COLLECTIVE ISLAMIC PRACTICES AND NATIONAL SOLIDARITY: RECONTEXTUALIZING KH AHMAD SANUSI'S EXEGESIS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article explores KH Ahmad Sanusi's Qur'anic exegesis as a foundation for collective Islamic practices that strengthen national solidarity in contemporary Indonesia. Drawing on his interpretations of key verses, the study situates Sanusi's thought within the historical context of struggles against colonialism and the present challenges of identity politics, digital disinformation, and eroding social trust. Through a qualitative analysis that combines contextual hermeneutics and comparative synthesis, the research demonstrates that Sanusi advocates for unity as an ethical imperative, manifest in shared rituals, communal discipline, and a collective commitment to moral renewal. Unlike state-led moderation that often emphasizes procedural tolerance, his exegesis emphasizes transforming individual dispositions and sustaining solidarity through religious ethics. While this approach provides profound insights into fostering cohesive civic identities, it faces limitations in adapting to pluralistic frameworks and decentralized authority. By integrating classical tafsir with contemporary sociopolitical analysis, this article contributes an interdisciplinary perspective on collective religious practices as a resource for resilient national cohesion.

Keywords: *KH Ahmad Sanusi, Collective Islamic Practices, National Solidarity, Qur'anic Exegesis, Social Cohesion*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi tafsir Al-Qur'an KH Ahmad Sanusi sebagai landasan bagi praktik keagamaan kolektif yang memperkuat solidaritas nasional di Indonesia kontemporer. Dengan merujuk pada interpretasi ayat-ayat kunci, studi ini menempatkan pemikiran Sanusi dalam konteks perjuangan historis melawan kolonialisme dan tantangan masa kini, termasuk politik identitas, disinformasi digital, dan melemahnya kepercayaan sosial. Melalui analisis kualitatif yang memadukan hermeneutika kontekstual dan sintesis komparatif, penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Sanusi menekankan persatuan sebagai keharusan etis yang terwujud dalam ritual bersama, disiplin komunitas, dan komitmen kolektif untuk pembaruan moral. Berbeda dengan moderasi negara yang sering menekankan toleransi prosedural, tafsirnya menekankan transformasi disposisi individu dan pemeliharaan solidaritas melalui etika agama. Meskipun pendekatan ini menawarkan wawasan mendalam dalam membangun identitas kewargaan yang kohesif, penerapannya memiliki keterbatasan dalam beradaptasi dengan kerangka pluralistik dan otoritas yang terdesentralisasi. Dengan mengintegrasikan tafsir klasik dan analisis sosiopolitik kontemporer, artikel ini memberikan perspektif interdisipliner tentang praktik keagamaan kolektif sebagai sumber kohesi nasional yang tangguh.

Kata Kunci: KH Ahmad Sanusi, Praktik Islam Kolektif, Solidaritas Nasional, Tafsir Al-Qur'an, Kohesi Sosial

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Indonesia has witnessed an intensification of social polarization that permeates political, religious, and digital domains, reshaping the contours of civic life and public trust. No longer an abstract concern, polarization now manifests as tangible patterns of antagonism, exclusion, and contestation that fracture social cohesion. For example, survey data from Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) in 2019 revealed that nearly half of respondents hesitated or refused to maintain friendships with individuals who supported rival presidential candidates. These finding underscores how electoral competition has redefined social association, transforming political preference into a primary marker of collective identity. The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election illustrate this dynamic vividly, as religious symbols and narratives were systematically instrumentalized to delegitimize opponents and mobilize loyalty (Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2021; Salahudin et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence demonstrates that polarization does not end with the conclusion of an electoral cycle. Social media campaigns leveraging religious sentiment have entrenched suspicion and resentment, producing persistent cleavages that extend into daily interactions (Ruslan et al., 2023). Disinformation further fuels this fragmentation: the 2022 Katadata Insight Center and Kominfo survey found that approximately 60% of Indonesian internet users regularly encountered misleading content online, especially regarding religion and politics. The viral circulation of such narratives creates echo chambers that reinforce ideological bias and erode civic trust (Karmila et al., 2024). In parallel, scholars have observed that disinformation networks systematically shape perceptions, entrench polarization, and weaken democratic norms (Plikynas et al., 2025).

While polarization in Indonesia is often discussed in terms of digital and political factors, its religious dimension remains equally salient. The Wahid Foundation's 2019 survey reported that only 47% of respondents expressed trust in people of other faiths, while 20% supported restricting religious minority activities. These attitudes reflect how sectarian identity continues to serve as a potent force, undermining pluralistic citizenship (Hariyadi et al., 2023; Hutabarat, 2023; Mawardi, 2024). In this environment, public demonstrations and episodes of violence are recurrent. The May 22–23, 2019 protests that escalated into riots, resulting in fatalities and hundreds of injuries, highlight the severe risks that deepening polarization poses to democratic stability and public safety (Arifianto, 2019; Weiss, 2020).

Several interrelated factors explain the persistence and deepening of these dynamics. Political elites routinely exploit sectarian narratives to consolidate electoral support (Rubaidi & Setianingsih, 2021). Historical rivalries among Islamic organizations—Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Persis—further compound ideological fragmentation (Arifianto, 2021). At the same time, the democratization of religious knowledge through digital platforms has diluted the unifying authority of traditional religious scholars, giving rise to charismatic preachers whose legitimacy rests on popularity rather than scholarship (Raya, 2024; Fauzi, 2023). This transformation has fueled competition over religious narratives and further entrenched echo chambers (Halim, 2022).

More recent scholarship emphasizes that the erosion of shared civic norms is also linked to the proliferation of hate speech, digital intimidation, and performative outrage (Waruwu et al., 2024; Yustitia et al., 2019). In this context, cultivating inclusive narratives and ethical resources capable of bridging divides has become an urgent necessity (Kaha, 2020; Tantra, 2024).

Against this backdrop, Islam as the majority religion in Indonesia carries profound potential to serve as a source of unifying moral authority. However, the same religious symbols that can promote solidarity have often been harnessed for exclusionary purposes, narrowing the scope for pluralism and marginalizing vulnerable groups (Schäfer, 2018). For instance, research shows that during the 2019 election, divisions within the Muslim community themselves contributed to social fragmentation, underscoring the need for renewed commitments to the principles of moderation (wasathiyah) and mercy (rahmatan lil alamin) (Salahudin et al., 2020; Garadian, 2020).

In this regard, KH Ahmad Sanusi emerges as a distinctive figure whose thought offers an ethically coherent and practically relevant model for counteracting polarization. A respected scholar and anti-colonial leader, Sanusi articulated a vision of religious life that placed ukhuwah (brotherhood), ta'awun (mutual assistance), and humility at the center of social cohesion. His seminal works, *Malja' al-Thalibin fi Tafsir Kalam Rabb al-'Alamin* and *Tamsiyyat al-Muslimin*, frame tafsir not merely as an intellectual exercise but as a vehicle for moral renewal and collective action (Lutfi & Rashid, 2019). Unlike many contemporary approaches that externalize blame for division, Sanusi's writings emphasize the transformation of individual dispositions—pride, greed, arrogance—as the basis for sustainable unity.

While political scientists and sociologists have documented the mechanics of electoral polarization and disinformation (Mahadian et al., 2023; Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2021), they often treat religious discourse as secondary to political strategy. Conversely, studies of KH Ahmad Sanusi have traditionally situated his exegesis within the context of anti-colonial resistance and jurisprudential development (Rohmana, 2015; Matin, 2009). This has left a gap: few studies have systematically examined how his tafsir can serve as a resource for addressing contemporary challenges such as digital polarization, sectarian competition, and populist religious rhetoric.

This article seeks to fill that gap by recontextualizing Sanusi's exegesis as both a moral compass and a practical guide for collective Islamic practices. The experience of the Persatuan Ummat Islam (PUI) Sukabumi demonstrates how Sanusi's ideas are not confined to historical discourse but can inform community-based strategies today. PUI has operationalized Sanusi's principles through a diverse range of programs: the *Malam Ukhuwah* combining spiritual and civic education; humanitarian relief for flood victims; the *Gerakan Nasional Wakaf Pangan* to promote economic solidarity; and regular Multaqa Ulama forums to deliberate on ethical challenges in an age of digital fragmentation. These examples illustrate that his vision of collective ethics can be dynamically translated into concrete initiatives that sustain social resilience.

Recontextualizing KH Ahmad Sanusi's thought is thus essential for two reasons. First, it preserves Indonesia's rich intellectual heritage and demonstrates that classical scholarship retains profound relevance when creatively adapted to contemporary socio-political realities. Second, it provides a conceptual and practical framework to build inclusive civic cultures that resist the instrumentalization of religion for divisive purposes. By centering Sanusi's exegesis in discussions of polarization, this research challenges the assumption that classical tafsir is inherently detached from practical concerns and offers evidence that tradition and innovation can be mutually reinforcing.

This study ultimately aims to show that reimagining Islamic exegesis as an ethical resource for collective solidarity is not only possible but necessary. In an era when digital platforms reward performative outrage and political elites normalize antagonistic rhetoric, Sanusi's insights remind us that enduring unity requires humility, self-discipline, and a shared commitment to the common good. By translating these principles into collective practices—organizational renewal, crisis response, youth cadre development, participatory policymaking, and economic empowerment—Islamic communities can contribute not merely to religious reform but to the strengthening of Indonesia's democratic and pluralistic society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design integrating contextual tafsir analysis and historical hermeneutics to explore KH Ahmad Sanusi's interpretations of Islamic unity and their recontextualization in modern Indonesia. This approach allows an in-depth examination of how religious meaning is constructed and applied within evolving socio-political realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The analytical framework draws on Fazlur Rahman's (1984) double movement, Abdullah Saeed's contextualist hermeneutics (2006), and Muhammad Abduh's reformist methodology (Abduh & Ridha, 1947). Rahman's method guides the reconstruction of the historical context in which

Sanusi's tafsir emerged, then extracts normative principles relevant to contemporary issues such as polarization and fragmentation. Saeed's framework informs the analysis of how interpretation must respond to transformations like identity politics and digital religious discourse. Abduh's approach situates tafsir as a driver of social renewal and collective resilience.

Primary data include Sanusi's major works—*Malja' al-Thalibin* and *Tamsiyyat al-Muslimin*— treated as theological texts and cultural records. Complementary data were collected through documentation of six contemporary practices inspired by Sanusi's thought: PUI Muktamar, Multaqa Ulama, inter-organizational dialogues, Malam Ukhuwah, humanitarian relief, and civic policy forums.

Analysis followed three phases. First, thematic coding identified core concepts such as hablullah (collective bonds) and tafarruq (disunity), cross-referenced with classical and contemporary tafsir. Second, historical reconstruction contextualized these themes within the colonial and postcolonial periods (Rohmana, 2015; Matin, 2009). Third, comparative synthesis evaluated their relevance to current issues like digital polarization.

Triangulation of tafsir texts, historiography, and contemporary data strengthened credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexivity was maintained to minimize bias. Overall, this methodology demonstrates how Sanusi's exegesis can inform collective Islamic practices and national solidarity in Indonesia today.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

KH Ahmad Sanusi's Exegesis on Islamic Unity and Solidarity

Verse: Surah Ali Imran [3]:103

> *"Hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. Remember Allah's Favor upon you—when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His Favor, brothers. And you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided."*

In his exegesis, KH Ahmad Sanusi underscores that this verse conveys an uncompromising imperative: Muslims must hold fast to the Qur'an as the ultimate foundation for both individual guidance and collective integrity. He explains that the "rope of Allah" (*hablullah*) represents the totality of divine revelation, which binds the community together and protects it from fragmentation. Sanusi warns that separation and conflict (*pabereuncay, pasalingsingan, pa-aing-aingan*) are not merely social problems but spiritual transgressions that provoke divine displeasure and undermine the blessings of unity.

He further emphasizes that adhering to Islamic teachings is essential for attaining salvation in this life and the hereafter. In his commentary, unity is not presented as a tactical response to external threats but as a religious duty integral to the very identity of the ummah. According to Sanusi, genuine cohesion requires obedience to Allah, respect for communal consensus, and the cultivation of humility rather than arrogance. Discord, by contrast, leads inevitably to collective weakness and dishonor.

Original Quotation (Sundanese):

> *"Jeung kudu muntang njeukeul maraneh kabeh kana agamana Allah jeung kana kitab Qoeran Allah anu jadi panungtun kana kasalamatan kabagjaan di akherat, sarta sakabehna jalma kudu cicing dina agamana Allah nyaeta agama Islam, jeung ulah pabarencay pasalingsingan pa-aing-aingan maraneh kabeh, balik kudu rempug jukung ngahiji mufakat maraneh kabeh dina agama Islam saperti dawuhan: saeunya eunyana Allah eta rido kamaraneh kabeh tilu perkara jeung mika bendo Allah ka maraneh kabeh tilu perkara nyaeta ridona Allah kamarenaeh kabeh kana ibadah maraneh kabeh ka Allah, jeung hente musrik maraneh kabeh kalawan ngareujeungkeun ibadah ka Allah ku hiji perkare jeung kadua rido Allah kaana muntang nyeukeul maraneh kabeh kana agama na Allah*

serta reumpug sakabeh jalma, jeung katilu rido Allah kana tumut Allah kabeh ka sakabeh anu ngurus ka maraneh kabeh kalawan urusan agama Allah jeung bendo Allah ka maraneh kabeh ka hiji tina ngalobakeun ka cerewedan kacekcokan papaduwan, kadua tina ngamoyah moyah nga leuleubar nga hambur hambur arta ka tiluna ngalobakeun soalan." (Sanusi, 1931, p. 312)

This passage articulates a holistic vision of Islamic solidarity that extends beyond doctrinal adherence. It incorporates social, moral, and spiritual dimensions, framing unity as an obligation that sustains the well-being of the entire community. Sanusi also identifies three behaviors that invite Allah's displeasure: persistent conflict, reckless extravagance, and constant provocation. These vices, he argues, weaken the ummah's capacity to fulfill its divine mandate and erode its credibility in the eyes of others.

Sanusi's interpretation thus positions this verse as a cornerstone for understanding Islamic social ethics. By calling believers to recognize their shared dependence on divine guidance and to relinquish divisive tendencies, the verse provides a framework for nurturing cohesive relationships grounded in faith, mutual respect, and collective purpose. In Sanusi's perspective, this message is especially urgent in contexts marked by political competition and ideological fragmentation, as unity is both a moral imperative and a source of strength.

Verse: Surah Ali Imran [3]:105

"And do not be like those who became divided and differed after clear proofs had come to them. And those will have a great punishment."

In his exegesis, KH Ahmad Sanusi delivers a strong critique of sectarianism, warning that division over essential religious matters undermines faith and communal identity. He clarifies that the prophetic tradition, "The difference of opinion among my community is a mercy," should never be used to justify discord on fundamental issues. Instead, it refers only to minor, harmless differences like personal preferences. For Sanusi, such disagreements must be contained to avoid fracturing solidarity.

On the phrase *wa la tafarraqu* ("do not be divided"), he insists Muslims must resolve challenges collectively, as isolation breeds indifference and erodes moral cohesion. Fragmentation, he stresses, is not merely social failure but an ethical lapse with spiritual consequences.

Sanusi identifies five causes of disintegration: sectarian proliferation, entrenched hostility, political manipulation, ignorance among religious teachers, and leaders' failure to build consensus. In Indonesia, he warns, similar dynamics empower innovators (*ahl al-bid'ah*) who distort Islam and weaken the ummah.

Original Quotation (Sundanese):

"Teugeusna jalma anu pabarencai dina iman na heunteu diaku golongan kanjeung Nabi Muhammad solallahu alaihi wa sallam. Saur Abu Hurairah eta jalma anu panbarencai beda-beda agamana anu ditampik ku kanjeung nabi sol'am nyaeta ahlul bid'ah, ahlul syubhat jeung ahlu dolalah." (Sanusi, 1931, pp. 256–257)

In sum, Sanusi's interpretation of this verse presents a robust ethical critique of sectarianism and a clear call to preserve unity as a religious and social imperative. His emphasis on collective responsibility, doctrinal clarity, and moral discipline situates this exegesis as a relevant framework for understanding and addressing the persistent challenges of fragmentation in contemporary Muslim societies.

Verse: Surah Al-Anfal [8]:46

"And obey Allah and His Messenger and do not dispute and [thus] lose courage and [then] your strength would depart; and be patient. Indeed, Allah is with the patient."

KH Ahmad Sanusi interprets this verse as a clear directive linking collective discipline to the preservation of dignity, power, and social resilience. He argues that persistent disputes (*papaseaan*) and mutual hostility (*pasalingsingan mumusuhan*) inevitably lead to disintegration, weakness, and humiliation of the Muslim community. According to Sanusi, these

behaviors are not merely personal failings but structural causes of societal decline that expose Muslims to domination by other groups and nations. Unity, therefore, is not an optional virtue but an existential necessity for safeguarding communal strength.

Sanusi further emphasizes that obedience to Allah and His Messenger forms the ethical foundation for overcoming enmity. He cautions that once division takes hold, the resulting fragmentation (*pabareuncai ruksak ancur*) erodes the ummah's collective purpose, rendering it powerless (*doif hina borangan*) and ultimately driving it into social and spiritual decline. He insists that only through patience and mutual understanding can Muslims sustain the integrity of their faith and advance the cause of Islam.

Original Quotation (Sundanese):

"Jeung ulah papaseaan maneh kabeh balik kudu akur maneh kabeh, kudu ngahiji rapih karana lamun maraneh kabeh papaseaan pasalingsingan mumusuhan manka tangtu pabareuncai ruksak ancur doif hina borangan maneh kabeh ana ges pabareuncai ruksak ancur doif hina borangan jeung tangtu leungit kamulyaan ka sampuraan ka agungan kakuatan maraneh kabeh tangtu tinggal hina na malaratna sangsara maneh kabeh jeung kudu sabar maneh kabeh dina ngajalankeun kaislaman dina ngahirupkeun islam dina ngamajukeun kamulyaan ka agungan islam." (Sanusi, 1931, pp. 56–57)

A striking aspect of Sanusi's commentary is his critique of division among religious scholars. He observes that conflicts often arise not from ordinary believers but from respected ulama who fail to embody the unity they advocate. This failure, he argues, has diminished the Muslim community's moral and intellectual stature. Sanusi laments that some scholars have retreated from social engagement while educated laity have distanced themselves from Islamic teachings, causing both groups to lose authority. He warns this fragmentation leads to humiliation, poverty, and weakness, urging all Muslims to unite religious knowledge and professional expertise to restore collective dignity.

Original Quotation (Malay-Indonesian):

"Dan toean-toean setelah mengetahoei kebodohan oemmat Islam dan kehinaan nja dan kemelaratan nja mudah-mudahan dengan hati yang toeloes sekalian oemmat Islam berbareng bekerdja menoentoet deradjat kemanoesiaan moedah-moedahan mendjadi manoesia dengan sebenar-benarnja di dalam doenia dan di dalam akhirat. Djangan manoesia nama saja Allahu alam, dan keadaan oemmat Islam daripada bagian golongan jang menoentoet pengetahoean pergaoelan hidoep tiada soeka akoer serta bagian kaoem agama malahan saling bentji satoe sama lain sehingga terdjadi kaoem agama tergelintjir daripada pergaoelan hidoep doenia jang sejoejoer-joeernja dan kaoem pergaoelan hidoep tergelintjir daripada agama Islam akhirnja roegi dan tjelaka melarat hina lemah kedoeanja dengan keboektian jang tiada bisa moengkir lagi. Oleh karena itoe maka oesahakanlah oleh sekalian pemeloek agama Islam ke akoeran dan persatoean di antara kaoem agama dan kaoem terpeladjar kedoeniaan soepaya sekalian oemmat Islam naik deradjatnja serta bahagia kaja sempurna dan moelia doenianja dan di akhiratnja" (Sanusi, 1934, p. 402).

In summary, Sanusi's interpretation of this verse integrates theological injunction with an acute awareness of the sociopolitical vulnerabilities facing the Muslim community. His exegesis insists that sustainable strength can only emerge from patient cooperation and unwavering commitment to collective purpose. By highlighting the destructive potential of disputes among both laypeople and scholars, Sanusi offers a compelling vision of unity as an ethical imperative and a practical strategy for communal resilience.

Verse: Surah Ali Imran [3]:19

"Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them—out of jealous animosity between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account."

KH Ahmad Sanusi interprets this verse as an explicit reminder that the essence of religion accepted by Allah is Islam, and that division arises not from genuine misunderstanding but from moral corruption and ulterior motives. He emphasizes that the disputes among those who received earlier revelations, as well as conflicts within the Muslim community, are driven by personal ambition, pride, and desire for worldly gain rather than any legitimate theological justification.

Sanusi highlights that such fragmentation is often rooted in individuals prioritizing their selfish interests over the collective good. He points out that lust for status, wealth, and authority corrodes sincerity in faith and sows' division. In his analysis, many influential figures—including scholars and community leaders—have historically resisted the truth not because of lack of knowledge but because embracing it would threaten their worldly privileges. This critique is particularly evident in his commentary addressing religious elites who feared that if people sincerely accepted Islamic teachings, their own influence and income streams derived from gifts and donations would diminish.

Original Quotation (Malay-Indonesian):

"Orang-orang jang berselisihan di dalam agama Islam dan menolak ataoe membentji akan agama Islam maka itoe terbitnja sekali-kali boekan daripada alasan ataoe keterangan hanja daripada menoeroet hawa nafsoe jang djahat ataoe daripada kehasoedan kebentjian di antara mereka itoe ataoe gemar akan kemegahan dan kebesaran doenia ataoe lantaran serakah akan kekajaan doenia. Seoempama oelama-oelama nja agama itoe beranggapan bahwa djika masoek ke dalam agama Islam nistjayalah lari anak moeridnja jang akhirnja poetoes segala sedekah dan hadiah kepadanja daripada mereka itoe" (Sanusi, 1935, p. 903).

Sanusi's interpretation thus situates the problem of disunity within a broader ethical critique of materialism and the corrupting influence of unrestrained desire. He argues that the love of worldly life (*hubb al-dunya*) remains the most persistent obstacle to genuine cohesion and collective spiritual progress. This perspective resonates with his wider exegesis, which consistently frames division not merely as an intellectual disagreement but as an ethical and spiritual failure that endangers both the integrity of the ummah and the sincerity of individual faith.

In contemporary terms, Sanusi's analysis offers a profound reflection on the enduring challenges faced by Muslim communities. His emphasis on the role of self-interest, competition for prestige, and fear of losing material benefits as drivers of division remains highly relevant, particularly in contexts where religious authority is entangled with social status and economic advantage. His critique underscores the importance of cultivating humility, sincerity, and ethical commitment as prerequisites for sustaining unity and fulfilling Islam's higher purposes.

The Contemporary Challenges of National Solidarity in Indonesia

The 2014 and 2019 presidential elections marked a profound shift in Indonesia's sociopolitical landscape, as electoral contests increasingly mobilized identity-based polarization. Survey data reveal the depth of this cleavage. According to a nationally representative survey conducted by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting prior to the 2019 election, nearly 50% of respondents reported reluctance to socialize with supporters of rival candidates, indicating that partisan affiliation had evolved into an identity boundary with social consequences (Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2021).

This intensification was not solely a byproduct of political competition but was amplified by the deliberate use of religious symbols and narratives. For example, campaigns in both elections frequently invoked Islamic identity to frame candidates as protectors of religious authenticity, effectively casting opponents as adversaries of communal faith (Zaluchu et al., 2019). In the 2019 contest, the selection of Ma'ruf Amin, a prominent cleric, as Jokowi's running mate illustrated how religious authority was instrumentalized to counter accusations of insufficient Islamic credentials (Pepinsky, 2019).

These dynamics have left enduring effects. As Jati (2022) observes, political polarization during 2014–2019 reconfigured elections from contests over policy into emotionally charged struggles for symbolic supremacy (Jati, 2022). This transformation eroded mutual trust and weakened democratic norms, embedding divisions that persist beyond the electoral cycle and threaten Indonesia's capacity for pluralistic consensus.

Social polarization in Indonesia has become increasingly entrenched through digital media platforms, which facilitate the formation of echo chambers that amplify ideological divisions. During the 2019 Indonesian election, Twitter data revealed highly fragmented news consumption patterns, with users clustering around partisan communities that acted as self-reinforcing bubbles (Maulana & Situngkir, 2020). These echo chambers not only restricted exposure to diverse perspectives but also reinforced affective polarization, in which individuals view their political opponents as threats rather than legitimate rivals.

Such dynamics are further exacerbated by algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritize emotionally charged and sensational content. Research has demonstrated that these algorithms play a critical role in promoting selective exposure, thereby intensifying group-based identity politics (Barberá, 2020). As a consequence, digital platforms have evolved into powerful spaces for political mobilization as well as disinformation campaigns. Karmila et al. (2024) observed that social media not only shapes perceptions but also constructs political identities, which in turn fosters antagonistic affiliations that persist beyond electoral cycles (Karmila et al., 2024).

These processes have significant implications for democracy and social cohesion. Studies indicate that the convergence of disinformation, selective exposure, and algorithmic amplification produces a digital environment in which polarization becomes self-sustaining (Kim, 2023). This reality underscores the urgency of strengthening digital literacy and designing platform governance that prioritizes civic resilience over engagement maximization.

The longstanding division between traditionalist and modernist Islamic organizations in Indonesia has contributed significantly to social fragmentation. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as the primary representative of traditionalist Islam, emphasizes the preservation of local religious customs, classical scholarship, and communal authority structures. In contrast, Muhammadiyah, the modernist movement founded in the early twentieth century, has championed reformist interpretations of Islam and embraced modern education and social services as vehicles for renewal (Arnez, 2010).

Over the past two decades, these differences have increasingly translated into political and social rivalry. During the Defending Islam movement of 2016–2017, for example, Muhammadiyah leaders were perceived to align more closely with Islamist-leaning coalitions critical of the government, while NU leadership explicitly defended pluralism and the state's legitimacy (Arifianto, 2021). Such positioning has deepened perceptions of sectarian antagonism, with each organization mobilizing its networks to assert moral and political authority.

Beyond the political sphere, the rivalry also shapes everyday religious practices and identity formation. NU's promotion of "Islam Nusantara," a culturally grounded interpretation of Islam, has been framed as a counterweight to Muhammadiyah's more textualist and modernist orientation (Jati & Risdianto, 2017). While these differences enrich Indonesia's religious landscape, they also complicate efforts to build consensus on shared civic values and social cohesion. This fragmentation underscores the need for dialogue that transcends organizational boundaries and reaffirms pluralistic commitments.

A large-scale longitudinal survey conducted by Yusuf et al. (2019) involving more than 20,000 Indonesian adults revealed that willingness to accept someone of a different religion varies significantly across social domains. While a majority were comfortable with people of other faiths living in the same village or neighborhood, acceptance decreased sharply in more intimate contexts such as interfaith marriage or building houses of worship nearby. Specifically, the study found that higher income and education levels correlate with greater tolerance, whereas higher religiosity predicts less willingness to accept religious diversity (Yusuf et al., 2019).

Complementary findings by Judijanto et al. (2024) show that strong religious beliefs can support social cohesion when coupled with inclusive practices. Their quantitative research among 175 respondents from diverse faith communities found that active religious participation was positively linked to trust and intergroup solidarity, highlighting religion's dual potential to foster unity or division depending on context (Judijanto et al., 2024).

Additional survey evidence underscores the importance of education in shaping tolerant attitudes. Thoyib et al. (2024) demonstrated that students with pesantren (Islamic boarding school) backgrounds scored significantly higher on measures of respect for diverse religious practices compared to their peers, suggesting educational institutions are critical spaces for cultivating interfaith trust (Thoyib et al., 2024).

Comparative Analysis: Relevance of Sanusi's Exegesis for Contemporary Indonesia

KH Ahmad Sanusi's exegesis of the Qur'an is remarkable not only for its moral clarity but also for its continuing applicability to the complex social, political, and technological landscape of contemporary Indonesia. His commentary on Surah Ali Imran [3]:103 foregrounds *hablullah*—the divine bond of unity—as an ethical imperative rather than a contingent strategy to secure social order. In Sanusi's thought, unity is not a passive absence of conflict but a disciplined commitment to shared moral purpose, underpinned by spiritual sincerity and collective obligation. This perspective stands in contrast to the more procedural understandings of tolerance and pluralism common in modern governance frameworks, which often prioritize coexistence over transformation of character (Pepinsky, 2019).

One of the most illustrative embodiments of Sanusi's vision is the Muktamar ke-14 Persatuan Ummat Islam, which brought together over a thousand delegates and national leaders under the theme "Washatiyah Islam and Re-Engineering the Organization Towards an Advanced Indonesia." This event vividly demonstrates how Sanusi's emphasis on *ukhuwah* and moderation is operationalized through organizational renewal and cross-sector alliances. The Muktamar did not merely produce rhetorical affirmations of solidarity; it initiated concrete measures, such as the signing of a memorandum of understanding with Rumah Zakat and the Ministry of Social Affairs, institutionalizing collaborative philanthropy as an expression of collective faith. In Sanusi's exegesis, maintaining unity (*la tafarruqu*) entails active efforts to transcend personal ambition and sectarian ego. The commitment to *Islah Samaniyah*—the eightfold reform of religious, educational, and socio-economic life—demonstrates precisely this orientation. By weaving together doctrinal renewal and civic collaboration, the Muktamar aligns closely with Sanusi's conviction that genuine cohesion requires not merely avoiding overt conflict but fostering shared discipline anchored in divine guidance (Ali Imran [3]:103).

Similarly, the Multaqa Ulama PUI 2022 provides another example of how Sanusi's principles are transposed into the contemporary sphere. This nationwide virtual forum convened scholars and community leaders to address challenges such as the standardization of the hijri calendar, the resilience of Islamic education after the pandemic, and the empowerment of families through zakat and waqf. Sanusi's exegesis emphasizes that knowledge must not become a pretext for factionalism (Ali Imran [3]:105); rather, it should be a vehicle for fostering consensus and mutual respect. The Multaqa embodied this ethic by facilitating inclusive dialogue across doctrinal, generational, and professional divides. Importantly, the forum's agenda demonstrates Sanusi's insistence that religious cohesion cannot be separated from practical commitments to social welfare. For Sanusi, solidarity is integrative—linking spiritual devotion, ethical reflection, and civic engagement. This combination anticipates what contemporary sociologists have identified as the "normative-institutional nexus" needed to sustain pluralistic societies (Arifianto, 2021).

The Dialog Interaktif Lintas Ormas Islam in Bogor further reveals the relevance of Sanusi's tafsir in navigating acute crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This dialogue, involving seven of Indonesia's most influential Islamic organizations, functioned as an arena of collective moral reassurance and coordinated public messaging. The call by Nur Ihsan Zaidi for patience and unity reflects Sanusi's insistence that *sabr* and *ta'awun*—patience and mutual support—are indispensable virtues in times of uncertainty (Al-Anfal [8]:46). While many contemporary responses to crisis focus on bureaucratic coordination and information management, Sanusi's

framework elevates spiritual disposition as the decisive factor in sustaining resilience. His critique of performative piety and ambition (Ali Imran [3]:19) resonates here: the dialog's rejection of blame politics and affirmation of shared destiny underscores that genuine solidarity arises from a moral commitment transcending organizational rivalries. Indeed, studies of crisis communication in Indonesia have found that messages grounded in shared religious idioms carry significantly higher credibility among the public than purely technical advisories (Kim, 2023).

One of the most compelling examples of how Sanusi's ideas have been recontextualized is the Malam Ukhuwah Pemuda PUI in Sukabumi, an event dedicated to cultivating the next generation of Muslim leaders. This gathering integrated ritual practices—such as qiyamul lail and communal prayer—with critical reflection on socio-economic challenges and technological change. Sanusi's exegesis places particular emphasis on *ukhuwah* as both an ethical state and a collective practice, a dynamic vividly illustrated by the event's blend of spiritual devotion and civic training. The symbolism of visiting Sanusi's grave reinforces the continuity between classical exegesis and contemporary praxis. Furthermore, the insistence that youth be equipped not only with religious literacy but also adaptive problem-solving capabilities aligns closely with Sanusi's call for Muslims to reconcile piety with active engagement in the world (Ali Imran [3]:103). The presence of municipal leaders underscored the integrative nature of this approach, bridging governmental support and grassroots empowerment.

The humanitarian response to the Sukabumi flood crisis carried out by PUI Peduli Kemanusiaan and Karang Taruna Jatiluhur is a further illustration of Sanusi's vision. The direct provision of psychosocial support and essential supplies operationalizes Sanusi's conviction that solidarity must be material as well as spiritual. His commentary on Ali Imran [3]:103 makes clear that unity entails active service to the vulnerable, untainted by ambition or sectarian calculation. In this case, the collaborative effort between faith-based and civic organizations demonstrates that the ethical commitment to *hablullah* can catalyze practical interventions that address both immediate suffering and the deeper psychological consequences of disaster. This practice anticipates contemporary models of disaster governance emphasizing "faith-based social capital" as a determinant of resilience (Maulana & Situngkir, 2020).

Perhaps the most innovative application of Sanusi's principles is evident in the Gerakan Nasional Wakaf Pangan (GNWP). By transforming the classical institution of waqf into a vehicle for national food security, GNWP exemplifies Sanusi's insistence that religious endowments must serve collective welfare rather than personal prestige (Ali Imran [3]:19). The program's integration of financial mobilization, land stewardship, and agricultural production embodies what contemporary analysts describe as "productive waqf," a model that merges spiritual obligation with economic empowerment (Raya, 2024). In a digital era when Islamic philanthropy is often reduced to individual transactions, GNWP's collective orientation and transparent governance resonate strongly with Sanusi's insistence that genuine charity must be animated by communal purpose and ethical sincerity.

Finally, the Public Policy Discussion on the Role of Youth in the Governmental Ecosystem 2024–2029 underscores the continuing resonance of Sanusi's thought. His emphasis on spiritual sincerity as the bedrock of civic participation (Ali Imran [3]:103) is reflected in the call for youth to move beyond passive observation and become agents of transformation. The forum's intergenerational dialogue between established scholars and emerging leaders operationalizes Sanusi's integrative ethic: that unity demands the combination of normative conviction and adaptive competence. The discussion's themes—economic justice, digital engagement, and political integrity—illustrate precisely the "moral-technical synthesis" that Sanusi anticipates. He warns against the seductive allure of status and popularity, insisting instead that moral authority derives from sincerity and collective benefit (Ali Imran [3]:19). This perspective challenges contemporary tendencies to equate religious legitimacy with social media metrics or populist appeal (Fauzi, 2023).

In each of these examples, Sanusi's exegesis offers a distinctive alternative to both procedural pluralism and technocratic governance. Whereas modern frameworks often externalize blame for fragmentation onto structures, Sanusi insists that sustainable unity requires the

transformation of individual dispositions—particularly pride, greed, and arrogance—into virtues of humility, patience, and mutual service. This orientation finds empirical support in contemporary studies showing that social trust and resilience are not merely institutional products but outcomes of ethical and spiritual commitments embedded in everyday practices (Soderborg & Muhtadi, 2021).

At the same time, the limitations of Sanusi's approach should be acknowledged. His framework assumes a bounded religious community governed by established ulama, an assumption that must be adapted to Indonesia's decentralized, media-saturated religious sphere (Raya, 2024). Moreover, while Sanusi's vision excels in fostering intra-Muslim solidarity, it offers fewer tools for interfaith negotiation in pluralistic contexts. Nevertheless, the six initiatives analyzed here show that his exegesis remains a vital source of moral imagination and collective purpose.

Taken together, these practices—ranging from institutional reform and disaster relief to youth empowerment and economic justice—demonstrate that Sanusi's tafsir is not a static inheritance but a living resource. When creatively recontextualized, it provides a coherent framework to address the moral and civic dilemmas of Indonesia's polarized democracy, affirming that spiritual integrity and social solidarity are inseparable pillars of an inclusive Islamic modernity.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that KH Ahmad Sanusi's exegesis offers a rich ethical framework that remains highly relevant for addressing contemporary polarization in Indonesia. His insistence that unity is an intrinsic moral obligation—anchored in humility, mutual respect, and collective purpose—provides a compelling alternative to procedural or instrumental approaches to social cohesion. The six collective practices examined here, including the Muktamar PUI, the Multaqa Ulama, inter-organizational dialogues, youth cadre development, humanitarian initiatives, and economic empowerment programs, illustrate how Sanusi's ideas can be creatively translated into concrete action. Each initiative exemplifies the transformative potential of recontextualized classical tafsir to cultivate solidarity, resilience, and civic responsibility in a fragmented socio-political landscape.

However, these practices also reveal the necessity of contextual adaptation. Sanusi's framework, while powerful in fostering intra-Muslim cohesion, requires strategic supplementation to engage interfaith dynamics and the complexities of digital communication effectively. Future initiatives should therefore integrate his ethical principles with innovative governance models, participatory dialogue mechanisms, and digital literacy programs to expand their reach and inclusivity. Policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society organizations are encouraged to further explore Sanusi's thought as a living resource for nurturing social trust and bridging divides. By embedding his values of spiritual sincerity and collective service in education, policy, and community engagement, Indonesia can advance toward a more cohesive and compassionate democratic society.

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