

## Mapping the “Aksi Bela Islam 212” effect: Redefining identity politics in Indonesian scholarship 2011–2023

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### Abstract

While identity politics has been central to modern political disputes, little work has systematically explored how its discursive deployment has limited interpretations in Indonesia. This paper seeks to fill that gap by examining changes in Indonesian academic discourse from 2011 to 2023 through a systematic literature review and content analysis of 60 peer-reviewed scholarly articles, adopting a Foucauldian genealogical method. Our findings reveal that in the initial phase of our baseline period (2011–15), identity politics was commonly represented as a cultural and ethnic phenomenon or, alternatively, as a natural outcome of plural democracy. A significant rift occurred in 2016–2017, when the “*Aksi Bela Islam 212*” (action to defend Islam) and the Jakarta gubernatorial election mobilised religious identities and harnessed them as a major academic frame. By 2019, scholarly opinion had little else to call identity politics than religio-electoral arrangements in the register of polarisation and democracy’s perils. However, termination, along with alternative expressions such as gender and ethnic empowerment, received considerably less attention until more recently. The narrowing identifies how Indonesian scholarship has prioritised high-stakes religious electoral politics over broader and more emancipatory identity politics. The research, therefore, highlights how discourse, power, and knowledge production interpenetrate to shape identity politics in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

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## Introduction

A number of political scientists have asserted that “all politics is identity politics” (Jung, 2006, p. 35; Parker, 2005, p. 53). While debatable, they have a point. Politics today is less determined by economic issues such as how high taxes should be and to what extent the private sector ought to play a role in social welfare programs. Instead, identity has become the central question explaining much of what is happening in contemporary global affairs, ranging from Brexit supporters and Catalan separatists to the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements (Fukuyama, 2018b; Späti, 2022).



This shift reflects the growing significance of identity politics, a form of political mobilisation that unites individuals based on shared characteristics, such as race, religion, or other identities. In contrast to political identity, which is that portion of an individual’s self-concept based on his or her affiliation with a national party or his own political attitude (Gentry, 2018), identity politics places the identity itself, and thus the need for its public acceptance, at the heart of the political agenda (Bernstein, 2005). It would be inaccurate, however, to say that economic issues are absent or replaced; in fact, many of these identity-based movements saw their struggles as rooted in economic hardship (Fraser, 1997; Walters, 2018). Hence, rather than seeing it in isolation, proponents have claimed identity politics as the site where intersectionality lives, where other fundamental rights are pursued—such as the right to a living wage, reproductive rights, protection from violence, and so forth (Alcoff, 2019; Farred, 2000; Jung, 2006; Nicholson, 2008).

But gradually that sense of empowerment started to dwindle. Identity politics has been criticised from various angles. Critics from the Right have described identity politics as a kind of “tribalism” that tears society apart and erodes democratic unity (Fukuyama, 2018a; Knouse, 2009). Some on the Left also argue that identity politics has weakened class-based organisation and removed economic inequality from the front lines of public conversation (Belibou, 2025; Garnham, 2021; Gimenez, 2006). In other words, the central worry of identity politics today across the political register is an accusation of prioritising private group interest above the common good (Hekman, 2000; Heyes, 2024). So, it has taken no time at all for identity politics to be imbued with two meanings: a means of empowerment for the unempowered or a source of division, the latter having increasingly dominated (Pilgrim, 2022).

Indonesia’s encounter with pluralism and its tumultuous post–New Order politics render it particularly instructive as a case for plotting how identity politics has undergone redefinition. In some respects, the country reflects a larger global trend: what once began as a language of recognition and pluralism has slowly hardened into one of unease. After being constrained under Suharto’s New Order regime (1966–1998), identity politics resurfaced as a vehicle of affirmation and pluralist inclusion in the early years of *Reformasi*. However, as the political system liberalised and competition intensified, political elites increasingly appropriated identity narratives for electoral mobilisation (Mietzner, 2020).

This move reached its apex with the dramatic 2016 “*Aksi Bela Islam 212*” movement, the largest protests in Indonesia’s history, which culminated in a massive demonstration in Jakarta on December 2, 2016. What originally was a demand for redress from Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (“Ahok”), couched in religious terms, was transformed in short order into a political carnival of the sacred and the profane (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Its divisive effects carried into the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and, most acutely, the 2019 presidential election. In these major events, political parties and elites strategically mobilised religious—and at times ethnic or regional—sentiments to consolidate support and marginalise rivals (Hidayah et al., 2025; Mujani, 2020; Sebastian & Arifianto, 2020). In short, Indonesia’s identity politics turned from an emancipatory vernacular of pluralism into a language of division and sectarianism.

Simultaneously, Indonesia is a distinctive case that might notably influence global studies of identity politics. The country has a significant Muslim-majority population that, despite its demographic thumbprint, traditionally has, and still does, contribute to shaping national and local-level political dynamics (Arifianto, 2020; Buehler, 2009). Furthermore, despite widespread assessments of Indonesia’s democratic regression (Mietzner, 2025a; Power & Warburton, 2020), elections remain fundamentally competitive and significantly shape the political landscape at both national and local levels (Fossati, 2025; Mietzner, 2025b). Thus, the mutual trajectory of the two contexts described has enabled Indonesia’s identity politics discourse to transform radically, not as a shift from recognition politics to electoral politics based on religious identity, but rather as an exemplification of a discursive shift toward electoralisation. In the global context, discursive shifts do not go beyond the recognition politics

as a multi-axis field, whereas in Indonesia's case, it is more than a rationale for already diagnosed symptoms: it describes the ways identity politics dynamics, impact, and transformation have both postulated general tendencies of reproduction and generated specific meanings that deviate from established frameworks.

What is unfortunate is that, to our knowledge, no comprehensive and systematic study has yet taken advantage of this opportunity. Although questions of identity have long concerned Indonesian political and social scientists, most studies have been reactive to high-profile political moments (the 2014 presidential election, the 212 Movement, the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, and the 2019 presidential election), producing episodic explanations rather than long-term conceptual analysis. These studies have certainly provided significant insights into certain events, yet this episodic emphasis results in a disjointed representation and does not adequately reflect discursive transformations across time. Moreover, much of the existing literature implicitly treats the meaning of identity politics as stable and self-evident, thereby overlooking how the term has been historically rearticulated—frequently in response to crises, divides, or political conflicts—and, equally important, how academic discourses themselves participate in defining what counts as “identity politics.”

To fill this theoretical and empirical gap in understanding identity politics, the present study explores how Indonesian-language academic works construct and reinterpret the sense of identity politics over time and what transformations in meaning reveal about the relation between knowledge and power. This approach employs a genealogy by Michel Foucault to illustrate that instead of searching for an origin, historical conditions which permitted certain ways of thought and activity will arise (Foucault, 1977). Specifically, it exercises archival patience to disentangle *descent* (*Herkunft*)—identifying the dispersed, accidental, and heterogeneous strands—thereby revealing that conceptual stability is often a precarious assemblage born of contingencies. From there, it identifies *emergence* (*Entstehung*), namely the moment when a certain power-knowledge configuration sediments a new form of practice or understanding and makes it appear necessary. Within this framework, the birth of a scientific idea does not occur in a neutral objective space but is a consequence of power-knowledge relations (*savoir-pouvoir*) that form a *regime of truth* (*régime de vérité*)—a system determining which interpretations are recognized as valid, which are deemed worthy of research, and which are pushed to the margins in a given historical period (Foucault, 2003).

Our premise, therefore, is that academics do not merely reflect political reality but are involved in a productive process that shapes it through knowledge selection, namely by highlighting certain lineages (*descent*) of inherited concepts while simultaneously suppressing other forms of knowledge that do not fit the prevailing *regime of truth*. In this context, the dominant definition of “identity politics” within academic discourse must be understood as an *emergence*: the result of a series of political events that interrupt and open a gap through which power consolidates new knowledge configurations. By positioning identity politics as an object of discourse rather than a settled category, this paper demonstrates how academic knowledge is formed, negotiated, and maintained as a medium through which claims regarding micro-political democracy are enacted. Empirically, this paper traces how post-authoritarian Indonesia functions as a distinct genealogical terrain, where the production of knowledge on identity politics both mirrors and mediates broader political transformations.

An examination of 60 articles from Indonesian-language peer-reviewed journals (2011 to 2023) indicates that collective thinking is increasingly interested in identity politics. Initially, the published articles related to identity politics were relatively few and primarily part of research on ethnicity, local culture, or post-decentralisation social processes. But since 2016, publications have blossomed, reaching their highest levels in 2019 and then consolidating after the 2019 elections and again prior to the 2024 elections. This tendency involved an orientation and emphasis toward the political and away from the conceptual, from localised readings to morphing into election issues. This was the 212 Movement, a (religious) mass mobilisation that

took place toward the end of 2016 and which has been established as an important milestone in this new terrain. Since then, academic literature has read identity politics within electoral competition and social division. Thus, forming a new trend in the academic discourse on identity in Indonesia. The more emancipatory aspects of identity politics, those concerning gender and minority ethnic rights, for example, have been relatively neglected as a result. Taken together, the findings suggest that identity politics is not a fixed category but a contingent discursive formation—continually redefined through the interaction of political events, public debate, and academic interpretation.

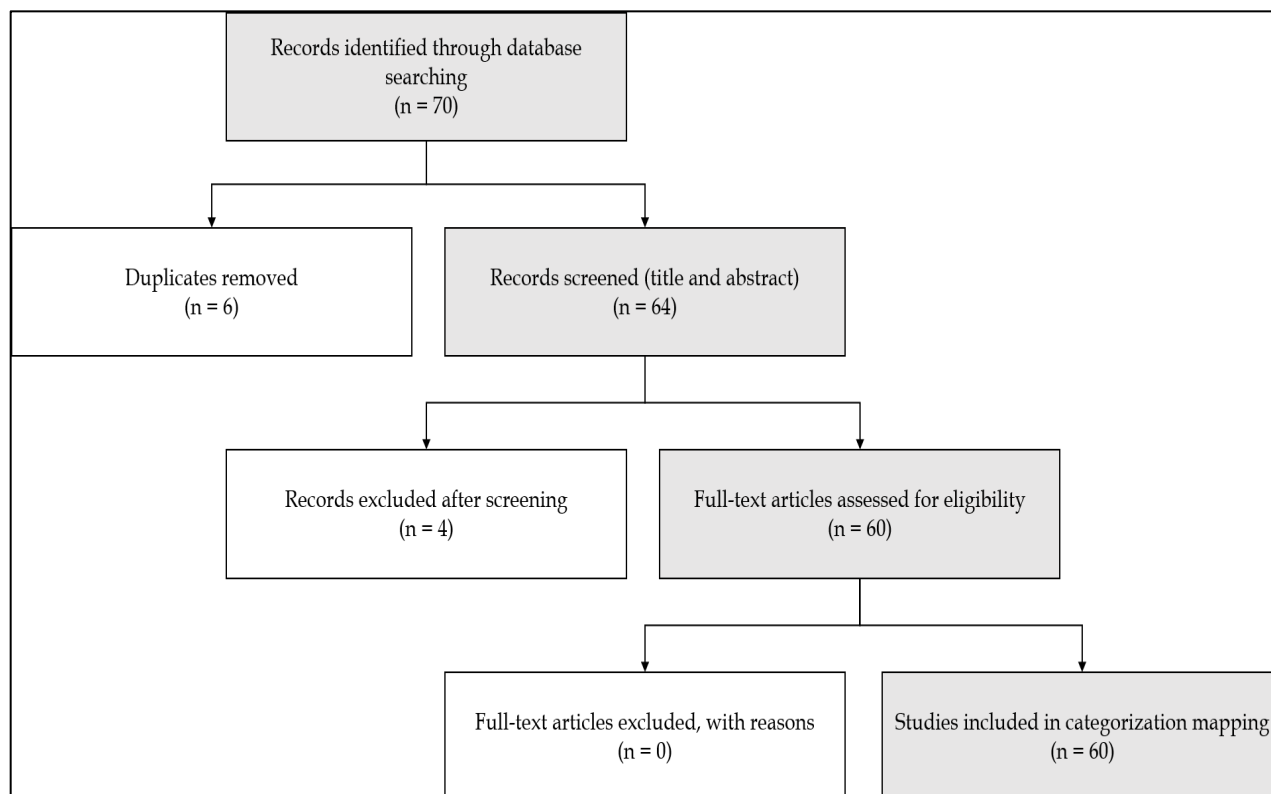
## Method

This article follows a mixed-methods approach, combining a systematic literature review (SLR) with qualitative content analysis, foregrounded by our interpretation from a Foucauldian genealogical perspective. The emphasis in discursive transformation on both descriptive mapping and deep interpretive reading makes this mix of the SLR and content analysis particularly apposite. The SLR provides a transparent, replicable map of Indonesian-language academic work on identity politics from 2011 to 2023, while qualitative content analysis examines how key terms, arguments, and evaluative framings of identity politics shift, fragment, and consolidate in response to specific historical and political dynamics.

The period 2011–2023 was selected to capture the post-*Reformasi* era’s formative debates, followed by the ratcheting up of identity politics in academic writing thereafter—not least around key events associated with the 212 Movement, the Jakarta gubernatorial election of 2017, and the general elections held in Indonesia in 2019. This SLR adopts PRISMA guidelines, and the inclusion criteria for the study are as follows: (1) it is written in Indonesian, (2) it has been published between 2011 and 2023, (3) it is present in a peer-reviewed journal, and (4) it explicitly states “identity politics” in its title, abstract or body messages.

### Graph 1.

*PRISMA flowchart*



Source: Research data, 2025.

During the identification stage, the researcher identified 70 articles ( $n = 70$ ) through a database search. This stage reflects the initial process of literature collection based on predefined keywords and search strategies.

Subsequently, during the initial screening stage, 6 duplicate articles ( $n = 6$ ) were removed, leaving 64 articles ( $n = 64$ ), which were then selected based on their titles and abstracts. This process aimed to ensure that only conceptually relevant articles proceeded to the next stage. From this screening, 4 articles ( $n = 4$ ) were excluded for failing to meet the initial inclusion criteria, leaving 60 articles ( $n = 60$ ) to proceed to the eligibility assessment stage via a full-text review. This stage involved an in-depth evaluation of the articles' methodological suitability, research focus, and scientific quality. No articles were excluded at this stage ( $n = 0$ ), indicating that all articles that passed the initial screening met the eligibility criteria comprehensively. At the inclusion stage, 60 studies ( $n = 60$ ) were deemed eligible and included in the categorisation mapping process. This indicates that all articles that had undergone the multi-stage selection process were used as the basis for the study's analysis.

From an interpretative perspective, the absence of exclusions at the full-text assessment stage ( $n = 0$ ) indicates that the search strategy and inclusion criteria formulated from the outset possessed a high degree of precision (high specificity). This demonstrates that the researchers not only succeeded in identifying a wide range of literature but also in identifying literature that was substantially relevant to the study's focus, thereby minimising noise and irrelevant articles in the subsequent stages. From a research methodology perspective, this condition can be interpreted as a strong indication that the SLR protocol design—including the selection of keywords, the databases used, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria—was well-planned and consistent. Consequently, the resulting categorisation mapping is more reliable, as it is based on a relatively homogeneous body of literature that aligns with the study's conceptual framework.

The review covered Google Scholar, the Garuda portal, SINTA, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), as well as backward and forward citation checking. Keywords such as "*politik identitas*," "*identitas politik*," and related terms (SARA, ethnicity, religion, populism, elections) were searched across disciplinary boundaries. The de-duplication and screening process yielded a final sample of 60 articles from an initial pool of about 70 articles (Graph 1).

The selected articles were copied, and several relevant metadata (such as the year of publication, title of article, author(s), institution(s), name of journal, and access link) were extracted; these data for each paper (article) are deposited in a tabular dataset. If available, verbatim definitions or explanations of identity politics were also noted. This dataset, saved in Excel and documented with the PRISMA flow diagram, served as input for descriptive mapping and qualitative analysis. In descriptive terms, by combining it with an annual publication count or the distribution of institutes, institutional mappings and journal mappings can be created; in thematic terms, one can compare popular and recedite topics across years.

Content analysis was performed using a two-stage coding process. In the first round, we coded each article according to identity, focusing on religion, ethnicity, gender, race, and other social differences that have been centralised in the literature. In the next stage, all texts were similarly coded by thematic focus—demonstrating how these identity categories were deployed within broader frames of reference, such as the politics of recognition or electoral politics. This two-tier approach enabled the study to record both the substantive identity categories and interpretive repertoires that link them to broader debates.

To increase robustness, a subsample of articles was independently coded by two coders. Differences were resolved by consensus and corrected through iteratively refining the coding scheme. Details of inclusion/exclusion criteria and coding steps were recorded to ensure transparency. Frequency tables, pivot tables, and time-series graphs were employed to depict both annual distribution and thematic development, facilitating the combination of statistical clarity with interpretative depth in a clear and replicable manner. This review used only published academic articles; therefore, it did not involve any human participants, and ethical clearance was unnecessary.

## Results and Discussion

The results are presented in two complementary parts. The first part of the study offers an overview of how scholarly work on identity politics shifted over time between 2011 and 2023, including the distribution of identity categories and thematic orientations across the article volume for each year. The second component then transits from mapping to meaning-making, investigating how the discourse of identity politics was discursively inscribed, constrained, and struggled over in Indonesian academic writing through recurring categories, including religion, ethnicity, and elections, on the one hand and more marginal themes, such as gender and multiculturalism, on the other. This framework preserves the results in both quantitative and discursive/historical terms. In the Discussion, after presenting these results, we discuss their relevance, link them to wider debates on identity politics, and outline the research's normative implications and limitations.

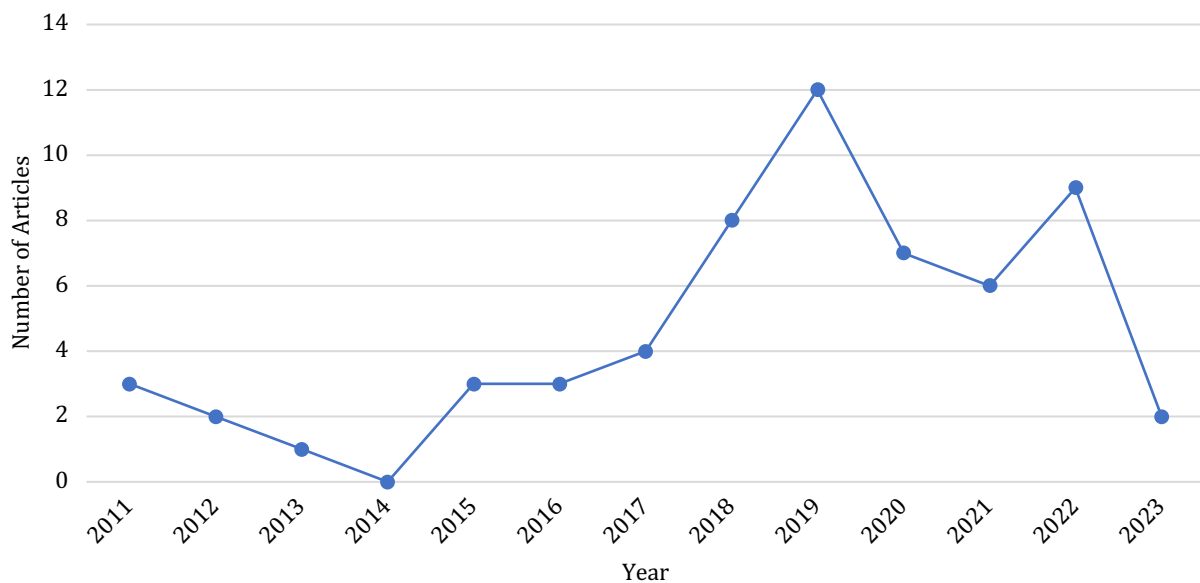
### Results

#### *The dynamics of Indonesian literature on identity politics*

A total of 60 publications on identity politics were identified between 2011 and 2023. The annual distribution shows a gradual but uneven rise in academic attention (see Graph 2). From 2011 to 2015, the number of publications remained low, averaging fewer than two articles per year. There was a spike in publications for this period (2016–2019), peaking at 12 in 2019. Subsequently, the number of publications became not insubstantial, fluctuating between 2 and 9 articles per year, but never again reaching the levels of 2019. In sum, using the comprehensive taxonomy presented above, it is possible to conclude that religion was the most frequently used framework in Indonesian scholarship on identity politics, with ethnicity and religious/ethnic identification as secondary frameworks (see Graph 3).

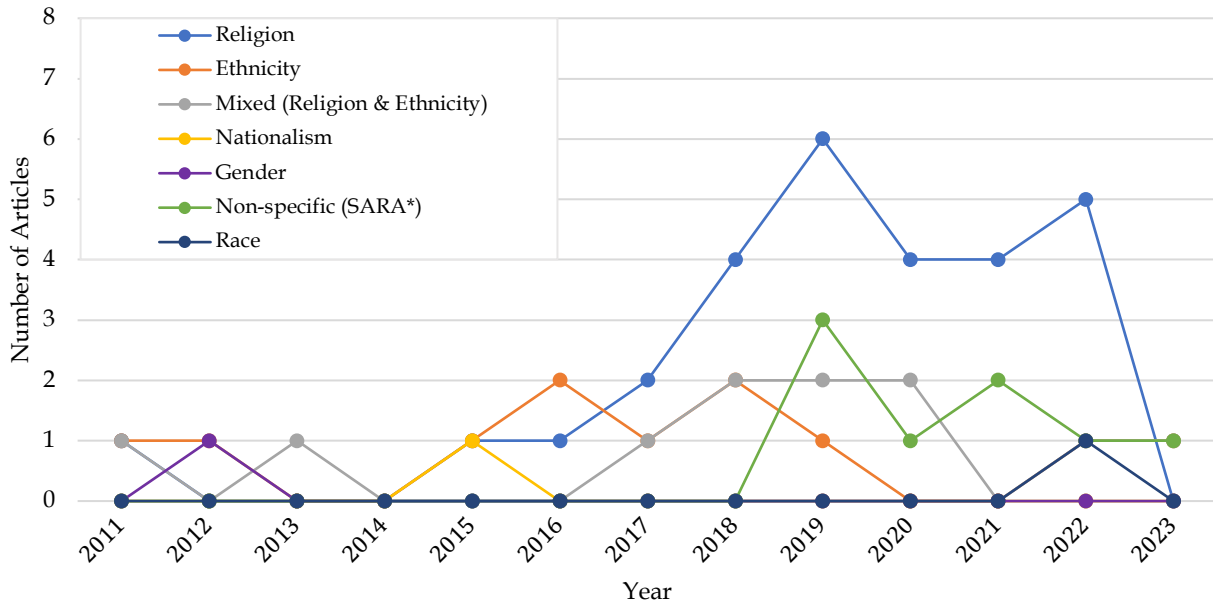
#### Graph 2.

##### *Number of identity politics articles per year (2011-2023)*



It should also be noted that identity politics was generally considered beyond the scope of the thematic from different angles, including nationalism, gender, and race, accounting for only a few studies. However, the key theme at the thematic level was indeed electoral politics, with 39 publications, while the second collection at this level was multiculturalism and recognition politics, with 14 and 7 publications, respectively (see Graph 4). Recognition politics in the present context refers to academic research that focuses on the insistence by oppressed groups for recognition, respect, and rights in public life. Electoral politics focuses on how identity markers are mobilised in elections, often linked to competition and polarisation, while multiculturalism examines how societies negotiate diversity.

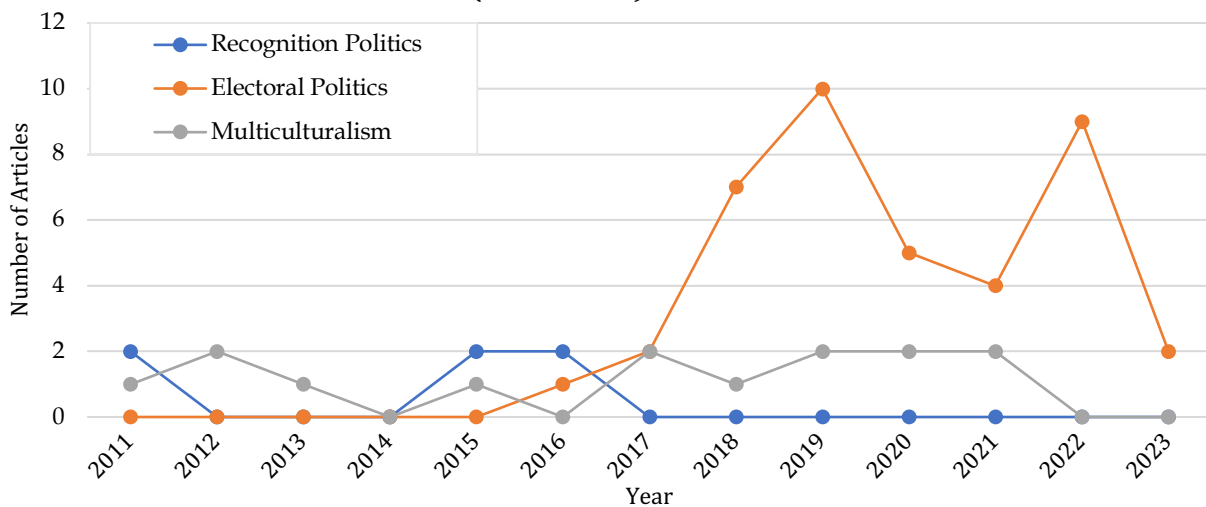
**Graph 3.**  
*Frequency of identity categories (2011-2023)*



*\*SARA is an Indonesian acronym for Suku (Ethnicity), Agama (Religion), Ras (Race), and Antargolongan (Inter-group).*

There were still a few publications between 2011 and 2015, covering different topics. During this time, only nine articles were published, with no more than three per year and none in 2014. Three articles were about ethnic identity, two were about religious identity, and two were about mixed religious and ethnic identity. One item apiece on national and gender identity rounded out the picture. Thematically, recognition politics and multiculturalism prevailed. Recognition politics appeared in two studies in both 2011 and 2015, while multiculturalism emerged more consistently in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2015. In contrast, explicit discussions of electoral politics were relatively limited during this period; most studies framed identity politics as a question of cultural rights or social coexistence rather than electoral competition. Many cases were also founded on problems in the area. .

**Graph 4.**  
*Distribution of thematic orientation (2011-2023)*



There was a shift in the number of publications and themes they addressed between 2016 and 2019. In this period, 28 articles were published (three times the total of the preceding five years). The number of papers increased from three in 2016 to twelve in 2019. Religion has emerged as the most frequent category, with six publications in 2019. Ethnicity and mixed

religion-ethnicity were less prevalent. Thematic coverage became significantly more dominated by electoral politics with 21 articles—nearly three-quarters of the total. Put differently, this means that Indonesian scholars are no longer inattentive about how identity politics, especially religious identity, were used during elections and other occasions. Since the 212 Movement in 2016, the politics of recognition theme has completely disappeared. Multiculturalism, for its part, had hung around but was overshadowed by the electoral theme. This was quite different from other years, as the concentration became pinpoint. Identity politics was directly connected with elections and the competing pressures that entailed.

After the peak in 2019, the number of publications stabilised. A total of 23 studies were published between 2020 and 2023. Although relatively high, the annual numbers fluctuated and never again matched the 2019 record. Religion stayed the most common category, with ethnicity and mixed religion-ethnicity coming in second and third, but less often. Indonesian academics have increasingly engaged with identity politics as both a concept and a political instrument, often employing expansive viewpoints without delineating specific identity categories, commonly referred to as “SARA.” Electoral politics remained the main theme.

In 2020 and 2021, the theme of multiculturalism appeared twice in each year. But after 2016, diversity was less about wanting unity and more about confrontation and division. In other words, identity politics in multiculturalism was talked about more to divide people than to bring them together, and it was often tied to controversial elections. On the other hand, recognition politics remained on the fringes until 2022. Importantly, authorship patterns also shifted during this period. Whereas in 2015–2016 articles were still often written by a single author, since 2020 they have been, on average, co-authored by two. This indicates a growing need for multidisciplinary research. In 2023, the number of authors per article was unusually high, though given the small base of articles, this trend should be interpreted cautiously.

All in all, three broad patterns can be distinguished across the three periods under review. First, the annual distribution of studies indicates a slow but uneven increase in scholarly attention. During the period from 2011 to 2015, the volume of publications was low, with fewer than 2 journal articles per year, resulting in a total of 9 studies. A sharp rise took place in 2016–2019, with 27 journal articles produced, followed by stagnation in 2020–2023, with 24 journal articles identified.

The second pattern concerns a gradual decline in the breadth of identity categories. Although multiple identifiers, including religion, nationality, gender, and allegiance, were explored in the first stage, almost all articles on religion were published during 2016–2019. While some diversity was introduced in the subsequent years, a focus on religious identity steeply decreased before becoming unaddressed in the last year, 2023. As for thematic alignment, the early years were mostly concerned with recognising politics and multiculturalism as framing coexistence, thus having a somewhat positive meaning. The middle years, however, focused on electoral politics. The later years, finally, imply a combination of electoral dominance, the rethought conflict, and newly framed multiculturalism. The third pattern concerns knowledge production, reflecting the shift from single-authored works during the first period to a dominant format in later studies, with more complex data and a more voluminous methodology.

### *The evolution of the meaning of identity politics*

Analysing the meanings of 60 Indonesian-language articles from 2011 to 2023 using the qualitative content analysis method, this article shows how the meanings of “identity politics” shift and continuously reconstitute over time as the conceptual frame, evaluative tone, and empirical focus change. These meanings correspond to Indonesia’s changes in electoral cycles, mass mobilisation, and media-policy terrain. With relatively fewer publications in the first five years, identity politics was presented as a familiar socio-cultural reality in a plural society like Indonesia. Most works in this period discuss how religion, ethnicity, and long-distance

geographical separation determine group boundaries, define and cultivate a sense of collective identity and imagination, and provide symbolic sources of identity recognition. Hakiki (2011) viewed identity politics as an instrument for minority groups to attain respect, focusing on the challenges faced by a spiritual community striving for legal recognition in the context of state-sanctioned religions. In the same way, Maksum (2015) saw identity politics as a means for indigenous groups to protect their traditions against the power of both the state and “official” religions. Meanwhile, Haboddin (2012) traced how ethnic identity in regions such as Riau and Papua was used to contest for power in the post-decentralisation period.

In the same period, some peripheral themes emerged, including men’s identity politics in the wild boar hunting tradition as a negotiation against the dominance of the matrilineal system in the Minangkabau (Arifin, 2012), identity politics as the formation of acculturative identity in border regions (Rozi, 2013), and identity politics as a basis of nationalism (Alfaqi, 2015). Despite their limited number, these works clarified a pre-2016 pattern in the literature, in which identity politics was more often understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon, with religion, ethnicity, and culture at its centre. Even when electoral elements appeared, such as in Syukur’s (2011) study of local elections in Sunda, they were merely incidental backdrops to broader cultural dynamics. This early orientation was a sign of an intellectual world still shaped by the hope of the Reformasi era, when identity politics was mostly seen as an extension of pluralism rather than as an attempt to win elections that could cause problems.

The first important juncture came in 2016. In this context, identity politics was explicitly formulated as a political asset of marginalisation and mobilisation. Identifications, especially religion and race, were used for recognition and to locate people and places within a competitive political space, as scholars found. Identity politics thus moved into a period of increased importance. In two studies, identity politics was examined as a negotiation of ethnic (Faraidiany, 2016) and religious (Syuhudi, 2016) identities in pursuit of access to political representation and local resources, enabling claims for recognition while also opening the door to exclusion. Both studies incorporated electoral elements, though their interpretations remained limited within the framework of struggles for representation. A notable shift occurred in Sari’s (2016) study, which analysed the politicisation of Islamic identity in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial campaign through religious slogans and narratives of group dignity. This study, therefore, illustrates how identity politics shifted from a framework of empowerment and visibility toward one increasingly tied to electoral mobilisation and group polarisation.

By 2017, the definition of identity politics was not just expanding; rather, the term had come to be defined almost entirely in terms of electoral politics and negative connotations. This discursive reorientation coincided with two closely linked political events: the 212 Movement of 2016 and the Jakarta gubernatorial election of 2017, both widely discussed as moments when religious sentiment, particularly Islamic symbolism, was mobilised by a handful of political actors to rally mass support. As a result, Indonesian scholars began to develop new interpretive variants. Whereas earlier studies tended to emphasise identity politics as a minority expression for political recognition, the concept was now observed as an instrument of majority groups and political elites, more precisely, of elites who shared the same identity as the majority groups, for political gain (Abdullah, 2017; Adiwilaga et al., 2017; Habibi, 2017; Saputra, 2017). Increasingly, these investigations reflected broader “us versus them” sentiments and the ability of political actors to exploit religious symbols while also appealing to identity in ways that threaten democratic institutions. The results have been documented as increasing polarisation, intolerance, and fragmentation.

Identity politics was well established in the Indonesian political landscape by 2018. As a result, the literature came to treat identity politics as a normal feature of the electoral “toolbox.” It seemed to have turned into a sort of template tactic for candidates looking to boost their vote count. However, most scholars have analysed this trend in a critical tone, associating it with electoral conflicts and social divisions. Lestari (2018), for example, saw identity politics

as the source of tensions between nationalism and religion; Nasrudin (2018) read the Jakarta election as a contest of claims between Muslim–indigenous groups and Chinese minorities; and Saputro (2018) highlighted the use of ulama symbols ahead of the 2019 presidential election as a biopolitical tactic of each candidate pair.

This trend was no longer exceptional or confined to Jakarta but emerged in various local and provincial contests. Regional case studies—from Dauly et al. (2018) in North Sumatra, Negong (2018) in East Nusa Tenggara, Wantona et al. (2018) in Gayo, to Saleh and Rosyidi (2018) in Tebing Tinggi—together demonstrated how “sons of the soil” (*putra daerah*) narratives, customary and religious networks, and even tactical abstention movements among Chinese voters were integrated into local electoral strategies. In aggregate, academic work this year began to move beyond debating the significance of identity politics toward examining its mechanisms of operation, particularly how it was reproduced and amplified within electoral settings.

In 2019, the discursive shift hardened into an almost full transition toward an electoral politics framework. That year, the major earlier political events—the 212 Movement of 2016 and the Jakarta gubernatorial election of 2017—became foundational references for analysing or predicting the dynamics of the 2019 elections or even the overall landscape of contemporary Indonesian politics (Anam, 2019; D. Lestari, 2019; Mahpudin, 2019; Nawawi, 2019; Renhoard, 2019). Thematically, the electoral framing of identity politics (as an instrument of elite mobilisation exploiting religious sentiment for political gain) became particularly prominent. Concurrently, the tone of scholarly engagement grew more critical, with some authors explicitly positioning themselves against the politicisation of identity. What made this year's literature distinctive was the emergence of the digital platformisation framework: social media was widely acknowledged to amplify sectarian appeals, create echo chambers, and spread identity-based narratives at unprecedented speed (Dhani, 2019; D. Lestari, 2019; Soenjoto, 2019; Triantoro, 2019). What initially appeared as a form of cultural representation increasingly intersected with digital media, amplifying the reach and resonance of identity-based appeals in national politics.

The 2020 literature reflected a diversification of focus while maintaining the patterns that had dominated previous years. That is, on the one hand, religious identity continued to function primarily as an electoral mobilisation instrument in both local and national contests. The 212 Movement and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election continued to serve as key reference points in scholarly analyses, now joined by discussions of the newly concluded 2019 presidential election. On the other hand, the 2020 literature, no longer merely critical, began entering a more reflective and retrospective phase. Indonesian scholars increasingly supplemented evaluations of the consequences of identity politics with considerations of governance and normative responses. Some studies proposed depolarisation strategies, such as the symbolic placement of Ma'ruf Amin as a representative of moderate Islam (Mujab & Irfansyah, 2020), while others offered institutional or theological frameworks, such as multicultural ethics (Ardipandanto, 2020; Dulmanan, 2020; Nego, 2020), as potential solutions to counter the divisive effects of identity politics. Even in local studies on the political influence of Sufi leaders in West Sumatra (Rinaldi et al., 2020) and the use of local religious markers in Central Kalimantan (Triana & Liska, 2020), the imagination of governance and normative responses was strongly emphasised. Altogether, this suggests a gradual shift in scholarly tone—from describing identity politics as an observable phenomenon to addressing it as a pressing social and institutional challenge.

The 2021 literature replicated the essential diagnosis already forged in that preceding year. Throughout the corpus, academics broadly perceived and categorised identity politics as a political practice that draws on collective markers, namely religious ones, to configure political identity and voter choice (Pora et al., 2021; Wingarta et al., 2021). A few scholars also explicitly acknowledged that identity politics was indeed rooted in dissatisfaction and a desire

for recognition, but limited their analyses to electoral tactics that recycled majority identity feelings (Samosir & Novitasari, 2021; Suharman, 2021; Widjaja et al., 2021). At the same time, this year's literature solidified a trend toward supplementing descriptive analysis with normative prescriptions. Specifically, there were repeated calls to ground public religiosity in Pancasila (Widjaja et al., 2021) or to support and promote long-term institutional solutions (Pora et al., 2021; Samosir & Novitasari, 2021; Wingarta et al., 2021). So, in relation to the literature of 2020, the literature of 2021 continued to diagnose elite manipulation, digital amplification, and democratic risks from identity-based polarisation—all while pressing for pragmatic remedies and cultural interventions.

The years 2022 and 2023 marked the maturation of literature focused on the resilience of and solutions to identity politics, both nationally and locally. Some works were retrospective, addressing the 212 Movement of 2016 (Adam, 2022), the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election (Samosir & Novitasari, 2022), the 2019 presidential election (Alhadar et al., 2022; Faraidiany & Sari, 2022; Syarwi, 2022), and regional contests (Putra et al., 2023; O. A. Sari et al., 2022); others were prospective, analysing the 2024 elections (Hutapea et al., 2023). Despite differences in emphasis, most publications during this period underscored the increasingly tight linkage between identity politics and electoral competition. Many also interpreted identity-based appeals as a common, though not universal, strategy for political mobilisation that reinforced “us versus them” distinctions. While acknowledged to build a support base, such uses of identity politics were feared to deepen social polarisation, weaken citizens' political rationality, and threaten the principles of a healthy, inclusive democracy. Solutions to identity politics did appear, but they were not the central concern. Thus, in these two years, identity politics came to be recognised not only as a durable mode of political life but also—above all—continually associated with electoral contestation and negatively connoted in relation to broader social and political life.

## Discussion

The evolution of conceptualisations of identity politics in Indonesian literature between 2011 and 2023 reflects both continuity and rupture. Continuity lies in the significance and resilience of religion—occasionally alongside ethnicity—as the central axis of political life. The Indonesian case, therefore, contrasts with Western literature, which tends to focus on issues of gender, race, and sexuality (Bernhardt & Pin, 2018; Jung, 2006; Nicholson, 2008; Walters, 2018). Yet this continuity was accompanied by a rupture in thematic orientation and conceptual meaning. Before the 212 Movement, the Indonesian literature on identity politics generally treated it as a familiar feature of political life in a plural society—an arena for claims-making, representation, and cultural negotiation. This formed a “regime of truth” that positioned identity politics as a social expression to be managed for harmony, not as an inherent threat to the democratic order. Following the event, however, post-212 Indonesian scholarship of identity politics stood unparalleled in religious mobilisation and electoral competition. To be precise, a significant swath of available literature came to identify identity politics as a kind of mobilisation strategy anchored in the language of religious sentiment and vote-maximising, thus putting conflictual and foreboding frames on recognition. Unsurprisingly, over time, fewer Indonesian scholars situated their work within the framework of identity politics. Having lost its emancipatory meaning, many identified themselves instead as critics or opponents of identity politics.

Genealogically, the shift in the definition of identity politics unfolded through a sequence of *emergences* and *descents* that crystallised around recurrent power struggles and punctuating political events. Let us adopt a longitudinal perspective, and we can observe that the term “identity politics” in Indonesian academic discourse shifted in response to significant political movements, both nationally and locally. Not all the links were immediate; publication lags meant that political responses and academic interpretations were influenced by events and reading back into them. Some studies engaged with events in real time, others retrospectively

analysed major political moments once they had subsided, while a smaller set looked prospectively toward navigating upcoming elections.

Regardless, what is evident is that the 212 Movement in 2016, in conjunction with the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, became a decisive point of *emergence* that reorganised the discursive terrain by foregrounding particular interpretations while marginalising others. The narrowing of meaning that began in this period intensified during the 2019 presidential election, when scholarly sense-making coalesced around two dominant frames: religion as the principal marker of political identity and elections as the stage on which it operated. In this consolidation, a new regime of truth took shape by sedimenting identity politics as a privileged yet constraining analytic through which the problems of Indonesian democracy were increasingly understood.

The reductionist model identified in Indonesian scholarship mirrors broader global debates on identity politics, yet this parallel does not imply that reductionism is unique to Indonesia; it reflects a wider script through which the meaning of identity politics is disciplined in political and epistemic struggles. If Trumpism and Brexit were turning points, shaping academic models in the West, then likewise, Indonesia’s 212 Movement and the 2017 gubernatorial election also faced similar pressures. In such escalating crises, the horizon of identity politics contracted, as narratives of empowerment were recast as narratives of threat, and political leaders seized upon anxieties to undercut the hope of acknowledgement.

At the same time, the Indonesian case developed its own trajectory. In Western contexts, the semantic shift of identity politics from minority-led struggles toward a tool for exclusion generally remained within the broader frame of identity recognition (Alcoff, 2019; Nicholson, 2008; Noury and Roland, 2020). In Indonesia, by contrast, identity politics was discursively displaced, or more precisely transposed, into the arena of electoral competition. Consequently, post-Suharto definitions of identity politics tended to bifurcate: on one side, it was understood as an instrument of liberation and a space for marginalised groups; on the other, as a power resource enabling dominant groups to consolidate influence. The latter became the prevailing interpretation in the literature after the 212 Movement.

The consequence of this new regime of truth is the exclusion of what Foucault (2003) terms “subjugated knowledges” (*savoirs assujettis*), namely local, particular, and delegitimised forms of knowledge suppressed by the dominant discourse. In this context, reducing identity politics to the axis of religion and elections not only narrows its analytical scope but also erases the genealogical traces of other issues that previously helped shape its landscape, such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and other categories. Only a few articles, for instance, touch on gender, and even then, it never becomes a focal point of analysis. Arguably, the ideas, experiences, and struggles rooted in these categories are degraded into *subjugated knowledges*, not because they are irrelevant but because they do not conform to the currently dominant structure of reasoning. One unintended implication is that the struggles of feminist, queer, or other minority groups for recognition become unreadable as—or even disqualified from—the field of “identity politics.”

It all underscores that academic discourse is productive: it actively shapes reality rather than merely reflecting it. It is, in other words, the very production of academic knowledge that is complicit in conferring relevance—what counts as “real” identity politics and what gets relegated to the margins. The perspectives of Indonesian scholars are not outside contributors to reality but rather fabricators of reality itself—interpretive spectacles formed by the social and institutional vantage points from which they view religion. As we observed in our corpus, a substantial share of the studies reviewed are authored by scholars based at local universities—including state Islamic universities and leading public institutions in urban centres—whose institutional and social milieus make engagement with religious debates more prominent. This embedding in the local context presumably influences research agendas and perspectives, generating interpretive leanings that ordain majoritarian religious narratives and

relegate alternative framings to less visibility. This pattern, from a Foucauldian perspective, is a matter of power/knowledge: academic authority legitimises the classification of some sites of contestation as problems, which are then transmitted through the media, policy discourse, and public debate.

Thus, in addition to filling the scholarly gap on the temporal shifts in the meaning of identity politics within Indonesian academic discourse, our study also contributes by questioning the epistemic assumptions underpinning the study of identity politics in the country. Our analysis, indeed, suggests that these shifts are related to the transformation of, in a Foucauldian sense, the regime of truth led by Indonesian scholars. Repeated acts of defining, citing, and analysing identity politics as a threat have gradually consolidated a horizon of understanding that shapes how scholars, journalists, political elites, and laypeople interpret this term. Genealogy does not consider identity politics as a fixed subject of analysis; rather, it reveals its historical contingency and identifies the moments of rupture that redefine its significance. Simultaneously, the genealogical method facilitates resistance by denaturalising reductive frameworks and reinstating marginalised alternatives—specifically, expressions of identity politics grounded in gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and other dimensions.

Our analysis, nevertheless, should be approached with caution. To begin, this article draws exclusively from Indonesian-language academic literature, and although such a focus is essential for gaining a sense of the depth of local academic discourses, it may miss lessons from international platforms or other languages that couch identity politics in alternative theoretical vocabularies. Second, the limitations of our SLR and content analysis stem from the availability of sources and publication timelines. Because the peer-review process is slow—sometimes months, other times years—the publications that cover specific political events are released after those events have occurred. This means that the literature reviewed in this article is more likely to explain events post-facto than to provide insight into how articulation of identity politics emerges, with obviously profound consequences for how it frames and interprets politicised identities. Third, in considering only academic articles, we omitted other intellectual products—policy reports, activist writings, and populist commentary—that also contribute to the developing discourse. However, we do not think these limitations discredit the significance of our study; rather, they provide opportunities for future research.

## Conclusion

The shifting meanings of identity politics in Indonesian-language scholarship from 2011 to 2023 should not be viewed as a linear chronology, but rather as a sequence of genealogical formations in which various configurations of power and knowledge sedimented, ruptured, and reassembled. The years 2011–2015 mark a nascent descent into a dispersed archive, where identity politics have been articulated through issues of community, multiculturalism, and recognition politics. A period of stark emergence from 2016 to 2019, during which political shocks in the 212 Movement and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election crystallised a configuration of identity politics closely linked to religious mobilisation in electoral contests. In this moment, one strand of discourse hardened into a regime of truth that disciplined scholarly interpretation and pushed alternative articulations to the margins. This configuration then consolidated between 2020 and 2023; however, alongside it, a language of multiculturalism reappeared, framing identity politics primarily as a site of conflict. Taken together, these three periods form a genealogical trajectory that reveals not parallel chronologies but epistemic transformations through which the meaning of identity politics emerged, consolidated, and circulated as if natural.

On this basis, our study suggests that identity politics is not a static or stable concept but rather contingent and contested through the interplay of political events, public debates, and academic interpretations. Thus, what often appears as a logical or technical analytical choice is, in fact, the outcome of discursive struggles that determine the boundaries of legitimate

knowledge—what can be thought, what can be studied, and what can ultimately be published as authoritative.

We are not, however, calling for the retirement of the concept of identity politics, particularly within Indonesian scholarship. We maintain that identity must remain a political concern because it influences not only individual self-understanding but also access to vital resources and, ultimately, life chances. Nor should identity politics be regarded merely as a wrong turn, but rather as a useful starting point for ongoing conversations that demand critical engagement. Our call, therefore, is that the study of identity politics in Indonesia needs to expand thematically and methodologically.

Identity politics remains a powerful tool for mobilisation; its manipulation poses risks to social cohesion. Therefore, ongoing efforts are needed to promote inclusive political practices rooted in Indonesia’s fundamental principles. Future research agendas should make space for marginalised themes such as gender intersectionality, the dynamics of identity in digital spaces, the struggles of Indigenous communities, the community of religious minorities, and the articulation of identity in relation to the environment and local culture. Some research emphasises that politics based on shared values and reinterpretation of identity politics aligned with Pancasila principles could mitigate the conflict and strengthen social resilience. In doing so, the discourse on identity politics can be restored to its diverse meanings—not only as an instrument of power but also as a legitimate and productive arena of democratic struggle. Only then can identity politics once again help us understand and confront social problems rooted in difference.

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