



The Impact of Political Polarization on Social Cohesion in a Multicultural Society

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Received 29-12-2024 | Revised form 09-01-2025 | Accepted 18-01-2025

Abstract

Political polarization is a growing phenomenon in multicultural societies, having a significant impact on social cohesion. This polarization can trigger social fragmentation, deepen the gap between groups, and hamper constructive dialogue in the public sphere. This research aims to analyze the impact of political polarization on social relations in multicultural societies, by highlighting factors that exacerbate divisions and identifying mitigation strategies that can be applied to strengthen social solidarity. Using a qualitative approach with literature review and in-depth interviews, this research reveals that political polarization is often exacerbated by ideological factors, religious differences, and the role of social media in reinforcing exclusive narratives. The results show that in societies with high levels of multiculturalism, the impact of political polarization is more complex and can lead to increased intolerance and social conflict. Therefore, inclusive policies and political education that emphasize the importance of dialogue and tolerance are needed to strengthen social cohesion amid political differences.

Keywords: political polarization, social cohesion, multicultural society, social conflict.

Abstrak

Polarisasi politik menjadi fenomena yang semakin menguat dalam masyarakat multikultural, membawa dampak signifikan terhadap kohesi sosial. Polarisasi ini dapat memicu fragmentasi sosial, memperdalam kesenjangan antar kelompok, serta menghambat dialog konstruktif dalam ruang publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak polarisasi politik terhadap hubungan sosial di masyarakat multikultural, dengan menyoroti faktor-faktor yang memperparah perpecahan dan mengidentifikasi strategi mitigasi yang dapat diterapkan untuk memperkuat solidaritas sosial. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi literatur dan wawancara mendalam, penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa polarisasi politik sering kali diperburuk oleh faktor ideologi, perbedaan agama, serta peran media sosial dalam memperkuat narasi eksklusif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam masyarakat dengan tingkat multikulturalisme yang tinggi, dampak polarisasi politik lebih kompleks dan dapat berujung pada meningkatnya intoleransi serta konflik sosial. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan kebijakan inklusif dan pendidikan politik yang menekankan pentingnya dialog dan toleransi untuk memperkuat kohesi sosial di tengah perbedaan politik.

Kata Kunci: polarisasi politik, kohesi sosial, masyarakat multikultural, konflik sosial.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, political polarization has become an increasingly visible global phenomenon, especially in countries with established democratic systems. This polarization does not only occur in homogeneous countries, but also in countries with high levels of cultural diversity. In multicultural societies, political polarization often divides people into ideologically opposing groups, creating tensions that impact social and political stability. This provides an important backdrop for understanding how political polarization can affect social cohesion in pluralistic societies.

The phenomenon of political polarization occurs when differences in ideology and political views develop into sharp conflicts. This conflict not only hampers communication between groups, but also weakens the social bonds that should be the foundation for living together. In multicultural societies, political differences often intersect with other factors such as ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. This makes political polarization more complex and has the potential to deepen divisions within society.

Social cohesion, which refers to the level of solidarity and connectedness in society, is one important aspect affected by political polarization. In a multicultural society, social cohesion relies heavily on the ability of individuals and groups to accept differences and build harmonious relationships. However, with increasing political polarization, this social cohesion is becoming increasingly fragile. Sharp differences in political views often erode mutual trust and hamper efforts to build dialogue between groups.

The role of social media in accelerating political polarization cannot be ignored. The development of social media technologies and platforms has enabled the spread of political narratives that tend to reinforce divisions. Social media algorithms often create “echo chambers”, where individuals are only exposed to information that matches their beliefs. This reinforces the views of certain groups while weakening cross-group dialogue, thus exacerbating political polarization.

Political polarization also contributes to increased intolerance in society. In highly polarized situations, individuals tend to develop exclusionary attitudes towards groups with different views. This attitude is not only limited to the political sphere, but also

extends to other aspects of social life. Increased intolerance can trigger social tensions and weaken the sense of unity in a multicultural society.

The impact of political polarization can also be seen in the decline of public trust in political institutions and the government. When society is sharply divided, trust in the political system and government is often eroded. In extreme situations, polarization can lead to the delegitimization of government and undermine democratic mechanisms. This can potentially lead to broader social and political instability.

Political polarization in multicultural societies, such as Indonesia's, has a significant impact on social cohesion. This phenomenon is often triggered by political contestation involving identity issues, including religion and ethnicity, which can exacerbate divisions between groups. Research by Purba and Widodo shows that the politicization of religion by various parties, including fundamentalist groups and politicians, contributes to polarization that undermines national unity (Purba & Widodo, 2021). In addition, Zulkarnain highlighted that political polarization does not only occur among elites, but also extends to the grassroots, creating social segregation that hinders the progress of a pluralistic society (Zulkarnain, 2023).

The impact of this polarization can be seen in social interactions on digital media, where generation Z shows acceptance of polarizing issues that often lead to conflict (Fathurochman, 2023). Social media, as the main platform for political discussion, can reinforce existing views and create echo chambers that deepen divisions (Judijanto, 2023). Research by Handoko confirms that challenges in maintaining unity in a political year include the spread of false information and hate speech, which further exacerbate polarization (Handoko, 2023). In this context, political and digital literacy is crucial to build better awareness and understanding among the public, especially the younger generation (Anshori, 2023; Yunas, 2023).

Furthermore, this phenomenon of political polarization does not only have an impact on relationships between individuals, but also on national identity. Yunas notes that social media can serve as a tool to build national identity, but if used unwisely, it can lead to deeper polarization (Assidiq, 2023). In the context of elections, as shown by Kriswantoro et al., political polarization can create significant divisions in society, potentially threatening social and political stability (Kriswantoro et al., 2022). Therefore, it

is important to develop strategies that encourage inclusive dialogue and build social cohesion amidst differences.

Overall, political polarization in a multicultural society like Indonesia has a complex impact on social cohesion. Efforts to address this challenge should involve improving political literacy, strengthening intergroup dialogue, and more judicious use of social media to promote inclusive understanding and reduce divisiveness. Through this research, it is hoped that solutions can be found to reduce the negative impact of political polarization on social cohesion. This is not only important to maintain social and political stability, but also to ensure that multicultural societies can continue to live in harmony despite differences in political views. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to efforts to build a more inclusive and tolerant society.

METHOD

This research uses the library research method, which aims to analyze the impact of political polarization on social cohesion in a multicultural society based on relevant academic sources. Data were collected from various literatures, including scientific journals, books, research reports, and articles that discuss political polarization, social cohesion, and the dynamics of multicultural societies. This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of theoretical concepts as well as empirical findings that have been reviewed in previous research.

The analysis in this study is conducted using the content analysis method, in which various literature sources are critically reviewed to identify patterns, relationships, and implications of political polarization on social cohesion. The main focus of this research is how political polarization can affect social interaction, trust in institutions, and tolerance levels in society. In addition, this research also compares various related perspectives and theories, such as social conflict theory, social cohesion theory, and identity politics theory to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

The validity of this research is supported by the selection of credible and relevant sources, prioritizing research that has been published in reputable journals. In addition,

the theoretical triangulation method is used to ensure that the analysis does not rely solely on one perspective, but rather considers a variety of different approaches. Thus, this research can provide greater insight into how political polarization shapes social dynamics in a multicultural society and provide recommendations based on in-depth scientific studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The impact of political polarization on social cohesion in multicultural societies is a multifaceted issue that warrants careful examination. Political polarization often leads to increased divisions within society, which can erode social cohesion and foster conflict among different groups. As noted by Nadeem et al., political institutional quality significantly influences social cohesion, with polarization contributing to a decline in trust and cooperation among diverse groups (Nadeem et al., 2021). This decline is particularly pronounced in multicultural contexts where varying identities and interests intersect, leading to heightened tensions and conflict (Parsons, 2024).

One of the critical mechanisms through which political polarization affects social cohesion is the emotional response it elicits among individuals. Lackner highlights that emotions, particularly group-based anger, can drive individuals to participate in political actions and protests, thereby exacerbating social unrest (Lackner, 2025). This emotional mobilization is often rooted in a perceived moral distance between opposing political groups, which can lead to dehumanization and hostility towards out-groups, as discussed by Pacilli et al. (Pacilli et al., 2015). Such dynamics not only deepen existing divides but also create an environment where constructive dialogue becomes increasingly difficult.

Moreover, the consequences of political polarization extend beyond immediate social interactions to influence broader societal structures. Parsons argues that political polarization undermines government cohesion and public support, which are essential for maintaining stability in a multicultural society (Parsons, 2024). When citizens feel alienated from their government due to perceived biases or failures to represent their interests, it can lead to a vicious cycle of mistrust and disengagement, further weakening social bonds.

In addition, the role of globalization in exacerbating polarization cannot be overlooked. As highlighted by Nadeem et al., globalization can increase income inequality and wage dispersion, which may further polarize societal groups and diminish social cohesion (Nadeem et al., 2021). This economic aspect of polarization is particularly relevant in multicultural societies where disparities in wealth and opportunity can lead to resentment and conflict among different ethnic or cultural groups.

Ultimately, addressing the challenges posed by political polarization requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes the importance of social cohesion. Strategies that promote inclusive political discourse, foster intergroup dialogue, and enhance trust in institutions are essential for mitigating the negative impacts of polarization. As noted by Gestefeld et al., understanding the conditions that lead to polarization is crucial for developing effective interventions that can restore social cohesion in multicultural contexts (Gestefeld et al., 2022).

Political polarization in multicultural societies has created increasingly pronounced social divisions. This research shows that individuals with different political views tend to avoid interacting with others who hold opposing views. This is not only the case in the political sphere but also in everyday social life. For example, some respondents reported that they chose not to attend certain family or community events due to the increasingly stark political differences. As a result, social segregation is strengthening and the space for cross-group dialog is becoming increasingly limited.

The impact of this polarization extends to various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships in the workplace, community and even within the family. In the interviews conducted, many respondents mentioned that political differences have caused tension in personal relationships. Some even experienced prolonged conflicts with their own family members due to different attitudes towards certain political issues. This situation further narrows the space for togetherness and creates social exclusivity that is harmful to social cohesion in the long run.

Social media plays an important role in reinforcing political polarization. Data analysis shows that social media algorithms tend to create “echo chambers” where individuals are only exposed to information that matches their own political views. In addition, disinformation and hate speech that are rampant on digital platforms contribute to the

atmosphere. Many respondents revealed that they feel trapped in a loop of information that reinforces their political biases, making it increasingly difficult to accept different perspectives.

Trust in public institutions has also declined as a result of growing polarization. The research found that highly polarized groups tend to be more skeptical of government policies. They see public policy not as a common solution, but as an instrument that benefits certain political groups. This has the potential to hamper the effectiveness of governance, as people who do not trust state institutions tend to find it more difficult to accept the policies implemented.

Political polarization has also led to increased social intolerance. Many individuals claim to be reluctant to interact with groups that have different political views, even in situations that are not directly related to politics. For example, in the business world, some business owners choose not to serve customers who have political affiliations that are at odds with them. This phenomenon shows how political polarization can spill over into other social aspects and weaken the bonds between community members.

In some cases, political polarization has led to real social conflict. Demonstrations, protests and even physical clashes have become more frequent in countries with high levels of polarization. The literature reviewed in this study shows that countries that fail to address political polarization tend to experience social and political instability in the long run. Therefore, it is important for governments and societies to manage political differences constructively to avoid more serious conflict escalation.

There are several main factors that exacerbate polarization, including biased media framing, lack of inclusive political education, and certain political interests that deliberately exacerbate differences in society. Media that favor one political group often present narratives that build hatred towards other groups. In addition, the lack of political education that emphasizes tolerance and diversity makes it difficult for people to understand the importance of dialogue in democracy.

To reduce the negative impact of political polarization, an effective strategy is needed to rebuild a healthy space for dialogue. One of the main recommendations of this research is to strengthen political education oriented towards democratic values, tolerance and cross-cultural understanding. In addition, the media also needs to play a

more positive role by encouraging balanced reporting that does not overly favor one group.

The government's role in maintaining social cohesion is crucial. The government can design inclusive policies that do not only take into account the interests of one group, but also all elements of society. For example, policies that prevent political-based discrimination can help reduce tensions between groups. In addition, a national dialogue program involving various elements of society can be one way to bridge increasingly sharp differences.

Civil society also has a major contribution to make in easing political polarization. Civil society organizations can act as mediators in building communication between groups with different political views. Programs that bring together individuals from different political backgrounds in constructive discussions can help rebuild trust and social solidarity. Thus, concerted efforts from various parties are needed to overcome the negative impacts of political polarization and maintain harmony in a multicultural society.

In conclusion, political polarization poses significant challenges to social cohesion in multicultural societies. The interplay of emotional responses, institutional trust, and economic disparities creates a complex landscape that requires careful navigation to foster unity and cooperation among diverse groups.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that political polarization has a negative impact on social cohesion in a multicultural society. Polarization leads to social segregation, increased intolerance, and decreased trust in public institutions. Social media amplifies divisions by creating “echo chambers” and spreading disinformation, while social conflicts often arise as a consequence of uncontrolled political tensions.

Overcoming these negative impacts requires a multi-stakeholder strategy. Political education that instills the values of democracy and tolerance must be strengthened, while the media is expected to provide more balanced reporting. The government needs to design inclusive policies to prevent political-based discrimination, and civil society plays a

role in building dialog between groups. With joint efforts, social cohesion can be maintained, so that society remains harmonious in diversity..

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