor Ifansyah, "The Dynamics of Islamic Social Organizations in the Central Java Governor Election," *Asketik: Journal of Religion and Social Change* 3, no. 2 (2019): 151–61, <https://doi.org/10.30762/asketik.v3i2.1564>.
- ⁶ Risa J. Toha et al., "The normalization of intolerance: The 2019 presidential election in Indonesia," *Electoral Studies* 74 (December 2021): 102391, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102391>.
- ⁷ Miftahul Huda N. M. and Muh Nur Rochim Maksum, "The Dynamics of Identity Politics in Islamic Teachings in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Election," *Terang: Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Studies* 1, no. 3 (2024): 159–66, <https://doi.org/10.62383/terang.v1i3.406>.
- ⁸ Taufik Hidayat and Miftahul Hidayat, "Islam and Identity Politics Ahead of the 2024 Elections," *Asketik: Journal of Religion and Social Change* 7, no. 2 (2023): 267–83, <https://doi.org/10.30762/asketik.v7i2.1163>.
- ⁹ Diego Fossati et al., "Ideological representation in clientelistic democracies: The Indonesian case," *Electoral Studies* 63 (February 2020): 102111, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102111>.
- ¹⁰ Mahyuddin Mahyuddin and Muhammad Zaldy Febry, "The Representation of Religious Identity in Regional Elections as a Medium for Resolving Ethno-Religious Conflict in Mamasa," *Palita: Journal of Social Religion Research* 8, no. 1 (2023): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.24256/pal.v8i1.3587>.
- ¹¹ Aris Munandar and Endang Susanti, "Identity Politics in a Multicultural Society: (A Case Study of Social Politics in Indonesia)," *Journal of Education, Social Sciences, and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.58472/jipsh.v1i1.20>.
- ¹² Ahmad Zaini et al., "Identity Politics in Electoral Politics," *Politicon: Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (2023): 137–62, <https://doi.org/10.15575/politicon.v5i2.25108>.

balance.¹³ From the perspective of *fiqh siyasah*, these values are related to the principles of public interest, the common good (*maslahah*), social unity (*ukhuwah*), and political justice as the foundations of social and state life.

In Indonesia, including in South Sumatra, Islam has developed through a historical process that has been accommodating toward local cultures, thereby shaping a moderate, inclusive, and adaptive form of Islam.¹⁴ Values such as balance (*wasathiyah*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and social justice have become part of the social practices of Muslim communities.¹⁵ Therefore, Islamic moderation is not only relevant as a normative value but also as an epistemological framework for understanding the dynamics of electoral democracy within diverse Muslim societies.¹⁶

This study aims to analyze the role of social identity and ethnicity in electoral democracy and its implications for the social cohesion of Muslim communities in South Sumatra, using the perspective of Islamic moderation as the primary analytical framework. South Sumatra was chosen as the research location because it represents a multi-ethnic Muslim society with intense social interaction and political contestation, making it relevant for examining the relationship between ethnic identity and electoral democracy in a local context.

Previous studies have shown that ethnicity has a significant influence on political behavior and voter preferences in electoral democracies.¹⁷ Most of these studies, however, have focused primarily on descriptive and institutional aspects, such as patterns of political support or power configurations, without giving adequate attention to long-term social and ethical implications.^{18 19} Studies linking social identity, ethnicity, and electoral democracy from the perspective of Islamic moderation remain relatively limited. This limitation indicates a gap in analysis regarding how Islamic values function not only as norms but also as social mechanisms that influence democratic practices and intergroup relations within Muslim societies.^{20 21 22 23}

Given this gap, this study offers a novel approach by integrating an empirical approach with the perspective of Islamic moderation as a framework for social analysis. Islamic moderation in

¹³ Rachel Kollar et al., “From Islamic religiosity to political participation. The role of social exclusion and origin-country ties,” *Social Science Research* 134 (February 2026): 103295, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2025.103295>.

¹⁴ Haikal Fadhil Anam, “Islamic Identity Politics and Its Impact on Democracy in Indonesia,” *POLITEA* 2, no. 2 (2019): 181, <https://doi.org/10.21043/politea.v2i2.5953>.

¹⁵ Timur Tumanggor and Anang Anas Azhar, “Identity Politics in the Indonesian Democratic Space: Dynamics, Strategies, and Implications for Social Cohesion,” *Indonesian Journal of Information and Communication Management* 6, no. 2 (2025): 1417–26, <https://doi.org/10.63447/jimik.v6i2.1436>.

¹⁶ Nur Kholis Majid, “The Dynamics of Identity Politics in Indonesia from the Perspective of Pancasila,” *Jurnal Media Akademik (JMA)* 3, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.62281/v3i3.1636>.

¹⁷ Dony Arung Triantoro, “The Practice of Identity Politics in Anies-Sandi’s Social Media Accounts,” *Journal of Communication Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019): 19–40, <https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.v16i1.1495>.

¹⁸ Pujangga Candrawijayaning Fajri, “The Dominance of Identity Politics in Indonesia’s Political Contests and Its Mitigation Ahead of the 2024 Elections,” *Journal of Democracy and Local Politics* 5, no. 2 (2023): 1–14.

¹⁹ Dyah Margani Utami et al., “The Role of the 30% Threshold for Islamic Parties: A Fast-Growing Middle Class and Religion-Based Political Preferences in Indonesia,” *Heliyon* 10, no. 4 (2024): e25700, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e25700>.

²⁰ Hendi Rustandi, “Identity Politics in Indonesia: The Interaction of Religion, Ethnicity, and Social Media in the Dynamics of Political Contestation,” *JURNAL SYNTAX IMPERATIF: Journal of Social Sciences and Education* 6, no. 5 (2025): 1351–59, <https://doi.org/10.54543/syntaximperatif.v6i5.812>.

²¹ Muhammad Saud et al., “Cultural dynamics of digital space: Democracy, civic engagement and youth participation in virtual spheres,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 97 (November 2023): 101904, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2023.101904>.

²² Sugata Ghosh and Anirban Mitra, “Ethnic identities, public spending, and political regimes,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 50, no. 1 (2022): 256–79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2021.09.003>.

²³ Arye L. Hillman et al., “Democracy with group identity,” *European Journal of Political Economy*, Behavioral Political Economy, vol. 40 (December 2015): 274–87, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2015.04.001>.

this study is understood not only as a normative value but as a social mechanism that actively limits the politicization of ethnic identity and contributes to restoring social cohesion following electoral contests. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of interdisciplinary Islamic social studies and enrich the understanding of electoral democracy in pluralistic and dynamic Muslim societies.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ISLAMIC MODERATION IN DEMOCRACY

Studies on social identity and ethnicity in electoral democracy have largely been explained through social identity theory, which emphasizes the processes of categorization, identification, and intergroup comparison in shaping political behavior. In the context of Muslim societies, this approach needs to be enriched with a religious values perspective that not only influences individual orientation but also shapes collective norms in social life. Therefore, this study employs Islamic moderation as an analytical framework to bridge the gap between social identity theory and the empirical realities of Muslim societies in electoral democratic practice.

The results of the study indicate that ethnic-based social identity holds a significant position in the electoral democratic practices of Indonesian Muslim society. Ethnic identity functions not only as a cultural marker but also as a medium for political articulation that influences the electoral orientation and preferences of the community. Within the framework of Islamic moderation, ethnic identity is not treated as an independent variable, but rather as part of a social reality that must be managed in accordance with the values of justice (*al-'adl*), moderation (*wasathiyah*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). Thus, the impact of ethnic identity on democracy is not deterministic, but depends on the extent to which Islamic values mediate and guide the expression of that identity in social and political life.

Field data obtained through in-depth interviews and social observation indicate that Muslim communities interpret ethnic identity through several key patterns. Some informants view ethnicity as a cultural background that does not directly determine political choices. In this view, ethnicity is understood as part of a community's history and culture that should not serve as the primary basis for determining political leadership. Informants in this category emphasize that moral integrity, justice, and social concern are the primary considerations in selecting leaders, regardless of ethnic background. This view aligns with the principles of Islamic political ethics, which place justice and trustworthiness as the basis for the legitimacy of leadership, rather than group affiliation or primordial identity. From the perspective of *fiqh siyasah*, just leadership is part of the effort to realize the public interest (*maslahah 'ammah*) for the entire society.

Some other informants interpret ethnic identity as a source of emotional closeness and social trust. Ethnic commonality is perceived as an indicator of shared values and concern for the group's interests. In the practice of electoral democracy, this interpretation often influences people's initial preferences, although it is not always definitive.²⁴ Field findings indicate that preferences based on ethnic closeness are still negotiated with rational considerations and the religious values held by the community. Within the framework of Islamic moderation, this tendency is understood as a form of natural social attachment, as long as it does not develop into an exclusive attitude that excludes other groups. The values of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *i'tidal*

²⁴ Lukman Hakim and Aris Nurbawani, "Media Framing in the 2024 Presidential Election Contestation and Its Relevance to Critical, Tolerant, and Moderate Learning in Islamic Higher Education," *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2025): 154–68, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i1.10864>.

(balance) serve as normative boundaries to prevent ethnic affinity from turning into social domination.

This study also found a tendency to interpret ethnic identity in an instrumental manner, particularly in situations of competitive political contestation. In this pattern, ethnicity is used as a tool for mobilization to consolidate political support. However, the public demonstrates a critical response when the use of ethnic identity becomes exclusive and delegitimizes other groups. This response indicates the presence of a social control mechanism rooted in religious values that rejects the excessive politicization of identity. This phenomenon suggests that Islamic moderation functions as an active social mechanism, not merely an abstract norm. The principles of justice and the prohibition against oppression in Islam serve as the basis for society to reject discriminatory and divisive political practices. These patterns of ethnic identity interpretation can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Patterns of Ethnic Identity Interpretation in Electoral Democracy Among Muslim Communities

Patterns of Interpretation	Characteristics of Field Findings	Social Implications
Cultural symbols	Ethnicity as a cultural background	Social Inclusivity
Emotional closeness	Ethnic commonality as a source of trust	Conditional cohesion
A tool for mobilization	Ethnicity as a political instrument	Risk of fragmentation

Source: Field data

The research findings indicate that the level of religious moderation significantly influences how the public perceives identity politics. Informants with a moderate religious orientation tend to view ethnic identity in a balanced manner. They accept the existence of ethnic identity as a social reality but reject using it as the sole basis for political decision-making. Conversely, tendencies toward identity exclusivism are more likely to emerge among groups with narrow religious understandings and minimal intergroup interaction. These findings reinforce the notion that Islamic moderation functions as a mediating variable linking social identity to the quality of democracy. From this perspective, diversity (*ta'addudiyyah*) is not eliminated but managed through the principles of justice, balance, and social responsibility. The relationship between religious orientation and attitudes toward ethnic identity can be described as follows:

Table 2. Religious Orientation and Attitudes Toward Identity Politics

Religious Orientation	Attitudes toward Identity	Democratic Impact
Moderate	Proportional and open	Social cohesion
Normatively critical	Selective and reflective	Stability
Exclusive	Ethnic dominance	Polarization

Source: Interviews and field observations

The role of religious social spaces also emerged as a key finding in this study. Religious study groups, majelis taklim, and mosque activities serve as spaces for transmitting Islamic values that

emphasize brotherhood, tolerance, and social justice. The religious narratives conveyed by religious leaders often serve as a moral reference for the community in addressing differences in political choices. This indicates that Islamic moderation is not merely a normative discourse but a living social practice embedded in daily life. In this context, religious institutions function not only as spaces for worship but also as arenas for the production of social ethics that influence the political behavior of the community. This demonstrates that Islamic moderation operates through concrete social institutions and exerts influence in maintaining social cohesion.

Table 3. The Role of Religious Social Spaces in Shaping Political Identity

Social Space	Social Function	Political Impact
Religious assemblies	Internalization of the value of brotherhood	Increased tolerance
Mosques	Spaces for social discourse	Conflict reduction
Religious figures	Moral authority	Ethical control

Source: Field observations

When compared to social identity theory, these findings confirm that ethnic-based categorization does indeed intensify in situations of political competition.²⁵ However, this study shows that such categorization is neither automatic nor absolute. These results indicate that individuals do not merely behave in accordance with their ascribed ethnic categories, but also take into account the social norms and religious values prevalent within their communities. Islamic values of moderation serve as a mediator that controls the expression of identity so it does not develop into exclusivism. In practice, Islamic moderation forms a self control mechanism that suppresses ethnocentric rhetoric and promotes cross-group interaction. This enriches identity politics theory, which has tended to position ethnicity as a determining factor in political behavior.²⁶ This finding opens a new perspective that political identity is dynamic and can be mediated by value factors, so that political behavior is not always linear with respect to inherent social categories.

From the perspective of Islamic social studies, these findings confirm that Islam possesses an ethical framework that enables the constructive management of diversity.^{27 28} Values such as justice, consultation (*shura*), and social solidarity form the foundation for building an inclusive democracy. Islamic moderation does not negate ethnic identity, but rather places it within a framework of justice and the common good.

The findings and discussion in this subsection indicate that ethnic-based social identity in Indonesian Muslim society cannot be separated from the values of Islamic moderation. Ethnic

²⁵ K. A. Bukhori et al., "Religious Authority and Political Dynamics: The Influence of Fatwa Issuance by Religious Institutions on Political Discourses in Indonesia," *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 2 (2025): 251–66, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i2.11784>.

²⁶ "Islam and Identity Politics Ahead of the 2024 Elections | Asketik: Journal of Religion and Social Change," accessed January 9, 2026, <https://jurnalfuda.iainkediri.ac.id/index.php/asketik/article/view/1163>

²⁷ Iswahyudi et al., "Moderate Ideology of the Yellow Book (Kitab Kuning): (A Study on the Moderation of the Kitab of *Fath* al-Mu'in Taught in Islamic Boarding Schools)," *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2025): 137–53, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i1.10722>.

²⁸ Muta'allim, "Kh. Hasyim Muzadi's Language Politeness Strategies in Responding to the Different Perspectives Between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah: A Sociopragmatic Study," *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2025): 54–77, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i1.10951>.

identity does not directly determine the quality of democracy, but operates through a process of social negotiation mediated by religious orientations and religious social institutions. This negotiation process includes cross-ethnic dialogue, compromise mechanisms, and the reinforcement of inclusive norms that limit the dominance of specific groups.²⁹ When Islamic moderation strengthens, electoral democracy tends to function inclusively and with a focus on social cohesion. Conversely, the weakening of moderation opens the door to identity politics that has the potential to undermine the quality of democracy. Thus, Islamic moderation serves as an intervening variable that balances the dynamics of identity politics and the quality of democracy, making it a strategic focus for sustainable democratic development in Indonesia.

THE POLITICIZATION OF IDENTITY AND ISLAMIC ETHICS

Research findings indicate that the politicization of ethnic identity is an inseparable phenomenon from electoral democratic practices within Indonesian Muslim society. Ethnic identity is not merely present as a cultural expression but is also strategically mobilized by political actors to build support, legitimacy, and group loyalty. Field findings indicate that the politicization of identity is not passively accepted by the public, but rather interpreted and evaluated within the framework of Islamic social ethical values.

From this perspective, Islamic moderation serves as a normative framework that distinguishes between legitimate expressions of identity and manipulative forms of identity politicization. Muslim communities tend to accept the use of ethnic identity as long as it remains within cultural boundaries and does not lead to exclusivism. Conversely, when identity is used to construct a “us” versus “them” dichotomy, strong social resistance emerges. Field data indicates that the public possesses the capacity for reflective judgment regarding identity politics. Informants stated that the use of ethnicity in politics becomes problematic when it is used to assert the superiority of a particular group or to discredit another group. This indicates that the community’s ethical awareness is not merely social in nature but is also rooted in Islamic values that emphasize justice (*al-‘adl*), brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), and the prohibition against division (*fitnah*).

Field observations reveal that the politicization of identity is carried out through various means, such as the use of cultural symbols, emotional narratives, and claims of group representation. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on public acceptance. In communities with a high degree of religious moderation, provocative political narratives tend to be rejected or critically negotiated.

Table 4. Patterns of the Politicization of Ethnic Identity and the Social Response of the Muslim Community

Patterns of Politicization	Forms of Practice	Social Response
Cultural symbols	Use of ethnic language and symbols	Relatively Accepted
Emotional and affective	Narratives of closeness and kinship	Negotiated
Exclusive and confrontational	Claims of group superiority	Rejected

Source: Field observations and interviews

²⁹ Zainal Arifin et al., “Analysis of Maqasidiyyah on the Compilation of Islamic Law and the Egyptian Al-Wasiyah Law Regarding Mandatory Bequests from Ibn Ashur’s Perspective,” *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2025): 15–30, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i1.10733>.

These findings indicate that the Muslim community is not homogeneous in its response to the politicization of identity. Symbolic politicization is still accepted as part of cultural expression, while exclusive politicization is viewed as a threat to social cohesion. This response confirms the existence of social control mechanisms that operate through religious values. This study found that Islamic social ethics play a significant role in limiting the politicization of identity. Values such as justice, trustworthiness, and social brotherhood serve as moral benchmarks for evaluating political practices. Informants emphasized that good leaders are not merely those who represent a specific ethnic group, but those who are capable of acting justly and maintaining social unity. This indicates that political legitimacy within Muslim communities is determined not only by primordial identity but also by moral integrity.

The relationship between the politicization of identity and the quality of electoral democracy becomes increasingly clear when linked to the degree of Islamic moderation. Field findings indicate that communities with moderate religious orientations tend to view identity politics critically and selectively. They do not reject identity as part of social reality, but they reject its politicization when it conflicts with the values of justice and the common good. This attitude contributes to strengthening the quality of electoral democracy, as political choices are based on more rational and ethical considerations. The politicization of identity that is not framed by Islamic social ethics has the potential to lower the quality of democracy. This study found that exclusive political narratives can narrow the space for dialogue, reinforce polarization, and reduce social trust between groups. These conditions lead to weakened social cohesion and a decline in the quality of political participation.

From the perspective of Islamic social studies, these findings confirm that Islamic values serve as an ethical framework for managing diversity. The principles of justice, consultation (*shura*), and the public good (*maslahah*) form the foundation for building an inclusive democracy.³⁰ The politicization of identity does not occur in a neutral space, but is always mediated by the values embraced by society.³¹ The findings of this study indicate that when Islamic social ethics function effectively, the politicization of identity tends to be controlled and directed toward broader social interests. Conversely, the weakening of social ethics opens the door to identity manipulation that undermines the quality of democracy.

The findings and discussion in this subsection indicate that the politicization of ethnic identity in Indonesia's Muslim electoral democracy is ambivalent. On the one hand, the politicization of identity can increase political participation and strengthen civic engagement. On the other hand, without ethical control, the politicization of identity has the potential to undermine social cohesion and the quality of democracy. Islamic moderation emerges as a key variable that determines the direction and impact of this politicization of identity.³² Thus, the quality of electoral democracy in Indonesia's Muslim society is highly dependent on the ability of the public and political actors to situate ethnic identity within the framework of Islamic social ethics. Sustainable democracy requires not only fair procedures but also an ethical consciousness

³⁰ Venkat Ram Reddy Ganuthula and Krishna Kumar Balaraman, "The Endurance of Identity-Based Voting: Evidence from the United States and Comparative Democracies," arXiv:2502.16524, preprint, arXiv, February 26, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2502.16524>.

³¹ Ria Anisa et al., "Identity Politics and Electoral Outcomes: A Systematic Review," Atlantis Press, January 8, 2024, 69–74, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-174-6_13.

³² Ardhana Januar Mahardhani et al., "The Kyai's Position in Rural Local Democracy Based on Patronage Politics at Tapal Kuda," *Muslim Heritage* 8, no. 1 (2023): 115–32, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v8i1.6004>.

³³ Mohammad Fuyudun Ni'am Imam et al., "Reexamining The First Hijrah as A Foundation for Ethical Pluralism in Ethiopia," *Muslim Heritage* 10, no. 1 (2025): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v10i1.11183>.

capable of managing identity diversity constructively. This underscores that the strengthening of social ethics and Islamic moderation is a crucial prerequisite for the realization of an inclusive and just electoral democracy.

MODERATE ISLAM AND POST-ELECTION SOCIAL COHESION

Research findings indicate that Islamic moderation plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion within Muslim communities during the post-election phase. This phase is a critical period in determining the sustainability of social relations, particularly following the intensification of identity mobilization during the electoral contest. In this context, social cohesion is determined not only by election results but also by the community’s ability to manage political differences through moderate religious values.

Field data indicates that Muslim communities with moderate religious orientations tend to normalize social relations more quickly after elections. Differences in political choices are not maintained as a source of conflict, but rather understood as a temporary aspect of democratic dynamics. Informants from various ethnic backgrounds emphasize that established social relationships should not be undermined by differences in political choices, especially in the context of interdependent communities.

Conversely, in communities with low levels of religious moderation, the effects of political polarization tend to persist longer. Political identities formed during the campaign period often become entrenched and evolve into social prejudices. Under these conditions, differences in political choice are no longer understood as a democratic expression, but as a representation of differing values and group loyalties. This suggests that post-election social cohesion is heavily influenced by society’s capacity to manage identities and differences constructively.

The role of moderate Islam in restoring social cohesion is evident through the functions of religious social spaces. Religious study groups, sermons, and religious forums serve as important channels for reducing social tensions in the post-election period. Religious leaders play a strategic role as moral authorities who emphasize the importance of unity, mutual respect, and acceptance of differences. Religious narratives emphasizing the values of ukhuwah (brotherhood) and social justice have proven effective in mitigating the lingering effects of political conflict that emerged during the election period. This role can be summarized as follows:

Table 5. The Role of Islamic Moderation in Restoring Social Cohesion After the Election

Dimensions of Moderation	Forms of Social Practice	Social Impact
Religious Narratives	Sermons and thematic religious study sessions	Tension Reduction
Social mediation	The Role of Religious and Traditional Leaders	Reconciliation
Public ethics	Call for mutual respect	Social cohesion

Source: Field observations and interviews

The findings indicate that Islamic moderation functions not only as a normative value but also as an active social mechanism in restoring social relations. Islamic values are translated into concrete social practices, thereby bridging political differences in everyday life. From the perspective of social cohesion theory, societies that share common values and possess strong

conflict resolution mechanisms tend to be more resilient to political shocks.^{34 35} The findings of this study reinforce this view by demonstrating that, within Muslim societies, these shared values stem from a moderated interpretation of Islam. Moderate Islam provides an ethical framework that enables society to separate political differences from broader social relations. When compared to electoral democracy theories that emphasize the importance of competition and participation, these research findings suggest that the quality of democracy is not only measured by high voter turnout but also by society's ability to maintain social cohesion after the competition ends.³⁶ A healthy democracy is not merely a democracy on election day but one capable of restoring and maintaining social relations post-election.

This study also found that the greatest challenge to electoral democracy in the post-election period lies in the lingering remnants of identity politics that have not yet fully dissipated. The “us” and “them” narratives formed during the campaign often leave traces in social interactions. In this context, Islamic moderation serves as an instrument for deconstructing exclusive political identities. Through religious narratives that emphasize equality and brotherhood, political identities are repositioned as differences in choice, not differences in human values. In the study of Islamic social sciences, this situation highlights the importance of strengthening Islamic-based public ethics. Islamic public ethics not only govern the relationship between the individual and God but also social relations among people.^{37 38} The findings of this study indicate that when Islamic public ethics function effectively, society is better able to manage conflicts and political differences in a mature manner.

The findings and discussion in this subsection indicate that Islamic moderation is a key factor in maintaining the sustainability of social cohesion within electoral democracy. Social identity and ethnicity, which intensify during election periods, do not necessarily pose a threat to unity, provided there are social mechanisms capable of managing them. Islamic moderation serves as a bridge between political competition and social harmony.³⁹ Thus, electoral democracy in Indonesia's Muslim society faces challenges not only during the competitive phase but also in the post-election phase. Strengthening Islamic moderation is a crucial prerequisite for ensuring that democracy does not culminate in prolonged social polarization. These findings underscore that sustainable democracy requires the integration of political procedures with religious and social values capable of maintaining social cohesion and justice.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that electoral democracy in Indonesian Muslim society is a social practice influenced by the construction of social identity, ethnicity, and the values of Islamic moderation. The findings indicate that social and ethnic identities do not inherently weaken democracy, but

³⁴ “A New Look at Ethnicity and Democratization,” *Journal of Democracy*, n.d., accessed January 9, 2026, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/a-new-look-at-ethnicity-and-democratization/>.

³⁵ Judith C de Jong and Liza M Mügge, “Political Representation and Intersectionality: Perspectives of Ethnically/Racially Minoritized Citizens,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 31, no. 1 (2024): 151–77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxad020>.

³⁶ Christian Houle, “Religion, language, race and ethnic voting,” *Electoral Studies* 61 (October 2019): 102052, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102052>.

³⁷ Mega Hidayati and Tito Handoko, “Public Participation in Religious Political Discourse in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election,” *Dialogia* 20, no. 2 (2022): 442–59, <https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v20i2.4875>.

³⁸ “Identity Politics and the Politicization of Religion in the Context of Elections in Indonesia | Dialektika Sosial Sociology Journal,” accessed January 9, 2026, <https://ojs.unimal.ac.id/dialektika/article/view/12590?utm>.

³⁹ Aba Agil Aziz et al., “Epistemic Rationality in Islamic Education from a Historical Perspective to Build Religious Moderation in Indonesia,” *Muslim Heritage* 8, no. 1 (2023): 7–15, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v8i1.5846>.

their impact is largely determined by the accompanying social ethical framework. In this context, Islamic moderation serves as a key mechanism that maintains a balance between political competition and social cohesion. Societies with a strong internalization of Islamic moderation tend to be able to manage political differences inclusively and restore social relations after elections, while a weakening of social ethics correlates with increased polarization and declining intergroup trust. These findings suggest that the quality of democracy is determined not only by electoral procedures but also by the ethical and social capacity of society.

The implications of this research emphasize the importance of strengthening Islamic moderation as social capital in electoral democracy, whether through religious education, the role of religious leaders in fostering public ethics, or policies sensitive to the social context of Muslim communities. Although this study is limited to a qualitative approach and a specific context, the findings provide empirical and conceptual contributions to the development of Islamic social studies. These limitations simultaneously open opportunities for further comparative research to deepen the analysis of the relationship between social identity, ethnicity, Islamic moderation, and electoral democracy, as well as to strengthen efforts to build an inclusive, just, and sustainable democracy.

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