



## **SOCIAL CONFLICT AND COHESION IN PLURAL SOCIETIES UNDER NORMATIVE SOCIAL MECHANISMS**

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### **Abstract**

This article develops a normative account of social conflict and social cohesion in plural societies. It explains how ethnic, religious, and interest based divisions can become sources of contestation when group boundaries are treated as moral absolutes, when access to resources is unequal, and when public recognition is distributed selectively. The discussion distinguishes everyday disagreement from escalatory conflict by focusing on meaning making, institutional trust, and the ethics of public speech. Cohesion is framed as an ongoing social achievement sustained by fair rules, credible mediation, cross group communication, and shared civic obligations. Particular attention is given to how narratives of victimhood and purity can narrow deliberation, while inclusive civic language can widen it without erasing difference. The paper proposes a conceptual framework linking three elements: boundary governance, procedural justice, and relational repair after episodes of hostility. The central claim is that durable cohesion requires protecting equal dignity, ensuring transparent decision procedures, and maintaining channels for grievance expression that do not reward intimidation. By articulating these conditions, the article clarifies why pluralism can remain peaceful when institutions nurture reciprocity and when leaders discourage categorical blame and collective punishment.

**Keywords:** plural societies, social conflict, social cohesion, procedural justice, mediation, group boundaries, public ethics.

## Introduction

A pluralistic society lives through repeated encounters between groups with different languages, origins, beliefs, and life habits. These encounters can bring a sense of richness as they offer opportunities for learning, expanding networks, and fostering curiosity toward other ways of life. However, the same encounters can give rise to anxiety when differences are perceived as threats to collective self-esteem. At the level of daily experience, people judge social security not merely by the absence of violence, but by the assurance that they are respected, not treated as perpetual outsiders, and granted equal opportunities. This underscores how vital it is to maintain healthy and mutually respectful relationships among citizens in neighborhood life (Warin, 2025). When this respect and opportunity are perceived as unequal, identity differences are easily used as a language of protest. Identity-based protest language often feels powerful because it provides simple explanations for a sense of grievance, even though such explanations may ignore the complexity of social structures. In the public sphere, statements asserting group superiority or claiming group suffering can turn conversation into a race for legitimacy (Di Masso et al., 2011). From this, it is evident that social conflict in a pluralistic society relates to how people interpret difference, rather than the mere existence of difference itself.

Ethnic and religious diversity are often closely linked to matters of resource distribution, access to employment, and social recognition. In communal life, social recognition concerns who is considered indigenous, who is deemed entitled to speak, and who is considered worthy of trust. When recognition operates selectively, certain groups may feel marginalized even while living side-by-side formally. Issues like this often arise due to differing views on justice within society (Saktiawan et al., 2021). At the same time, advantaged groups may view their privileges as natural, as they are inherited through customs and symbols. These differing assessments create tensions that are difficult to resolve through mere calls for unity, because the tension is rooted in daily experiences regarding access and respect (Østby, 2008). Furthermore, political and economic interests frequently use identity as a vehicle for mobilization, because identity provides clear boundaries between friend and foe. Especially when society is actively involved in political affairs, the dynamics

of support often become highly emotional (Rojak et al., 2021). When identity becomes a vehicle, the space for negotiation narrows, as compromise is easily interpreted as betrayal. In such situations, conflict can transform from fair competition into hostility that shuts down empathy. Therefore, understanding the sources of conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests requires a framework that assesses the relationship between group boundaries, distribution, and moral language in the public sphere.

Social cohesion in a pluralistic society is not a state that emerges on its own, but rather the result of continuous social work. This social work is evident in the existence of shared rules, habits of respect, and ways of resolving disputes without causing humiliation. In the experience of citizens, cohesion is often felt when differences do not hinder cooperation, when people feel safe expressing their identities, and when institutions are perceived as fair (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Therefore, every individual needs to balance personal desires and their responsibilities toward others so that harmony is maintained (Saputra & Darmawan, 2021). Cohesion is also formed through routine interactions that provide opportunities to see the human being behind the group label. Routine interactions can occur in schools, markets, workplaces, civic organizations, or places of worship that are in close proximity. Even in densely populated suburban environments, the togetherness of residents is heavily determined by the way they interact every day (Wisnujati & Mardikaningsih, 2021). However, routine interactions do not always result in closeness, as interactions can take place with distance, mutual suspicion, and closedness. This is where social mechanisms that maintain cohesion become important, such as procedures that treat citizens equally, trusted local leadership, and grievance channels that do not trigger revenge. When these mechanisms are weak, the sense of security is disrupted and rumors easily replace knowledge. Rumors accelerate polarization because they provide quick narratives that position other groups as the cause. Thus, social cohesion requires a framework of conversation and institutional arrangements capable of resisting the urge for simplification.

Social conflict in a pluralistic society often starts from small markers, such as expressions considered demeaning, administrative treatments considered discriminatory, or collective decisions considered biased. We

need to realize that small problems left unchecked can damage the harmony that has been built over a long time within families and the environment (Sulistyo, 2022). Small markers become large when they are read as patterns rather than single events. Reading them as patterns emerges when citizens feel their experiences are being repeated and ignored. When the feeling of being ignored meets group narratives, conflict gains moral energy. Moral energy makes people convinced that they are defending honor, not just fighting for interests (Varshney, 2001). Within this framework, conflict can harden because the opponent is perceived not as a fellow citizen, but as an existential threat. Difficulties in meeting daily life needs also often make social situations more sensitive to friction (Mahmudah, 2021). When existential threat becomes the common language, harsh actions feel justifiable. At this point, social cohesion is threatened not by the difference itself, but by the way difference is framed as a reason to erase the rights of other groups. Thus, social mechanisms that maintain cohesion must be able to neutralize existential framing through fair rules, credible mediation, and moral leadership that rejects collective scapegoating. Without such mechanisms, conflict tends to move from limited disputes toward widespread hostility.

Pluralistic societies also face tension between freedom of expression and the obligation to maintain collective dignity. Freedom of expression is important for democracy, yet expressions that label other groups as contemptible can trigger collective wounds. Furthermore, it is important for us to care for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly who often experience psychological pressure in old age (Issalillah & Aisyah, 2022). Collective wounds form long-lasting social memories and influence how the next generation views other groups. In the experience of citizens, collective wounds are often revived through symbols, commemorations, and circulating stories. Stories can be a source of identity resilience, but they can also be a source of hatred if they close off the recognition that the other side also experiences suffering. Support from the social environment is greatly needed so that every member of society feels protected, including in health aspects (Khayru, 2022). In the digital space, the spread of stories happens quickly, often without verification, so public emotions rise easily. When emotions rise, compromise is perceived as weakness and legal procedures are perceived as slow. This situation increases the risk of

unilateral action. Therefore, social cohesion requires public communication ethics that refrain from generalizations and distinguish individuals from the group. Fair legal protection is also crucial so that no member of society feels cornered due to their mental or physical condition (Zahid et al., 2022). This ethics also demands that institutions guarantee justice so that citizens do not take the law into their own hands. Thus, the discussion of conflict and cohesion in a pluralistic society needs to assess the relationship between public language, collective memory, and institutional legitimacy (Bar-Tal, 2007).

The description of the problem in this topic centers on the difficulty of explaining the sources of conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests without falling into oversimplified explanations. Conflict is often judged as a result of the nature of a particular group, whereas such an assessment ignores the social mechanisms that make tension tangible (Benford & Snow, 2000). In many respects, citizen involvement in maintaining their environment and community can be the key to preventing division (Zulkarnain et al., 2021). In many situations, conflict arises from the intersection of a sense of injustice and the identity language that gives shape to that feeling. This sense of injustice can relate to access to public services, the distribution of opportunities, or the treatment by authorities. However, this feeling becomes an open conflict when it is framed as a collective insult. This framing does not occur in a vacuum, as it is produced through conversations, rumors, and trusted informal authorities. Awareness of the importance of maintaining the balance of nature and the environment is also part of our collective responsibility as citizens (Nuraini et al., 2022). When framing hardens, citizens demand recognition and retribution, not merely procedural improvements. At that point, social integration that appeared stable can collapse because mutual trust is lost. This issue shows that conflict needs to be read as a process, not as a sudden explosion. Reading it as a process demands attention to how group boundaries are constructed, how interests are politicized, and how institutions influence the sense of justice.

The next problem description relates to the way society maintains integration and social cohesion once identity conflict has formed, yet recovery mechanisms are often understood only as calls for unity. Calls for unity may provide temporary calm, but they do not automatically restore trust, because

trust requires evidence of justice and changes in how the aggrieved party is treated. Good public policy should be able to balance economic and social aspects so that the lives of citizens become more stable (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2021). In many discussions, social cohesion is treated as an abstract value, so its mechanisms are not discussed operationally. In fact, social mechanisms work through clear rules, dispute resolution procedures, trusted leadership, and meaningful spaces for encounter (Chan et al., 2006). When these mechanisms are not designed, integration depends on chance and on specific figures. Dependency on figures makes integration fragile, because a change in leadership can alter the balance. Furthermore, integration mechanisms must face the dilemma between respecting differences and enforcing shared norms. If shared norms are too loose, citizens feel there is no protection. If shared norms are too rigid, citizens feel their identities are suppressed. This issue demands a normative explanation of the requirements for fair cohesion in a diverse society.

The urgency of this writing lies in the need to build a conceptual framework that organizes the understanding of the sources of conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests, as well as the social mechanisms that maintain integration and social cohesion. This writing is necessary so that public discourse does not stop at labeling certain parties as the cause, but instead moves toward a more orderly assessment regarding the distribution of justice, the management of group boundaries, and communication ethics. Urgency also arises because pluralistic societies often face situations where identity issues are used to simplify economic and political problems. This simplification may accelerate mobilization, but it hinders fair resolution. A normative framework is needed to distinguish conflict as a competition of interests that can be negotiated from conflict that erases the dignity of the other party. With such a framework, social integration can be understood as institutional work and cultural work that can be strengthened through rules, procedures, and moral leadership. Ultimately, a deep understanding of social problems will help us create a life that is more peaceful and mutually supportive (Bouchard, 2011). This writing aims to provide an academic language that can be used in civic education, policy design, and community mediation.

The purpose of this writing is to formulate a normative framework regarding social conflict and integration in a pluralistic society through a

critical reading of sociological ideas on identity, inequality, and the governance of difference. The description is directed toward explaining the sources of conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests as a relation of interpretation, resource distribution, and social recognition. This writing also aims to organize explanations of the mechanisms that maintain cohesion, such as shared rules, cross-group communication, mediation, and procedural justice. Theoretically, this framework clarifies the relationship between group boundaries and civic solidarity. Practically, this framework provides an ethical reference for policy designers and community leaders. The discussion is expected to help readers distinguish between conflict that is a form of fair competition and conflict that threatens humanity, so that the shared living space remains protected in the face of public hate speech.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative literature review to construct a conceptual synthesis regarding social conflict and integration in a pluralistic society, focusing on the sources of conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests, as well as the social mechanisms that maintain cohesion. Adler and Clark (2011) emphasize that social research requires sharp questions, clear definitions, and reasoning steps that the reader can follow. In line with this, the selection of sources is directed toward works discussing the formation of group boundaries, resource competition, institutional legitimacy, and dispute resolution arrangements. Babbie and Edgerton (2023) emphasize the importance of precision in constructing arguments from written sources, including the discipline of distinguishing theoretical claims, normative assumptions, and conceptual consequences. In this study, reading materials are organized into themes such as identity and recognition, inequality and distribution, public discourse and collective emotions, and cohesion mechanisms such as shared rules and mediation. These themes are then woven into an explanatory framework that addresses the problem formulation without presenting field data.

The processing of materials is conducted through repeated reading, noting key concepts, and comparing ideas to find common ground as well as conceptual differences. Beins (2017) emphasizes method as a tool of intellectual life that trains precision in reasoning, so that the writer does

not fall into disorderly generalizations. This principle is used to test whether a conflict concept explains the process of hostility formation or merely labels the outcome. Sarantakos (2017) emphasizes that social research requires an interpretative discipline that maintains consistency in terminology and ensures the accuracy of relationships between concepts. In this research, consistency is maintained through operational definitions of terms such as group boundaries, cohesion, procedural justice, and relationship restoration. The results of the reading are then synthesized into normative propositions that assess the requirements for fair cohesion, including the requirements for the protection of dignity, procedural transparency, and safe grievance channels.

The reliability of the argumentation is maintained through cross-thematic tracing that connects identity and interests within a single explanatory sequence. The synthesis procedure is performed by testing coherence specifically, whether a cohesion mechanism is capable of addressing the sources of conflict previously described, and whether that mechanism aligns with justifiable principles of justice. Babbie and Edgerton (2023) help reinforce the need for logical structure, while Adler and Clark (2011) help keep the writing focused on the questions. Beins (2017) strengthens the discipline of reasoning, while Sarantakos (2017) guides the caution of interpretation on social issues fraught with judgment. Through these procedures, the study results are presented as a conceptual synthesis that can be used to read the dynamics of identity conflict and formulate normative measures for the governance of diversity.

## Result and Discussion

Social conflict in a pluralistic society can be understood as a dispute that goes beyond ordinary differences of opinion, as it touches upon claims regarding group self-esteem, the right to living space, and institutional legitimacy. Conflict becomes dangerous when identity is treated as a rigid moral boundary, such that the other party is no longer viewed as a fellow citizen with rights. At the initial stage, conflict often emerges as grievances about unfair treatment, unequal access, or demeaning public language. These grievances can be channeled through formal procedures if the procedures are trusted. In managing various affairs in society, we need clear rules and firm law enforcement so that everyone feels protected (Nuraini

et al., 2021). However, when procedures are perceived as biased or distant, grievances shift to informal channels such as rumors and mass mobilization. In informal channels, emotions strengthen and the logic of evidence weakens. Normative discussion emphasizes that the source of conflict does not lie in diversity, but in the way diversity is managed through rules, distribution, and recognition. Good policies should indeed be designed to improve the quality of life for the community by prioritizing health and equality for all (Issalillah, 2021). When social recognition is granted selectively, citizens interpret difference as the basis for unequal treatment. This is where conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests finds an easily understood language, because identity provides a quick explanation of who is considered advantaged and who is considered disadvantaged. Therefore, every public policy taken needs to have a strong legal foundation so that social welfare is truly achieved (Rizky & Udjari, 2021). This framework demands attention to the mechanisms of group boundary formation and to the ethics of equal treatment as a prerequisite for cohesion (Hale, 2004).

The source of ethnic-based conflict is often related to the process of social categorization that makes origin a criterion for trust. Social categorization can manifest through jokes, stereotypes, or informal policies regarding who is fit to lead. When ethnicity is used as a criterion, individuals lose the opportunity to be judged as persons. Often, local community groups have their own ways of maintaining environmental harmony through the local wisdom they possess (Nurmalasari & Nuraini, 2021). At a certain stage, the experience of being treated as a category creates a sense of exclusion. This sense of exclusion then seeks a language that can bind individual experiences into a collective experience. Collective language provides power, but it can also transform grievances into a total rejection of other groups. Normative discussion demands a distinction between healthy ethnic pride and ethnocentrism that erases the dignity of others. To avoid protracted social problems, the government needs to lead in a way that tangibly serves the public interest (Rojak, 2021). Healthy ethnic pride respects cultural heritage without closing access to other citizens. Ethnocentrism turns heritage into a tool of exclusion. Ethnocentrism often strengthens during resource competition, because identity is used to justify priority for one's own group. In large cities, differences in residence sometimes create striking

social and economic distances between citizens (Fauzi, 2021). In this situation, procedural justice becomes crucial. Transparent procedures can hold off accusations of favoritism. However, transparent procedures must be accompanied by understandable communication, as transparency without understanding still triggers suspicion. Thus, cohesion mechanisms need to organize the distribution of opportunities in a manner that is visibly fair and verifiable (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Sources of religious-based conflict often stem from truth claims that are transferred into the political and social spheres. Religion provides moral orientation, yet when truth claims are used to judge the eligibility of other citizens, the space for togetherness narrows. We can learn a lot from hobby communities or specific interest groups that can unite people from various backgrounds (Rejeki, 2021). Conflict escalates when religious symbols are used as markers of political loyalty, such that differences in belief are perceived as threats to the order. In a normative reading, the primary issue is not religiosity, but the politicization of religious boundaries that turns citizens into categories. Politicization can occur through speech accusing other parties of moral decay, or through efforts to limit civil rights based on identity (Fox, 2001). For an organization or institution to function well, all processes must be carried out efficiently and effectively (Radjawane et al., 2022). When civil rights are restricted, trust in equality collapses. The collapse of trust gives rise to two equally destructive reactions: withdrawal from the public sphere or defensive mobilization. Defensive mobilization often produces hardened fear, so that dialogue is viewed as weakness. Governments must also be able to adjust regulations to the changing times to remain relevant and fair for all levels of society (Halizah & Mardikaningsih, 2022). In such situations, the vital cohesion mechanism is a guarantee that institutions protect freedom of religion while simultaneously upholding equal civic norms. Civic norms mean that differences in belief must not be a reason to reduce the rights of other citizens. Thus, social integration requires a clear separation between the freedom of belief and the use of power to impose beliefs.

Sources of interest-based conflict often appear easier to negotiate because they relate to resources, positions, or policies. However, interests become difficult to negotiate when they are cloaked in identity. Interests cloaked in identity make demands appear sacred, such that compromise is

considered an insult. In a normative reading, this cloaking is a form of political strategy that moves the debate from the realm of reason to the realm of loyalty. In facing situations full of uncertainty, every organization or group must indeed have an agile way to adapt (Arifin & Darmawan, 2022). When loyalty is used as a measure, facts no longer determine the outcome. People choose narratives that benefit their group rather than the narrative that makes the most sense. This condition exacerbates conflict because each party feels they have moral justification. In a pluralistic society, interests often compete at the local level, for example, regarding economic access or development priorities. The welfare of workers and group members also significantly influences how an institution can provide maximum service to the community (Gautama et al., 2021). If distribution is perceived as biased, grievances can develop into identity demands. Therefore, cohesion mechanisms need to organize distribution through consistent procedures and trusted oversight. Trusted oversight requires information transparency and safe grievance channels. However, grievance channels must be guarded so they do not become arenas for slander. This is where public communication ethics are needed—namely, separating policy criticism from attacks on the group. In this way, interest conflicts can remain within the realm of policy debate rather than turning into identity-based hostility (Fearon, 1995).

The formation of group boundaries is a key mechanism that explains why differences can transform into conflict. Group boundaries are constructed through naming, symbols, and informal rules about who is included and who is not. Boundaries can be fluid when cross-group interaction is intensive and when multiple identities are recognized. Even in the midst of modern life today, many community groups still hold firmly to their ancestral traditions as their identity (Amri & Khayru, 2022). Boundaries become rigid when groups feel threatened and when public narratives emphasize purity. In a normative reading, narratives of purity are dangerous because they close off space for citizens who have cross-group ties. Purity narratives also encourage suspicion toward compromise, as if compromise were a form of betrayal. When compromise is suspected, dispute resolution mechanisms weaken. Furthermore, the existence of green open spaces in residential environments is also very important to improve the quality of life and interaction between residents (Dahar et al., 2022).

Group boundaries are also reinforced by spatial segregation—namely, the separation of residences, schools, or workplaces based on identity. Segregation reduces opportunities for meaningful encounters. Without encounters, stereotypes go uncorrected. Stereotypes are then treated as knowledge. This pseudo-knowledge facilitates conflict mobilization. Thus, social cohesion requires mechanisms that lower boundary rigidity, for instance, through inclusive public spaces, rules that prevent discrimination, and practices that recognize multiple identities. Consequently, maintaining integration means ensuring that boundaries remain negotiable through shared experiences and procedural justice (Wimmer, 2008).

Economic inequality and disparities in access to public services often serve as fuel for conflict, especially when inequality coincides with identity lines. When a certain group is dominant in specific positions, other groups may interpret that dominance as a result of favoritism rather than fair competition. This interpretation may be accurate or exaggerated, but the determining factor is whether institutions provide a way to examine and rectify the inequality. Small decisions within the household, such as how we consume goods, turn out to have an impact on the environment around us (Halizah & Nuraini, 2021). In a normative reading, inequality that cannot be scrutinized breeds suspicion that develops into cynicism. Cynicism toward institutions reduces compliance with procedures, leading citizens to choose the path of pressure. The path of pressure can turn into violence if there is no trusted space for negotiation. Therefore, cohesion mechanisms must encompass distributive justice and procedural justice (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013). Distributive justice concerns outcomes perceived as fair, while procedural justice concerns the way decisions are made and explained. We must also be more concerned about negative societal views that often hinder an individual from rising above their personal problems (Aisyah & Issalillah, 2022). Procedural justice is important because it provides a sense of being respected, even when the outcome is unfavorable. However, procedural justice must be evident in practice, not just in documents. If citizens see that rules can be bought, the sense of justice is lost. Thus, maintaining cohesion in a pluralistic society requires institutions that are consistent, transparent, and accessible to all groups.

Public discourse and social media can accelerate conflict because they transform local events into national or group symbols. In the digital space, messages are condensed into slogans, and slogans tend to divide. Division occurs because slogans rarely leave room for nuance. Furthermore, attention algorithms promote content that triggers emotions, making anger and fear the primary currency. The way we communicate in the virtual world has indeed changed significantly and greatly influences how an online community is formed (Darmawan, 2021). In a normative reading, this issue demands an ethics of public communication that rejects generalizations and collective blame. This ethics is crucial because collective blame erases the distinction between perpetrators and uninvolved group members. When collective blame is accepted, retaliation is considered legitimate. Retaliation prolongs conflict and strengthens the memory of wounds. Cohesion mechanisms in the digital space require two things: civic literacy and the responsibility of opinion leaders. Civic literacy means the ability to evaluate information, distinguish criticism from hate speech, and refrain from sharing rumors. The responsibility of opinion leaders means rejecting the mobilization of hatred even if it is advantageous. Additionally, institutions need to provide rapid and credible responses to misleading information so that rumors do not become alternative truths. Thus, social integration in the digital era depends on a framework of conversation that maintains dignity and on institutions capable of restoring trust (Sunstein, 2018).

Social cohesion is often maintained through civic norms stating that all citizens have equal standing before the rules. This norm is not merely a principle; it must be translated into experience. The experience of equality occurs when public services are provided without bias, when authorities enforce rules without favoritism, and when collective decisions are explained with understandable reasons. In social life, we need to understand that every individual has different psychological conditions and perspectives in facing the changing times (Darmawan et al., 2021). In a normative reading, civic norms function as a bridge between identities because they provide a common ground that does not depend on ethnicity or religion. However, civic norms can weaken when citizens observe double standards. Double standards trigger a sense of being played. The feeling of being played transforms dissatisfaction into anger. Therefore, a

vital cohesion mechanism is the consistency of rule enforcement. Consistency requires oversight and accountability. Accountability means that public officials can be asked to explain decisions, and errors can be corrected through fair procedures. Furthermore, civic norms require public education that instills respect for difference without erasing identity. This education emphasizes that difference is a social fact that can be managed through rules and ethics. In this way, cohesion becomes the result of the intersection between fair institutions and a civic culture that respects dignity (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008).

Cross-group encounter spaces are social mechanisms often cited as sources of closeness, yet closeness does not emerge automatically. Meaningful encounters require shared goals and interaction rules that protect all parties. If encounters occur in situations of intense competition, they can reinforce stereotypes. The problem of social inequality in large cities often makes efforts to unite citizens a significant challenge (Mardikaningsih, 2021). Therefore, a normative reading emphasizes the quality of interaction, not just the frequency. The quality of interaction increases when citizens cooperate on projects that require mutual trust, such as environmental activities, community service, or school organizations. Working together creates opportunities to see the competence and goodwill of the other party. However, collective work must be accompanied by rules of equal participation, so that minority groups are not merely treated as supplements. Equality of participation is important because respect is born from the experience of being involved. Furthermore, encounter spaces need to provide room for the expression of identity without fear. If identity must be hidden to be accepted, cohesion becomes shallow. Shallow cohesion easily cracks during a crisis. Thus, encounter mechanisms that maintain integration must be designed as encounters that are equal, safe, and oriented toward realistic shared goals (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Mediation and dispute resolution are essential mechanisms in maintaining integration, as conflict cannot be entirely erased from society. Conflict can be managed if there are trusted procedures and mediators perceived as honest. Trust in a mediator depends on reputation, independence, and the ability to listen. Justice must also be felt by those living in disadvantaged environments, especially regarding health and environmental impacts (Issalillah & Mardikaningsih, 2022). In a normative

reading, mediation must not become a moral stage that humiliates one of the parties. Mediation that humiliates will breed resentment, even if an agreement is reached. Therefore, mediation needs to emphasize the restoration of relations and the restoration of procedures, not just the restoration of order. Restoring relations means acknowledging wounds, limiting hate speech, and creating commitments to not repeat the offense. Restoring procedures means fixing the rules that triggered injustice, such as distribution or service rules. Additionally, mediation must distinguish between the perpetrator of an action and the broader group, so that mediation does not reinforce stigma. Collective stigma is the fuel for the next conflict. Thus, mediation mechanisms that maintain cohesion demand an ethics of recognition—namely, acknowledging suffering without transforming it into a license for retaliation (Wall et al., 2001).

Procedural justice is the core of cohesion because it governs how citizens accept decisions that are not always pleasant. Citizens tend to accept difficult outcomes if they feel they have been heard, given reasons, and treated with respect. In a normative reading, respect is a value that operates at the micro level, such as the way authorities speak, the way officials serve, and the way community leaders summarize decisions. The quality of good service at community health centers significantly determines the extent to which citizens feel satisfied and valued (Khayru & Issalillah, 2022). Small insults can ignite large conflicts because they touch upon dignity. Therefore, maintaining integration requires an ethics of public service. This ethics includes information accuracy, patience, and consistency. Furthermore, procedural justice demands access to appeal mechanisms. Appeal mechanisms provide space for correction, so that citizens do not feel trapped. A sense of being trapped triggers desperate actions. However, appeal mechanisms must be usable without fear of retaliation. If citizens are afraid, an appeal becomes a mere formality. In a pluralistic society, fear is often related to identity, as minority groups may feel more vulnerable. Thus, procedures must be designed to protect the vulnerable. Consequently, social cohesion depends on procedures that are fair, accessible, and executed with respectful language (Tyler, 2003).

Relationship restoration after a conflict requires much longer social work than the restoration of order. Order can be restored through authorities, but trust cannot be forced. Trust is built through the

consistent experience that the other party will not attack and that institutions protect everyone. Many workers in the informal sector in urban areas live in uncertain conditions, so they greatly need attention from fair urban governance (Mahmudah, 2022). In a normative reading, restoration requires recognition of losses and reparation mechanisms that are considered reasonable. Reparation does not always mean money; it can mean the restoration of rights, the restoration of access, and the restoration of reputation. Additionally, restoration requires restrictions on narratives that glorify violence. Narratives that glorify violence turn perpetrators into heroes, leading the younger generation to learn that hostility is a way to gain honor. Restricting narratives does not mean prohibiting memory, but rather organizing memory so that it does not become a tool for retaliation. This is where history education and civic education are needed. Civic education teaches the distinction between remembering wounds and justifying hatred. Thus, the mechanism for restoring relations encompasses both cultural and institutional work—building equal experiences while simultaneously building a language that recognizes the dignity of all groups (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006).

Local leadership is often the deciding factor in whether a conflict subsides or escalates, as local leaders hold symbolic authority in the eyes of citizens. Symbolic authority is not just a position, but the ability to shape how citizens interpret events. Leaders who refrain from generalizations can prevent conflict from spreading. Leaders who inflame emotions can accelerate polarization. In a normative reading, the leadership that maintains cohesion is leadership that places the dignity of citizens as the boundary. Changes in how we relate to others in urban environments are indeed often influenced by figures who are able to protect all parties (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). The boundary means that leaders do not allow speech that dehumanizes individuals in other groups and do not permit collective punishment. Furthermore, leaders need to build safe listening spaces so that grievances can be channeled without violence. Safe listening spaces include routine meetings, interfaith forums, and equal representation mechanisms. However, listening spaces will fail if leaders only listen to pacify, without improving procedures. Citizens judge leaders by actions, not by speeches. Therefore, moral leadership must be accompanied by administrative ability to improve services and clarify rules. Thus, local

leadership connects the culture of dialogue with institutional action, so that integration becomes an experience rather than a slogan (Wolff, 2011).

Shared regulations governing public life are tools for cohesion, yet regulations can also become sources of conflict if they are drafted without justice. In a pluralistic society, regulations must protect religious and cultural freedoms while ensuring that public spaces are not dominated by a single group. Dominance can emerge through symbols, language, or policies that grant privileges. In many cases, the inequalities occurring in society are often rooted in a long history of unresolved social structural injustices (Gani, 2022). In a normative reading, fair regulations demand the principle of equality meaning rules apply equally to all as well as the principle of proportionality meaning restrictions on freedom must be reasoned and limited. If restrictions are imposed without acceptable reasons, citizens perceive the institution as arbitrary. This assessment triggers distrust. Furthermore, fair regulations require an inclusive drafting process. An inclusive process provides opportunities for different groups to voice their concerns. The opportunity to speak is not a guarantee that all desires will be met, but it provides a sense of being respected. A sense of respect is the basic ingredient of cohesion. Thus, an essential integration mechanism is a regulatory framework drafted and implemented in an accountable manner, allowing differences to coexist within agreed-upon boundaries (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013).

Education and the socialization of civic values are long-term mechanisms for maintaining cohesion, as identity conflicts are often rooted in the way the younger generation learns about difference. If difference is taught as a danger, children will grow up with suspicion. If difference is taught as a manageable social fact, children will grow up with self-confidence and respect. Therefore, it is very important to continue encouraging the community to be more caring and aware of their responsibilities through appropriate education (Gautama & Mardikaningsih, 2022). In a normative reading, civic education must teach two abilities: the ability to think critically about rumors and the ability to empathize without losing one's identity. Critical thinking helps children resist the urge to generalize. Empathy helps children see the human being behind the label. However, education is not sufficient as classroom material alone, because values are learned through school practices. School practices include how teachers treat students, how

schools manage conflict, and how schools provide space for cultural expression. If a school allows identity-based mocking, it teaches that humiliation is normal. If a school enforces respect, it teaches boundaries. Thus, education is a cohesion mechanism that works through institutional habits. These habits form citizens who are capable of exercising restraint during provocation and are able to resolve disputes through reason and procedures (Banks, 2008).

The political economy of conflict shows that identity disputes often mask broader issues of distribution. When societies face economic uncertainty, people seek easy explanations. Identity often becomes an easy explanation because it offers a clear target. We also see how development or improvements in certain areas sometimes make small communities feel marginalized from their own environment (Fauzi, 2022). In a normative reading, easy explanations must be viewed with caution as they often shift responsibility from policy structures to vulnerable groups. This shift in responsibility exacerbates injustice and prolongs conflict. Therefore, cohesion mechanisms must include fair distribution policies and open policy communication. Open policy communication explains the reasons behind priorities and opens space for correction. Without communication, rumors fill the void. Furthermore, cohesion requires protection for groups targeted as scapegoats. This protection is a moral test for institutions. If institutions remain silent, the message received by citizens is that violence is acceptable. Thus, social integration requires the courage of institutions to uphold minority rights, even when the majority is angry. In a normative reading, this courage is not an elitist stance, but a prerequisite for equal citizenship not to collapse. Consequently, identity conflict and distributive injustice must be read as a mutually reinforcing sequence (Stewart, 2005).

The relationship between identity and interests can be explained through the mechanism of interpretation the way social actors interpret events as evidence of group injustice. Interpretation is shaped by circulating stories, social memory, and experiences with public services. When the experience of service is poor, stories of injustice are easily believed. When the experience of service is fair, stories are more easily corrected. Simple habits within society, such as how we shift toward more environmentally friendly lifestyle choices, also reflect our social

relationship patterns (Hariani & Al Hakim, 2022). In a normative reading, this means that the quality of institutions is a fortress against the mobilization of hatred. That fortress works through daily experiences, not through slogans. Additionally, the mechanism of interpretation is influenced by symbols, such as flags, clothing, and rituals. Symbols can strengthen pride, but they can also be used to mark territory and intimidate. Therefore, the management of public space needs to organize the use of symbols so they do not transform into exclusive claims. Organizing does not mean erasing symbols, but ensuring they are not used to exclude. Thus, social cohesion requires a balance between identity recognition and the protection of shared spaces. Protecting shared spaces means all citizens can be present without fear. When fear decreases, extreme interpretations lose their power. Hence, social mechanisms for maintaining integration work through the reduction of fear and the enhancement of equal experiences (Lieberman, 2003).

Safe grievance channels are a vital mechanism because conflict often explodes when grievances find no place. Grievances that find no place turn into anger, and anger seeks an outlet through identity symbols. In a normative reading, safe grievance channels must fulfill three requirements: access, protection, and follow-up. Access means citizens know where to complain and can do so without high costs. Protection means the complainant does not experience retaliation. Follow-up means the grievance does not stop at recording. If a grievance channel lacks follow-up, citizens learn that procedures are useless. When procedures are deemed useless, citizens turn to mass pressure. Mass pressure increases the risk of violence. Therefore, grievance channels are instruments of conflict prevention. Furthermore, grievance channels must be able to separate policy disputes from identity-based hatred. This separation is crucial so that grievances remain within the realm of reason. If grievances are allowed to turn into insults, the grievance channel instead becomes a stage for hatred. Thus, the design of grievance channels must be accompanied by communication ethics, moderation rules, and mediation capabilities. All of these are institutional tasks directly related to social cohesion (Grimes, 2017).

Social cohesion is also maintained by cross-group economic practices that create reasonable and mutually beneficial interdependence. This interdependence can emerge in trade, business cooperation, or work

networks. When citizens have the experience of needing one another, they have a practical reason to maintain order. However, practical interdependence is not enough if symbolic injustice remains strong. Symbolic injustice means one group is treated as a perpetual servant or a perpetual guest. In a normative reading, economic cooperation must be accompanied by respect the recognition that each party possesses equal dignity. Respect is evident in the way one speaks, the way one addresses others, and the way profits are shared. If economic cooperation occurs within a demeaning relationship, conflict remains possible because the wound to dignity does not disappear. Thus, cohesion mechanisms require an ethics of social transaction. The ethics of social transaction demands honesty, equal treatment, and the rejection of stereotypes. Additionally, institutions need to ensure that economic rules do not produce group monopolies. Group monopolies trigger jealousy. Jealousy is easily politicized. Consequently, cross-group economics can become a bridge for cohesion if executed within a framework of justice and respect (Varshney, 2003).

In a pluralistic society, multiple identities often become a source of resilience because they expand the circles of loyalty. Citizens can feel part of a specific ethnicity, part of a specific religion, and part of a broader civic community. Multiple identities lower the risk of polarization because people have ties that cross boundaries. However, multiple identities can be suppressed when public narratives demand a single choice. Single-choice narratives force citizens to choose, causing gray areas to vanish. In a normative reading, maintaining multiple identities means protecting the freedom of citizens to be more than one thing. This protection is vital so that cohesion does not depend on uniformity. Uniformity produces pseudo-order and breeds resistance. Thus, cohesion mechanisms should encourage a plurality of identities within a single framework of equal citizenship. This framework sets boundaries against discrimination and violence but does not force cultural uniformity. Therefore, healthy social integration can be understood as the ability to live together without erasing differences, provided that differences are not used to diminish rights. This principle binds freedom and justice into a single system of coexistence (Sen, 2007).

Reconciliation is often understood as mutual forgiveness, but in a normative reading, reconciliation without justice risks becoming denial. Denial makes victims feel forced to forget, while perpetrators do not learn.

On the other hand, justice that only punishes without restoring relations can leave behind hidden hatred. Therefore, restoration mechanisms need to organize a balance. Balance means ensuring that violations are acknowledged, losses are reasonably restored, and guarantees of non-repetition are established through procedural changes. The guarantee of non-repetition is the core. This guarantee can take the form of changes in rules, changes in enforcement patterns, and changes in communication practices. In a pluralistic society, the guarantee of non-repetition also requires the protection of shared living spaces, such as the protection of places of worship and citizens' homes. This protection is both symbolic and practical. Symbolic because it shows that rights are upheld; practical because it reduces fear. Thus, relationship restoration is an institutional and cultural task that must be structured with the principles of dignity and equality (Gibson, 2004).

Conflict based on ethnicity and religion strengthens when identity is used as a criterion for rights, and when interests are transferred into the language of moral purity. Within a normative framework, the social mechanisms that maintain integration and cohesion operate through three main paths: the management of group boundaries to remain fluid through equal encounters, the enforcement of procedural justice through consistent and accessible institutions, and the restoration of relations through credible mediation and reasonable reparation mechanisms. These paths are reinforced by public communication ethics that reject generalizations and collective punishment. These paths are also strengthened by grievance channels that are safe and possess follow-up mechanisms, so that citizens are not driven to seek resolution through violent pressure. Thus, social integration can be understood as a social achievement that must be maintained by rules, procedures, and a civic culture that respects dignity. This framework emphasizes that diversity can live in peace when institutions maintain equality and when society rejects narratives that dehumanize individuals in other groups (Uslaner, 2012).

## Conclusion

Social conflict in a pluralistic society is formed through processes that link identity boundaries with a sense of injustice, selective social recognition, and public discourse that ignites collective emotions. The sources of

conflict based on ethnicity, religion, and interests cannot be understood as the result of diversity alone, but rather as the result of how diversity is managed through the distribution of opportunities, decision-making procedures, and communication ethics. Social cohesion is maintained when institutions uphold procedural justice visible in public services, when cross-group encounter spaces are organized to be equal and safe, and when mediation and relationship restoration are conducted without humiliating any party. Post-hostility recovery requires the acknowledgment of losses, reasonable reparation mechanisms, and procedural changes as a guarantee of non-repetition. Thus, social integration and cohesion are understood as social achievements that require institutional and cultural work, with human dignity as the moral boundary that must not be violated by identity mobilization.

Implications and suggestions emphasize the need to organize the governance of diversity by making procedural equality a priority rather than an afterthought. Public institutions need to strengthen consistency in rule enforcement, provide safe access to appeals, and establish grievance channels with follow-up mechanisms so that citizens are not driven to channel dissatisfaction through the mobilization of hatred. Community leaders need to maintain public communication ethics by rejecting generalizations, rejecting collective blame, and resisting narratives of purity that close off the space for deliberation. Cross-group encounter spaces need to be designed to be goal-oriented, ensure equal participation, and protect vulnerable groups, so that encounters become authentic experiences of mutual recognition. Civic education needs to emphasize the ability to think critically about rumors and the ability to empathize without losing one's identity, so that the younger generation can manage differences through reason and procedures. Further writing is suggested to detail normative indicators for the quality of mediation, the quality of public service procedures, and the quality of relationship restoration, so that social cohesion can be conceptually assessed with consistent measures.

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