



The Instrumentalization of Religion in Identity Politics: A Fiqh Siyasah Theory Perspective Ahead of Elections in Contemporary Muslim Society

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Abstract

The phenomenon of religious instrumentalization in identity politics ahead of the election is becoming an increasingly relevant issue in contemporary Muslim society. The use of symbols, narratives, and religious sentiments in political contestation often no longer functions as a means of moral education, but as an instrument of electoral mobilization that has the potential to trigger social polarization. This research aims to analyze the practice of religious instrumentalization in identity politics ahead of the election through the perspective of fiqh siyasah and examine the relevance of fiqh siyasah principles in modern democracy. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study approach that examines various scientific literature, books, and articles related to identity politics, religious politicization, and fiqh siyasah. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to integrate the principles of classical and contemporary fiqh to evaluate the practice of identity politics in the context of modern democracy. The results of the study show that the use of religion as a tool for political legitimacy is contrary to the principle of justice (al-'adl), deliberation (asy-shura), trust, and benefit which is the basis of the syar'iyah siyasah. This practice has the potential to shift democracy from the arena of exchanging ideas into an identity conflict that divides society. This research emphasizes the importance of strengthening political literacy, digital literacy, and moderate religious understanding to maintain the function of religion as a source of public ethics and social adhesive. The implication of this research is expected to be a reference for academics, religious figures, and policy makers in building a more inclusive and cultural political culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of using religion as a tool in identity politics ahead of general elections is one of the most complex and challenging dynamics in contemporary Muslim society. Religion, which usually functions as a source of ethics, morality and guidelines for social justice, is often simplified into a tool for political mobilization to increase electoral power. In the electoral arena, competition for ideas and programs is often overshadowed by various forms of black campaigns that use religious symbols as "ammunition" to attack political opponents emotionally and focus on identity.

Black campaign is an unethical political strategy because it is carried out by spreading incitement, slander, defamation, misleading information, conflict provocation, and hatred to damage the reputation of political opponents. According to Adhim et al. (2024), legally black campaign can be understood as a form of campaign that uses incitement, defamation, and conflict provocation as a tactic to weaken political opponents. This strategy not only aims to bring down the opponent's image, but also tries to put certain parties in a difficult position through the spread of negative issues that far exceed the limits of reasonable political debates. In political practice, black campaigns are often carried out through the spread of false information, lies, and defamation so that political opponents lose public trust (Purnawati & Fajar, 2021).

In addition, black campaigns can also take advantage of ethnicity, religion, race, and certain social group issues to arouse public sentiments. Its characteristics can be seen from the use of provocative speeches based on religious identity, the spread of hatred by anonymous accounts on social media, and messages that divide society for political gain alone. The pattern shows that black campaigns not only attack certain individuals or political groups, but can also damage the public communication space. The development of digital technology has changed the pattern of public political communication ahead of the election. Social media is not only a means of spreading political information, but also a space for the formation of public opinion which is often colored by identity narratives and group sentiments. The

research of Arditama, Lestari, and Munandar (2024) shows that the dynamics of digital politics in the 2024 General Election shows the importance of digital citizenship ethics in maintaining the quality of democracy. Although the digital space opens up wider opportunities for political participation, various conflicts and identity-based debates are still challenges that need to be anticipated through the strengthening of digital political ethics (Arditama et al. 2024). Therefore, black campaigns cannot be seen as an ordinary political communication strategy, but rather as a manipulative practice that destroys the quality of democracy, weakens political ethics, and has the potential to create social conflict in the community.

In the context of modern Muslim society, including the general election experience in Indonesia, negative campaign practices are often interspersed with religious politicization. Instead of encouraging the public to choose candidates based on their vision, skills and work plans, campaign messages often focus on hatred that uses religious affiliation. This creates division and conflict among people. From the point of view of Islam, politics (siyasah) is closely related to the principles of common good, justice and moral responsibility. The Fiqih Siyasah branch sees politics as a tool to achieve the goals of Islamic law, which includes welfare, justice, and maintaining social harmony, rather than seeing it as a manipulative strategy that reflects ethics only to win elections.

Classical figures such as Al - Mawardi emphasized that power must encourage justice and maintain social peace as part of religion. Obligation, instead of using religious feelings to create conflict among Muslims (Afiandi et al., 2026). Similarly, the view of Ibnu Taymiyyah places political legitimacy on actions that uphold justice, not on emotional narrative manipulation. To strengthen their presence and create a strong identity, identity politics has become the only method they use. In Indonesia and among its residents, diversity of religions, ethnic groups, cultures, and backgrounds has played an important role in forming a unique national identity (Nurfazillah, 2024).

The theology of multiculturalism helps people to understand and appreciate differences and be tolerant of different people. The main goal is to

build a common strength so that we can face challenges in advancing the country. Because a strong identity can strengthen the sense of unity and unity when we do development and face problems together.

Ahead of the election, the term identity politics becomes very important because every person or group has a great awareness and desire to protect and fight for their identity through the political path they choose. The identity that is fought for can be diverse, such as religious identity, ethnicity, and gender. In political identity, groups usually try to gain recognition, protection, and equal opportunities in political and social life.

In a simpler context, identity politics functions as a means to protect the rights and interests of individuals or groups so that they can be more visible and recognized. By combining the phenomenon of black campaigns and the use of religion for certain purposes, this article seeks to provide a critical theoretical framework through the point of view of Fiqih Siyasah to analyze: how far the use of political religious symbols in identity ahead of elections can be considered ethical, and how Islamic political thought can provide a normative view of the practice in the context of today's democracy.

Although various studies have discussed identity politics, religious politicization, and black campaigns in democratic contestation, most studies still focus on socio-political impacts and communication strategies used by political actors. Research that specifically examines the phenomenon of instrumentalization of religion through the perspective of fiqh siyasah and linking it to the practice of modern democracy is still relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap of the study by analyzing how the principles of fiqh siyasah can be used as a normative framework in assessing the practice of religious-based identity politics ahead of the election.

This research aims to :

(1) Analyzing the phenomenon of religious instrumentalization in identity politics ahead of elections in contemporary Muslim society; (2) Studying the phenomenon based on the principles of fiqh siyasah; and (3) Explaining the relevance of fiqh values in modern democratic life.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the treasure of contemporary fiqh studies, while practically it can be a reference for the community, religious figures, and policy makers in building a more ethical, inclusive, and mutually benefit-oriented political culture.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method. This method was chosen because the research focuses on the conceptual analysis of the instrumentalization of religion in identity politics based on the perspective of fiqh siyasah. Research data was obtained from various relevant literature sources, including books, national and international scientific journal articles, proceedings, and academic documents that discuss identity politics, religious politicization, democracy, and fiqh. Data collection is done through literature search using Google Scholar, Garuda, and various other scientific journal databases. The literature used is selected based on the relevance of the theme, the credibility of the source, and the novelty of the publication, especially those published in the period of 2017–2025. Data analysis techniques use content analysis which is carried out through several stages, namely data collection, data reduction, theme categorization, data interpretation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis is carried out by identifying the relationship between the concept of identity politics, the practice of religious instrumentalization, and the principles of fiqh siyasah to produce a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1) the phenomenon of religious instrumentalization in identity politics

Islamic identity politics emerged as a resistance against injustice in the distribution and access to resources. This creates a common awareness to fight the situation. Political identity arises from the relationship between democratic values that are common and local values or other values that already exist and form a social structure in society.

The change between democratic values and local values that already exist in society, coupled with community understanding, is one of the forms

in democracy that needs to be upheld for its basic rights. This causes political identity to grow and develop rapidly and become part of the democratic development process. In Indonesia, the problem of identity politics has emerged a lot. Identity politics here is increasingly related to religious issues, tribes, ideologies, and local interests that are conveyed to the community by the elites in various ways.

In addition, identity politics often creates a situation faced by a movement that pressures the government to fulfill demands related to its identity needs. In its development, identity politics can be considered to have two sides. It can give a good impact and also a bad impact. A good political identity can strengthen a sense of solidarity and unity because of the common fate in certain groups.

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Including strengthening and developing the attitude of mutual respect between various groups. Islam views identity politics as a very honorable thing if it is done for a good purpose as well. In Islam, the leader must be a believer. This is in accordance with His words in QS Al Maidah verse 51 which says, "O people who believe!" Do not make Jews and Christians your leaders; they protect each other.

Whoever among you makes them a leader, then he is part of their group. "Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoers." The black campaign rule is to use harmful statements, convey sarcasm, and spread rumors about the candidate to the public. The goal is to create views that are considered unethical, especially regarding public policy. The black campaign in the study of fiqh siyasah and the teachings of the Islamic religion is considered as akhlakul madzmumah, which is a bad trait and should be avoided. This is included in the following actions:

1) Acts of slander

Slander is the act of accusing or spreading false information about other people, which can damage their reputation.

2) Acts of incitement

Incitement is an action that makes someone feel hateful or angry towards others with the purpose of damaging the relationship between them.

3) Ghibah's deed

Ghibah is when we say bad things about someone else that is true, but that person does not want to be talked about.

4) The deed of namimah/fighting sheep

Namimah is when someone conveys someone else's words to others with the aim of ruining the relationship between them.

To strengthen the existence and form a strong identity, identity politics is the only way used. In Indonesia, religious, tribal, cultural, and ethnic diversity is very important in forming a distinctive national identity. The theology of multiculturalism helps people to understand and appreciate differences and be tolerant of others. Because a strong identity can strengthen the sense of unity and unity in carrying out development and solving problems together. As the election approaches, the term identity politics becomes very important.

This happens because every person or group feels aware and wants to be strong to defend and fight for their identity through the political path they choose. The identity that is fought for can be different, such as religious identity, ethnicity, and gender. In political identity, groups usually try to gain recognition, protection, and equal opportunities in political and social life. In a simpler context, political identity plays a role as a way to protect the rights and interests of people or groups so that they can be more visible.

The Politicization of Religion

The politicization of religion is a highly effective way to influence the public to support political candidates, especially among those with strong religious ties. Politicians who can align themselves with specific religious values typically receive more support from that religious group

(Dzulfikri et al., 2020). Politics involving religion leads to a diverse electorate—segmented by religion which can influence how voters assess the qualifications, platforms, and experience of political candidates. The use of religion in politics can lead to social conflict between religious groups (Yunus et al., 2023). Harsh words, verbal attacks, or the spread of emotionally charged narratives can create tension and problems among people.

Political differences stemming from religious differences can lead to tension and, in more severe cases, result in violence within society. When politics is influenced by religion, more attention is paid to religious identity and symbols than to important policy issues (Diinis Sipa, 2021). This reduces voters' opportunities to choose candidates based on their platforms and qualifications. In a healthy democracy, choices should be based on deep understanding and rational decisions, not solely on religious factors.

When faced with the use of religion for political gain in the run-up to elections, it is important to improve political education and understanding of religion. Sound political education and a critical understanding of religion can help voters grasp broader issues and distinguish between responsible and extremist uses of religion. Open political education must emphasize the importance of voting based on qualifications, platforms, and political legitimacy, rather than solely on religion. To address the issue of the negative politicization of religion, we need to foster dialogue and collaboration among political actors, religious leaders, and civil society (Riyanto et al., 2024).

The politicization of religion is a method of manipulating politics by leveraging understanding and knowledge of religion. This is achieved through proselytizing, public relations, propaganda, or other means that make people less aware, confront them with issues, and expose them to specific information. According to theory, religion and politics should coexist without one dominating the other. Religion and politics mutually benefit one another.

Some countries combine politics and religion in a mutually beneficial relationship. Politics provides guarantees to protect the security of religious communities, while religion provides

“theological legitimacy” to maintain political power. In religious education, there are efforts to influence religious thought with the aim of incorporating specific interests into politics and engaging in social manipulation.

In the context of identity politics, religion is often used as a foundation for forming groups that support one another and advocate for the rights of those perceived as marginalized or threatened (Fathony, 2018). When these groups feel that their religion is not respected or is even under attack by more powerful forces, they tend to adopt a more insular and defensive stance. Consequently, religious identity which should foster peace and harmony can transform into a force that fuels social division and reinforces radical ideologies.

Identity politics that emphasize the protection of religion as part of a collective struggle can reinforce the belief that their religion is under threat and must be protected by any means necessary. In many situations, this rhetoric leads to the creation of an “us versus them” narrative, in which groups with different religions or views are seen as threats that must be confronted forcefully, even through the use of violence. As narratives like this gain traction, individuals or groups involved in politics may become ensnared in ideas that foster radicalization.

The influence of religious radicalization in identity politics has a significant impact on social cohesion and political stability. If this radicalization is not properly managed, it can lead to open conflict between religious groups and create tensions that are difficult to resolve. Religion-related violence, discrimination, and intolerance are on the rise, damaging relationships between people who previously lived together in peace. Therefore, it is important to understand how religious radicalization relates to identity politics. This will enable us to develop effective prevention strategies, such as fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting education on tolerance, and implementing inclusive policies to protect religious and cultural diversity within society.

2. Analysis of the Instrumentalization of Religion from the Perspective of Fiqh al-Siyasah

From the perspective of *fiqh al-siyasah*, politics is understood as an effort to regulate society based on the principles of Islamic law in order to achieve the public good. Politics is not merely about power, but also involves a moral responsibility to establish justice, order, security, and the well-being of society. Therefore, every political activity must always be oriented toward the achievement of the objectives of Islamic law (*maqashid al-shari'ah*).

The practice of instrumentalizing religion that has emerged in contemporary identity politics must be analyzed based on the fundamental principles of *fiqh siyasah*. According to Muhammad Salim Awwa, the principles of *fiqh siyasah* can be classified into five main categories. One of the most fundamental **principles is the principle of justice (al-'adl)**. In Islam, justice is the primary foundation for the exercise of power. The Qur'an explicitly commands Muslims to act justly even toward those of different faiths or with whom they are in conflict. Therefore, the use of religious symbols to discredit political opponents is an act contrary to the principle of justice because it creates biased treatment of others.

In addition to the principle of justice, political jurisprudence also emphasizes the importance of **consultation (ash-shura)**. Consultation is a decision-making mechanism that involves broad public participation. In the context of modern democracy, this principle can be realized through free, fair, and honest elections. However, when the political process is dominated by the mobilization of religious identity, people tend to make decisions based on emotional sentiment rather than rational consideration. Consequently, the essence of consultation as a process of seeking the best solution for the common good is diminished.

The next **principle is trust**. In political jurisprudence, power is viewed as a trust that must be exercised honestly and responsibly. A leader is accountable not only to the public but also to Allah SWT. Therefore, any form of information manipulation, propaganda, slander, or exploitation of religious symbols for political gain constitutes a violation of the principle of trust. Politics grounded in trust should prioritize honesty, transparency, and accountability in every decision-making process.

The practice of instrumentalizing religion also contradicts **the principle of al-musawah, or equality**. In Islam, all human beings are equal before God. Differences in religion, ethnicity, or social status should not be used as a justification for unequal treatment in political life. However, in identity politics, society is often divided into "us" and "them," thereby creating discrimination that contradicts the principle of equality taught by Islam.

Furthermore, the concept of the public interest (*maslahah*) is a crucial aspect of political jurisprudence. All political policies must be directed toward achieving the greatest possible benefit for society. If a political practice instead leads to conflict, hatred, and division, then that practice cannot be categorized as part of Islamic political jurisprudence. The instrumentalization of religion that leads to social polarization clearly contradicts the goal of the public interest because it causes greater negative impacts than the benefits it yields.

The study of political jurisprudence examines the relationship between leaders and the people, as well as the relationship between institutions of power and society. The scope of this discussion is quite broad. According to Hasbi As-Shiddieqy, political jurisprudence is divided into eight distinct fields.

- 1) Constitutional Law addresses the fundamental rules governing the form of government, the limits of power, the relationship between leaders and the people, and the method of electing the head of state.
- 2) Legislative Policy (Lawmaking) Regarding the legislative branch's authority in managing state affairs—including the role of the *ahlul halli wal aqdi*, the drafting of the constitution, laws, and local regulations—the objective is to ensure that all policies remain consistent with Islamic teachings, which are constantly evolving and relevant to the current context.
- 3) Qadhaiyah (Judiciary) Relating to the legal system, the administration of justice, the responsibilities of those in authority, and the role of the courts in maintaining order and harmony in society in accordance with the principles of Sharia.
- 4) Fiscal Policy (Economic and Financial Policy) Managing regulations related to the collection,

management, and expenditure of government funds.

- 5) Public Administration Discusses how government administration functions, including its authority, organizational structure, and various state institutions.
- 6) International Relations: The study of foreign policy and how to manage relations between Islamic countries and other nations.
- 7) Executive Branch (Law Enforcement/Executive) Concerning the implementation and enforcement of laws by the executive branch.
- 8) War Policy, managing the government's rights and regulations during times of war or emergency.

Abdul Qadir Audah, an expert in political jurisprudence, in his book titled *Al-A'mal al-Kamilah: Al-Islam wa Audha'una al-Qanuniyah* (1994: 211–223) (Fahmi, 2017), outlines the principles of politics in Islam as follows:

1. The complete equation.
2. Equitable justice.
3. Freedom in the broadest sense.
4. Fraternity;
5. Unity;
6. Mutual cooperation;
7. Eliminating violations of the law;
8. Promoting key values;
9. Receiving and exercising the rights granted by God.
10. Share wealth with everyone don't just hoard it.
11. Do good deeds and help one another;
12. Upholding the principle of consultation.

3. The Relevance of the Principles of Fiqh al-Siyasah in Modern Democracy

The principles of fiqh siyasah are closely linked to the practice of modern democracy, which is grounded in ethical and humanitarian values. One of the main principles, namely shura (consultation), can be understood as the foundation of public participation in political life (Syahputra, 2025). In democratic practice, this value is reflected through the conduct of elections, freedom of expression, and citizen involvement in the public policy-making process.

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The principle of amanah also emphasizes that power is a moral responsibility for which one must be accountable, both to society and to God. In the context of elections, amanah is reflected in the attitude of political elites who are honest, transparent, and do not exploit religious symbols for practical political gain. An ideal leader from the perspective of fiqh siyasah is not merely one who possesses a religious image, but one who is capable of implementing policies that bring benefit to society at large.

Furthermore, the relevance of fiqh al-siyasah in modern democracy is evident in the importance of maintaining national unity. Excessive identity politics risks undermining social cohesion, whereas fiqh al-siyasah emphasizes the importance of unity among the people and social stability. Thus, the values of fiqh al-siyasah can serve as an ethical foundation for building a political culture that is inclusive, tolerant, and oriented toward the common good.

4. Challenges and Solutions in Facing Identity Politics

One of the main challenges in dealing with identity politics in the modern era is the still low level of political literacy and digital literacy among people. Digital literacy is not just about being able to use technology, but also about the ability to select, evaluate, and verify information received from social media. Research by Ferawati, Setyowati, and Husain (2025) in JESS shows that digital literacy has a significant impact on individuals' ability to manage information and solve problems they face in the digital space. These findings suggest that improving digital literacy can be a preventive strategy to reduce the spread of political hoaxes, hate speech, and identity-based propaganda ahead of elections (Ferawati et al, 2025).

On the other hand, a weak understanding of political ethics makes people more easily swayed by

symbolic issues rather than more substantive matters, like welfare, education, health, and public policy. As a result, democracy is often seen just as a competition to win or lose, rather than as a way to achieve common interests and well-being.

To deal with this situation, there needs to be a strengthening of political education based on religious and national values. Political education is not just aimed at increasing public participation in elections, but also at fostering critical awareness so that people can assess candidates rationally, objectively, and responsibly. In addition, religious literacy needs to be directed towards an understanding of Islam that is moderate, open, and upholds the value of brotherhood.

Religious leaders also play an important role in reducing the politicization of religion. Through preaching that emphasizes unity, tolerance, and social ethics, they can act as a counterbalance to provocative identity politics narratives. Moreover, the government needs to strengthen regulations related to the spread of hate speech and smear campaigns so that the democratic life remains healthy, peaceful, and conducive.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation that has been presented, it can be understood that the instrumentalization of religion in identity politics ahead of elections is a phenomenon that has been developing in contemporary Muslim society. Religion, which essentially functions as a moral guide and a source of ethical values, is often used as a means of political mobilization through the use of religious symbols, emotional narratives, and campaigns based on certain identities. This situation not only triggers social polarization but also shifts the substance of democracy from a competition of ideas to confrontation group identity. From the perspective of *fiqh siyasah*, using religion manipulatively for political interests goes against the basic principles of Islamic politics, such as justice (*'adl*), public welfare (*maslahah*), brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), and efforts to prevent harm (*dar' al-mafasid*). In the Islamic political tradition, power is seen as a moral trust aimed at maintaining order and harmony in society, not as a tool to exploit religious sentiments for electoral gain. In various elections, both at the national and local levels,

religious, ethnic, and social group identities are often strategically used to attract public support. However, this practice often has negative effects on the unity and integration of the nation. Therefore, ethical and normative guidelines are needed in dealing with the use of identity politics so that it does not cause divisions in society. This study shows that the principles of *fiqh siyasah* are highly relevant.

as a foundation for assessing and responding to identity politics practices. Applying these values can guide political activities toward creating the common good, not just the victory of certain groups. Politics based on Islamic teachings is not simply practical, melainkan juga mengandung dimensi etis dan edukatif which is capable of encouraging the creation of a harmonious community life and avoiding social conflicts. Therefore, political education that is oriented towards religious and national values needs to be continuously strengthened to achieve a mature, fair, and dignified democracy in Indonesia. In addition, improving political literacy and critical religious understanding is also important so that people can distinguish between religion as a moral guideline and religion being used as a tool for political interests. In this way, religion can still function as a source of values that unites democratic life, rather than a means that sparks division ahead of political contests.

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