

## Bridging Identities: The Political Participation of Chinese Indonesians in a Multicultural Landscape

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**Abstract:** The Chinese community has often received insufficient attention, despite historical evidence demonstrating their significant role in various fields, including religion, literature, language, art, and sports. Common representations of the Chinese ethnic group tend to be negative, portrayed as economically dominant but opportunistic, lacking political loyalty, lacking nationalism, and prioritizing self-interest. Historical accounts typically highlight their role in the economy, either as major traders or as controllers of trade routes deemed detrimental to the local population.

**Purpose:** This article examines the shifting political identity and participation of Chinese Indonesians in the post-Reformasi era, a period marked by democratic opening and greater recognition of cultural diversity. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the political identity of Chinese Indonesians has transformed since the

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fall of the New Order and to explore its relationship with the broader development of multiculturalism in Indonesia.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The methodology used was descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through document study and literature review. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, which analyzes text or documents and then narrative analysis to examine the collected narratives.

**Findings:** The findings reveal a significant transformation in the political behavior of Chinese Indonesians from a historically passive stance shaped by discrimination, stigma, and restrictive state policies, they have increasingly become active participants in political processes. The study finds that government policies after 1998 which gradually restored cultural rights and citizenship equality played a crucial role in enabling this political reorientation. This change shows how greater institutional openness strengthens minority political agency.

**Originality/value:** This research draws on its integrative analysis, linking political participation to identity reconstruction and multicultural practices as authenticity. As a value, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how minority groups reposition themselves within Indonesia's evolving democratic landscape.

**Keywords:** Chinese Indonesians; political identity; political participation; multiculturalism; social capital

**Paper Type:** Article-research

### **Introduction**

Throughout Indonesian history, the involvement of the Chinese community has often received insufficient attention, despite historical evidence demonstrating their significant role in various fields, including religion, literature, language, art, and sports. Common representations of the Chinese ethnic group tend to be negative, portrayed as economically dominant but opportunistic, lacking political loyalty, lacking nationalism, and prioritizing self-interest (Ertug, Cuypers, Dow, & Edman, 2023).

Historical accounts typically highlight their role in the economy, either as major traders or as controllers of trade routes deemed detrimental to the local population.

The arrival of Chinese people in Indonesia can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), when China established trade relations with various regions in Southeast Asia. Some of them had already settled on the island of Java (Djawa Dwipa). During the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), Chinese people were also present in the Srivijaya Kingdom. The early 9th century saw the migration of Chinese Muslim communities, as well as Arab and Persian traders, from Guangzhou to Srivijaya, following a rebellion led by Huang Chao. Furthermore, according to Yuanzhi's records, Chinese communities returned to the Indonesian archipelago during Admiral Zheng He's seven expeditions during the Ming Dynasty (Taneo, Ndoen, & Neolaka, 2019).

At the time of Zheng He's first visit, Chinese communities were already spread across Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan. Toward the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the number of Chinese immigrants in the Indonesian archipelago increased significantly. Ethnically, the Chinese community in Indonesia consists of Hokkien, Hakka (Kheh), Tiu-Chiu, and Cantonese. According to the 2010 BPS census, Indonesia has a total population of 237,641,326 people spread across approximately 1,300 ethnic groups. The Chinese ethnic group ranks 18th, with a proportion of approximately 1.22%, or equivalent to 2,832,510 individuals (Subagya, 2015). Further developments of ethnicity in Indonesia from 1930, 2000, and 2010 can be seen in the following image.

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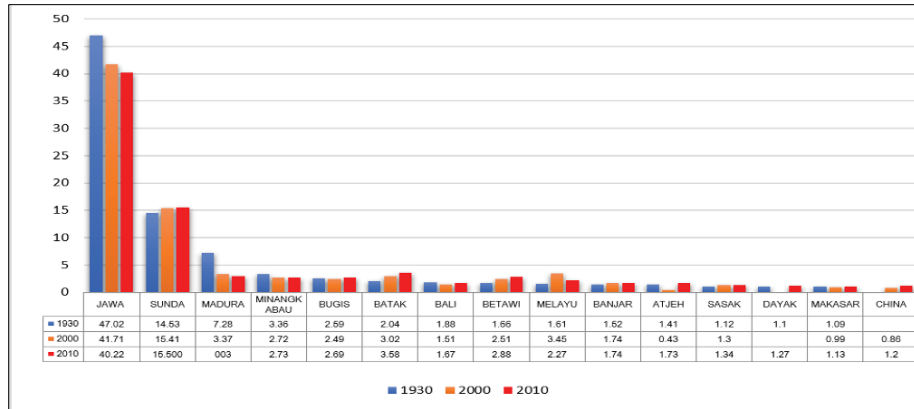


Figure 1. Developments of Ethnicity in Indonesia from 1930, 2000, and 2010  
 Source: BPS RI, 2010 in Utomo, 2020

Data from the Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia (BPS RI) shows that the ethnic Chinese population in Indonesia has continued to increase since the 1930s. At that time, the proportion was recorded at 0%, but increased to 0.86% in 2000 (Pitoyo & Triwahyudi, 2017). Since then, this proportion has continued to rise in line with population growth, migration patterns, and improved demographic recording, illustrating the sustained presence and expanding distribution of ethnic Chinese communities across Indonesia.

According to Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data, the Chinese-Indonesian community is now spread throughout almost all of Indonesia, although the largest concentrations are in Greater Jakarta (*Jabodetabek*), West Kalimantan, and Bangka Belitung. This demographic distribution shows that ethnic Chinese communities have become an integral part of Indonesia’s social and cultural landscape, participating in diverse sectors such as trade, education, local governance, and civic activities.

The broader geographic spread of the Chinese-Indonesian population also illustrates important dynamics in identity politics, minority representation, and multicultural governance in

Indonesia. As they reside in increasingly diverse regions, issues concerning cultural integration, social cohesion, and equitable political participation continue to gain relevance within local and national policy discussions. This dispersion further highlights how minority communities navigate their identities and civic roles within Indonesia's pluralistic society, demonstrating both resilience and adaptability amid evolving socio-political contexts.

During the Dutch East Indies colonial period, the government implemented a policy of restricting residency for ethnic Chinese (*wijkenstelsel*), allowing them to leave certain areas only with special permits (Dewi & de Meulder, 2024). This discrimination based on the politicization of identity did not end in the colonial era but continued after Indonesian independence, particularly during the liberal democratic era, through a system of barriers intended to protect indigenous entrepreneurs from competition with foreign importers, thus excluding Chinese entrepreneurs from the category of national importers.

Another measure that marginalized ethnic Chinese was Government Regulation No. 10 of 1959, issued by President Sukarno, which prohibited them from selling retail in rural areas, encouraging migration to the suburbs. Discrimination against political identity also occurred during the Old Order, for example, in 1958 when an anti-Kuomintang campaign emerged due to alleged interference by Taipei in a local rebellion (Permana & Purwantiningsih, 2021).

Chinese schools linked to the Kuomintang were closed, and in 1965, after a coup involving communist groups was defeated, the government imposed various restrictive policies. This is including a ban on the use of Chinese characters and language, restrictions on Chinese media and schools, a ban on Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh celebrations, restrictions on rituals in Chinese temples, and the change of the term "Chinese" to "Cina".

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TAP MPRS No. III/MPRS/1966 also required Chinese citizens to Indonesianize their names (Thio & Sidarto, 2024).

Significant changes occurred after the 1998 reform movement, marked by the resignation of President Suharto and the appointment of BJ Habibie as his successor. This momentum opened up as the opportunities for the public to actively participate in the democratization process, reflected in the emergence of various new political parties with diverse ideologies and mass bases, ranging from Islamic and Christian parties, socialist parties, to nationalist parties. Political participation among the public, both at the local and national levels, has increased significantly.

The policy shift from New Order assimilation to post-reform multiculturalism raises important questions: how did the political identity of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia develop after the New Order, and how is the strengthening of their political identity related to the development of multiculturalism in the country?

This paper aims to explain the dynamics of the political identity of the Chinese community and analyze the factors driving their increased political participation post-New Order. Furthermore, this study examines the relationship between the strengthening of ethnic Chinese political identity and the progress of multiculturalism in Indonesia.

**Methods**

This study employs a qualitative research approach using documentary study and literature study as the primary methods of data collection. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to review the ideas, theories, and concepts put forward by experts, while simultaneously utilizing the results of previous research on identity politics and multiculturalism, both in Indonesia and internationally. Through literature review, this research not only replicates existing findings but also synthesizes, makes comparisons, and identifies research gaps that can serve as the basis for new understanding.

The research focuses on a single key variable, namely the political participation of Chinese Indonesians in the post-Reformasi era, which is analytically linked to supporting conceptual variables such as political identity, multiculturalism, and social capital. The operational definition of political participation in this study refers to the forms of engagement both formal and informal demonstrated by Chinese Indonesians in political processes, including electoral participation, involvement in political organizations, public advocacy, and representation in governance structures.

The research design is descriptive-analytical, aiming to interpret socio-political transformations by synthesizing documented evidence and scholarly interpretations. The research subjects consist of textual and archival materials, including academic journals, books, government regulations, policy documents, historical records, media articles, and organizational reports related to Chinese Indonesian political involvement. Data were collected through documentary analysis, which examines official records and historical documents, and literature analysis, which reviews prior studies and theoretical discussions.

The data analysis technique follows a thematic qualitative approach. Collected materials were categorized into themes: identity reconstruction, citizenship rights, political behavior, multicultural policy, and social capital, and interpreted to identify patterns, causal linkages, and socio-political implications. Triangulation across various sources was applied to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

### **Discussion and Findings**

#### **Experience of the Chinese Community in Indonesia**

The long history of the Chinese community in Indonesia illustrates how their identity was shaped by experiences of discrimination dating back to the colonial era (Ninawati, Setiawan, & Suparman, 2020). During the Dutch East Indies, this

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community was positioned as an economic intermediary, playing a crucial role in trade, but their access to politics and bureaucracy was severely limited. However, these structural constraints were not experienced uniformly, as gender, class, religion, and generational position significantly shaped how different segments of the Chinese community engaged with political life.

This study finds that the Reformasi era marked a critical turning point in the political inclusion of Chinese-Indonesian citizens by dismantling formal legal barriers and opening access to political participation. However, while earlier analyses tend to emphasize normative progress, a closer empirical examination reveals a more complex and ambivalent trajectory. These policies disproportionately affected Chinese-Indonesian women, who experienced layered marginalization through both ethnic discrimination and gendered exclusion from public and political spheres.

This created an ambivalent position: they wielded significant economic influence but limited socio-political authority. During the New Order era, discrimination against ethnic Chinese was further reinforced. Stereotypes depicting them as a wealthy group were exploited by the government to restrict cultural expression, implement assimilationist policies, and narrow public space.

Religious identity further complicated political experiences within the community. Chinese-Indonesian Muslims often occupied an ambivalent position, as religious affiliation could mitigate certain forms of exclusion while ethnic identity continued to mark them as “non-pribumi.” Meanwhile, younger generations who came of age after the New Order experienced relatively greater political openness, yet remained shaped by intergenerational memories of repression and violence.

As a result, the political identity of the Chinese community focused more on survival strategies than on strengthening formal

political positions. This stigma is complex, as the Chinese community was not only the target of discriminatory policies but also often scapegoated in socio-political crises. Consequently, their political participation during this period was low, high-risk, and received little official recognition.

Fundamental changes occurred after the collapse of the New Order in 1998. The government revoked number of discriminatory regulations, including the requirement to Indonesianize names, the ban on cultural celebrations, and the distinction between "indigenous" and "non-indigenous." These measures open up opportunities for ethnic Chinese to renegotiate their political identity within a more inclusive framework of citizenship.

Quantitatively, the increase in Chinese-Indonesian political participation can be observed through gradual growth in representation within legislative and executive institutions. The number of Chinese-Indonesian candidates contesting legislative elections increased significantly after 1999, particularly in urban areas such as Jakarta, Medan, and Surabaya. Although their overall proportion remains small relative to population size, the presence of Chinese-Indonesian politicians in the DPR, DPRD, and local executive offices represents a marked departure from the New Order era, when political participation was largely suppressed (Wen, 2017).

Survey-based studies also suggest a gradual shift in political attitudes. Post-Reformasi surveys on political trust and civic engagement show that younger Chinese-Indonesian voters demonstrate higher levels of electoral participation and political efficacy compared to previous generations, who were shaped by experiences of political exclusion and state-sponsored discrimination. These findings support the argument that participation has increased, although unevenly across regions and social classes.

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Nevertheless, this participation remains concentrated in urban centers and among middle-to-upper socioeconomic groups, indicating that political inclusion is still shaped by structural inequalities and local political configurations.

In this more open environment, the role of community organizations, business associations, and social networks became crucial, providing a space for the Chinese community to participate in national political discourse while simultaneously building social capital that strengthened internal solidarity and external legitimacy.

Post-reform dynamics demonstrate a shift in the political orientation of ethnic Chinese: they no longer focused solely on survival strategies, but began to seize political opportunities to support specific candidates, form parties, and advocate for collective interests. Their political identity is now more flexible, adaptive, and in line with the currents of globalization that emphasize the value of pluralism (Setijadi, 2015).

This transformation is also reinforced by political reforms that expanded civic space and shifted the relationship between minority groups and the state. The post-authoritarian environment enabled ethnic Chinese communities to renegotiate their position within Indonesia's national identity framework, no longer confined to the economic sphere but increasingly visible in public and political arenas. As Hoon (2012) argues, the new era of cultural citizenship has allowed Chinese Indonesians to articulate belonging more confidently, benefiting from state recognition of diversity and greater institutional openness to minority participation.

The consolidation of civil society after Reformasi has facilitated deeper engagement between Chinese Indonesians and other social groups, political parties, and advocacy networks. These interactions help dismantle long-standing stereotypes while promoting cooperation based on shared democratic values.

Dieleman, Koning, and Post (2010) notes that Chinese Indonesian organizations, youth communities, and business networks are increasingly involved in broader societal issues from governance reforms to social justice campaigns showing that political participation is now intertwined with efforts to strengthen interethnic trust.

The globalization and digital connectivity have significantly shaped how political identity is negotiated among younger Chinese Indonesians. Their exposure to global discourses on diversity, rights, and multicultural citizenship influences more progressive political attitudes and inspires new forms of political engagement. Researchers have observed that these shifts contribute to the formation of hybrid political identities rooted in local citizenship yet informed by global norms which enable minority groups to participate more assertively in democratic processes (Mubah & Anabarja, 2020).

This development illustrates how identity politics, digital culture, and multiculturalism converge to redefine the political role of Chinese Indonesians in the twenty-first century. As younger generations become more digitally connected and socially engaged, they increasingly utilize online platforms to articulate political views, mobilize communities, and challenge exclusionary narratives. These shifts indicate that political participation among Chinese Indonesians is becoming more multidimensional, extending beyond traditional structures toward more inclusive and networked forms of civic engagement.

### **The Emergence of Political Identity and Multiculturalism**

In discussing political identity and multiculturalism, this study draws on Castells's perspective, which emphasizes that identity is culturally embedded in individuals. Chinese Indonesians are considered a non-indigenous group, despite ethnic identities associated with their local regions, such as Batak (Medan Chinese), Betawi (Bentuk Chinese), and Bangka (Bangka

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Chinese). Furthermore, there is a distinction between Peranakan Chinese, who were born and raised in Indonesia and speak Indonesian, and Chinese, who are descendants of indigenous Chinese for several generations, maintain Chinese culture, and use Chinese as their primary language (Toshio, 2025).

Empirically, Chinese-Indonesian political experiences vary significantly across regions such as Pontianak, Medan, Bangka, and Jakarta. In areas with long-standing settlement patterns and stronger local integration, Chinese Indonesians often developed different survival strategies compared to those in urban political-economic centers. These regional variations influenced patterns of political caution, engagement, and alliance-building, demonstrating that political identity cannot be abstracted from local histories and power configurations.

Chinese ethnic identity is shaped not only by their own perceptions but also by the claims of others. Castells emphasizes that identity emerges when dominant institutions assign a label, and individuals internalize and construct meaning from that label: "Identities can also originate from dominant institutions; they become identities only when and if social actors internalize them and construct their meaning around this internalization" (SinghaRoy, 2018).

Political identity, according to Castells, can be understood through a process of identification, which is divided into three models. First, identity legitimacy, which is the identity formed by institutions or authorities to assert their dominance. Second, identity resistance, which arises when oppressed groups construct new identities in response to the pressures of domination. Third, identity projects, which are efforts by certain groups to construct new identities to gain a particular social position through social movements that can influence the broader societal order (Barandiaran, Calleja-López, & Cozzo, 2020).

Theoretically, this analysis contributes to minority politics and authoritarianism studies by showing that authoritarian regimes often incorporate minority elites while excluding minority masses, producing long-term path dependencies that persist into democratic transitions. As such, political identity formation among minorities should be analyzed through the lenses of class, power, and historical violence, rather than through normative assumptions of multicultural inclusion alone.

A pluralistic society as a collection of different elements coexisting within a single political system. A concrete example can be seen in the interactions between Chinese, Indian, and Malay communities, who, despite their distinct traditions and cultures, can coexist and cooperate within an ethnoreligious framework while maintaining their respective identities. Geertz added that a country's independence often gives rise to ethno-religious sentiment, as the vision and mission of independence emphasize full control of the state (Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023).

Simply put, multiculturalism can be understood as both the recognition and preservation of cultural diversity (Amani, 2025). Multiculturalism protects cultural differences, such as minority languages, while addressing the inequality between dominant and minority groups. Multiculturalism is a mechanism for minority groups to integrate into the wider society, gain recognition, and promote regulations that respect differences so they become part of society. Cashmore added that multiculturalism serves to maintain inter-ethnic harmony and build relationships between the state and minority groups.

The concept of social capital originally emerged in economics as the accumulation of resources that can be invested for future benefits. In the 1960s, this concept was expanded to include human factors such as education, health, and skills as complements to physical capital (Leoni, 2023). The core of social capital lies in social networks, which serve as assets and the

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foundation of social relationships, enabling individuals to connect and benefit each other (Sánchez-Arrieta, González, Cañabate, & Sabate, 2021).

In the context of politics and democratization, social capital emphasizes the importance of networks or civic communities operating vertically and horizontally to foster civic engagement. This engagement encompasses social solidarity and political participation, which impact economic and the quality of democracy. Therefore, the social capital perspective is highly relevant to analyzing the political identity of ethnic Chinese. This concept demonstrates the resources possessed by the Chinese community to actively participate in the political process.

The application of social capital theory helps explain how trust, shared norms, and sustained interactions enable the Chinese Indonesian community to navigate political structures and overcome historical barriers to participation. Their networks spanning economic associations, cultural organizations, and social groups serve as platforms for political learning and collective empowerment. Bridging social capital connects Chinese-Indonesian groups with broader civil society organizations and non-ethnic political actors.

Thus, the relationship between the three theories can be summarized as follows: multiculturalism provides institutional recognition, identity theory explains political meaning-making, and social capital accounts for the mechanisms through which identity is transformed into political participation. By integrating Castells, multiculturalism, and social capital theory into a unified framework, this study moves beyond a descriptive compilation of concepts. It demonstrates that political identity formation among Chinese Indonesians is a relational process shaped by institutional recognition, power structures, and networked resources.

Through these networks, individuals build the confidence and capacity needed to engage in democratic processes,

demonstrating that social capital strengthens not only internal cohesion but also outward political visibility and influence. Ultimately, this perspective underscores that political identity among Chinese Indonesians is not solely shaped by external forces such as state policies or societal perceptions but is also actively constructed through their own social infrastructures.

As recent studies highlight, minority communities with strong social capital are better positioned to assert their rights, contribute to public debates, and redefine their place within multicultural political systems (Suryani & Azmy, 2020). In this sense, social capital functions as both a foundation and a pathway for expanding democratic inclusion, allowing the Chinese Indonesian community to participate more meaningfully in Indonesia's evolving political landscape.

#### **Social Capital and the Rise of Chinese Indonesian Economic Networks during the New Order Period**

The economic and business success of the Chinese community during the New Order era was a crucial factor in paving the way for their participation in practical politics after the 1998 reforms. Rather than merely reflecting economic achievement, this success constituted a form of social capital that functioned as a political mechanism by compensating for the systematic exclusion of Chinese Indonesians from formal political institutions. During the New Order, interactions between the government and Chinese businesspeople tended to be secretive, but during the reform era, these relationships became more transparent, particularly in the political sphere. This shift indicates a transformation in the function of social capital—from covert survival strategies under authoritarianism to semi-institutionalized channels of political access in the democratic period.

The social capital that had been established previously was further strengthened through the continued collaboration

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between businesspeople and the ruling elite. These networks operated as mechanisms of political brokerage, enabling access to electoral politics without mass-based mobilization. Examples include the involvement of Chinese businesspeople in supporting presidential and vice-presidential candidates, including the participation of Hary Tanoesoedibjo, who ran with Wiranto through the Hanura Party in the 2014 presidential election (Tapsell, 2015).

According to Yoshihara Kunio in Southeast Asia, indigenous capitalists do indeed play a role, but their scale is still far below that of Chinese capitalists (Booth, 2022). For example, of the ten largest private banks, only Bank Niaga is owned by indigenous people, while in the manufacturing sector, the Bakrie group is the only major indigenous player. Indigenous contributions are more visible in the construction and oil services industries, which are closely linked to the government. Thus, unlike indigenous capital, which is embedded within political-bureaucratic networks, Chinese capital evolved largely outside formal political channels, reinforcing its reliance on informal and personalized ties.

After the end of the Soeharto era, the wealth of the Chinese began to be viewed as part of the national wealth, and discrimination against them diminished. Extensive business networks and trust among Chinese businesspeople facilitated coordination across regions and between the central and regional governments (Booth, 2016).

The patron-client relationship between the government and Chinese businesspeople became very close and difficult to separate. Field emphasized that the core of social capital lies in social networks, which serve as valuable assets and the foundation of social relationships. Patron-client relationships typically take place face-to-face, with the patron getting to know the client personally, fostering trust, and establishing closeness. This

relationship as a form of vertical solidarity, while Scott adds characteristics such as unequal exchange, face-to-face interaction, and flexibility and expansiveness. This dynamic is reflected in the formation of political parties led by Chinese businesspeople and their ties to the government.

The social capital of the Chinese community has unique characteristics, making it difficult to compare with other groups in Indonesia. In the post-reform era, although state independence was not yet fully evident, ethnic Chinese social capital persisted and functioned optimally in various organizations.

This aligns with Fukuyama's view that individuals in complex organizations work not only for personal gain but also out of a commitment to shared values and goals. Suharto's close ties with Chinese businessmen had been established since his military career. After the end of the New Order, these networks and social capital continued to be utilized by retired military personnel entering politics to gain support from Chinese businessmen, while Chinese businessmen felt it was important to establish close ties with those in power to strengthen their positions in the business and economic sectors.

The rise of Chinese Indonesian economic networks during the New Order period illustrates how strong social capital – characterized by trust, kinship-based ties, and long-standing commercial traditions – became a critical foundation for business growth amid restrictive political circumstances. In a context where political participation was limited and discrimination persisted, Chinese-Indonesian entrepreneurs relied on dense intra-ethnic networks, access to informal credit systems, and collaborative business practices to build resilient economic alliances. This social capital enabled them to navigate regulatory barriers, reduce transaction costs, and sustain business continuity even during periods of economic volatility.

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At the same time, state policies under the New Order unintentionally reinforced these networks by granting privileged access to certain Chinese-Indonesian conglomerates while constraining broader political engagement, resulting in a unique pattern where economic empowerment advanced alongside socio-political marginalization. Ultimately, this case demonstrates that under authoritarian regimes, minority social capital may stabilize power relations rather than challenge them, a finding that has broader theoretical implications for the study of minorities, informal power, and post-authoritarian political inclusion.

### **Multiculturalism and Its Challenges**

The findings of this study reveal that the strengthening of political identity among Chinese Indonesians goes hand in hand with the broader evolution of a more inclusive multicultural society in Indonesia. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with multiculturalism theory, which posits that recognition of cultural plurality and institutional accommodation are essential for minority groups to fully engage in national life (Suryani & Azmy, 2020). However, this study also recognizes that multiculturalism in Indonesia operates unevenly and remains fragile, often limited to symbolic recognition rather than substantive equality.

At the same time, the strengthening of Chinese Indonesian political identity cannot be separated from the changing socio-political landscape after the fall of the New Order. The Reformasi era opened broader democratic spaces that allowed minority groups to express cultural identity, participate in public discourse, and build new forms of political engagement. This transformation demonstrates how shifts in political opportunity structures can stimulate minority empowerment and strengthen their sense of belonging within the national framework. Yet, these expanded political opportunity structures have been highly contingent and reversible, shaped by shifting elite interests, electoral competition,

and majoritarian pressures rather than by a consolidated commitment to minority protection.

Moreover, the increasing visibility of Chinese Indonesians in economic, social, and political spheres has contributed to normalizing their presence as part of Indonesia's multicultural fabric. Through participation in local governance, civil society, entrepreneurship, and cultural revitalization, the community has gradually reshaped public perceptions that once associated them solely with economic elites or outsider identities, although these perceptions remain highly unstable and context-dependent.

During the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), policies became more tolerant and inclusive, restoring civil and cultural rights for Chinese Indonesians and contributing to their formal acceptance as full citizens. This political shift underlines the importance of identity politics theory, whereby legal recognition, and state endorsement of group identity bolster minority mobilization (Suryani & Azmy, 2020).

Nevertheless, the research also uncovers persistent structural and social obstacles. Despite legal normalization, prejudice and negative stereotypes against the Chinese community remain entrenched in public discourse and everyday social interactions. Literary and historical analyses find that although regimes have changed, the binary categorization of "pribumi" (native) vs. "non-pribumi" (Chinese descent) continues to affect the lived experience of Chinese Indonesians, especially during moments of crisis. (Wijayanti, 2022). This persistence must be read against Indonesia's history of anti-Chinese violence, including the 1965-1966 massacres and the 1998 riots, which continue to inform collective memory, fear, and political caution among Chinese Indonesians.

Moreover, the study confirms that social capital plays a vital role in reinforcing political identity and enabling civic participation. Drawing on the work of Putnam, research shows

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that the Chinese Indonesian community's dense networks of trust, reputation, and mutual support strengthen their collective efficacy and political confidence (Hisyam, Kinanti, Miftaqiyah, & Adila, 2024). These forms of social capital have been crucial in transforming the group's political stance from passivity in the New Order to a more assertive, organized, and participatory presence in contemporary politics.

Furthermore, the revitalization of community organizations, educational institutions, and cultural associations has provided renewed spaces for political learning and civic engagement among Chinese Indonesians. These institutions serve not only as hubs for cultural continuity but also as environments where discussions about rights, representation, and public affairs can take place more openly. As community members interact through these platforms, they cultivate a deeper understanding of their position within Indonesia's pluralistic society and enhance their readiness to participate in democratic processes.

The growth of bridging social capital has strengthened the ability of Chinese Indonesians to engage with diverse groups beyond their immediate community. Through collaborations with civil society organizations, professional networks, and interethnic forums, they are expanding their influence within Indonesia's multicultural public sphere. These cross-community relationships help reduce social distance, foster interpersonal trust, and challenge outdated narratives that once limited their role in national politics, ultimately promoting a more inclusive civic environment.

Ultimately, the increasing political engagement of Chinese Indonesians reflects a broader transformation within Indonesia's democratic landscape, where minority voices are gradually gaining recognition and legitimacy. As dense networks of trust and cooperation continue to evolve, the community becomes more confident in asserting its political identity and contributing to

national discussions on citizenship and equality. This trajectory demonstrates that robust social capital not only reinforces internal solidarity but also empowers Chinese Indonesians to bridge identities and participate more fully in shaping Indonesia's diverse and multicultural democracy.

### **Conclusion**

The political transformation of Chinese Indonesians in the post-Reformasi era demonstrates how identity reconstruction, strengthened social capital, and an increasingly multicultural national framework can collectively foster more inclusive democratic participation. This study suggests that the evolving political identity of Chinese Indonesians reflects not only a growing confidence in state protections but also the broader societal shift toward acknowledging diversity as an integral component of national life.

However, the persistence of stereotypes and identity-based biases indicates that multiculturalism in Indonesia remains an unfinished project that requires continuous societal and institutional commitment. To sustain this progress, it is recommended that future policy initiatives prioritize educational programs promoting intercultural understanding, strengthen anti-discrimination mechanisms, and encourage the participation of minority groups in political and civic platforms. Further empirical research involving community-level engagement is also recommended to deepen insights into how multicultural principles are experienced and negotiated in everyday social and political interactions.

Limitations of this study must be acknowledged. As a literature and documentation-based analysis, it relies on secondary sources, which may not fully represent the diversity of regional and individual experiences of Chinese Indonesians. Further empirical research, such as field interviews, survey-based studies, or comparative case analyses, would provide richer, more

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nuanced insight into how multiculturalism and social capital operate at the grassroots level.

In addition, comparative studies with other minority groups or cross-provincial analyses could provide broader perspectives on the dynamics of identity politics in Indonesia. Strengthening educational programs, anti-discrimination mechanisms, and civic participation platforms is recommended to ensure that multiculturalism continues to develop as a lived and equitable social reality.

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