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Manufacturing Difference: Instrumental Identity Mobilization and the Politics of Everyday Life in Urban Indonesia

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Commentators have often cited a deepening of identity-based social fault lines across Indonesia's vast sociopolitical landscape. Yet the country has experienced little of the kinds of communal conflict or electoral turmoil of near neighbours in recent years. Drawing on observations of electoral politics in Jakarta, this article argues that top-down electoral polarization bears little resemblance to how identity and difference are experienced and utilized as pragmatic resources in the urban politics of the everyday. This dynamic helps to explain why the parameters of electoral polarization have dissipated post-election and failed to translate into deeper forms of societal-level conflict.

Keywords: Jakarta, polarization, elections, identity, everyday life politics.

"Excuse me sir", I asked, "can you please tell me the way to Habib Rizieq's house?" Despite having visited the home of the grand imam of the Front Pembela Islam (FPI) several times previously, I had managed to confuse myself using Google Maps and had stopped to ask the help of an elderly man sitting in a street-side *warung* (stall) in the district of Petamburan, Central Jakarta. After giving me directions for the short walk to Rizieq's house, he pointed towards a Christian middle school across the road. "You know, he studied here as a kid. Not sure how much he learnt though!", he said, chuckling.[1]

It was late 2014, and the FPI was nearing the height of its disruptive and polarizing powers. Over the previous month, they had carried out a series of initially small street demonstrations opposing

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the appointment of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, or Ahok, as governor of Jakarta. Elected in 2012 as vice governor alongside Joko Widodo ("Jokowi"), Ahok was appointed governor by Jakarta's parliament after a bitterly fought national election that saw Jokowi win the presidency in 2014. Backed by the Red and White Coalition (Koalisi Merah Putih), a coalition of political parties that had supported the presidential campaign of Prabowo Subianto, the protests focused on Ahok's apparent "arrogance", but there were also placards declaring the Christian and ethnic Chinese governor an "enemy of Islam". At one protest, an effigy of Ahok was hung by the neck and burnt, invoking memories of past episodes of sectarian violence. These were to be the precursor to far bigger protests and the political turmoil that erupted in 2016, generating what many analysts described as a highly polarized and volatile political landscape, unprecedented in Indonesia's post-Reformasi era (Setijadi 2017).

From 2014 onwards until its peak in 2019, a common refrain in media and expert commentary was that Indonesia was on a political and social knife-edge (Aspinall 2014). The parameters of electoral contestation established by rival political elites were said to have prised open deep sociopolitical cleavages. Some of these cleavages were considered historical, such as tensions between pluralists and Islamists that were fundamental in shaping Indonesian postcolonial state-building. Such tensions were perpetuated more recently from the 2010s as a result of increased religious conservatism and conspicuous piety, together with the prominence of hard-line and fundamentalist religious groups such as FPI and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI).[2] Regional autonomy too has served to increase the political salience of ethnic identity.

By 2017, multiple opinion polls indicated that a majority of people felt society was increasingly divided into rival political camps, intertwined with competing sets of grievances and claims (Rahadian 2017).[3] This sentiment was echoed by commentators and analysts who painted a grim picture of a new emerging polarized sociopolitical reality despite Indonesian politics having, as many had noted, a sociopolitical landscape that did not lend itself towards deep

political cleavages with weak partisan political identity and strong cultures of clientelism and transnationalism (Warburton 2020).

And yet in what was the heart of the FPI's territory in Petamburan, the atmosphere was remarkably typical of a busy heterogeneous Jakarta neighbourhood, the narrow streets a chaotic flurry of varied economic activity, of the new and the old, and comings and goings of all kinds of people. Ethnic Chinese women chatted in front of their homes a stone's throw from Rizieq's residence, as shirtless day labourers sat at a *warung* smoking cigarettes, and young women from one of the many local *kost* (low-cost boarding house) milled at the front of a small electronics store waiting for their laptops to be repaired. Beyond a couple of banners and a small group of listless young men wearing FPI insignia at the kampong's entrance, there was little to indicate that this was the centre of an organization considered by many as dangerously radical and a central driver of spreading sectarianism. Such observation of routine activities of everyday urban life could be considered inconsequential, even superficial.[4] However, it raises some intriguing questions. What does it mean, in terms of the fabric of everyday life in urban Indonesia, to be polarized? How is the construction of religious and ethnic identity, in so far as it is "hardening" into "us" and "them"—considered a defining characteristic of societal polarization—experienced or enacted during everyday life? Despite indicators of a degree of societal-level polarization (Warburton 2020, p. 26) around periods of heightened political tension, how do we explain the relative absence in Indonesia of evidence of the kinds of social conflict or antagonisms often associated with it elsewhere?

This article argues that instrumental, dynamic and contingent approaches towards identity are a routine part of the negotiations, compromises and strategies of everyday life for many Indonesians living in dense, heterogeneous urban contexts. It is suggested that these kinds of contingent approaches to identity have translated into strategic and performative engagements with the discursive polarization manufactured by political actors around elections in the capital over the past decade. Rather than producing, or reflecting,

deep, broad-based societal or sectarian cleavages, political polarization has been engaged with instrumentally as an opportunity structure for developing networks and coalitions of interest, targeted attempts at redistribution, and as an avenue for articulating various grievances. Polarization, as such, has only been sustained when it provides these instrumental opportunities for a broad array of groups, communities and individuals, and dissipates or disappears almost as soon as it does not.

Drawing on Simone and Rao's notion of "urban majorities", it is suggested that the heterogeneity of urban life in contemporary Jakarta, despite trends towards spatial segregation, has been the often-overlooked translational context for discursive polarization, where rather than reflecting or producing a social-relational reality, it has been engaged with pragmatically, strategically and productively (Simone and Rao 2021). It considers this pragmatism through an examination of two case studies. One is the involvement of the urban poor in mobilizations and networks of the 212 Movement, a politico-religious coalition that organized massive street protests in Jakarta against former Jakarta governor Ahok in 2016.[5] The second considers the emergence of ethnic militias claiming to represent the Betawi, considered the indigenous ethnic group of Jakarta. Against a historical context of sociocultural hybridity, a temporarily hardened construction of Betawi identity was mobilized as part of strategies to redress perceived socio-economic marginality. It is argued that in both cases engagement in political and identity polarization by urban majority populations has been contingent and targeted.

Polarization, Social Relationality and the Urban Majority

A focus of the literature on political polarization in Indonesia has been its impact on the quality of democratic processes and institutions and the attitudes and preferences of voters.[6] A relative blind spot has been the extent to which polarization manifests, if at all, in changes to social relations in specific spatial contexts. Studies of identity-based grievance politics and polarization more

generally have often assumed that identities forming the basis of cleavages are relatively fixed and visible, making them a relevant category for political mobilization and analysis and a clear, even self-evident, basis of populist appeal (Suryanarayan and White 2022, p. 735). In the Indonesian context, Warburton (2019) has argued that polarization has remained relatively "shallow and contingent" despite public perceptions that it is deep and sustained. This apparent disjuncture between societal perceptions and indicators of actual sociopolitical cleavage is significant in so far as it is suggestive of the power of polarization as a discursive instrument. Considering this, Tapsell (2019) suggests that online lives have tended to distort offline realities, producing an artificial atmosphere of polarization that is capitalized upon by various political entrepreneurs. As Fealy has noted, affective polarization has been greatest in the socially untethered online world of social media (Fealy et al. 2022), where it is arguably inherent to the medium, but has not overflowed into significant offline social conflict or antagonisms.[7]

An effectively "empty" polarization within a context of minimal ideological or policy differentiation among political contestants generates a dynamic by which various material grievances and claims seek to find expression and mobilization capacity within the parameters of this discursive polarization. In a survey-based analysis testing whether political polarization has a mass base, Soderberg and Muhtadi (2023, p. 441) suggest that resentments, such as anti-Chinese sentiment, translate into distinct political preferences in polarized electoral contests. They interpret findings of a consistency of resentment across income brackets as suggesting that cogent resentments are largely disentangled from economic and material circumstances. This conclusion, however, does not consider class outside of strict income determinants, and in particular the shaping role of social relations of power, nor the ways in which resentment mobilizers, such as the FPI, actively direct the language of material grievance towards religious and sectarian frames within a context of unequal power relations (Wilson 2014a, p. 253).[8] The appeal to political elites of the FPI and similar groups has been precisely

their ability to co-opt and reorientate anomies produced by uneven patterns of development (Wilson 2015, p. 157).

That polarization, even at its ostensive peak at moments of political juncture, did not engender predictable patterns of mobilization or conflict in Jakarta despite sectarian sentiments featuring prominently in the public sphere is unsurprising if we shift focus away from stated attitudes and online/offline perceptions towards the dynamics of the socio-relational context.[9] Intergroup hostility and hardening of us/them binaries underpinning identity and ideological polarization are greatly reduced where intergroup contact is frequent and complex, even with the distorting impact of the online world.[10] In a comparative assessment of urban communal conflict, Elfversson et al. (2023, p. 2) argue that the theoretical pathways connecting urban growth and forms of unrest largely fail to give due consideration to the "violence-stemming" effects of dynamic urban expansion. I extend this observation to the mitigating effects of the heterogeneity of urban majority life in Jakarta to explain why political polarization, while being engaged with, has remained largely discursive and contingent. An example is the post-election riots in Jakarta of 2019. Widely attributed to the charged polarized tone of the elections, there was, however, little evidence that the riots were a product of broad societal sentiment. Many of the individuals subsequently prosecuted for instigating the riots, for example, had long histories as hired provocateurs, suggesting the violence was orchestrated rather than spontaneous (Hakim and Wedhaswary 2019). The speed with which polarization dissipated post-election was also remarkable. While some analysts attributed such dissipation to post-contest elite reconciliation and its impact on respective follower camps (Setiawan 2022), this view assumes that polarization had a deep societal base.

Negotiating the uncertainties and complexities of urban life in a city like Jakarta means that people cannot rely solely on "inherited notions about people of the past", nor can they count on long-standing notions of identity as reliable or predictable markers (Simone 2014, p. 226). The negotiations of the everyday requires what Simone has referred to as "a way of seeing between the lines";

identity is not engaged as a fixed property in everyday interactions between self-contained subjects, nor as an immutable or consistently reliable frame for the assessment of others. This does not mean that identity markers such as ethnicity or religion are not salient. Despite Jakarta's "melting pot" status, ethnicity has retained sociopolitical power as a means of establishing and claiming place and, in some cases, rights that are not immediately accessible via citizenship either of the city or nation. The dynamics of post–New Order reforms of regional autonomy and decentralization have served to invigorate the political saliency of ethnic and cultural identities. Specific shared interests, including those via constructs of identity and corporate belonging, what Simone calls "vernaculars of recognition", will often come to the fore in ways that make possible the articulation of specific demands or rights (p. 85). But at the same time, for many residents of the city's heterogeneous districts, such recognition is underpinned by flexibility and a tactical logic. In short, the politics of the everyday means that people, including in neighbourhoods such as Petamburan, need to keep their options open and work out disputes and tensions via the density of interactions in which they are enmeshed.

Socio-spatial segregation, such as in the growth of gated estates, residential enclaves, superblock complexes and apartment towers for middle- and upper-class residents, has been identified by some scholars as a structural condition contributing to increasing societal polarization as a result of its fracturing of the social space of mutual exposure and shared public services (Morales et al. 2019).[11] "Faith-based" and sharia housing, for example, has grown in urban Indonesia in recent decades in part because of the rise of upper- and middle-class identity piety expressed via patterns of lifestyle consumption and desires for individuation and forms of socio-spatial homogeneity. Sunesti found that the drivers are not necessarily identity-based, with interest in sharia housing among Indonesians under forty often being due to equally instrumental economic reasons, i.e., easier loan repayment processes, together with ideological/lifestyle preferences (Sunesti and Putri 2022).

Most of Jakarta's residents, however, live in what can best be described as heterogeneous majority neighbourhoods. This "urban majority", according to Simone and Rao (2021, p. 152), does not reflect a statistically predominant social demographic as such, in so far as it is neither strictly poor nor firmly middle class. Nor is it one way of doing things, but rather a confluence of heterogeneous ways of life, backgrounds, livelihoods, capacities and incomes. Segregation, as Garrido has argued with respect to many of the largest cities in the global South, has a strong relational component marked not by the concentration and isolation of people, such as the slums of the poor or "lifestyle" consumptive middle class in segregated spaces (Garrido 2021); instead, like many megacities of the global South, Jakarta has an interspersion of poor kampong neighbourhoods and elite gated enclaves, between and linked through urban majority areas. Spatial segregation is less a matter of an absence of interaction than of increasingly unequal relations between different groups within the city.

Guma and others have argued that this urban majority, a feature of cities of the global South, is enmeshed in a complexity that necessitates and produces survival strategies, specializations and identities necessary for urban life (Simone 2014; Guma et al. 2023). Constituencies shift and change over time, remaining porous rather than fixed. The following cases offer examples of urban majority neighbourhoods and communities engaging in strategic and instrumental mobilization. This instrumentality is shaped and constrained by structural relations of power constitutive of poverty that make it one of the few effective strategies available to the economically precarious (Hutchison and Wilson 2020, p. 275).

Instrumental Engagement: Jakarta's Kampong and the Anti-Ahok Movement

On 11 April 2016, on the orders of Jakarta's governor Ahok, the coastal neighbourhood of Kampung Akuarium in North Jakarta was razed to the ground, just ten days after the issuing of notice of intent

to do so.[12] Even with a nominal promise of relocation, the speed of the eviction and complete destruction of their homes and property left the neighbourhood of 385 families shell-shocked and traumatized (Wijaya 2016). It was part of an extensive programme of evictions and forced displacements in Jakarta by the Ahok administration that was immensely popular among the city's middle and upper-middle classes, for whom he represented an uncompromising approach to tackling the city's infrastructural woes. Within the space of twelve months, this eviction campaign resulted in over 5,000 being displaced (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Jakarta 2018).

Akuarium is a neighbourhood of poor and lower-middle-class households, with many residents making a living from fishing or selling food. It had been a strong support base for Jokowi's campaign for governor in 2012 with Ahok as his deputy, and later for his 2014 successful campaign for the presidency, projecting him as someone who, according to one resident, "cared about ordinary working people".[13] Much of this support was channelled and articulated via the Urban Poor Network (Jaringan Rakyat Miskin Kota, JRMK), an urban poor network organization with a strong presence in North Jakarta. After the eviction and demolition of 241 buildings, 80 families refused to leave the site, rebuilding makeshift housing or living in tents amid the rubble of their old homes. The area became a very visible and increasingly high-profile protest site.

Despite a groundswell of antagonism from those directly affected by the governor's eviction campaign, the destruction of Akuarium initially generated little significant mainstream political interest outside of long-term advocates for the urban poor (Wilson 2016).[14] It was weeks later, with the emergence of allegations of blasphemy against Ahok, that Akuarium began to be frequently visited by an array of political organizations and figures, its rubble-strewn landscape an almost irresistible campaign backdrop.[15] Akuarium's fate at the hands of the Ahok administration increased its political and strategic value to other actors mobilizing against the governor and his political allies. Some organizations that offered assistance to Akuarium residents, such as the FPI, previously had little interest in the fate of evicted

kampong residents or the urban poor but immediately recognized the moral and political capital to be gained from the devastation of Kampung Akuarium and other kampongs in the political and public relations tussle with pro-Ahok forces, which was quickly taking on national implications.[16] Akuarium residents were invited to meet with political and religious leaders and featured in political party social media campaigns (Ariefana and Tolen 2017). The residents' temporary camp at the site of their erstwhile homes also became a site of pilgrimage and selfie backdrop for the growing ranks of middle-class participants in the 212 Movement, who gave regular donations of food, water, tents and other necessities.

The attention was welcome, albeit at times overwhelming. Apart from long-term advocates for housing rights, such as the Rujak Centre for Urban Studies of the Legal Aid Foundation (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, LBH), many middle- and upper-class liberals who often advocated on behalf of the urban poor had defaulted to support Ahok.[17] The prominent presence of hard-line Islamists and the seemingly radical nature of opposition to Ahok served, to these middle-class supporters, to further entrench the view that hostility to him was driven by sectarianism rather than any rational grievances over his policy agenda, in line with the predominant polarized discourse. This perception in turn saw a doubling down of support for his policies of urban displacement, gentrification and renewal, which became intertwined with the defence of pluralism, as represented by Ahok's "double minority" status (Wilson 2017). As Michaels (2006) argued, the emphasis placed by ostensibly liberal elites on diversity often operates to mask or generate silence around issues of social and economic inequality and to naturalize economic structures from which their own wealth and status are gained. The diversity of an elite is used to legitimize its material and policy interests.[18] In this instance, pro- and anti-Ahok polarization operated as opportunity structure and rationalization for an array of material struggles by different socio-economic groups and communities to secure or consolidate their material conditions and access to the city.

The shift of anti-Ahok mobilizations further away from ostensive critiques of his administration to a sectarian-charged anti-blasphemy banner coalesced a broad polarized identity formation of an aggrieved and disenfranchised Muslim majority (Hadiz 2019, p. 272). This served as an umbrella allowing strategic cross-class coalitions and the embedding of various struggles, claims and interests within a wider discursive field, spanning the hyper-local to the national. Akuarium residents found themselves enmeshed in a complex, contradictory and often tense web of multiple relationships and juggling of strategic alliances. This included, for example, the FPI and the Great Indonesia Movement Party, or Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra), as well as the LBH, each of which entailed different kinds of contingent loyalty, expectations and identity performance. Permanent conditions of insecurity mean that the urban precariat need to keep options open and will often pursue diverse avenues and relationships to hedge risk rather than pursue a singular set of alliances (Hutchison and Wilson 2020). This instrumental politics is shaped not by cynical self-interest but by the structural relations of power constitutive of poverty that requires pragmatic opportunism and keeping one's options open (Hutchison and Wilson 2020). This mode of political agency rarely involves a coherent ideology and inherently works against the possibility of ideational or identity hardening inherent to forms of sociopolitical polarization.

Despite the shared threat of displacement, not all affected communities responded the same way. For example, local strongmen in Luar Batang, a neighbourhood immediately adjacent to Akuarium and the site of a heritage-listed mosque drawing pilgrims to its *keramat* (shrine to a Muslim saint) were deeply involved in the anti-Ahok movement from early on, including some of its more violent and sectarian manifestations.[19] The threat of mass eviction, however, did not translate into unequivocal support for Kampung Akuarium from these local strongmen, although there was a sense of broad social solidarity from Luar Batang residents. Initially it had been proposed by the Ahok administration that Luar Batang be rezoned as a religious tourism precinct. This would entail evicting

and relocating many of its thousands of residents to social housing in other parts of the city on the grounds that they lived illegally on government-owned land and that their presence contributed to infrastructural problems such as flooding and traffic congestion.[20] Lobbying by mainstream religious organizations, together with the potential for a significant conflict escalation, eventually resulted in the plans being shelved. Having secured lucrative control over the religious pilgrimage and heritage economy, the Luar Batang strongmen saw Kampung Akuarium's destruction as an opportunity to extend their own economic interests and sociocultural authority via Luar Batang's transformation into a heritage precinct. As such, they opposed the rebuilding of Kampung Akuarium.[21] As there were families living in both neighbourhoods, leading to many Akuarium residents moving to Luar Batang after their eviction, tensions simmered, and at several points the situation threatened to become violent.[22] Externally, however, the area was regularly reported on as a "hotbed" of unified sectarian opposition to Ahok's "wicked" (*dhzolim*) administration (*Eramuslim* 2016).

Anti-Ahok sentiment in Luar Batang manifested, in some instances, in overt anti-Chinese racism. While being an often-conspicuous element of segments of the broader 212 Movement (Fealy 2016), anti-Chinese racism was absent in neighbouring Kampung Akuarium. Explanations given by Luar Batang residents highlighted socio-spatial divisions in the area as generative of ethnic tensions, such as the high percentage of ethnic Chinese residents in upper-middle-class apartments that surround the northern end of Luar Batang.[23] In Akuarium, the prominent role in supporting the community played by Rujak Centre activists, several of whom were ethnic Chinese, was cited as a factor mitigating the spread of anti-Chinese sentiment.[24]

The deepening discourse of socio-religious polarization around the election nonetheless offered possibilities for Akuarium residents to forge strategic cross-class alliances and to push their plight onto a bigger political stage. They were able to effectively capitalize on this period of national political upheaval to make claims against powerful actors, supported by other political actors and allies, both

long-term and contingent. The political juncture was relatively short-lived, but Akuarium residents were able to capitalize on the opportunities it presented, in part because of strong community organization and the galvanizing role of committed allies such as JRMK, Rujak Centre and LBH. The result was the forging of a political contract brokered by the JRMK and other urban poor communities with governor candidate Anies Baswedan, who rode the anti-blasphemy wave to electoral victory.[25] On taking office, Anies initiated a broad consultative process involving residents, architects and related government agencies, which within three years resulted in the building of bespoke apartment blocks on the site of the old neighbourhood and the reconstituting of the Kampung Akuarium community.[26] The engagement of Akuarium and other urban poor in what was widely considered a sectarian identity movement was instrumental and contingent, and in this case successful, in redressing a violation of their rights as citizens together with its material impacts. Having served its purpose, the parameters of polarization and many of the temporary alliances forged through it ended.[27]

"Real Pribumi" or Transient Stranger? Contingent Constructions of Betawi Identity

Amid the rapid social and political change following the end of Soeharto's rule in 1998, ethnicity, religion and local identity emerged as organizational poles in contestations over space, resources and authority. In the context of socially heterogeneous neighbourhoods in Jakarta where access to resources, space and income is a source of constant tension, insecurity and negotiation, the "power of localising" and emphasizing of difference gained a new political currency in these contestations (Wilson 2015, p. 91).

Claims of indigeneity in Jakarta are, by default, contentious, considering its long history as a melting-pot city formed by waves of trans-ethnic integration, and where the majority trace a lineage to elsewhere (Simone 2014). Jakarta identity is by default creole, in ways that have been important for the promotion of postcolonial

nationhood (Knorr 2014, p. 163). Even residents who have lived in Jakarta for decades will often identify or represent themselves as relative newcomers or "strangers" to the city in so far as such representation affords a degree of flexibility, with ethnicity operating as a vehicle for individuals to secure themselves in the city via networks and established socio-economic niches (Simone 2014, p. 133).

The Betawi are commonly regarded as the original residents of Jakarta, with a creole sociocultural identity that reflects the city's social and cultural heterogeneity. The most widely accepted theory is that Betawi identity emerged from the intermixing of various ethnic groups brought to the colonial capital of Batavia by the Dutch to serve as indentured labourers, slaves, domestic servants or soldiers (Castles 1967). Traditionally smallholder farmers and landowners, many Betawi had divested their land holdings under pressure from Jakarta's relentless expansion and encountered difficulties in transitioning to new livelihoods.

Some of the most economically disenfranchised Betawi neighbourhoods were in Cakung, in East Jakarta, an area that is a mix of small to medium-sized manufacturing enterprises, several small industrial estates and one of Southeast Asia's biggest bus terminals, crammed between which are densely populated poor and lower-middle-class neighbourhoods, and a handful of upmarket estates. Long a first point of call for new arrivals to the city, Cakung is made up of mixed neighbourhoods of recent and first-generation migrants drawn to work in its furniture and shoe factories. It was from here that a new kind of militant Betawi organization emerged in the early 2000s, the Betawi Brotherhood Forum, or Forum Betawi Rempug (FBR), which articulated sharp lines between "authentic" Betawi and "migrants", together with an aggressive assertion of entitlement, reflected in their slogan of "smart arses, smash em!" (*yang kurang ajar, hajar*!).[28]

The construction of Betawi identity by the FBR as the "original" and "real owners" of Jakarta entailed a hyper-parochial emphasis on language and reinvented cultural practices together with popular

culture images of the Betawi *jawara* (martial arts strongman), such as the culture hero Si Pitung. This hard martial image by default excluded many who identified as Betawi, such as those with Chinese or Yemeni heritage (the FBR also alienated, and horrified, many middle-class Betawi who had long dominated politically powerful Betawi representative bodies such as the Betawi Consultative Body, or Badan Musyawarah Betawi [Bamus Betawi]). The FBR's early efforts to join Bamus Betawi were greeted with scorn by Central Jakarta Betawi elites, who considered it a dangerous embarrassment (Wilson 2015, p. 108). The rapid spread of the FBR, however, soon overran these objections. It was a self-proclaimed revolt of the *Betawi Pinggir* (marginal Betawi), a historical reference to Betawi communities in Jakarta's east, but now recast as a catch-all for the poor and working class. Perhaps counter-intuitively, one appeal of affiliation to groups such as FBR was the opportunities it created for forms of mobility and flow across the city for socio-economically marginal individuals to network and meet different kinds of people, which in turn provided social and economic possibilities (Wilson 2015, p.110). Parochialism, in effect, opened up new worlds. As the group expanded, it created a mobility structure and network that operated as a fulcrum of sorts for a broad range of agendas and interests.

The FBR's contingent construction of identity, ethnicity and place were mobilized as strategic capital in "othering" other residents as a means for claiming legitimacy and entitlement to territory, understood as the creation of space as an instrument through which a particular kind of authority is exercised, and as the establishment of "differentiation among inhabitants and spaces" (Simone 2014, p. 89). A particular strategy of the FBR was targeting municipal politics, with focused campaigns to either win local-level positions such as neighbourhood or village head, or to co-opt elected officials. These positions provided access to resources and opportunities for small-scale redistribution and dispensing of contracts, serving to increase the popularity of the organization. The early, often violent, conflicts orchestrated by the FBR targeted informal economic sectors dominated by other ethnic groups, in particular Madurese and Batak,

with takeovers justified on the grounds that both were "outsiders" (Brown and Wilson 2007, p. 392).

As it sought to make itself a citywide organization, the FBR reached the limits of its own rhetoric. There were only so many in the city who identified as Betawi, or "real Jakartans" (Jakarta *asli*) in the terms outlined by FBR. What was initially a powerful rhetorical tool for gaining leverage in territorial tussles and expanding its sphere of influence was now closer to a constraint. This was partially resolved by a "loosening" of who or what was "Betawi", which entailed the FBR's leadership conferring "honorary Betawi" status on key local power brokers to enable their incorporation into the organization's network (Wilson 2015, p. 107). For example, the territory of local power brokers and strongmen from Tanimbar in a Central Jakarta tourist area were integrated into FBR's franchise system through this method.

By the early 2010s, and under the leadership of Kyai Lutfi Hakim, the FBR had consolidated control over key citywide Betawi representative bodies such as Bamus Betawi and established largely functional, if not amenable, relations with rival groups and communities. This move enabled the FBR to become a distribution hub for various small contracts and opportunities for its members. Its early militancy and hard assertions of Betawi identity gave way to an even more inclusive reframing of the organization's objectives and role, away from polarizing claims of "real ownership" and militant threats of "smashing smart arses" towards a language of custodianship and collective responsibility. This evolution was further consolidated after the FBR's leadership shifted support behind incumbent president Jokowi, with a self-conscious reframing of its role as "protecting Jakarta's diversity", and a working definition of Betawi that perhaps more accurately reflected the city's history, as those "whose fate is tied to Jakarta".[29] Hakim also drew the FBR more firmly within the social and organizational networks of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), with which he had long been affiliated. After Jokowi won the 2019 election with NU's support, the FBR severed links with hardliners such as the FPI and capitalized on the increase in NU's social and

political power under Jokowi's second term, playing its role as an arbiter of mainstream notions of tolerance and pluralism (Fealy 2020).

Conclusion

The instrumental use of identity as a means for contesting or gaining access to resources, including political power, is broadly recognized as being integral to elite politics in Indonesia and elsewhere. The two cases discussed provide insights into how marginalized communities and residents within urban majority contexts have strategically engaged in polarized identity politics. In both cases, engagement in polarized political movements and mobilization around "hardened" identities was strategic and contingent. Identity mobilization was one of an array of tools through which relationships among residents, and polities, were managed, albeit in ways that are fragmented and localized, and often in lieu of the efficacy of claims to rights based on citizenship. Unequal relations of power shape and constrain these tactical engagements. It has been suggested that, in the context of heterogeneous urban centres such as Jakarta, these kinds of engagements can be in part explained by the urban majority context of translation, reflective of how identity is practised in everyday relations, operating as a space for negotiation rather than being fixed and indelible.

The dynamics of the presidential elections of 2014 and 2019 were shaped by manufactured identity polarization as an electoral strategy that operated as a means of engineering distinction between elite contestants, establishing grounds for mobilizing constituency support, in lieu of coherent ideological or policy agendas. Broad majoritarian constructions, of either Islam or an Indonesian constitutional pluralism, have been politically appealing in this regard, as each is effective in accommodating and subsuming class divisions and attendant grievances, while sustaining the existing sociopolitical hierarchy. Political actors have an incentive to employ polarizing politics to generate receptiveness to "illiberal" or otherwise self-serving projects. Post-2019 "counter-polarization", for example, saw the Jokowi administration target its polarized "other" in the form of

Islamist opposition. Yet despite its repeated invocation, including as moral panic or appeal to resentment, polarization has not resulted in increasing sustained or entrenched social conflict or division.

A perhaps more salient fault line has emerged between ongoing high levels of public support for a continuation of Indonesia's multilevel electoral democracy, and the push from political parties and some large organizations for its downscaling (see Wilson 2024). This has been a driver of counter-polarization on the part of the state, reflecting entrenched hostilities to the idea of political and social opposition (see Fealy, White and Muhtadi 2022). After manufacturing identity-based difference as a framework for political contestation and a subsequent recalibrating of elite ruling coalitions, post-election "reconciliation" has seen performative "bridge building" and co-option.[30] This has included integration of previous critics and opponents within the Jokowi administration, from his presidential rival to organizations such as NU, whose advocacy for notions of religious moderacy have been subject to political weaponization through state recalibration of the boundaries of politically acceptable expressions of Islam.[31]

Such recalibration is evidenced by the fate of groups such as FPI, which had a history spanning over two decades of manufacturing and provoking polarizing antagonisms and engaging in "symbolic militancy" in the public sphere, reaching its peak in the anti-blasphemy movement of 2016–17 (Wilson 2019). Failing to help Prabowo secure the presidency in 2019, the FPI no longer had political utility, other than as a scapegoat in the post-election realignment. Rizieq's return from self-imposed exile from Mecca during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 confirmed his status as a political irritant and locus of government opposition (Paddock 2020). This diminished political utility and emergence as a political irritant combined to see the organization promptly outlawed, with Rizieq and other FPI leaders later imprisoned on a variety of charges. The FPI's mass support base diminished quickly with little protest at its banning, including from those who had swelled the ranks of the 212 mobilizations that the FPI led.[32] It seems that they, too, had already moved on.

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NOTES

1. Habib Rizieq Shihab graduated from the Bethel Christian middle school in Petamburan in 1979.
2. Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia is an Islamist organization that has the stated objective of establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate. Operating in Indonesia as an underground network beginning in the 1980s, by the 2000s it had expanded into a nationwide organization with a significant support base. In 2017 President Jokowi signed a presidential decree outlawing the organization on the grounds that it "threatened national unity". See Movanita (2017).
3. Significantly, while surveys indicated a perception of deep division, another finding was that most were fed up with divisive political rhetoric. See *Jakarta Post* (2017).
4. A short study done on social interaction in Petamburan by Abdillah et al. (2022) has highlighted the high degree of socio-religious tolerance and absence of ethnicized or religiously framed conflict.
5. For more on the 212 Movement, see Mohamed and Waikar (2018).
6. See, for example, Warburton (2020); Muhtadi and Warburton (2020); Mietzner (2021); Fossati, Muhtadi and Warburton (2022); and Fealy, White and Muhtadi (2022).
7. It is important to note, however, that this has not been the case regarding minorities identified as "deviant" or "immoral", such as the Ahmadi, Shi'a or LGBTQ+ Indonesians (Fealy, White and Muhtadi 2022).
8. Unlike arbitrary income measures of economic class, such as those adopted by the World Bank, relational analysis of class focuses on power, exploitation and accumulation. See, for example, Pattenden (2018).
9. Relational approaches depict social reality, according to Emirbrayer (1997), in "dynamic, continuous and processual terms, and relations between social terms and units as pre-eminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substances".
10. For example, the online (mis)representations of surveys suggesting that intolerance was on the increase. As Tomsa (2020) has noted, the Indonesian survey industry has been influential in setting the tone and parameters of political discourse. In this respect, opinion polls have arguably been a significant contributor to the persistence of discursive polarization.
11. Morales et al. argue that the existence of multiple subcultures in urban areas is not a societal problem, but that difficulties arise when "societal

norms are not shared, especially those relevant to services and resources, such as health or education".

12. For a more detailed analysis of the history of the eviction and eventual rebuilding of Kampung Akuarium, see Indrawaty, Leitner and Sheppard (2023).
13. Interview with Kampung Akuarium resident, 2016. The neighbourhood was part of a 2012 political contract between Jokowi, Ahok and urban poor communities as a neighbourhood to be protected from eviction and provided with tenure security.
14. See, for example, CNN Indonesia (2016). Some partisan groups were quick to assist, such as Jaringan Merah Putih, a Gerindra-aligned NGO, and the Ratna Sarumpaet Crisis Centre.
15. These included Islamic organizations such as the FPI, Forum Ummat Islam, and Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, alongside political parties such as Gerindra and Partai Karya.
16. See *Berita Persatuan* (2016).
17. See, for example, CNN Indonesia (2017).
18. Lutfi Hakim, head of the Betawi Brotherhood Forum, commented that the increasing number of middle-class people living within gated housing estates had contributed to "a reduced sense of responsibility towards others" and a "dehumanized" notion of how the city can best be governed. Interview with Lutfi Hakim, Jakarta, Indonesia, 10 April 2016.
19. During an attempted visit to the neighbourhood in 2016, Ahok was pelted with stones after rumours circulated that he planned to replace the mosque with a mall. Some Luar Batang residents were involved in the ransacking and burning of a nearby mini-market, and this was attributed to anti-Chinese sentiment. See, for example, *Vice* (2016).
20. The poor were regularly blamed by Ahok's administration for the city's perennial flooding despite evidence to the contrary. See Wilson (2014b).
21. See Antara (2016).
22. In one instance, men linked to Luar Batang power broker Daeng Mansur began fencing parts of the rubble-strewn Kampung Akuarium site, allegedly in preparation for its clearing and redevelopment as a heritage precinct.
23. A community leader further explained that many ethnic Chinese former residents of Luar Batang had moved into these new developments. This was claimed to have generated resentment at their apparent upward social mobility and abandonment of community.
24. Interview with Akuarium residents, 2017.
25. Political contracts as a strategy had been one of trial and error. Previous contracts with Jokowi in 2012 had failed to deliver. The experience saw a significant refining of the process in 2017, including legal assistance to

ensure contracted agreements were executable and binding. For more on the use of political contracts by the urban poor, see Savirani and Aspinall (2017).

26. For a detailed account of this process, see Irawaty and Gugun (2023).
27. For example, the FPI did not retain a presence in the neighbourhood after Anies's election. The close relations with Gerindra and Prabowo also ended, with some residents stating that Prabowo's acceptance of a ministerial role in the Jokowi administration was proof that he had exploited the community for electoral gain.
28. For a more detailed description of the emergence of the FBR, see Wilson (2015) and Brown and Wilson (2007).
29. Interview with Lutfi Hakim, Jakarta, Indonesia, 3 May 2014
30. See, for example, CNN Indonesia (2023).
31. See *WartaEkonomi* (2022).
32. Some political entrepreneurs, however, have continued to attempt to reproduce the differences of 2016. See, for example, *Viva* (2022).

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