

# **Redefining the Islamic Defenders Front's (FPI) identity after its dissolution by the Indonesian government**

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DOI:10.18326/ijims.v13i2. 393-426

## Abstract

This research aims to understand how identity redefinition occurs and what cultural variables result in identity redefinition. The Indonesian government has disbanded several mass organizations throughout the years. To ensure its survival, the group hid among the crowds. Meanwhile, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), which the government had disbanded in 2020, was renamed the Islamic United Front, and it maintained a milder stance toward the government to survive. Several research studies have examined the government's rationale for abolishment. However, research on how organizational actors react to their organizations' dissolution is still scarce. The research examined the former Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) members' perceptions of their organization's dissolution by the government in 2020. The study utilized a qualitative research design. The data analysis was performed inductively to ascertain the former FPI members' subjective opinions of the organizational redefinition. The findings indicated that former FPI members reinvented their identity after the government's disbandment as a means of survival by adopting more lenient, accommodating, and inclusive views toward the government and other mass groups. Also, the disintegration of radical religious groups may catalyze a new relationship between radical Islamic organizations and the state.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana redefinisi identitas terjadi dan variabel budaya apa yang menyebabkan adanya redefinisi identitas. Pemerintah Indonesia telah membubarkan beberapa ormas selama beberapa tahun. Dalam rangka memastikan keberadaannya, kelompok itu bersembunyi di antara kerumunan. Sementara itu, Front Pembela Islam (FPI) yang dibubarkan pemerintah pada tahun 2020 berganti nama menjadi Front Persatuan Islam, dan mempertahankan sikap yang lebih lunak terhadap pemerintah untuk bertahan. Beberapa peneliti telah meneliti alasan pemerintah melakukan penghapusan. Namun, penelitian tentang bagaimana pelaku organisasi bereaksi terhadap pembubaran organisasi mereka masih belum banyak dilakukan. Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi mantan anggota Front Pembela Islam (FPI) tentang pembubaran organisasinya oleh pemerintah pada tahun 2020. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa mantan anggota FPI menemukan kembali identitas mereka setelah pembubaran pemerintah sebagai cara bertahan hidup dengan mengadopsi

pandangan yang lebih lunak, akomodatif, dan inklusif terhadap pemerintah dan kelompok massa lainnya. Selain itu, disintegrasi kelompok agama secara radikal dapat memicu hubungan baru antara organisasi Islam radikal dan Negara.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Defenders Front; Organizational disbandment; Radical Islamic; Radical movement; Redefining identity*

## **Introduction**

The dissolution of the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) by the Indonesian government in 2020 marked a significant turning point in the intricate dynamics between the state and radical Islamic groups. This pivotal moment prompted a reevaluation of the strategies employed by such groups in response to government actions, revealing a nuanced pattern of adaptation and survival. The aftermath of the FPI's collapse provides a lens through which we can explore how radical Islamic organizations navigate the challenging landscape created by state interventions.

The FPI's disbandment in 2020 acted as a catalyst for a broader phenomenon, wherein various radical Islamic groups strategically redefined their identities to endure the pressures exerted by government measures. The case of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), disbanded in 2017, is illustrative of this adaptive trend. In response to the government's actions, HTI opted for a subtle transformation, removing organizational symbols and shifting its operations to college campuses and mosques<sup>1</sup>. This strategic move allowed the group to persist, albeit in a more covert manner, blending into the social fabric to avoid heightened scrutiny. Renaming and repositioning of the FPI as the Islamic United Front exemplify a similar strategic

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<sup>1</sup>Ali Maksum, "Discourses On Islam And Democracy In Indonesia: A Study on the Intellectual Debate between Liberal Islam Network (JIL) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (2017), 405-422, <http://jiis.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIs/article/view/557>.

maneuver undertaken by radical Islamic groups to ensure their continued existence. The adoption of a milder stance toward the government reflects a pragmatic approach to survival, acknowledging the necessity of navigating a more conciliatory path. This shift in strategy signifies a recognition among radical Islamic groups that adapting their public image and relationship with the government is crucial for their sustainability in an increasingly hostile regulatory environment. The ripple effect of the FPI's dissolution resonates across the spectrum of radical Islamic organizations in Indonesia. Entities such as Jamaah Islamiyah, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, and other Islamic Jihadist organizations witnessed a decline following the bans on HTI and FPI. This cascade effect underscores the interconnectedness of radical Islamic movements and their collective response to governmental interventions. The dissolution of one group triggers a domino effect, compelling others to reassess their strategies and, in some cases, cease activities altogether.

The insightful perspective offered by Islamic scholar Azyumardi Azra adds depth to our understanding of these strategic adaptations. Azra highlights that the redefinition of identities is not merely a reactive measure but a methodical strategy employed by radical Islamic groups to confront the challenges posed by a government with a hostile stance. It underscores the agency of these groups in actively shaping their narratives, recalibrating their public image, and navigating the complex interplay between religious ideologies and state authority. These circumstances have far-reaching implications for the landscape of radical Islamic groups in Indonesia. The adaptive strategies employed by these groups, ranging from subtle transformations to outright cessation of activities, demonstrate a complex interplay between identity, survival instincts, and responses to state interventions. The case of the FPI serves as a pivotal case study in understanding the dynamics of radical Islamic movements in the face of

governmental actions, shedding light on the resilience and adaptability inherent in these groups as they navigate an evolving socio-political landscape.<sup>2</sup>

Previous studies on the redefinition of Islamic groups' identities—after their collapse—often adopted two distinct perspectives: sociopolitical and security stability. According to studies conducted using the first viewpoint, the official authority has consistently asserted that Islamic groups are misguided and hazardous to Pancasila philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Studies employing the second approach have examined how radical Islamic groups might endanger a country's stability.<sup>4</sup> Our examination of publications under both views revealed that studies of identity redefinition have mostly ignored the subjective perceptions of the disbanded Islamic group members. Leading figures and activists from the banned Islamic groups stated that they have never been invited to discussion before to the government's decision. Therefore, the perspectives of the banned radical organizational actors are critical for establishing a thorough knowledge that enables the formulation of suitable policies to address radical organizations' concerns.

Redefining identity in response to unfavorable circumstances is a tactic Islamic groups should use when the state and Islamic organizations are in disagreement. Since Identity is shaped by knowledge, values, emotions, and social context, it can change through group affiliation and symbolic representation, influencing attitudes. This process can foster inclusivity. Research on social movements, especially among the

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<sup>2</sup>Achmad Nasrudin Yahya, *Azyumardi Azra: Pembubaran HTI Dan FPI Jadi Peristiwa Penting Dalam Sejarah Gerakan Islam Di Indonesia*, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/01/15/19374191/azyumardi-azra-pembubaran-hti-dan-fpi-jadi-peristiwa-penting-dalam-sejarah?page=all>; Arthur Garrison, "Terrorism: The Nature of Its History", *Criminal Justice Studies: A Critical Journal of Crime, Law and Society*, Vol. 16, no. 1 (2003), 39–52.

<sup>3</sup>Bambang Prasetyo, "Pembubaran Hizbut Tahrir di Indonesia dalam Perspektif Sosial Politik", *Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol. 19 (2016), 251–164.

<sup>4</sup>Bayu Marfiando, "Pembubaran Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) Ditinjau Dari Kebebasan Berserikat", *Jurnal Ilmu Kepolisian* Vol. 14, no. 2 (2020), 89.

youth, explores identity redefinition. It reflects the evolving connection between individuals and groups, adapting to changes in communication. Identity redefinition can lead to positive interactions and structural shifts or negative conflicts. Each side to a dispute has its own interests, which, together with power, will determine the appropriate policy. Similarly, identity redefinition is a tactic for people and religious organizations to change to sustain their existence. Redefining identity may be seen as an organization's adaptive response to structural circumstances and conditions and a process of cultural transformation used as a survival strategy.

On the other hand Social movements are embodied in social organizations, which have features and are susceptible to a variety of internal and external forces (e.g., organizational structure and value internalization) that impact the group's ability to achieve its objectives.<sup>5</sup> Van Dyke and Amos<sup>6</sup> wrote that social movements do not always rely on social coalitions to mobilize large numbers of people, and these movements frequently emphasize five elements in achieving their goals: (a) social ties; (b) a conducive organizational structure; (c) ideology, culture, and identity; (d) institutional environment; and (e) resources. However, social movements may encounter problems driving their collective movements.<sup>7</sup> These movements sometimes attract dark actors who impact the collective movement's original aims, subsequent resolutions, and policies

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<sup>5</sup>N. Zald Mayer and Ash Garner Roberta, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay, and Change," in *Social Movements in an Organizational Society* (Routledge, 2017), 121-142; Nella Van Dyke and Bryan Amos, "Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success," *Sociology Compass* (2017); Michael Yaziji and Jonathan P. Doh, "The Role of Ideological Radicalism and Resource Homogeneity in Social Movement Organization Campaigns against Corporations," *Organization Studies* (2013).

<sup>6</sup>Van Dyke and Amos, "Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success."

<sup>7</sup>Matthew Lee, Tommaso Ramus, and Antonino Vaccaro, "From Protest to Product: Strategic Frame Brokerage in a Commercial Social Movement Organization," *Academy of Management Journal* 61, no. 6 (December 2018): 2130-2158.

addressing these social challenges.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the notion of social movements is inextricably tied to a variety of modern social and political forces and their national scenarios according to particular political situations driven by specific interests.<sup>9</sup>

This research aims to understand how identity redefinition occurs and what cultural variables result in identity redefinition. The examination of these issues enables an in-depth understanding of the connection between radical Islamic groups and the state in the context of democratic freedom and civil society reinforcement. Additionally, this understanding assists in developing a more contextual and effective strategy for dealing with similar religious groups. The analysis of the redefinition of Islamic groups' identities after their collapse provides valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary political violence. The first situation highlights two predominant perspectives—sociopolitical and security stability—through which scholars often view the aftermath of such collapses. On the one hand, official authorities assert that these groups pose a threat to the Pancasila philosophy; on the other, studies examine the potential impact of radical Islamic groups on a country's stability, particularly concerning the distinction between state ideology and FPI ideology.

Despite emphasis on sociopolitical and security stability in understanding post-collapse dynamics, the second analysis suggests that identity remains crucial a factor in contemporary political violence. While some skeptics may downplay the role of identity and other ideological phenomena, it is acknowledged that identities can indeed exacerbate and intensify conflicts.

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<sup>8</sup>Erich J. Sommerfeldt and Aimei Yang, "Relationship Networks as Strategic Issues Management: An Issue-Stage Framework of Social Movement Organization Network Strategies," *Public Relations Review* (2017).

<sup>9</sup>María Teresa Findji, "From Resistance to Social Movement: The Indigenous Authorities Movement in Colombia," in *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America* (Routledge, 2018), 112–133.

The recognition of the exacerbating role of identity is supported by findings such as those by Wucherpennig et al., who observe that civil wars, where one party perceives itself as fighting for excluded ethnic groups, tend to last longer than others. Furthermore, the analysis expect to acknowledges the limitations of overly dismissing the role of identity in political violence and the connection between weak social cohesion among groups and increased risks of terrorist violence further underscores the relevance of identity in shaping the trajectory of post-collapse situations. In the context of the redefined identities of FPI, the subjective perceptions of the members, can be highlighted in the first situation, gain added significance. The fact that leading figures and activists from FPI have not been included in discussions regarding government decisions emphasizes a critical gap in understanding the perspectives of the very individuals whose identities are at the center of the discourse.

### **Reforming organization**

The complex relationship between civil society groups and the state has persisted for decades due to differing views on the state and welfare. Regulation of mass organizations in Indonesia should align with Pancasila values, the 1945 Constitution, and related laws. The government can dissolve groups conflicting with these principles, as seen with the disbandment of organizations like FPI and HTI, although it raises concerns about freedom of association. Law No. 19 of 2017 grants the government the power to dissolve deviant communal organizations, but this challenges the fundamental freedom to associate. Indonesian community groups must adapt their ideologies to align with Pancasila to avoid dissolution, despite potential debates over democratic rights. Government oversight and citizen reporting play a role in monitoring organizations that violate state ideology and law. The dissolution of groups like FPI is driven by



philosophical, sociological, and legal considerations, occasionally sparking debates on freedom of assembly and expression.

The dissolution of the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI) marks a pivotal moment in the trajectory of Islamic organizations in Indonesia, signaling a transformative phase in their growth and reshaping the dynamics of state-Islamic group interactions. The response from FPI to its dissolution, manifested through a deliberate redefinition of its identity, reflects a profound shift in the organization's attitude and strategic direction. This redefinition can be dissected into three pivotal changes that collectively signify the evolution of FPI; *first*, FPI's identity redefinition is evident in the restructuring of the organization itself. This restructuring extends beyond mere cosmetic changes, delving into a fundamental reevaluation of the organizational structure and spirit. The dissolution prompted FPI to reconsider its internal dynamics, fostering adaptability, flexibility, and inclusivity. The organizational spirit, once characterized by adversarial confrontations, has undergone a metamorphosis to embrace a more cooperative and community-centric ethos. This shift reflects a conscious effort to distance the organization from its previous confrontational stance and cultivate a more harmonious internal environment. *Second*, dimension of FPI's identity redefinition involves a meticulous reassessment and reformation of its policies and programs. The organization, once notorious for its involvement in controversial and confrontational activities, has undertaken a strategic overhaul of its agenda. This realignment is apparent in the adoption of policies that emphasize humanitarian values, educational outreach (da'wah), and a commitment to law and human rights. The restructuring of programs signifies a departure from previous aggressive postures, opting for a more courteous, elegant, law-abiding, gentle, and inclusive approach. FPI's recalibrated policies and programs mirror an earnest endeavor to align with broader societal

values and demonstrate a commitment to positive social engagement. *Third*, a crucial facet of FPI's identity redefinition lies in the fundamental reorientation of its relationship with governing authorities. The dissolution mandated a strategic reconsideration of the organization's stance towards the state. FPI, in response, has transformed its relationship with authority from one of overt opposition to a more cooperative and constructive engagement. This recalibration is evident in the organization's efforts to establish a rapport with the government, demonstrating a willingness to collaborate within the confines of legal and regulatory frameworks. The shift towards a more amicable interaction with authorities reflects a strategic adaptation aimed at securing the organization's viability within the constraints of state regulations.

### **Reconceptualization of FPI organization: structure and organizational culture**

At the end of 2020, the Indonesian government formally disbanded the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). As a result, FPI 'dissolved' its structure and renamed and reorganized its operations. The Islamic Defenders Front was renamed the United Islamic Front and then the Islamic Brotherhood Front, both of which were also abbreviated as FPI. FPI's solicitor, Aziz Yanuar, indicated that the name change resulted from a mutual agreement and the counsel of Habib Rizieq Shihab. According to Agustin (2021), the shift from 'defender' to 'unity' and then 'brotherhood' represents a reorientation of the FPI organization toward a more communal or cultural orientation. According to Habib Rizieq Shihab, genuine brotherhood encompasses both defense and unity.<sup>10</sup> The FPI's swift reaction to the disbandment by creating a new organization demonstrated that the

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<sup>10</sup>Sachril Agustin, FPI Ganti Nama Lagi, Front Persatuan Islam Jadi Front Persaudaraan Islam (Jakarta, 2021), <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5321568/fpi-ganti-nama-lagi-front-persatuan-islam-jadi-front-persaudaraan-islam>.

government succeeded in disbanding the organization procedurally but not dismantling its philosophy. Indeed, FPI continues to operate under its new name and initiatives.<sup>11</sup>

The defunct Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the new Islamic Brotherhood Front (FPI) have a similar vision and objective. Both organizations seek to “apply Islamic precepts in all facets of life.” The objective of the former Islamic Defender Front is to thoroughly implement *al-amr bi al-ma’ruf wa an-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (commanding what is lawful and prohibiting what is evil) in all spheres of human existence (*kaffah*). The group intended to nurture good people (*salihat*) who live in a prosperous country and receive an abundance of blessings and the pleasure of God (*baldat tayyibah wa rabb ghafûr*). However, the new FPI introduced a new orientation in its Articles of Association toward manifesting *Islam rahmatan li al-alamin* by protecting Islam and Pancasila from liberalism, atheism, communism, capitalism, and extremism. The reorientation has undoubtedly transformed the new FPI from an organization identified with a stern and uncompromising attitude to one that is tolerant of social diversity and devoted to defending Indonesia and Pancasila doctrine. The goal of the Islamic Brotherhood Front is the creation of a complete Islamic life that functions as a blessing for the whole world (*rahmatan li al-alamin*) and deepens the Indonesians’ brotherhood. The organization’s purpose is to implement Islamic principles in all parts of life, emphasizing humanity, justice, brotherhood, and unity.<sup>12</sup>

FPI’s political actions were manifested in its advocacy for a sharia-ruled Indonesia. This objective demands FPI members to educate and nurture individuals following the Islamic law and protect them from the impact of

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<sup>11</sup>Chairul Fikri, *FPI Ganti Nama Lagi Menjadi Front Persaudaraan Islam*, Jakarta, 2021. <https://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/716669/fpi-ganti-nama-lagi-menjadi-front-persaudaraan-islam>.

<sup>12</sup>FPI, *Anggaran Dasar Front Persaudaraan Islam (FPI)*, Jakarta, 2021. <https://www.faktakini.info/2021/09/anggaran-dasar-front-persaudaraan-islam.html>.

sin and wrongful acts of exploitation. Islamic law was imposed on society by demonstrating that tolerating tyranny would result in moral damage to the community and by elucidating how Islamic law is administered. At least 64 disputed violent actions were committed by members of the Laskar Pembela Islam, FPI's paramilitary army, including the closure of nightclubs, brothels, and food stalls, the threat and imprisonment of particular nationalities, and clashes with other religious-based groups. Unsurprisingly, many political parties see the FPI as a symbol of aggressive conduct in religious preaching. The new FPI attempted to improve on the organization's previous unpleasant and strict reputation. During the declaration, FPI High Priest Habib Rizieq Shihab said that the new FPI must prioritize the movement's three pillars: humanity, education (*da'wah*), and law and human rights. Additionally, K.H. Sobri Lubis, FPI Chairperson, stressed that the new FPI must exhibit delicate, courteous, and elegant organizational conduct and adhere to the law in its *da'wah*.<sup>13</sup>

### **Changes in FPI's policy and work program**

FPI has been exploring symbolic Islamic fanaticism in its organizational activities since its founding. As a result, the FPI's political activities reflect their emotional attachment, mass power, and group interests. The emotional bond is established by a series of regular group Islamic studies and direct actions aimed at prohibiting wrongdoings in the society (*an-nahy 'an al-munkar*). FPI's efforts in each social movement underline its members' outrage and disappointment at the governing regime for failing to take necessary action/decisions when addressing specific socio-political situations. Following the government's prohibition, FPI's social activities and actions shifted toward prevention, emphasizing *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf* (commanding the right), such as assisting flood victims in East Jakarta's

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<sup>13</sup>Fikri, *FPI Ganti Nama Lagi Menjadi Front Persaudaraan Islam...*

Kampung Cipinang Melayu and cleaning Bethel Petamburan Church.

The FPI's movements revolved around its leaders and sub-organizations. Habib Rizieq Sihab, the founder, general chairman, and high priest of the FPI, is the organization's central figure. His superb speeches serve as a magnet for the group, although his policies often result in societal polemics. Meanwhile, the FPI's main sub-organization is made up of paramilitary forces that are very devoted to Habib Rizieq Shihab. Following the government's prohibition, the paramilitary organization ceased aggressive and physical operations while increasing their social and humanitarian activities.

FPI seeks to create Islamic law and Islamic governance. As a result, FPI's efforts include both social and political dimensions. The FPI's desire to defend the Islamic system within the multicultural setting of Indonesia resulted in the organization's exclusive and intolerant attitudes against other religious organizations. FPI's work promoting the implementation of Islamic principles and rules in Indonesia grew the organization into an exclusive and self-righteous entity. Following the prohibition, the FPI rebranded itself and engaged in political, economic, educational, and social activities.

### **Redefining the relationship between organization and authority**

Azis Yanuar, FPI's attorney, claimed that the group would not register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. Article 28e paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution mentioned that everyone has the right to join, gather, and express his or her rights. According to Yanuar, the Constitutional Court's 2013 judgment No. 82, Article 16 paragraph (3) and Article 18 of the mass organization legislation, which requires all groups to get a registration certificate (SKT), violates the 1945 Constitution. Organizations that do not have a registration certificate (SKT) are not registered but are not

immediately considered defunct.

FPI maintained a non-confrontational approach toward the government after its second founding in mid-2021. The group was not outspoken in its opposition to the government's policies. For instance, the group did not march in the streets in response to recent political events, such as the government's inadequate management of the Covid-19 pandemic and the halal status of the Covid-19 vaccination.

Abu Fihir Alattas emphasized in the statement that all FPI guardians, members, and supporters should avoid needless battles with the tyrannical dictatorship, and the Islamic United Front was established to preserve religion, country, and state in line with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. The FPI declarator's comment showed that the new FPI favored an accommodating rather than combative stance toward the government. The new Islamic Brotherhood Front (FPI) adheres to five philosophical tenets: (1) preserving the religion and country, (2) da'wah and Islamic education, (3) law enforcement and human rights, (4) humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and (5) the establishment of honest and trustworthy media (Statutes of the Islamic Brotherhood Front).<sup>14</sup>

### **The missing POV**

In the context of Indonesia, the Front Pembela Islam (FPI) has long been perceived as a socio-religious movement with a reputation for frequently resorting to violence, representing what many consider the adversarial face of Islam. However, a comprehensive examination reveals a multifaceted evolution in the trajectory of the FPI, challenging simplistic characterizations. This research, delving into the post-dissolution phase of the FPI, provides insights into the organization's transformative journey.

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<sup>14</sup>FPI, *Anggaran Dasar Front Persaudaraan Islam (FPI)*...

Contrary to expectations, the disbanded FPI did not fade into obscurity but instead underwent a remarkable metamorphosis, emerging as a more adaptable, refined, and inclusive entity, from the notion that the FPI's survival and relevance necessitated a strategic redefinition of its identity. The disbandment served as a catalyst for this transformation, compelling the organization to reassess its *modus operandi* and adapt to changing sociopolitical landscapes.

In the imperative standpoint of members within the newly-formed Islamic Front Unity (new-FPI), the imperative to redefine identities has emerged as a crucial necessity for sustaining the FPI's relevance and continuity within a dynamic political and societal landscape. This imperative, rooted in the demand for adaptability, compelled the FPI to undergo a fundamental transformation, relinquishing its confrontational image in favor of a more flexible, graceful, and inclusive organizational ethos. It is essential to note that the dissolution of the organization did not automatically erase its previous philosophy and fighting spirit; instead, the dissolution seemed to galvanize the congregation, reinforcing their commitment to what they perceive as the pursuit of truth. The alteration of the organization's name—from 'defender' to 'unity' and subsequently to 'brotherhood'—reflects a deliberate shift towards a more communal or cultural orientation. According to Shihab, these name changes signify a reorientation that encompasses genuine brotherhood, combining elements of self-defense and unity.

Crucially, the swift response of FPI leaders in establishing a new organization underscores a critical point: while the government may have dismantled the FPI organization procedurally, it has not effectively extinguished its underlying philosophy. This resilience suggests that the FPI can effectively resume its activities through the adoption of a new structure and initiatives. Importantly, this perspective sheds light on a

crucial aspect often overlooked in the broader discourse—the voices and perspectives of FPI members. The argument presented here contends that the government’s procedural disbandment did not adequately address the underlying beliefs and motivations of the organization’s members, who remained steadfast in their commitment to what they perceive as a quest for truth. By not engaging with the viewpoints and concerns of FPI members, the state may have inadvertently allowed for the organization’s philosophical continuity and operational resurgence, as evidenced by the swift establishment of the new-FPI. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the FPI’s dynamics necessitates considering the perspectives of its members, whose voices have been largely absent in the government’s actions and decisions.<sup>15</sup>

In the inception of the new FPI, the deliberate incorporation of ideals into the organizational framework serves as a strategic maneuver by FPI leaders to invoke emotional resonance and garner support from former FPI members. The active engagement of members in the newly established organization serves as a tangible manifestation of their unwavering dedication to the political trajectory outlined by FPI leaders. The seemingly straightforward alteration of the organization’s name can be interpreted as a mechanism to both accommodate and channel the emotional sentiments and active participation of the congregation. The process of reconstructing the congregation’s identity involves implementing a new organizational structure, adopting more tempered approaches, and avoiding direct confrontations.

This transformation in FPI’s approach is a direct outcome of the internalization of values, emotions, active involvement, concern, and the pride associated with being a member of a government-banned group. It is crucial to emphasize that this perspective elucidates a facet often

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<sup>15</sup>Fikri, *FPI Ganti Nama Lagi Menjadi Front Persaudaraan Islam...*



overlooked in the overarching narrative—the viewpoints and experiences of FPI members. Their active participation in the new organization underscores their allegiance to the cause championed by FPI leaders, showcasing a nuanced understanding that extends beyond mere procedural disbandment. The absence of direct engagement with the perspectives of FPI members in the state's decisions and actions inadvertently allowed for the organization's strategic evolution and resilience. Recognizing the internal dynamics and emotional dimensions of FPI members provides a more comprehensive understanding of the group's adaptability and persistence in the face of government measures.<sup>16</sup>

### **FPI among identitarian narattive**

The analysis of the FPI's transformation in Indonesia reveals a nuanced interplay between identity and ideology. The statement emphasizes the necessity for the FPI to redefine its identity for continued viability, highlighting a shift from a confrontational stance to a more flexible, graceful, and inclusive organization. This evolution challenges a rigid dichotomy between 'identity' and 'ideology,' as the FPI's name changes from 'defender' to 'unity' and 'brotherhood' signify a dynamic reorientation toward communal and cultural values. The dissolution of the FPI as an organization does not eradicate its underlying philosophy, emphasizing the adaptability of identity. The quick establishment of a new entity by FPI leaders underscores the resilience of its philosophy, showcasing that governmental procedural dissolution did not substantially suppress the organization's core beliefs.

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<sup>16</sup>Jennifer Donovan, David Rose, and Marie Connolly, "A Crisis of Identity: Social Work Theorising at a Time of Change", *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 47, Issue 8 (2017): 2291–2307; Owen Griffiths and Arif Ahmed, "Introducing Identity," *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, Vol. 50 (2021), ; James H. Liu et al., "Living Historical Memory: Associations with National Identity, Social Dominance Orientation, and System Justification in 40 Countries", *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2021), 104–116.

Moreover, the analysis prompts reflection on the broader applicability of the analytical tools ‘identity’ and ‘ideology’ in understanding socio-religious movements. The critique of framing these concepts as contrasting phenomena encourages a more nuanced examination of how these movements strategically reshape their identities and ideologies to navigate challenges and maintain existence. This perspective aligns with a dynamic understanding of ‘identity’ and ‘ideology,’ emphasizing the fluid nature of these concepts in the context of socio-religious movements. Overall, the study of the FPI’s transformation serves as a case study for scholars to reconsider and refine their analytical frameworks, recognizing the intricacies of identity and ideology in the evolving landscape of such movements.

As stated in its articles of association, the new FPI’s emphasis on propagating *Islam rahmatan li al-alamin* prompted the organization to adopt more accommodating techniques in dealing with societal divisions and Pancasila philosophy. Through its Laskar Pembela Islam sub-organization, the former FPI was infamous for its violent deeds. Before 2014, over 64 acts of violence had been committed, cementing FPI’s reputation as a symbol of aggressive conduct in the name of religion. According to Habib Rizieq Shihab, the new FPI is founded on three fundamental principles: humanity, education (*da’wah*), and law and human rights. K.H. Sobri Lubis, the new FPI chairman, desired FPI members to teach Islam with courteous, elegant, law-abiding, gentle, and inclusive demeanor.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the new FPI, the organization’s shift from its previous violent reputation to a focus on propagating *Islam rahmatan li al-alamin* is indicative of a deliberate restructuring of its identity and ideology. The move away from aggressive conduct associated with the former FPI reflects an acknowledgment of the need for a more inclusive and accommodating

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<sup>17</sup>Fikri, *FPI Ganti Nama Lagi Menjadi Front Persaudaraan Islam...*

approach, aligning with the principles of humanity, education (da'wah), and law and human rights, as articulated by its leaders. This transformation illustrates that identities, even those rooted in ideological or religious affiliations, are dynamic and subject to an intentional redefinition for strategic and societal reasons.

FPI's reconceptualization is inextricably linked to its political and social setting. Following the FPI's disbandment, its leaders faced three challenges: preserving their beliefs and philosophy, avoiding open conflict with the government, and balancing with the larger community's social interest, which regarded them as violent and illegal community organizations. FPI leaders formed a new organization to preserve the banned FPI's philosophy, congregation, and network of connection among its members. Additionally, the new FPI altered its social interaction pattern by stressing kinder and more open attitudes in response to its negative reputation in society. Thus, attempts to forge a new social identity via a new branding have been undertaken by culturally and structurally reinventing the style, appearance, and reconceptualization of the FPI movement. The social environment impacts emotions and conduct.<sup>18</sup> FPI leaders' attempts to re-conceptualize the congregation's emotions and behavior have an effect on the organization's look. Furthermore, the broader analysis of identity as a sociological and psychological construct highlights that ideological identities, such as those associated with political or religious beliefs, play a significant role in shaping individual behavior. The shift in the FPI's identity from a symbol of aggressive religious conduct to an organization promoting courteous, elegant, law-abiding, gentle, and inclusive demeanor suggests a conscious effort to leverage the sociological and psychological mechanisms associated with identity. This strategic restructuring enables

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<sup>18</sup>Maruice Mangum and Ray Block, "Social Identity Theory and Public Opinion towards Immigration", *Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (2018), 41.

the new FPI to engage with societal divisions and Pancasila philosophy in a more constructive manner, emphasizing the potential for ideological identities to transcend violent tendencies and contribute positively to societal cohesion. In this context, the FPI's evolution serves as an example of how intentional identity reconstruction can reshape the narrative of a socio-religious movement, challenging preconceived notions and fostering a more nuanced understanding of identity dynamics.

The FPI Reborn's social adjustment activities correspond to Van Dyke and Amos'<sup>19</sup> phases in accomplishing an organization's objectives. During the organization's first creation stage, the revived FPI recognized social linkages that united its congregations. Social links are formed based on kinship and shared destiny, ethnic origin, religion, and madhhab in religious practice. Depending on these social links, an organization's structure was established and subsequently legitimized by the constitution and norms governed by the ministries of home affairs and law and human rights in Indonesia. The next step is to purify ideology, identity, and culture to conform to the majority's beliefs and not infringe national laws. The next step is to establish a secure culture, identity, and philosophy. The two last phases are to remodel the institutional environment, including administrative functions, and realign current resources with the organizational strategy. Following this line of thought, the resurrected FPI effectively altered its ideological indoctrination and identity patterns, which were previously seen as aggressive and anti-Indonesian. Instead of insisting on being a disembodied organization, the FPI opted to demonstrate its pragmatic political side by abiding by the government's regulations.

This is in stark contrast to Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which has remained politically neutral. Nonetheless, HTI groups periodically demonstrate their presence and purpose to create an Islamic caliphate

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<sup>19</sup>Van Dyke and Amos, "Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success"...

in specific locations. For instance, the Nahdlatul Ulama Regional Board president in East Nusa Tenggara requested the police to arrest banned HTI members who disseminated propaganda movies and engaged in propaganda activities in East Nusa Tenggara.<sup>20</sup> Numerous issues may arise due to the complicated connection between civil society groups and the state.<sup>21</sup> For instance, despite the government's disbandment of HTI and the backing of 99 percent of Indonesians, HTI's radical ideology did not completely vanish from Indonesia.<sup>22</sup> HTI and the government's divergent perspectives on defining a state and citizen welfare exacerbate an already complicated relationship. As a consequence, a contradiction developed between the state/government and the imagination of state defined by HTI group.<sup>23</sup>

The act of redefining one's identity affects individuals associated with the defunct group and strengthens the connection to symbols associated with the group (figures, ideologies, and norms). FPI members' adjustment and collective identities as inclusive identities are influenced by their connection to the symbol.<sup>24</sup> Crocetti's<sup>25</sup> and Hornsey's<sup>26</sup> perspectives are

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<sup>20</sup>Benediktus Sridin Suhu Jahang, *NU Dorong Kepolisian Proses Hukum Ketua HTI Di NTT* (NTT, 2020), <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/1527612/nu-dorong-kepolisian-proses-hukum-ketua-hti-di-ntt>.

<sup>21</sup>Jessica Leigh Doyle, "State Control of Civil Society Organizations: The Case of Turkey", *Democratization*, Vol. 24, no. 2 (2017), 244–264.

<sup>22</sup>I. Artharini, *Lebih Dari 90% Orang Indonesia Dukung Penolakan HTI Dan ISIS* (Jakarta, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-40153060>.

<sup>23</sup>Maksum, "Discourses On Islam And Democracy In Indonesia" ...; Tomi Setiawan and Asep Risnandar, "Negara Modern, Dan Utopia Negara Khilafah(?)", *Jurnal Kajian Peradaban Islam*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (2019), 6–12; Mochamad Thoyyib, "Radikalisme Islam Indonesia," *TA'LIM : Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>24</sup>Elisabetta Crocetti, Francesca Prati, and Monica Rubini, "The Interplay of Personal and Social Identity", *European Psychologist*, Vol. 23, no. 4 (2018), 300–310; Matthew J. Hornsey, "Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory: A Historical Review", *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (2008), 204–222.

<sup>25</sup>Crocetti, Prati, and Rubini, "The Interplay of Personal and Social Identity"...

<sup>26</sup>Hornsey, "Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory: A Historical Review"...

mirrored in one informant's answer, who said that the FPI congregation's spirit has grown stronger after its disbandment, since their process of redefining one's identity exerts a profound impact on individuals associated with a disbanded group, fostering a deeper connection to symbols linked with the group—be they figures, ideologies, or norms. For FPI members, the adaptation and cultivation of collective identities manifest as inclusive entities, influenced significantly by their affiliation with symbolic representations. This sentiment is echoed in the perspectives of Crocetti and Hornsey, finding resonance in the response of an informant who asserted that the spirit of the FPI congregation has not waned but, in fact, grown stronger post-disbandment.

Adding a layer to this argument is the noteworthy observation that, rather than engaging in a direct fight for identity or sticking to established labels, FPI members have chosen a distinct path. They opt for the strategic move of redefining their organizational name and fashioning a novel ideological framework. This decision reflects a conscious effort to reshape their identity, not merely in terms of nomenclature but also through the symbolic attire of their ideology. The focus shifts from a confrontational stance to a more adaptive and transformative approach, emphasizing the malleability of identity and the ability to evolve in response to external challenges. In this way, FPI members navigate a nuanced journey of redefinition, choosing a course that extends beyond conventional battles over labels, signaling a deliberate and strategic evolution in their ideological and organizational fabric. How the disbandment of the FPI prompts a redefinition of identity and a strengthened connection to group symbols, aligns with the argument against a rigid separation between identity and ideology. The act of redefining one's identity within the FPI, even after its dissolution, illustrates that the two concepts are intricately intertwined. The paradoxes highlighted in the analysis, such as Kaldor's distinction

between “identity politics” as inherently exclusive and “the politics of ideas” as open and integrative, become relevant. The FPI members’ adjustment and the collective identity they form are deeply influenced by their connection to symbols associated with the group, encompassing figures, ideologies, and norms.

Moreover, the argument challenges Kaldor’s attempt to differentiate between legitimate projects and those labeled as identity politics. In the context of the FPI, the informant’s assertion that the congregation’s spirit grows stronger after disbandment, believing they were fighting for a particular truth, underscores that identities can be progressive, and ideas can be harnessed for both positive and damaging purposes. The act of re-engaging in a new forum and forming FPI cells, despite the disbandment, emphasizes that the dissolution does not preclude individuals from exercising their rights and expressing their collective identity. The situation aligns with the critique that the distinction between a politics of identities and a politics of ideas is not consistently maintainable, as identitarian movements often frame their demands as legitimate rights with powerful visions of the future. They believed they were fighting for a type of truth, as shown by the government’s decision to dissolve the group (Abim, Informant from Bali). Collectively, the establishment of mass organizations in Indonesia must be regulated and guided by Pancasila values, under the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, Article 20-21 of the 1945 Constitution, Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution, Article 28C paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution, Article 28E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution, and Law Number 17 of 2013 concerning community organizations.<sup>27</sup> Individuals’ faith in the group and eagerness to re-engage in a new forum demonstrates that the disbandment does not preclude them from exercising their rights. As a result, it is impossible to prevent the formation of FPI cells that advocate for the application of Indonesian sharia law.

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<sup>27</sup>Maksum, “Discourses On Islam And Democracy In Indonesia”...

## **Conclusion**

Disbanding radical Islamic groups has been shown to be ineffective to ending their existence and activities. Although the government officially disbanded the FPI, this study demonstrates that the organization is still active and has gone through some changes since its inception. In order to thrive under the restrictive rule of the state, radical organizations pursue a policy of identity redefinition. Since both the government's inattention, and slow response, to poverty, oppression, and immorality, and the congregation's ideological indoctrination contribute to the extreme actions of the FPI. It touches upon the issue of normative judgments towards FPI and their role in operationalizing distinctions between identity and ideology. Thus circumstances insist that certain projects be legitimate while others mobilized in the name of religion or culture fall outside the realm of identity politics underscores the inherent state actor subjectivity in these judgments. The FPI's trajectory challenges such normative assertions by showcasing that identitarian movements can be driven by what their members perceive as legitimate cultural and religious rights, inherently linking identity to ideology.

In overall, the present study provided insight into the results of how ex-members of the dissolved Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) redefined their sense of self subsequent to the government's dissolution of the organization in 2020. The results indicate that these individuals embraced more permissive, accommodating, and comprehensive perspectives towards the government and other large collectives as a mechanism for their survival. The dissolution of FPI has initiated a new phase in the development of Islamic organizations and the dynamics of state-Islamic group relations. The response provided by FPI, through the means of redefining its identity, indicated a noteworthy alteration in the organization's perspective and trajectory. The redefinition of identity by the FPI can be succinctly



encapsulated in three primary modifications, namely: (1) the redefinition of the organization's structure and organizational ethos, (2) the redefinition of policies and programs, and (3) the redefinition of the organization's association with authority.

The current research provides valuable insights into the intricate process of identity reconfiguration among individuals who were once affiliated with radical groups. It specifically emphasizes the potential consequences of disintegration, illuminating how such events can catalyze the formation of novel associations between extremist Islamic organizations and the government. This underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics that unfold during the dissolution of radical groups, as it can have far-reaching implications for the broader landscape of counter-terrorism efforts and national security. Despite the progress made in unraveling these complex dynamics, there remains a critical need for additional investigation to deepen our comprehension of the factors contributing to radicalization. This encompasses a holistic examination of the elements that give rise to radical religious factions, the intricate interplay between identity redefinition and the perpetuation of these factions, and the efficacy of various tactics in efficiently combating radicalization. By delving into these nuanced aspects of radicalization, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of extremist ideologies. Such understanding is paramount for policymakers and counter-radicalization initiatives seeking to develop more efficacious strategies to confront the menace of radicalization. With this heightened awareness, policymakers can tailor interventions that not only address the immediate aftermath of radical group disintegration but also work towards preventing the roots of radicalization from taking hold in the first place. In essence, by identifying and resolving these complex concerns, policymakers and counter-radicalization initiatives can refine their approaches, fostering

a more resilient and inclusive community that stands resilient against the threat of radicalization. This, in turn, contributes to the overarching goal of cultivating tranquility and stability within society, ensuring the safety and well-being of its members.

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