

Support for Palestine Among Indonesian Muslims: Religious Identity and Solidarity as Reasons for E-Petition Signing

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Abstract

A petition is a form of collective action urging the government or a public entity to resolve a specific situation. There is inconsistency between previous research on whether religious or political identity is more likely to lead to radical or peaceful actions, especially in terms of how feelings of solidarity relate to religious-political issues. This study examines the reasons Indonesians signed e-petitions supporting Palestine. Data were collected from the comment sections of e-petitions supporting Palestine on change.org. In total, we analyzed 380 comments from 25 e-petitions using a qualitative approach. Using NVivo for thematic analysis, we found that the most recurring themes were moral violation, followed by independence for Palestine, solidarity, hatred as a negative emotion, and religious identity. Additionally, matrix nodes analysis showed identification with Islam was related to solidarity. These findings suggest that the similarity of religious identity in the two nations can be associated with solidarity as a reason for signing the e-petitions. We also discussed the association between moral violation and independence for Palestine as reasons for signing the e-petitions.

Keywords

Collective action; E-petition; Indonesian-Palestinian; Identity; Solidarity

“But today, we finally acknowledge the obvious: that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital.”
(Donald Trump statement, December 6, 2017)

ong and Han (2019) found evidence that the urban residents will increasingly participate in protests as political participation expression. People took part as protesters as a response to political issues, for example, action responded to Donald Trump's statement on the introduction quote. Several peaceful demonstrations and even clashes occurred in various parts of the world

between December 10th and 16th, 2017, in response to Donald Trump’s statement that the United States would recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital (Al-Jazeera, 2017). In Indonesia, thousands protested at the U.S. Embassy, Jakarta (Jansen, 2017). Other actions taken by Indonesians included creating and signing an online petition in support of Palestine. Petitions are one form of peaceful collective action (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Tausch et al., 2011; Thomas & Louis, 2014; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Wright, 2009). E-petitions are fundamentally the same as traditional petitions that aim is to urge an authority or organization to act or to refuse certain actions or policies (Panagiotopoulos & Elliman, 2012). Collective action is the basis of social movements for social change (Oliver, 2013).

Many social scientific studies have examined

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the role of collective identity in social movements (Hunt & Benford, 2004), including petition signing (see Shi, Hao, Saeri, & Cui, 2014; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2016). For instance, the collective identity perspective has been used intensively to explain social movements in the 2000s (Klandermans & Stekelenburg, 2013; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010). Gamson (1992) argued that collective identity is critical in explaining social identity and its relationship with collective action, including in political context. Brewer (2001) claimed that the key to such study area is “political identity.” In psychological research, political identity has become the focus of studies in collective action research (Alberici & Milesi, 2016; van Zomeren, Postmes et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Several other studies explained the role of religious identity in radical or collective violence (Basedau et al., 2011; Duffy & Toft, 2007; Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016; Phalet et al., 2010). On the one hand, Phalet et al. (2010) found that religious identity contributed to normative (peaceful) collective action promoting religious purposes. This type of identity is useful to explain the supports of conflict reconciliation through positive group-emotions (Baysu et al., 2018). It means that some findings on collective action lead to the role of politicized identities, others to the role of religious identity. Furthermore, we concluded that previous research was unclear on expounding whether religious or political identity leads people to feel solidarity and support collective action.

We believe that a similar dynamic will happen with solidary actions such as e-petition signing. Various factors potentially affect a person’s decisions in such matters. We explain the most relevant identities as motivations to support e-petitions concerning religious-political issues. We also explore the association between identity and other motivating factors such as solidarity, morality, and support for the independence of Palestine. Using a qualitative approach, we argue that religious identity and solidarity can explain the Palestinian solidarity actions by Indonesian Muslims. We assume there are two reasons for this: (1) the context of the study is a religious issue, and (2) Indonesian and Palestinian Muslims feel a sense of connectedness as fellow Muslims. We investigated this assumption using comments for supporting

e-petitions signed by Indonesian Muslims. This study also seeks to explain past collective action, not only the intention or attitude of the collective action, as in the previous studies (e.g., Phalet et al., 2010; Baysu et al., 2018; Saab et al., 2015).

Religious Identity in Collective Action

It has been proven that collective action can be related to religious affiliation. Williams (2002), for example, proved that African American church members in Arkansas engaged in collective action that used the religious and cultural meanings of the church in explaining the social situation. Not only that, political engagement (such as petition signatures) increased among second-generation Muslim immigrants compared to their first-generation counterparts in Western Europe (Just et al., 2014). In the area of religious-political action, we explored whether religious factors explained an individual’s support for an e-petition as a form of collective action.

Now, let us revisit the conceptual framework of the study. The perceived similarity in subjective identification is one of the mechanistic solidarity concepts from Émile Durkheim’s *De la division du travail social* (1983). We also draw on the concept of organic solidarity related to instrumental independence (Thijssen, 2012). In addition to focusing on identity, we are open to the possibility of other factors involved. When Indonesian Muslims perceive their identity as identical to that of Palestinians, this increases their feeling of solidarity. In turn, this sense of brotherhood increases the feeling of injustice suffered by Palestinians. We believe that this became a strong motivation for Indonesian Muslims to join the protests. Della Porta and Pizza (2008) proposed a similar dynamic, describing that the context of protest, sense of identification, solidarity, and injustice increased people’s motivation to participate in collective action.

In more recent studies, social identity has been emphasized as the central factor of collective action (see meta-analysis van Zomeren, Postmes et al., 2008). Many studies explained the role of politicized identity as a form of social identity in collective action (Tausch & Becker, 2013; Thomas et al., 2016; van Zomeren,

Postmes, et al., 2008). Shadiqi (2020) explained politicized identity as an activist identity of movement members. In the context of a religious-political issue, we assume that religious identities will also have a role in encouraging people to act. We explored the role of religious identity in collective action, following the suggestion of Baysu and Phalet (2017). Shadiqi et al., (2018) found that Muslim identity does not directly explain the peaceful collective action in the Palestinian conflict context; instead, group efficacy was determined as one mediating factor between the two. Derived from there, we believe that religious identity could be another factor contributing to such action. Given the context, Indonesian Muslims’ support for Palestinians expressed by their signing of e-petitions, is arguably a result of their religious identity.

Data and Method

The collected data consisted of 380 comments from 25 e-petitions regarding support for Palestine, circulated on change.org in 2017. Three of the comments were eliminated from the analysis because the participants were not from Indonesia. The data contains the petition content, number of signatures, comment writing time, name of the writer, comment content, number of likes, and writer’s country/region of origin. However, the specific identity of the writer was not available on the website.

There are several e-petition platforms, such as change.org, causes.com, and moveon.org. We selected change.org as a data resource. Change.org was established in 2007 and has grown to have over 200 million users from 196 countries. It is currently the largest e-petition platform and has many e-petitions concerning various topics (Huang, et al., 2015). Huang et al. (2015) described that e-petitions are more accessible and faster than paper petitions, and they do not require much action commitment.

Among the 25 e-petitions, 22 e-petitions were created by individuals and three were made by groups (P1, P2, and P4; see Figure 1). All creators of the e-petitions were from Indonesia, and the total number of signees was 30,851 people. We read and selected three e-petitions based on their topic, i.e., support for Palestine. The search keywords were “Palestine,” “Jerusalem,” and “Indonesia.” The number of comments on each petition ranged from 0–210. Most of the comments were written in Indonesian, and others were in English. We collected the data on February 9–17, 2018. Figure 1 shows the details of the number of comments for each petition Figure 1 (note: P is the petition code).

We moved these comments to a dataset for later thematic analysis using NVivo software. We carried out three levels of coding through grounded theory approach: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Glasser & Straus, 1967; Meier et al., 2008). We captured 13 code

Figure 1. Number of comments by petition, organized by date

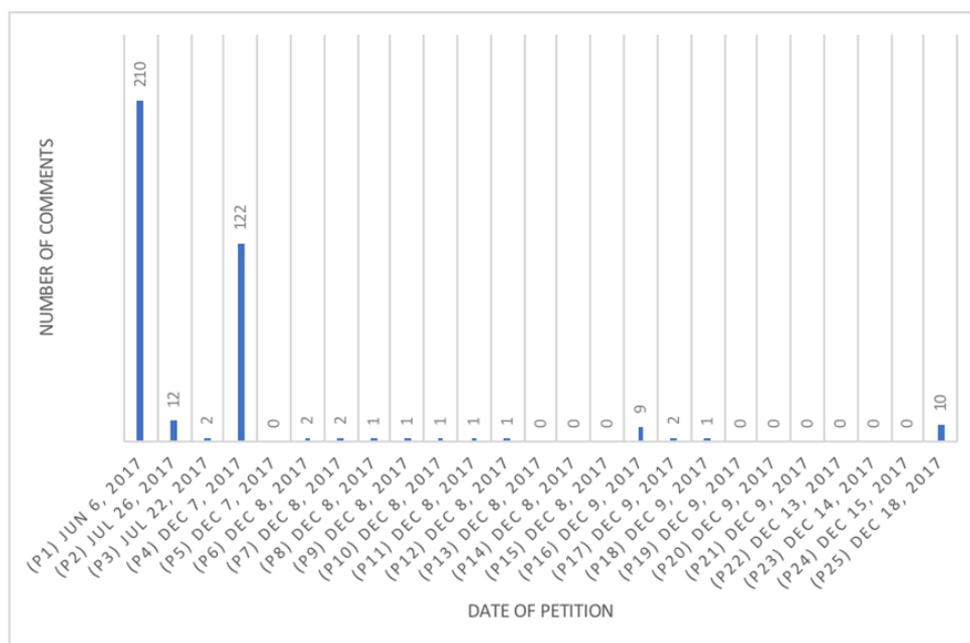


Table 1. Reduction of codes, categories, and themes for the e-petition comment contents

Open coding: Code	Axial coding: Category	Selective coding: Theme
• Anger	• Negative emotion	• Hatred as a negative emotion
• Hatred	• Religious identity	• Religious identity
• Support for stopping violence, crime, and colonialism	• Humanity (human rights)	• Moral violation
• Religious identity	• Independence	• Independence of Palestine
• National identity	• Moral violation	• Solidarity
• Humanity	• Support for the political structure	
• Independence	• Peace	
• Indonesian president and government support	• The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia	
• Peace	• Territory and power	
• The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia	• Solidarity	
• Justice		
• Religious belief		
• Solidarity		

categories from the open coding stage. They were narrowed down to nine categories in the process of axial coding (2nd level). At this level, we created a codebook containing coding names, definitions, descriptions of when coding was used, and examples of the comment contents (Berends & Johnston, 2005). Details of codes, categories, and themes reduction process can be seen in Table, and the codebook details can be seen in Table 2.

The codebook was used in selective coding conducted by inter-rater team (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998) of two trained raters. One rater did not know the research question, and one did. Both raters were trained on the NVivo program and understanding the codebook. One was an independent rater (from outside the research team) with is a Bachelor of

Psychology, and the other was the author, who holds a Master's degree in psychology. Both raters had conducted qualitative studies and coded verbatim before. Reliability of the coding analysis was achieved through inter-rater discussion and consensus. The quality of the inter-rater coding was assessed from the kappa score (Cicchetti, 1994). We found excellent kappa score (0.75–1.00) for the results of selective coding (*mean kappa* = 0.979), which meant that the two raters had similar coding. On the next step, all the authors discussed and decided the results from the selective coding process.

In addition to thematic analysis, we analyzed the frequency of words through several stages in NVivo. In the initial screening stage, we performed word analysis and cleared the conjunctions; the results showed 94 nouns and

Table 2. Categorization of keywords from the word frequency analysis

Keywords (top 10 freq. words)	Theme Classification
Independence, State, Capital, Nation, Freedom, Donald Trump	Independency of Palestine
Muslim, Zionist	Religious Identity
Brother	Solidarity
Colonialist	Moral convictions

verbs. In the next stage, we identified which words had the same meanings (e.g., “peace” and “peaceful”) and grouped together words from the two languages with the same meaning (e.g., “kemanusiaan” in Bahasa and “humanity” in English) or referent (e.g., “Donald” and “Trump”). We also eliminated words with a less than 1% occurrence. At this stage, 54 words remained. The 10 most frequent words, in order, were as follows: colonialist, Muslim, brother, independence, state, capital, nation, Zionist, freedom, and Donald Trump (see the results of the cloud tag word frequency in Figure 4). These 10 words were classified using the five themes. Table 3 summarizes the results of the word frequency classification.

Results and Discussion

In the final stage of the coding process, we identified five main themes that emerged from the comments for all e-petitions. The five themes were hatred as a negative emotion, religious identity, moral violation, Palestinian independence, and solidarity (see Table 1). This section presents the results of the content analysis of the e-petitions and discusses the interrelationship between the main coding themes. First, we found that two of the 25 e-petitions (P1 and P4) had a large amount of support and comments. The goals of these e-petitions were (1) to liberate and eliminate violence in Palestine, and (2) to respond to Donald Trump’s speech recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Second, the matrix-coding analysis showed an interrelationship between religious identity and solidarity as well as between moral violations and the issue of Palestinian independence. These pairs emerged because (1) there were four themes of coding (independence of Palestine, moral violations, solidarity, and religious identity) with a large number of mention frequencies in all comments; (2) the results of the word frequency analysis showed five frequently-appearing words (i.e., colonialism, Muslim, brother, independent, and state) related to the inter-coded matrix results.

Overview of the Two Main Contents of E-Petitions: Supporting Palestine

Amnesty International Indonesia, a global

movement focused on injustice and human rights, created P1. The Majelis Dzikir Hubbul Wathon Indonesia, a religious-based group of moderate Islamic scholars in Indonesia, created P4. Both groups are considered to be influential due to their established reputations for focusing on global and national issues related to justice. Their reputations serve as a vehicle for them to mobilize people because in some ways, it provides an organizational structure crucial for social movement (see McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

E-petition signing is a collective action focused on a goal malleable by the people or organization moving it (Oliver, 2013). Collective action tends to be organized, while in contrast, collective behavior is less structured (Rao et al., 2000) and may even be spontaneous (Oliver, 2013). The organization that created P1 focuses on humanitarian issues in Indonesia; as a group, it was easier for them to mobilize their members and other sympathizers to sign the e-petition than it would have been for an individual initiator.

Further, the purpose of the e-petition was in accord with the organization’s goals. For example, Amnesty International Indonesia created a petition on the issue of violence in Palestine. It requested the governments—both national and international—to regulate economic policy with Israel, stop violence in Palestine, and support Palestinian independence.

For the last 50 years, Israel has been forcing thousands of Palestinians off their land, occupying and illegally using it to create settlements that exclusively house Jewish Israeli settlers. We want governments to stop enabling the economy that keeps these illegal settlements growing and fuels the suffering of Palestinians: and you can help. (P1)

The theme coding and word frequency analysis also strengthened the conclusion that P1 is in line with the organization’s goal of focusing on issues of Palestinian violence and independence. The dominant themes in the P1 comments were solidarity, moral violation, and independence. The word frequency analysis across all e-petition comments revealed the highest frequency words, namely, independence, freedom, Muslims, brothers, and colonialist (see Table 3).

Table 3. Codebook of coding themes

Theme and code (frequency of code source)	Definition (reason for signing the e-petition)	When coding was used	Example of comment content
Solidarity (164)	Equal responsibility, attachment, brotherhood, and caring	The respondent felt a brotherly bond and care for Palestinians.	"We must care about the fate of our fellow Muslims in Palestine." (MU, P1-76).
Independence of Palestine	Political opinion (e.g., territorial rights and power, constitution), peace, needing supporting from political structure (government and president), freedom, and independence of Palestine	The respondent supported the independence of the Palestinians as a political opinion.	"Israel is a colonial state that has no right to take over the city of Jerusalem and all of Palestine." (TA, P4-P22)
Code: Territory and power (172)			
Freedom and independence (107)			
The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (31)			
Peace (34)			
Supporting of political structure (33)			
Moral violation	Moral violation (e.g., torture, crime, colonization), humanity or human rights concerns, and supporting justice	The respondent believed what Israel was doing to Palestinians violated moral standards, a sense of humanity, and/or justice.	"They (the Palestinians) are the real hosts, and Israel is the only one who robs everything of the Palestinian people ... they slaughter children, women, and the elderly..." (RP, P1-P5)
Code: Moral violation (167)			
Humanity or human rights (70)			
Justice (25)			
Hatred as a negative emotion (68)	Negative feeling or emotion, such as hatred, insulting attitude, anger, contempt, and sadness	The respondent expressed hatred, an insulting attitude, cursing, upset feeling, or anger with what Israel had done in Palestine.	"Therefore, I strongly condemn Israel and its friends."
Religious identity (64)	Categorization and self-identification with religious groups (as Muslims)	The respondent identified or categorized himself/herself as a Muslim and felt a shared or similar identity with Muslims group in Palestine.	"I signed this because of my duty as a Muslim, defending the Muslim brother in Palestine..." (NHZ, P4-25).

As Figure 1 shows, the number of e-petitions skyrocketed following Donald Trump’s statement on December 7, 2017. We found 22 e-petitions created by Indonesian Muslims as a response to the Palestine issue, created on December 7–18, 2017. Further, the most-signed e-petitions were those made in response to Donald Trump’s speech (P4). These findings demonstrate that, in addition to the initiator’s role as a group or organization, current events influenced the purpose and content of the e-petitions. For example, P4 discussed Palestinian independence in response to Donald Trump’s statement:

The statement of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, who will recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, is a controversial statement that can cause a lengthy conflict. ... We invite all of you to express our condemnation of U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision and support the “Petition of the Rejection of Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel” because Jerusalem belongs to all of us. (P4)

The most frequent coding theme in P4 concerned territory and power. This means that

most people signed the petition because they wished for Palestinian land to be freed from colonialism, occupation, and control of others. The word frequency analysis of all comments across the 25 e-petitions accorded with the content of P4. The words related to Palestinian independence were the following: independence, state, capital, nation, freedom, and Donald Trump.

Similarity of Religious Identity and Solidarity

We found that conflict in Palestine seemed to reinforce individuals’ action related to their identity as Muslims. Most of the petition comments indicated that Indonesian Muslims felt a sense of similar religious identity with their Palestinian counterparts. They felt that they shared kinship under their belief in one Allah, as many comments began with “I am Muslim” and continued with phrases such as “brother in faith.” The word frequency analysis also pointed to the role of Muslim identity, as the word “Muslim” was one of the most common words across the 25-e-petitions (see Figure 2). This indicated that the Palestine issue intensified the sense of shared social identity, as Muslims, between Indonesians and Palestinians.

Figure 2. Results of word frequency analysis for all e-petitions



Our finding on the role of religious identity was different from some previous studies, which clarified the role of religious identity in the context of radical or violent action (see Basedau et al., 2011; Duffy & Toft, 2007; Hirschhoefer et al., 2016). In our study, the thematic analysis of e-petition commentary found that religious identities could explain the reasons for supporting peaceful collective action. Correctly, our finding applied to the context of peaceful action related to religious themes, such as e-petitions on the Palestinian conflict. In other instances, religious incidents (e.g., the case of a cartoon of Muhammad) could strengthen or create solidarity; this would make it easier for a movement to occur (Tarrow, 2011).

The results of the NVivo matrix-coding analysis showed an interrelationship between the motivation of religious identity and solidarity, as both themes became the second most significant matrix-coding frequencies (see Table 4). Identity similarity described the basic principle of the psychological process of social identity theory; that is, social identification through the similarity of social group traits and social categorization explained group differences (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Such identity similarity found in our study was between Indonesian Muslims supporting the e-petition for Palestinians.

This shared Muslim identity became the reason for taking action in solidarity. Rootes (2013) argued that collective identity creates solidarity, and we found that this extends to collective action support as well. Solidarity may be triggered by common attributes that form an affiliation pattern (Heckathorn & Rosenstein,

2002). Our finding is in line with Della Porta and Diani's (2006) explanation that collective action requires the presence of the basic concept of an identity as "us" and a sense of collective solidarity. Evidence of such a relationship was seen in many of the e-petition comments, including the following:

I am very concerned about my brother in Palestine. Allahuakbar, Allahuakbar, Allahuakbar. (MF, P1-53)

Because I care about the Palestinians and fellow Muslim brothers. (LHK, P2-66)

I signed this because of my duty as a fellow Muslim, defending the Muslim brother in Palestine. (NHZ, P2-25)

I am Muslim, and I should be helping my fellow Muslims. (WEM, P21-2)

Note: MF, LHK, NHZ, and WEM are the initials of the writer's name. P1, etc. is the petition code.

Relationship Between Moral Violation and Support for Palestinian Independence

The first rank coding matrix showed moral violation ("*pelanggaran moral*" in Bahasa) concern regarding Palestinian independence issue (see Table 4). Moral conviction referred to a person's subjective evaluation of right and wrong and/or good and bad (Skitka et al., 2005). The motive of morality was defined as a form of violation of socially applicable moral standards,

Table 4. Matrix of the intersections between main coding themes

	1. Hatred as a negative emotion	2. Religious identity	3. Moral violation	4. Independence of Palestine	5. Solidarity
1. Hatred as a negative emotion	-	2	12	11	2
2. Religious identity		-	2	4	18
3. Moral violation			-	34	14
4. Independence of Palestine				-	17
5. Solidarity					-

and this would affect one's efforts to protect the value of sanctity and vulnerability (van Zomeren, 2015a). Moral violation refers to a violation of something taboo (van Zomeren, 2015b). The existence of violated values and principles generates moral anger, and following that, people generate grievances as the core of collective action (Klandermans & van Stekelenburg, 2013). Our finding showed that some moral violations, such as murder, violence, torture, crime, oppression, and territorial extraction (colonization), are believed to have occurred in Palestine.

Morality was regarded as one catalyst for actions, motivated by variables such as social identity, group-based anger, and group efficacy (van Zomeren, 2013; 2015a; 2015b). Personal moral conviction, such discrimination against the British Muslim minority, was evident in shaping one's desire to participate in collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2011). Besides the intention of collective action (Study 1 & 2, van Zomeren et al., 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2011), moral conviction also predicted actual behavior, such as signing a petition (Study 2, van Zomeren et al., 2012).

Our finding was in line with these findings and able to clarify the role of moral conviction in the behavior of signing e-petitions. Among all the coding themes, moral violation in Palestine was the second most frequent theme ($n = 167$). The frequency of this theme was below the territory and power coding themes, both closely related to the content of Palestinian independence. We believe that the Palestinian independence issue relates to the Indonesian historical context. Soekarno, a founding father of Indonesia, supported anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in Arab countries, such as Palestine conflict (Muttaqien, 2013).

In the context of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the petition signatories assumed that moral violation (such as colonialism and violence) was related to the effort to liberate Palestine. There are four explanations to understand this relationship. First, coding of moral violations and territorial had the highest frequency, especially in P4. Second, the content of P4 showed that recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel triggered negative moral judgment on Israel. Third, some of the words with the highest frequencies related to the theme of moral viola-

tion (word: colonialism) and Palestinian independence (words: independence, state, capital, nation, freedom, Donald Trump) (See Figure 4). Fourth, some comments on the support for e-petition produced the second coding matrix of this theme, such as the following:

I signed this petition because Israel was the only nation at this time who still colonizes, oppresses, and even kills people from other countries, in this case, happened with Palestinian. And they are NOT REALLY HAVING A RIGHT to live in the land of Palestine. (PN, P1-157).

Israel is a colonial state that has no right to take over the city of Jerusalem and all of Palestine. (TA, P2-22).

Israel is the invader with no power over Al Quds. Al Quds forever belongs to Allah and the Muslims.....!!!! (G, P2-121).

Conclusion

In urban contexts, collective action can consist of protests or demonstrations, with people taking to the streets. On the internet, people can participate in online collective actions such as signing e-petitions. For instance, Indonesian Muslims expressed their support for Palestine by signing various e-petitions. Through a content analysis of e-petition comments, we found two primary reasons for signees' support: (1) similarities of religious identity between Indonesians and Palestinians and the related sense of solidarity and (2) belief that Israel had violated moral standards in inhibiting Palestinian independence. Additionally, collective actions initiated by groups or organizations received more support than those initiated by individuals. This demonstrated that an essential component in collective action is the presence of a reputable organization as an initiator.

Our findings were specific to two contexts, i.e., the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the context of Muslims as the majority religious group in Indonesia. Different contexts would likely yield different dynamics of support reasons for e-petitions. Further research is needed to explore whether the factors that emerged in this study are relevant in other

contexts, for example, with other religions or minority groups. The main finding of this research is that people are more likely to engage in online actions, namely, signing e-petitions, if identity, solidarity, and morality factors are salient in the collective action. A practical implication for organizations that create e-petitions is that they should evoke identity, solidarity, and morality factors to increase support.

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