



International Journal
Social and Political Sciences

International Journal Social and Political Sciences

(I J S P S)

e-ISSN: 3089-5936 p-ISSN: 3089-5987

Vol 3, No 1 April (2026): Page no: 1-16

Available online at

<https://journal.austrodemika.org/index.php/ijspss>



Deliar Noer's Perspective on Identity Politics as Practiced by Islamic Political Parties

Fiqi Restu Subekti¹, Taufik Awan Wibowo²

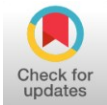
¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Al-Asmariyah University, Zliten, Libya

Corresponding Author: fiqirestu912@gmail.com¹

<https://doi.org/10.69812/ijspss.v3i1.232>

Article Info



Article History

Received:

April 11, 2026

Revised:

April 21, 2026

Accepted:

April 30, 2026

Abstract:

This study examines Deliar Noer's perspective on the practice of identity politics employed by Islamic political parties in Indonesia, particularly in relation to its implications for Muslim political unity, electoral strategy, and the substantive orientation of Islamic politics. The issue is important because identity politics has often been used as a political instrument to mobilize support, strengthen group solidarity, and construct electoral legitimacy. However, in practice, such politics may also produce social fragmentation, narrow political orientation, and symbolic contestation that does not necessarily contribute to solving public problems. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical method, this study relies primarily on Deliar Noer's relevant works and is supported by secondary literature concerning Islamic politics, political parties, and identity-based political mobilization in Indonesia. The findings show that Deliar Noer tends to view identity politics as a political tendency that brings more negative consequences than positive contributions. According to this perspective, identity politics may weaken the unity of the Muslim community, shift attention away from substantive public policy issues, and prioritize symbolic religious claims over programmatic political agendas. Nevertheless, Deliar Noer does not reject Islamic politics itself. Instead, he offers constructive evaluations by emphasizing reformist commitment, ukhuwah Islamiyah, cooperation among Muslim groups, the strengthening of Islamic education and economy, and the recognition of politics as a legitimate and strategic means of struggle. Therefore, Islamic political movements should ideally move beyond narrow identity-based mobilization and develop inclusive, solution-oriented, and programmatic agendas that advance justice, social welfare, and the broader public good.

Keyword: Deliar Noer, Identity Politics, Islamic Political Parties, Democracy, Islamic Politics.



INTRODUCTION

Identity politics has consistently remained a central issue in every election in Indonesia. One of the most frequently mobilized forms of identity in electoral contests is Islamic identity. This condition is unsurprising because the majority of voters in Indonesia

are Muslim (Anam, 2019; Anwar et al., 2025). The politicization of religious sentiment often produces a dual effect. On the one hand, it can strengthen solidarity; on the other hand, it can trigger tensions and even social fragmentation. Religious identity is often commodified as a political instrument, which tends to obscure the focus on substantive policy issues. Politicians frequently employ religious rhetoric and Islamic symbols to attract specific voter bases. Such practices are often criticized because they prioritize shared identity while weakening broader social cohesion.

Islamic identity politics remains one of the most decisive variables in Indonesia's electoral competition. However, the primary issue does not merely lie in the emergence of religious symbols within politics, but rather in the transformation of identity from a means of moral representation into an instrument of exclusive electoral mobilization. At this point, identity politics must be distinguished from legitimate Islamic political representation. Not every articulation of Islamic values in politics is inherently problematic. It becomes problematic when identity is employed to secure political support, assert moral superiority, or restrict the space for national political coalitions.

In this study, identity politics is understood as the use of identity markers, particularly religious identity, to construct political boundaries, mobilize support, and consolidate electoral loyalty. From a more critical perspective, identity politics extends beyond the affirmation of collective identity and becomes problematic when identity is utilized to limit programmatic deliberation, obscure policy agendas, and intensify divisions between social groups. Therefore, identity politics must be differentiated from the substantive representation of Islamic values. Not all forms of Islamic political expression are synonymous with identity politics.

In this study, Islamic political parties are understood as political organizations that explicitly associate themselves with Islamic values, symbols, or aspirations, either through their historical foundations, social bases, or political platforms. Nevertheless, the Islamic character of a political party does not automatically guarantee a substantive political orientation. Islamic political parties may develop in two distinct directions. The first is programmatic politics, namely a political orientation that translates Islamic values into measurable public policies. The second is symbolic politics, namely a political orientation that places greater emphasis on identity markers than on the resolution of public issues.

In the post-1998 Reformasi era, several political parties openly promoted their religious image. For instance, the United Development Party reinstated the Ka'bah as its Islamic symbol. Other parties, such as the National Awakening Party and the National Mandate Party, emerged from the bases of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, namely Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Meanwhile, the Prosperous Justice Party declared itself an Islamic party from the beginning of its establishment (Wahyudi, 2022). The utilization of Islamic symbolism by these parties is primarily aimed at attracting voters through emotional religious bonds. This strategy is rooted in the assumption that strong religious sentiment can secure electoral support, thereby creating a tendency to emphasize religious identity over concrete policy agendas.

Although the term "identity politics" was not yet widely recognized during the independence era or the Old Order, its underlying principles had already been practiced in politics. Historical records indicate that Islamic political parties in earlier periods had implemented various forms of identity politics. For example, the Masyumi Party positioned Islamic law as the central platform in its electoral campaigns (Argenti, 2020). Other Islamic parties, such as the Indonesian Islamic Union Party, Nahdlatul Ulama, and the Indonesian Islamic Tarbiyah Party, also actively promoted religious issues to their

constituents (Latief, 2016). Another example can be seen in several local Islamic parties that introduced regional regulations inspired by Islamic law to appeal to Muslim voters. Therefore, even though the term “identity politics” was not yet in use, these practices clearly reflected the early utilization of Islamic identity as a political instrument. In this sense, the roots of Islamic identity politics in Indonesia extend far into the past, even though the terminology itself gained prominence only in later periods.

In reality, both in the present and in earlier periods, the practice of identity politics by Islamic political parties has tended to produce more harm than benefit. Rather than strengthening the unity of the Muslim community, such practices have contributed to internal fragmentation among Muslims. Deliar Noer argues that Islam should function as a unifying force, not a divisive one. Fundamentally, he maintains that the use of religious identity should be directed toward fostering unity within the ummah rather than generating fragmentation. However, in practice, it has often led to political tensions. This occurs because Islamic political parties frequently prioritize the mobilization of support based on religious constituencies, thereby contributing to the division of the national vote.

The analysis of political thought in this study employs a hermeneutic reading of the text. This approach requires an interpretation that situates Deliar Noer's work within its historical context, intellectual experience, and the political struggles of his era. In this way, Deliar Noer's criticism is not read as a decontextualized moral comment, but rather as an intellectual construction arising from his observations of the fragmentation of Islamic parties, internal contestation within the Muslim community, and changes in the landscape of Indonesian democracy. This framework is important because Islamic political thought often does not explicitly use terms that are now popular, yet it contains a conceptual logic that remains relevant for interpreting contemporary phenomena.

A number of studies on Islamic identity politics in Indonesia reveal two main tendencies. First, identity politics has been highlighted as an electoral strategy used to attract Muslim voters through religious symbols and Islamic activities; however, such practices often lead to social polarization and obscure the focus on substantive policy issues (Daulay et al., 2019; Triantoro, 2019; Fautanu et al., 2020). Second, identity politics has also been viewed as a symptom of a representational crisis among Islamic political parties that have lost their ideological appeal and consequently rely on religious symbolism as a tool for political mobilization, whether through social media, visits to Islamic boarding schools, or religious rhetoric (Naimuddin, 2014; Rodiana & Suryaningtyas, 2024). These two tendencies indicate that Islamic identity politics in Indonesia remains a contested arena between electoral interests and Islamic moral ideals, without a stable balance between the two.

A number of studies have explained Islamic identity politics from the perspective of electoral strategy, social polarization, and the crisis of party representation. These studies indicate that religious symbols often work effectively in mass mobilization, but their impact is not always constructive for democratic consolidation. Nevertheless, most existing research remains at the level of describing contemporary phenomena. Existing studies have not sufficiently positioned Deliar Noer's thought as a normative lens for historically and conceptually assessing when Islamic identity in politics becomes productive and when it turns into a burden for the struggle of the Muslim community. This is where the research gap of this article lies.

The existing literature tends to discuss identity politics as a sociological symptom. In contrast, this article reads Deliar Noer's works as a source of political critique containing moral, historical, and strategic evaluation. Thus, the novelty of this article lies

not only in its object of study, but also in the way it is read. Deliar Noer is positioned not merely as an observer of Islamic parties, but as an Islamic political thinker who provides an evaluative standard for assessing identity practices, fragmentation within the Muslim community, and the programmatic decline of Islamic parties.

Building on this problem, the aim of this study is explicitly formulated as follows. First, this study analyzes Deliar Noer's critique of the identity politics practiced by Islamic parties. Second, this study reconstructs Deliar Noer's normative and strategic framework regarding healthy Islamic politics. Third, this study evaluates the relevance of these ideas for the renewal of Islamic parties in contemporary Indonesian democracy. With this formulation, the article does not stop at describing criticism, but also positions Deliar Noer as a conceptual source for the reform agenda of Islamic politics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical literature review design. The primary data consist of Deliar Noer's works that directly discuss Islamic parties, Islamic administration, Islamic modernism, the relationship between Islam and politics, as well as his autobiography. The selected works are based on three criteria. First, the works contain either direct or implicit readings of Islamic parties, Muslim politics, or the relationship between Islam and the state. Second, the works represent the intellectual phase of Deliar Noer that is most relevant to the problem of identity politics. Third, the works provide normative arguments that can be used to assess the practices of Islamic parties.

Secondary data are drawn from recent academic literature discussing identity politics, Islamic parties, Indonesian democracy, and Islamic political thought. Secondary literature serves two functions. The first is to clarify Deliar Noer's position within contemporary scholarly discourse. The second is to test the consistency of interpretation so that the reading of primary works does not lead to excessively arbitrary conclusions. All data are then classified into analytical themes, namely fragmentation within the Muslim community, symbolic politics, the loss of substantive orientation, democratic relevance, and the offer of programmatic politics.

The analysis process is carried out through four steps. First, text inventory is conducted to identify relevant sections. Second, thematic reading is used to identify patterns in Deliar Noer's critique of Islamic parties. Third, historical interpretation is employed to relate Deliar Noer's ideas to the political situation in Indonesia during the period he observed. Fourth, conceptual synthesis is undertaken to formulate the implications of Deliar Noer's thought for contemporary Islamic parties. This procedure was selected so that the findings of the study would be not only descriptive, but also argumentative and academically defensible.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Biography of Deliar Noer

Deliar Noer was an Islamic intellectual, writer, and political scholar. He was the first Indonesian to earn a PhD in political science from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, United States (Kahin, 2009). Deliar Noer was born in Medan on February 9, 1926, to Minangkabau parents from Tilitang, Kamang, and passed away in Jakarta on June 18, 2008. His life was deeply rooted in Islamic values, as he was raised in a Minangkabau Muslim family (Iskandar & Firdaus, 2020).

Deliar Noer's political trajectory began in the 1950s when he was actively involved in leading the Islamic Students Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, HMI), from the

Jakarta branch to the national level (Iskandar & Firdaus, 2020). His involvement in HMI brought him into contact with prominent national figures such as Mohammad Hatta, Mohammad Natsir, Mohammad Roem, and Buya Hamka (Gunadirdja, 2001). He made significant contributions to political life through his writings, academic work, and role as a political observer. His works encompass both political ideas and critiques of government policies. His struggle was not limited to intellectual analysis but also extended to concrete actions. He was involved in the Forum for the Purification of People's Sovereignty and participated in the establishment of a political party.

Deliar Noer served as the personal secretary to Mohammad Natsir from approximately 1955 to 1959. This position provided him with close exposure to the political sphere (Maskur et al., 2022). In order to pursue further studies in the United States, he resigned from this position. After returning from the United States, he began teaching at the University of North Sumatra in 1963; however, in his third year, in 1965, he was dismissed on the grounds of allegedly opposing Soekarno's political manifesto (Noer, 1996). Following the transition of power from Soekarno to Soeharto, Deliar Noer was appointed as a presidential advisor. His appointment was intended to help secure support from Islamic groups, particularly the Islamic Students Association (HMI), for the policies of the Soeharto administration (Maskur et al., 2022).

In 1967, he was appointed as the rector of IKIP Jakarta, a position he held until 1974. During his tenure, he focused on improving campus administration, enhancing academic quality, and developing student potential. He also promoted tangible physical development, including the construction of a new rectorate building, a student activity center, laboratory facilities, and additional classrooms that enriched academic life. However, in 1974, his career took a dramatic turn. He was dismissed after being accused of inciting student protests during the Malari incident. The accusation stemmed from his article titled "*Mencari Jalan Keluar dari Kemelut Sekarang*" published in *Harian Abadi*. The article contained a critique of the government for prioritizing control and punitive measures against students rather than fostering guidance and dialogue. According to Deliar Noer, the government should have listened to and responded to students' aspirations and demands, rather than suppressing them outright (Noer, 1996).

As a result of his criticisms, Deliar Noer became the target of intense surveillance. His writings, speeches, and other manuscripts were subjected to prior review before being permitted for publication. Even the content of his inaugural professorial speech was requested to be revised on the grounds that certain parts were considered potentially provocative to students and the public, and therefore deemed inappropriate for delivery. Nevertheless, Deliar Noer ultimately refused to alter the content of his inaugural address, as he believed that what he had written was consistent with academic principles and could be scientifically justified. He was even willing to accept the cancellation of the speech, since his appointment as a professor did not depend on it. Unfortunately, this stance led to severe consequences. He was forced to resign from his position as rector of IKIP Jakarta and, more tragically, was prohibited from teaching at various universities across Indonesia (Maskur et al., 2022).

Deliar Noer's experience as an activist, educator, academic bureaucrat, and political observer enabled him to directly witness the tension between Islamic idealism and political pragmatism. From this perspective, it becomes evident that his criticism did not emerge from a detached or sterile distance, but rather from a long intellectual engagement with the issues of the Muslim community and the state. Therefore, an interpretation of his thought must be situated within the context of Islamic political

struggles, which were often drawn into internal fragmentation and contests over identity-based legitimacy.

Throughout his career, Deliar Noer produced numerous significant works that explore the relationship between Islam, politics, and the national life of Indonesia, reflecting his intellectual journey. His writings are not only academic in nature but also reflective and accessible to a broader audience. Some of his major works include: (1) *Administrasi Islam Indonesia*; (2) *Islam, Pancasila dan Asas Tunggal*; (3) *Partai Islam di Pentas Nasional 1945–1965*; (4) *Perubahan Pembaruan, dan Kesadaran Menghadapi Abad-21*; (5) *Gerakan Modern Islam Indonesia 1900–1942*; (6) *Mohammad Hatta: Biografi Politik*; (7) *Otobiografi Deliar Noer*; (8) *Membincangkan Tokoh-Tokoh Bangsa*; (9) *Mencari Presiden*; (10) *Mohammad Hatta: Hati Nurani Bangsa 1902–1980*; (11) *Islam dan Masyarakat*; and (12) *Islam dan Politik*. These works demonstrate his deep concern for social welfare, intellectual development, and the importance of dialogue between religious values and the demands of the state.

2. Deliar Noer's Perspective on Identity Politics as Practiced by Islamic Political Parties

Deliar Noer regarded Islamic parties as part of the political endeavor of the Muslim community, not as a final end in themselves. In Noer's logic, political parties are merely instruments. The primary measure is whether such instruments strengthen the welfare of the Muslim community and preserve the integrity of the nation. From this perspective, Islamic parties must not transform identity into a rigid moral boundary. Identity should instead function as an integrative force that encourages cooperation rather than destructive competition.

This perspective is important to read historically. During the early years of the republic, Islamic parties participated in advancing the articulation of Muslim interests in constitutional debates, education, and the position of Islam within the state. This historical contribution certainly should not be denied. However, Deliar Noer observed that this representative function often weakened due to internal rivalries, strategic differences, and contests over symbolic authority. In the author's reading, Deliar Noer does not negate the contribution of Islamic parties, but rather rejects the moment when that contribution becomes frozen into an identity claim that is no longer productive.

Here an important distinction emerges between Deliar Noer's position and the author's interpretation. Textually, Noer emphasizes the importance of Muslim unity and national interests. Interpretively, the author reads this emphasis as a critique of identity politics that reduces the Muslim community to a narrow electoral bloc. This means that Deliar Noer is not offering anti-politics, but rather proposing an Islamic politics that is broader than mere symbolism. The following is the author's analysis based on a reading of Deliar Noer's works, which implicitly contain critiques of identity politics as practiced by Islamic political parties of his period.

First, fragmentation of the ummah. The term fragmentation of the Muslim community is not used in a single sense in this study. The concept encompasses four dimensions. First, electoral fragmentation, namely the division of Muslim voters across multiple competing political vehicles. Second, ideological fragmentation, namely sharp differences over strategy, sources of legitimacy, and ways of understanding the relationship between Islam and the state. Third, organizational fragmentation, namely rivalry among parties or among Muslim groups that obstructs coalition formation. Fourth, policy fragmentation, namely the weakening of Islamic politics' capacity to influence the public agenda collectively.

These four dimensions help explain why Deliar Noer's criticism is not merely moral, but also structural. For Deliar Noer, fragmentation is not only a matter of broken emotional solidarity. Fragmentation also reduces bargaining power, weakens political leverage, and shifts the energy of the Muslim community from substantive development to symbolic competition. Therefore, fragmentation of the Muslim community in Noer's reading must be understood as the breakdown of the relationship between identity, organization, and the public agenda.

Competition among Islamic political parties has often centered on symbolic religious identity claims. Rather than competing through substantive policy programs, parties tend to emphasize symbols, labels, and identity affiliations to attract mass support. This symbolic competition gives rise to political strategies focused on asserting who most authentically represents the "voice of the ummah" rather than addressing what can be concretely delivered for the community. Such an obsession with Islamic identity claims renders parties vulnerable to political opportunism that neglects broader socio-economic agendas (Fernando et al., 2023).

An excessive focus on identity limits the capacity of parties to accommodate the plurality of perspectives within the diverse Muslim community (Subekti & Mutiullah, 2025). As a result, political debates tend to revolve around symbolic legitimacy rather than the formulation of applicable public policies. This phenomenon also normalizes internal opposition based on religious labeling. Consequently, Islamic political parties that prioritize identity claims do not strengthen the Islamic movement; rather, they often weaken it from within (Weda & Amiruddin, 2022).

The Darul Islam rebellion serves as a historical case noted by Deliar Noer as a cautionary example. It illustrates how identity claims grounded in the implementation of sharia can escalate into efforts to replace the existing state order. The rebellion, led by Kartosoewiryo, asserted that the ideal state must be founded upon Islamic law, thereby rejecting compromise with the republican system (Noer, 2000). Such claims transcend mere programmatic differences and instead represent identity-based positions that cast certain groups as antagonistic both to the state and to other, more pragmatic Muslim groups.

This rebellion contributed to polarization within Islamic political forces, as some elites chose a diplomatic political path aligned with national interests, while more hardline factions pursued confrontation. This tension demonstrates how rapidly ideological claims can escalate into conflict when not managed through inclusive political institutions. It is important to note that one of the drivers of radicalization is the failure of Islamic political parties to provide representative platforms capable of accommodating diverse aspirations (Kyrchanoff, 2021). The Darul Islam case highlights that efforts to replace the state foundation with religious law carry implications not only for political continuity but also for the broader legitimacy of Islamic movements. It reinforces the argument that identity politics, when not channeled through healthy political institutions, can lead to political disintegration.

A direct consequence of such fragmentation is the weakening of the political voice of the Muslim community at the national level, as support becomes divided among parties each claiming superior representation. When electoral support and social backing are fragmented, the bargaining power of Islamic politics in shaping public policy becomes limited (Nasr, 2005). Furthermore, exclusive identity attributes create opportunities for external groups to stigmatize Islamic politics as synonymous with religious supremacy. This stigma is exacerbated when certain individuals or factions resort to violence or reject national consensus, thereby affecting the broader image of Islamic movements.

The resort to violence and the rejection of national consensus distort the public image of Islam and undermine the moral legitimacy of moderate Islamic political parties (Es, 2018). In practical terms, potential political coalitions often fail to materialize due to mutual distrust among parties competing over identity claims. As a result, substantive issues such as economic redistribution or educational reform are overshadowed by identity-driven narratives that attract greater public attention. Consequently, internal fragmentation obscures the role of Islam as a constructive political force, replacing it with symbolic political contestation. In the long term, this condition diminishes the collective capacity of the Muslim community to influence national policy, while simultaneously reinforcing negative public perceptions of Islamic politics, particularly in the aftermath of separatist movements.

Second, loss of substantive focus within the ummah. The next line of critique highlights how identity-based debates drain the energy of the Muslim community and shift attention away from substantive agendas toward contests of legitimacy. Within such a political structure, discourse revolves around the question of “who is more Islamic” rather than “how to address concrete problems in everyday life.” Identity debates rapidly consume intellectual attention, organizational resources, and social capital that should otherwise be directed toward educational reform and other pressing issues. As a result, the collective capacity to design pro-people public policies diminishes, as efforts are diverted toward symbolic validation.

Identity-based contestation also tends to hinder the emergence of technocratic leadership capable of formulating concrete policies. When emphasis is placed on moral authority, the space for technical deliberation, which is crucial for addressing structural issues such as poverty and social infrastructure, becomes constrained. This phenomenon reinforces elite hierarchies that prioritize prestige over grassroots empowerment. Consequently, there is a pressing need to reorient priorities from identity claims toward human development agendas (Noer, 1978). Without such a shift, the Muslim community risks losing momentum for substantive progress.

Historical experience further illustrates this dynamic. The struggle for legitimacy can be observed in the internal conflict between the Masyumi elite and the Nahdlatul Ulama group over the allocation of strategic positions, particularly the post of Minister of Religious Affairs (Noer, 2000). This conflict demonstrates how disputes over bureaucratic influence and institutional control triggered tensions that ultimately led to Nahdlatul Ulama's withdrawal from the Masyumi coalition. The contestation over ministerial positions was not merely a personal rivalry, but rather a struggle over moral legitimacy, rooted in competing claims regarding who was most entitled to represent the aspirations of the ummah. In this context, formal positions became instruments for securing political narratives and access to state resources.

Such political constellations generate significant obstacles to the formulation of long-term policies and sustainable development programs. Competition over positions widens the gap between political elites and their constituencies. When administrative and bureaucratic domains are dominated by identity-based rivalries, the quality of public service delivery deteriorates. These dynamics reveal the vulnerability of Islamic organizations when institutional interests override the broader needs of society. Consequently, the struggle for positions becomes a major impediment to substantive development agendas.

The shift away from substantive concerns also results in stagnation in the development of educational capacity, work ethic, and social morality within the community. When organizational resources and activist energy are absorbed by

competition for power, initiatives to improve curricula, teacher training, and educational infrastructure are neglected or under-supported. Moreover, the politicization of social programs transforms moral instruments into tools of legitimacy rather than vehicles of social transformation. In the medium term, this leads to insufficient social investment in key sectors such as health, education, and economic empowerment.

Furthermore, the politicization of values undermines the credibility of efforts to cultivate a consistent work ethic within society. Without a sustained focus on human capacity development, claims of Islamic identity risk becoming empty rhetoric that fails to improve the quality of life of the community (Fatimah et al., 2025). The absence of substantive agendas also creates space for patronage practices to fill the vacuum left by inadequate development programs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to restore priority to human development rather than the pursuit of political positions (Rahmalestari et al., 2026).

Third, loss of relevance in modern democracy. Another line of critique argues that identity politics has lost its relevance in modern democracy due to its failure to generate concrete programs in the fields of economics, education, and social justice. Politics oriented toward labels and moral claims tends to neglect technical and implementable policies, whereas democracy requires accountability and measurable policy outcomes (Virginia et al., 2023). Political parties preoccupied with maintaining identity claims often fail to prioritize policy research and administrative capacity, both of which are essential for the effective implementation of public programs. In Deliar Noer's view, modern democracy requires a combination of moral legitimacy and bureaucratic competence; without both, identity claims risk devolving into mere rhetoric (Noer, 1998).

Programmatic politics requires that such deficiencies be addressed through evaluation mechanisms, performance indicators, and transparent governance. If Islamic political parties fail to formulate inclusive economic agendas or ambitious national education plans, their capacity to contribute to the resolution of structural problems becomes significantly constrained. Therefore, a shift from identity-based politics to program-oriented politics is imperative to ensure the continued relevance of Islamic discourse within modern governance structures. Without such reorientation, religious claims alone will not suffice to secure public trust, particularly among voters who demand tangible outcomes. This awareness should serve as a call for Islamic movements to strengthen their public policy capacity.

A frequently debated example is the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has at times been perceived by certain groups as disproportionately serving the interests of the Muslim majority, thereby generating accusations of exclusivity (Noer, 2000). Bureaucratic structures, personnel appointments, and administrative policies associated with a particular religious community may create the perception that public services are not fully inclusive. This dilemma opens the possibility of exclusion if the management of religious institutions is not grounded in the principles of the rule of law and justice. The perception that the Ministry marginalizes minority groups can weaken national cohesion and reinforce accusations of sectarianism against Islamic political parties.

Such accusations are often used to discredit Islamic political agendas that may, in fact, be oriented toward universal welfare. Therefore, the governance of religious institutions requires transparency and a clear public service orientation to ensure that perceptions of partiality do not undermine state legitimacy. It is essential that policies consistently uphold principles of justice for all citizens so that state institutions avoid the appearance of exclusivity (Chernysh, 2020). The controversies surrounding religious

bureaucracy demonstrate that institutional form must not substitute for the substantive pursuit of justice. To maintain relevance, state religious institutions must function as instruments of integration rather than sources of exclusion.

More broadly, these dynamics contribute to the declining bargaining power of Islamic politics within modern democratic systems. Fragmented parties that remain focused on identity claims face difficulties in building strong and programmatic coalitions. When other political actors offer technical solutions to public problems, Islamic parties that lack policy capacity risk being abandoned by voters seeking concrete results. Institutional weaknesses and internal fragmentation further reduce the effectiveness of Islamic political actors in securing strategic positions within parliament and government (Tanuwidjaja, 2010). In the context of macro-level policymaking, fragmented parties are unable to consolidate coalition commitments necessary for structural reform.

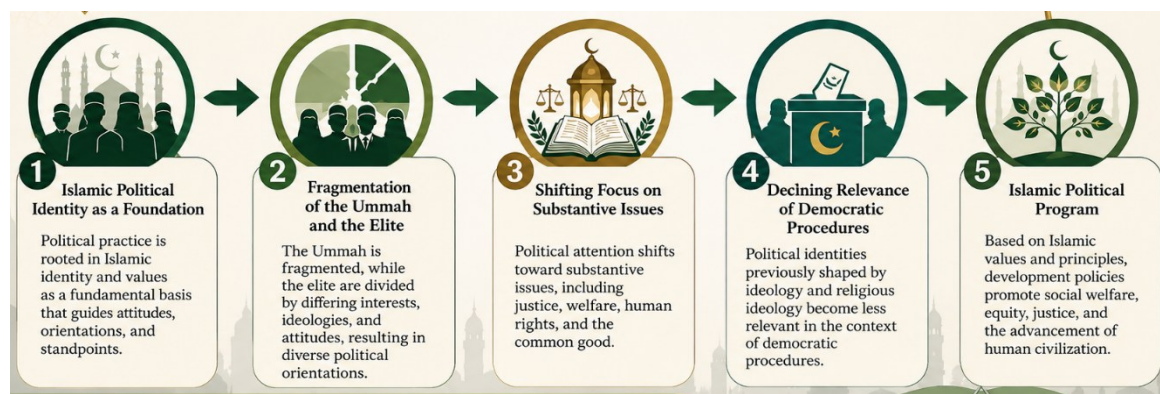


Figure 1. Conceptual Flow of Deliar Noer's Critique
Source: Author, 2026

The history of Islamic politics needs to be read as a continuous but not identical process. In the Masyumi era, Islamic politics appeared with a strong representational ambition and even contributed to debates over the foundational principles of the state. At this point, Islamic politics had a democratic function because it channeled Muslim aspirations into the constitutional arena. However, during the same phase, internal conflicts and strategic contestation also emerged, weakening consolidation.

The Darul Islam case then became a serious warning for Noer. There, Islamic identity moved from a representative claim to a confrontational logic toward the state. For Noer, this event demonstrated that when identity is used to reject national compromise, Islamic politics loses public legitimacy. The author's reading of this case is that Noer viewed identity-based extremism as the furthest form from healthy Islamic politics. Entering the New Order era and the post-Reformasi period, the pattern shifted but did not break. Islamic parties remained present, but they more often operated under electoral structures that demanded rapid symbolic mobilization. PKB, PAN, PPP, and PKS demonstrate that Islamic identity remains a political resource. However, this resource is often used instrumentally. Here, Noer's conclusion remains relevant. Identity used without programmatic work will reproduce old problems in new forms.

3. Evaluation of Islamic Parties in Indonesia according to Deliar Noer

In addition to offering implicit critiques, Deliar Noer also explicitly articulates his ideas and proposals as an evaluation of Islamic political parties in Indonesia. In his work

Mengapa Partai Islam Kalah?, he clearly outlines a set of strategic measures that should serve as a collective agenda for the Muslim community to enable Islamic parties to regain their strength in future democratic contests. These measures are as follows:

First, the commitment to reform. Islamic political parties must strengthen their determination and commitment to undertake genuine reforms by abandoning detrimental past practices and replacing them with progressive initiatives that provide tangible public benefits (Noer, 1998). Such reform should not remain at the level of rhetoric but must be reflected in concrete actions. This includes ending exclusive sectarian tendencies and eliminating corrupt political practices that undermine the credibility of Islamic movements. By abandoning these negative patterns, Islamic parties can restore public trust and redirect their political energy toward constructive and productive change. Deliar Noer (1978) emphasizes that national interests must take precedence over group interests. This principle reflects a universal ethic of compassion toward all people, not limited to Muslims alone. Thus, Islamic politics is expected to uphold public interests fairly, without discrimination, and to be grounded in mutual trust. With a reform-oriented vision, Islamic parties can position themselves as a manifestation of *rahmatan lil-'alamin*, serving society at large.

Second, *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood). Islamic political parties must cultivate a strong sense of fraternity and solidarity within the Muslim community (Noer, 1998). This requires unity among members, overcoming sectarian differences, and prioritizing shared religious commitments over individual interests. Solidarity should function as an ethical foundation for political engagement, ensuring that internal conflicts are resolved through deliberation rather than confrontation. Islamic teachings place great emphasis on unity and compassion, not merely as rhetoric but as practical values (Jamil, 2023). Strengthening *ukhuwah* must be reflected concretely in political life through trust-building, internal cohesion, conflict reduction, and the maintenance of strong social networks. Strategically, a solid foundation of *ukhuwah* provides the collective strength necessary to achieve shared goals. Therefore, party cadres must pay attention to both interpersonal and group relations among Muslim constituents to foster a harmonious political environment.

Third, cooperation among Muslims. Following the strengthening of *ukhuwah*, the next step is to institutionalize practical cooperation among Muslim groups (Noer, 1998). This includes collaboration between Islamic political parties and Muslim organizations in political, social, and public policy initiatives that genuinely benefit the community. Such cooperation can minimize the fragmentation of the Muslim electorate that often weakens collective political influence. Forms of cooperation may include joint community programs, collective *da'wah* initiatives that enhance religious and social awareness, and political agreements based on shared Islamic values. To be effective, such cooperation must be consistent and transparent. Transparency in planning and implementation demonstrates that Islamic political forces are stable and responsible, rather than merely forming opportunistic alliances for electoral gain (Rastgar, 2023). As a result, Islamic parties can move away from destructive competition and instead form broader coalitions to achieve common objectives.

Fourth, alliances across organizations and parties. Islamic political parties need to expand cooperation beyond Islamic organizations to include broader segments of society (Noer, 1998). Openness to partnerships, including with non-Muslim groups, must be based on principles of justice and equality, ensuring that cooperation is inclusive and meaningful for all parties. Examples include cross-party policy dialogues, coordinated

efforts to alleviate poverty, and community empowerment programs involving diverse stakeholders. Through such participatory engagement, Islamic parties can transform from insular entities into centers of social dialogue, thereby enhancing their legitimacy and expanding their constructive influence. By practicing *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (national solidarity) and *ukhuwah basyariyah* (universal human solidarity), Islamic parties demonstrate political maturity. Broad and diverse coalitions generate positive synergy in formulating universal public policies while preventing political isolation (Lorenz, 2020).

Fifth, awareness of Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions must remain responsive to developments in modern science and knowledge (Noer, 1998). Improving educational quality should encompass not only intellectual capacity but also practical skills and moral character. This aligns with the Islamic imperative to seek knowledge. Accordingly, curricula in *pesantren*, *madrasahs*, and Islamic higher education institutions must adapt to contemporary needs. The teaching of science and technology should be balanced with Islamic values to ensure that Muslims remain competitive in the process of modernization. When Islamic educational institutions excel in scientific development, they will produce cadres who are both intellectually competent and morally grounded (Maimunah, 2021). This intellectual foundation enables Islamic political parties to formulate evidence-based policies rooted in Islamic values. Strong and relevant education thus equips Islamic political movements to contribute meaningfully to national development (Barton & Yilmaz, 2021).

Sixth, the Islamization of knowledge. Deliar Noer advocates for the Islamization of knowledge as an effort to integrate general sciences with Islamic values (Noer, 1998). The aim is to eliminate the dichotomy between religion and science, recognizing that both should function in a complementary manner. Islamization does not merely involve labeling disciplines as "Islamic," but rather entails a critical examination of scientific methodologies, epistemologies, objectives, and ethical frameworks in light of Islamic teachings (Miftahuddin, 2023). This approach seeks to develop a scientific paradigm that is free from excessive secular dominance while remaining culturally relevant to Muslim societies (Irfani et al., 2026). Consequently, Islamic political parties should support research that incorporates religious values into academic inquiry, ensuring that scientific development remains ethically grounded and socially beneficial.

Seventh, Islamic economics. Economic development grounded in Islamic values constitutes a key priority in Deliar Noer's framework. The economic system should be structured to prevent wealth concentration among elites and instead ensure equitable distribution across society. Islamic economics emphasizes social justice by protecting vulnerable groups and promoting equitable welfare (Meirison, 2022). Principles such as *zakat*, *infaq*, and social responsibility toward the poor must be concretely integrated into the economic and political platforms of Islamic parties. Furthermore, Islamic parties should advocate for fair fiscal policies, support for micro, small, and medium enterprises, and the strengthening of community-based economic initiatives. Economic cooperation must also align with Islamic ethical principles, including the rejection of exploitative practices such as *riba*.

Eighth, politics as the determining factor. Deliar Noer (1998) underscores that, above all strategies, politics remains the decisive factor in determining the success of Islamic political parties. A well-planned political process, from party organization to legislative formulation and enactment, serves as the primary mechanism for translating the aspirations of the Muslim community into legal and public policy frameworks. The implementation of Islamic principles requires a constitutional political platform.

Therefore, political parties function as formal channels for articulating and advancing regulations that reflect Islamic values. This approach reflects a pragmatic orientation that utilizes democratic mechanisms to achieve legitimate legal recognition for Islamic-oriented policies. Political parties thus serve as the principal instruments for communicating and promoting Islamic values within the framework of the state, not merely as rhetoric, but as measurable and accountable programs.

Deliar Noer's eight evaluative ideas should not be read as a stand-alone normative list, but rather as a practical reform agenda. Reformist determination means that Islamic parties must improve cadre recruitment, organizational discipline, and campaign ethics so that they do not depend on symbolic nostalgia. Islamic brotherhood requires clear mechanisms for resolving internal conflict, not merely moral exhortation. Cooperation among Muslims and alliances across Islamic organizations should be translated into joint policy forums, not only temporary coalitions formed shortly before elections.

Awareness of Islamic education and the Islamization of knowledge should be understood as an institutional investment. Islamic parties that seek relevance must produce cadres who understand public policy, social data, political economy, and governance. Without such capacity, identity will remain merely a rhetorical asset. Likewise, Islamic economics must be realized through programs of redistribution, MSME empowerment, fair fiscal policy, and the strengthening of social safety nets. In this sense, Noer urges Islamic parties to move from symbolic politics toward welfare-oriented politics.

Table 1. Analysis of Forms of Identity Politics, Their Political Consequences, and Critical Responses

Forms of Identity Politics	Political Consequences	Deliar Noer's Critical Responses
The use of religious symbols as campaign instruments	Attracts emotional support, but shifts attention from policy to image	Calls for renewal and a more substantive programmatic orientation
Exclusive claims to represent the Muslim community	Triggers internal fragmentation and mutual delegitimization among groups	Emphasizes ukhuwah Islamiyah and Muslim solidarity
Competition over office and strategic positions	Encourages elite conflict and obscures the public service agenda	Advocates cooperation and the ethics of deliberation
Identity mobilization without policy capacity	Reduces the competitiveness of Islamic parties in modern democracy	Affirms the importance of education, Islamic economics, and political competence

Source: Author, 2026

Most importantly, politics as a decisive instrument must be understood democratically. Noer was not calling on Islamic parties to dominate the state in the name of identity. Rather, he encouraged the use of democratic mechanisms to formulate policies that are accountable. For contemporary Islamic parties, the implication is clear. Party reform is not sufficient if it only strengthens religious imagery. Reform requires

accountability, capacity-based candidate selection, measurable policy platforms, and the ability to build coalitions across identities.

Deliar Noer's thought has very clear democratic implications. First, it supports democratic accountability by demanding that parties work through programs, not merely symbols. Second, it supports pluralism by rejecting identity exclusivism that closes off political cooperation. Third, it encourages coalition building because it recognizes that fragmentation only weakens the bargaining power of the Muslim community. Fourth, it advances policy-oriented political competition because it regards the quality of public service as the primary measure of political success.

In this way, Deliar Noer can be read as an Islamic political thinker compatible with constitutional democracy. He does not regard democracy as a threat to Islam. What he rejects is the use of democracy as a stage for identity mobilization that neglects substance. Therefore, Deliar Noer's contribution to the study of Islamic politics lies in his effort to bridge Islamic values and democratic rationality, which require openness, responsibility, and cooperation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Deliar Noer viewed the identity politics of Islamic parties as a practice that tends to produce more harm than benefit. This harm appears on three levels. First, the fragmentation of the Muslim community arises from competition over claims to Islamic representation. Second, substantive orientation is lost because political energy is absorbed by symbols and legitimacy. Third, the relevance of Islamic politics declines when modern democracy demands programs, administrative capacity, and policy accountability. The contribution of this study lies in three aspects. Conceptually, this study clarifies the distinction between identity politics and substantive Islamic politics. Historically, this study positions Deliar Noer as an Islamic political thinker who critically and longitudinally examined the problems of Islamic parties.

Practically, this study offers an evaluative basis for reforming Islamic parties so that they do not become trapped in narrow symbolism, but instead move toward programmatic work that is inclusive, solution-oriented, and directed toward the public interest. In this sense, Deliar Noer's ideas remain relevant for building Islamic political reform in Indonesia. Islamic parties need to reaffirm that religious identity is not the final goal, but rather a source of ethics for policy work that is more just and broader in benefit. At this point, Islamic politics attains its dignity as an instrument of struggle that is able to preserve Muslim unity while also strengthening democracy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

-

REFERENCES

- Anam, H. F. (2019). Politik identitas Islam dan pengaruhnya terhadap demokrasi di Indonesia. *Politea*, 2(2), 181. <https://doi.org/10.21043/politea.v2i2.5953>
- Anwar, C., Rozi, F., & Hasan, S. N. B. (2025). Politics of Inclusion and Adaptive Physical Education: A Systematic Review of Policy Implementation for Students with Special Needs. *International Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 2(3), 186-202. <https://doi.org/10.69812/ijsps.v2i3.145>
- Barton, G., & Yilmaz, I. (2021). Contestations of Islamic religious ideas in Indonesia. *Religions*, 12(641), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641>

- Cahya Rosdiana, A., & Suryaningtyas, A. A. (2024). Politik identitas dalam kampanye politik Ganjar Pranowo menjelang Pilpres 2024. *Jurnal Audiens*, 5(1), 77–90. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jas.v5i1.336>
- Chernysh, M. F. (2020). Conceptual foundation of social policy: Dignity, justice, equality. *Sotsiologicheskii Zhurnal*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.19181/socjour.2020.26.1.7051>
- Dauliy, S. M., Kusmanto, H., & Kadir, A. (2019). Politik identitas pada pemilihan gubernur Sumatera Utara tahun 2018. *Jurnal Administrasi Publik: Public Administration Journal*, 9(1), 51. <https://doi.org/10.31289/jap.v9i1.2230>
- Dewi, S. M., Syamsudin, M. H., Alatas, A., & Muhsin, I. (2024). Islamic revivalism: Dynamics of Islamic parties in legalizing Islamic law policies in Indonesia and Malaysia. *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 9(1), 231–258. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v9i1.8514>
- Fernando, H., Larasati, Y. G., Abdullah, I., Jubba, H., Mugni, A., & Persadha, P. D. (2023). The de-existence of Islamic political parties in general elections: A case study of Indonesia as a Muslim-majority country. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2225838>
- Fatimah, S., Arif, M., Hidayat, A., Kosim, K., Nasir, A., & Busro, B. (2025). Life based on Islamic religious philosophy with life satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 106(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.46222/PHAROSJOT.106.22>
- Fautanu, I., Buhori, M., & Gunawan, H. (2020). Politik identitas dalam Pilkada DKI Jakarta tahun 2017: Perspektif pemikiran politik Nurcholish Madjid. *Politicon: Jurnal Ilmu Politik*, 2(2), 87–112. <https://doi.org/10.15575/politicon.v2i2.8146>
- Gunadirdja, A. (2001). *Deliar Noer, pendiri HMI di Jakarta*. Jakarta: Panitia Penerbitan Buku 75 Tahun Prof. Dr. Deliar Noer.
- Irfani, M. A., Iqbal, I., & Nugraha, D. (2026). The ethics of Al-Ghazali's perspective in Kimiyaus Sa'adah and its relevance to contemporary moral challenges. *Al-Ulum: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Keislaman*, 12(3), 223–240. <https://doi.org/10.31102/alulum.12.3.2025.223-240>
- Iskandar, & Firdaus. (n.d.). Pemikiran Deliar Noer mengenai gerakan Islam modern Indonesia 1900–1942.
- Jamil, M., Abbas, S. Z., Al-Salami, A. A. A., Al-Khafaji, F. A. H., Saenko, N. R., & Ramírez-Coronel, A. A. (2023). Islamic teachings and religious brotherhood in the Islamic society. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8369>
- Kahin, A. (2009). *In memoriam: Deliar Noer*. *Indonesia*, 87, 129–131.
- Kyrchanoff, M. (2021). Indonesian Islamism as a marginal case of the political Islam development in a Muslim country. *Shidnij Svit*, 3, 107–122. <https://doi.org/10.15407/orientw2021.03.107>
- Latief, M. (2016). *Sekularisme dalam parti politik Islam di Indonesia: Kajian terhadap Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa dan Partai Amanat Nasional (Tesis)*. Universiti Malaya.
- Lorenz, G. M. (2020). Prioritized interests: Diverse lobbying coalitions and congressional committee agenda setting. *Journal of Politics*, 82(1), 225–240. <https://doi.org/10.1086/705744>
- Maimunah, I., Huda, M., Haque, A., & Zubaidah, Z. (2021). Islamic boarding school at university: A strong pathway for integrating religion and science. *J-PAI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 8(1), 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.18860/jpai.v8i1.15361>

- Meirison, M., Unani, T., & Kasmidin, K. (2022). Social justice and poverty: Islamic economic perspective. *Li Falah: Jurnal Studi Ekonomi dan Bisnis Islam*, 7(1), 50. <https://doi.org/10.31332/lifalah.v7i1.2225>
- Miftahuddin. (2023). Islamization of science or scientification of Islam? Bridging the dichotomy of science. *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 15(1), 105–130. <https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.2023.4113>
- Naimuddin, M. (2014). Model penelitian pemikiran Islam modern “Gerakan modern Islam di Indonesia 1900–1942” (Deliar Noer). *Saintifika Islamica*, 1(2), 87–96.
- Nasr, V. (2005). The rise of Muslim democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(2), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1353/JOD.2005.0032>
- Noer, D. (1963). The rise and development of the modernist Muslim movement in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period (1900–1942). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Noer, D. (1978). *Administration of Islam in Indonesia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- Oliveros, V., Weitz-Shapiro, R., & Winters, M. S. (2023). Credit claiming by labeling. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(13), 2099–2127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140231169016>
- Rastgar, A. A., Davoudi, S. M. M., Surahman, H. S., & Al-Salami, A. A. A. (2023). Following Islamic teachings in the governance of Islamic society with an emphasis on transparency. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8032>
- Rahmalestari, W., Aswar, & Subekti, F. R. (2026). Humanisme sebagai etika politik: Relasi negara dan agama dalam pemikiran Abdurrahman Wahid. *Takuana: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sains, dan Humaniora*, 4(4), 1942–1952. <https://doi.org/10.56113/takuana.v4i4.305>
- Subekti, F. R., & Mutiullah. (2025). Gus Dur's ideas in influencing postcolonial Islamic Nusantara thought. *Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal (MICJO)*, 2(2), 1993–2003. <https://doi.org/10.62567/micjo.v2i2.735>
- Tanuwidjaja, S. (2010). Political Islam and Islamic parties in Indonesia: Critically assessing the evidence of Islam's political decline. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 32(1), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1355/CS32-1B>
- Triantoro, D. A. (2019). Praktik politik identitas dalam akun media sosial Anies-Sandi. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 16(1), 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.v16i1.1495>
- Wahyudi, J. (2022). Pudarnya ideologi partai Islam pascareformasi: Telaah atas perjalanan Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) sejak pemilu 2009–2019. *Politea*, 5(1), 104. <https://doi.org/10.21043/politea.v5i1.14849>
- Weda, S., & Amiruddin, A. (2022). Performance of Islamic political parties in Indonesian contemporary political practices. *Randwick International of Social Science Journal*, 3(1), 211–230. <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v3i1.397>