

# University Students' Perceptions of Nationalism Represented in Contemporary

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## Abstract

This mix-method study specifically focused on identifying students' perceptions regarding the concept of Nationalism, contemporary Nationalism, and their perceptions on forming a new nationalism. A quantitative approach was made through surveys and a qualitative approach by means of interviews. Data were obtained from students' perceptions. They were studying history education programs from four Indonesian universities. Thematic content analysis was deployed to generate the findings in this study. The findings suggest that the majority of students detailed that the concept of Nationalism concerns loyalty and pride towards the nation, which is marked by the awareness and efforts to glorify and prioritise the nation's interests. The love for the nation in contemporary can be demonstrated through another specific way, such as their choice of studying in history education. This study ends with a conception that Nationalism will not vanish in time and age, but only the actualisation is different.

## Keywords

Nationalism, Contemporary, students' perceptions

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## Introduction

Scholarly discussions on Nationalism have generally been embarked on ideas and policies. Nationalism manifests each society's national awareness in one country (Hroch, 2020; Kecmanovic, 1996). Benedict Anderson calls it an imagined community, which means the creation of Nationalism and solidarity starts from the imagination of its citizens about it (Breuilly, 2016; Harnita et al., 2019). The principle of citizenship developed by Turner was enacted into a narrative of Nationalism which is understood as the development of citizens' rights. Thus, Nationalism is considered a civic creation program (Lin & Tsai, 2013), and citizenship can be interpreted as the centre of Nationalism's concept (Altikulaç & Yontar, 2019; Arif, Nasihien, & Sutowijoyo, 2021). Nationalism continues to develop over time, including when entering the era of globalisation. Globalisation is subject to eliminate Nationalism, but several studies show that globalisation per se is the product of Nationalism (Isradi et al., 2021; Rinaldy & Ikhsan, 2021). Globalisation can help grow the state's infrastructure strength (Çinar, 2010; Hall, 2000; Lin, 2004; Malešević, 2019). Globalisation is developed as a new imagined community since it is understood as a new image in which a nation-state can develop more than other countries, such as in Turkey (Çinar, 2010). Turkey is considered a modern, western, and secular country and a supporter of globalisation as its government sets new norms to create national identity and citizenship. On the other part, China spreads its Nationalism through art. Among them are installation art such as an old fishing boat pierced by 3000 arrows made in China and on display at New York's Guggenheim Museum. The arrow is bamboo with a bronze tip and a swan feather tip (Lin, 2004). Although the artwork is considered an exotic object in America, it can also be interpreted as anti-western by mentioning Chinese art as a strategy used to develop China's excellence (Cotter, 1998; Wu, 2017). Nationalism in Indonesia cannot be separated from revitalisation in facing the challenges of globalisation. Indonesia's dependence on other countries is still pervasive, especially to meet basic needs and micro-technology that is subject to demise the attitude of Nationalism and leads Indonesia into the flow of globalisation. Thus, a new nationalism awareness is necessary to face global problems (Sulistiyono, 2018). However, with anti-globalisation sentiment after the Brexit case and the trade war between China and the United States, many countries began to revive Nationalism and their national identity, including Indonesia (Warburton et al., 2018). It is believed that the current development of globalisation has cemented the ideology of the contemporary nation-state (Malešević, 2019). The anti-globalisation sentiment provides an opportunity for history teachers to re-instill the spirit of Nationalism among students. The use of ethnography about understanding local excellence, local history, and local wisdom can be elevated to instill an attitude of Nationalism (Reuter, 2018). In Poland, teachers build Nationalism by teaching the past as part of what has happened naturally while promoting their country. Students are more interested in learning history while strengthening collective memory that evokes nationalism attitudes (Arab, 2020; Jaskurowski, Majewski, & Surmiak, 2018). Research in Indonesia shows that using a historical inquiry-based module effectively increases the students' Nationalism (Mujiyati, Wanto, & Agung, 2017). A survey study in China reported that history learning has a low impact in instilling Nationalism. This is due to the use of unattractive textbooks for students (Qian, Xu, & Chen, 2017). Uninteresting history textbooks require some changes, especially in the content and form of new textbooks, actual use of textbooks for teachers and students, increasing cognitive and emotional factors towards the country's history, and other information sources (Qian et al., 2017). Historical material that continues to increase forces teachers to continue innovating and revitalising, linking history in every era to the present and continuously carrying out literacy. Previous studies in France and the United States revealed that history books highlight progressive Nationalism and promote pride in the French state's history. In the United States, the cultivation of Nationalism is emphasised in teaching ethnocultural diversity as a national history with multiculturalist historiography (Hutchins, 2016). Indonesia has numerous historical textbooks both before and after the New Order era. The writing of history books after the New Order era was due to the presumption of historical distortion by the New Order government. However, it still requires a validity test of the statement. The most recent version of the rewritten Indonesian history is Indonesia's book in Flow of History, with eight volumes and one additional volume from Prehistory to the New Order and the Reformation (Abdullah & Adrian, 2012). However, in fact, since 1998, only a small number of historians have produced new histories. Writing remains based on old history, only trying to find new perspectives and methodologies, which does not mean producing new historical textbooks prototypes (Suwignyo, 2014). After the New Order era, textbooks on Nationalism can be categorised into three central concepts: territorial Nationalism, economic Nationalism, and Cultural Nationalism (Aspinall, 2016). Territorial Nationalism arose when parts of Indonesia were no longer parts of Indonesia, such as East Timor and the Sipadan and Ligitan cases claimed by Malaysia. Economic Nationalism arose because of the government policy that imposed foreign ownership restrictions as a form of Indonesia's economic independence.



Cultural Nationalism arose when there were claims of cultural activities by other countries, such as Malaysia's case. The history textbook given to students is the Indonesian book in history (IDAS) (Abdullah & Adrian, 2012). This is an official book of Indonesian history published by the Government of Indonesia as the primary reference book. Students analyse history using historical research steps. This study aimed to explore the students' perceptions of Nationalism in the presentday using relevant history textbooks.

## Materials and Methods

This study employed a mix-method design. The design can be used in an educational context to explore problems and cases with two approaches: qualitative and quantitative (Ajah, Ajah, & Obasi, 2020; Tavakoli & Baniasad-Azad, 2017). A qualitative approach explored complex phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions (Corbin, 2017). This study seeks to understand students' perceptions of the concept of Nationalism in the history books they read to portray the contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The quantitative approach was used specifically for processing survey data.

## Participants

Students involved in this study were 30 students drawn from four universities that run history education. They were recruited using a purposive sampling method. The survey was disseminated using a Google form, while the interviews, observation, and documentation deployed a video conference platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students' responses were measured using scores and explored using semi-structured questions. Most of the students involved in this study came from university B with 17-19. Before the empirical fieldwork commenced, all students were asked the consent of their willingness to participate in the study. They were also informed that their responses would be used for research and publication purposes. For ethical considerations, participants' identities and affiliations were kept confidential. Upon reading the written interview, only nine students agreed to participate in the face-to-face interview stage. Students' demography information can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Participant Demography Information

Name	Gender	Age	Religion	University	Level
Ikq	Female	17	Islam	University A	1
Ran	Male	18	Islam	University B	1
Rac	Male	18	Islam	University B	1
Yog	Male	18	Islam	University B	1
Cit	Female	18	Islam	University B	1
Mar	Male	19	Islam	University B	1
Yop	Male	19	Islam	University C	1
Win	Female	18	Islam	University D	1
Sar	Female	18	Islam	University D	1

## Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using two instruments: survey and interview. The survey questionnaire was disseminated using Google form. The survey was carried out to explore the types of history books students read to increase their Nationalism. It was done to portray the students' viewpoints on contemporary

Nationalism. Besides, an interview was carried out to explore the students' perceptions of Nationalism in the present day.

## Research Procedure

We were distributing questionnaires, and open-ended questions were chosen as designs to answer research questions. First, we explained the study objectives and asked students to fill out a consent form. The lecturers then contacted them to participate in the study. Furthermore, Google form sheets and written interview on perceptions of Nationalism were prepared. Online, face-to-face interviews via zoom were conducted as a confirmation of questionnaire responses and written interviews. Data from the interview were recorded and transcribed. To identify and classify the interview data, tabular form models were used.

## Data Collection Technique

Data were collected by filling out questionnaires and written interviews sent via a Google form. Then, an unstructured interview was conducted to emphasise the written interview data. Interview questions included Indonesian Nationalism, new Nationalism, and history books that can increase the values of Nationalism. Interviews were conducted by considering students' free time and done to those who filled out the written interview appropriately.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data were reduced by repeated reading and coding to display the data in a matrix. The coding pattern is based on a conceptual framework and research questions. Codes were identified for every aspect of the dimensions of Nationalism and students' experiences in reading history books. The first author checked and coded data from the interview as it was impossible to rely on multiple raters. In order to prevent premature conclusions, the identified data were checked and verified with the original data multiple times. Besides, direct quotes from interviews were used to demonstrate and support findings. The collected data were analysed using thematic content analysis (Ferdiansyah, Supiastutik, & Angin, 2020; Fullana et al., 2016) to understand what is being told and identify problems and experiences based on predetermined themes.

## Results and Discussion

Based on selective data analysis, three finding themes were identified, such as (1) students' perceptions on the concept of Nationalism, (2) students' perceptions on contemporary Nationalism, and (3) students' perceptions on how to build a new nationalism. Students' perceptions of the concept of Nationalism. The concept of Nationalism was raised from scholars' varied viewpoints and experts on nationality with diverse emphases. Prevalence is given towards language, religion, customs, territory, and constitution. In the finding, students were asked to score from 0-10 on each concept of Nationalism in the questionnaire. The total score was averaged so that each concept contained an average score. Then, the concept of Nationalism was sorted as depicted in the students' understanding. Findings related to students' perceptions of the concept of Nationalism is presented in the following table 2.

**Table 2.**  
Concept of Nationalism

No.	Statement	Score
1	Nationalism is loyalty and love for a nation	8.83
2	Nationalism as loyalty and love for the nation which is marked by feelings, awareness, and efforts to glorify and prioritise the interests of the nation in various aspects.	8.47
3	The sense of nationality is a feeling of the people, society, and the Indonesian nation about the condition of the Indonesian nation in its life journey towards the ideals of the nation	8.43
4	Nationalism as a nationalism that arises because of the existence of equality of fate and history, and the importance of living together as an independent, united and sovereign nation.	8.33
5	Nationalism is formed by elements of language, race, ethnicity, religion, civilisation, territory, state, and citizenship.	8.23
6	This similarity in language and similarity in fate as a colonised nation crystallised over a long period and formed a feeling and a national spirit.	8.13
7	National ties are one form of social ties, apart from family ties and ethnic ties. The family bonds are formed because of blood or hereditary relationships that later expand into clans or clans.	8.03
8	Nationalism is basically a stage of collective thought or consciousness in which people believe that their main duty and loyalty is towards the nation-state	7.97
9	Historically, the nation is formed as a stable people's community based on the same language, region, economic life, and psychological feelings manifested in a common culture.	7.90
10	A belief determines the nation as an alliance organised into one, namely a belief published because of the belief in the same fate and purpose.	7.87
11	Indonesian Nationalism is not static but rather dynamic or constantly experiencing ups and downs, depending on the internal and external conditions of the nation concerned	7.7
12	As the majority of the population in the archipelago, Islam has a big role because it is an identity that distinguishes it from the colonialists.	7.77
13	National ties are bonds to humans based on emotional tendencies born from the instinct to defend oneself and do not grow out of permanent consciousness.	7.57
14	A nation is an imagined political community - and is envisioned as inherently limited and sovereign	7.20
15	A nation is a human community that has a name, which controls a homeland, has shared myths and history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and obligations for all its members.	7.03
16	Nationalism is a nation that is united because of the same birth factor.	7.03
17	Nationalism is an ideology as well as a form of behaviour	7.03
18	The growing sense of nationality was shaped by colonialism, especially by the Dutch.	6.50

Students' responses on the questionnaire were echoed by the interview data as follows. In general, Nationalism loves his country, continued with a sense of Nationalism that he is willing to sacrifice and has the spirit of keeping his country going and prosperous (Cit, Zoom Interview, 23 November 2020) The sign of Nationalism in general, Nationalism, according to my understanding, we must have, is our love for the country, a love for the country, and a sense of wanting to defend the country (Mar, Zoom Interview, 22 November 2020) In my opinion, Nationalism is a form of love for the homeland that can be reflected by arousing the nation's interests rather than self-interest (Rac, Zoom Interview, 23 November 2020) In addition, students also reasoned that Nationalism is a form of loyalty and love for the nation so that a sense of nationality emerges in every society. These findings correspond to (Altikulaç & Yontar, 2019) study, reporting that the spirit of Nationalism would emerge and survive if the people loved and were loyal to their country. However, students argued that many threats at present eroded the sense of Nationalism. According to the students, the values of Nationalism are prevalent issues that can threaten the nation's sovereignty.

### This perspective is depicted in the interview.

Indonesia's position as a large country with a large population and a different background is a potential for



a Nationalism shift. Many ethnic religions, communities, interests, differences can be triggers and factors that weaken Nationalism (Yog, Zoom Interview, 23 November 2020). Youth nationalism today is not the same as a youth during the struggle. At that time, the youth were willing to die for their country and fight to become independent. However, at this time, it isn't easy to find the younger generation who have this determination (Yop, Zoom Interview, 22 November 2020). The onslaught of foreign cultures and social media also affects the decline in a person's attitude of Nationalism or Nationalism. For example, Korean culture has become daily life in shows or styles of dress that are widely imitated (Win, Zoom Interview, 22 November 2020). Indonesian Nationalism should be strengthened by recognising its own nation, the same language, and the common fate as a colonised society for quite a long time to form feelings and a national spirit. However, national ties are one form of social bond besides family and ethnic ties. Therefore, national and local diversity and good cooperation benefit Nationalism's attitude (Reuter, 2018). The questionnaire data also revealed that other perceptions were seen from a reasonably low score below 7.5. Students contributed an average score of 6.5 on the statement that a sense of nationality did not grow due to the Dutch's colonisation. This was possible when the Dutch colonised Indonesia. The country built several areas, such as the Anyer Panarukan road that connected the west to the east route of Java's island. Even though it used a forced labour system, there was development when the Dutch colonised it. Previous research by Sunardi (2003) unveiled that the concept of nationality has significant components: a sense of nationality, understanding of nationality, and national spirit and national behaviour. National behaviour is the act of citizens who prioritise the national interests and the state compared to the group interests and respect and tolerance of their fellow countrymen. These four components serve as indicators of nationality.

### Students' perceptions of contemporary Nationalism

Based on the contemporary Indonesian dictionary, present means modern.

**Table 3.**

Contemporary Nationalism

No.	Statement	Score
1	How high is your nationality level	8.40
2	Excellent and fair law enforcement can strengthen Nationalism	8.80
3	Religion will strengthen Nationalism if religion is interpreted and used as a humanist life guide and rahmatan lil alamin.	8.47
4	The TNI is a crucial instrument whose function is to safeguard the country's sovereignty and national integration.	8.37
5	Historical experiences experienced by a nation will shape a sense of nationality in the nation's society. As long as this historical feeling is strong, the national ties will also remain strong.	8.33
6	The Aceh case, as an indication of the structural conflict <b>between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)</b> , is a symptom of weakening national ties	8.00
7	Distrust and negative prejudice in society weaken national ties	7.83
8	The difference in economic status can loosen the national ties that have been established and developed among the nation's citizens	7.33
9	The case of Sambas (1999) is an indication of weakening national ties.	7.30
10	Conflicts between ethnicities and even between religions weaken national ties	7.27
11	The feeling of the ingroup as the Indonesian nation can thicken the sense of nationality of respondents who come from border areas, not an economic factor.	7.23
12	Ethnicity can be positive towards Nationalism, but on the other hand, it can be negative.	7.20
13	Religion can contradict and be counterproductive to Nationalism if religion is made into an exclusive ideology.	7.13
14	Nationalism or the feeling of the nationality of respondents who are near the border is higher when compared to respondents who are near the center of government	7.03
15	Nation character building does not work. What exists is the song of the money approach, a material-based approach so that the appreciation and development of non-material values become (considered) unimportant.	6.77
16	The decline in Nationalism was only temporary	6.70
17	The decline in the quality of national ties was triggered by the regional autonomy political policy in 1999	6.63

No.	Statement	Score
18	Democratic freedom weakens national ties	5.47

Contemporary reflects freedom to determine appropriate aspects at present. Therefore, contemporary Nationalism can be interpreted as a form of loyalty and love for Indonesia's nation and state in a new form. Based on the questionnaire data, the students' average nationality level was 8.40. When confirmed to the students through an interview on November 22, 2020, via Zoom meeting, they shared their perceptions in the following interview. In my opinion, I have a high level of nationality because my parents took me to a neighbouring country, and I miss things in Indonesia, especially the food and atmosphere. Moreover, I was in the History Study Program, which is my own choice of study program because I like studying Indonesian history (Ika, Zoom Interview, 22 November 2020). Honestly, I prefer Indonesian songs and folk songs compared to western songs, especially Korean songs. I don't like it because Indonesian songs are easier to follow, maybe because the language is mastered. I also like folk songs, especially songs that come from my region. Even so, I know some folk songs from other regions (Ran, Zoom Interview, November 22, 2020). The students' vignettes echo previous research on cultivating a sense of national love for the people. Providing songs that evoke the country's spirit and love can help the younger generation increase their sense of Nationalism. Music has long been a symbol of national identity in the education system throughout Indonesia. Patriotic songs are generally considered good materials and essential for cultivating respect, loyalty, and good citizenship for students (Hebert & Kertz-Welzel, 2016). Students' perceptions of aspects that evoke contemporary Nationalism can be seen from the scores given to each statement. The highest score statement is that fair and good law enforcement is believed to strengthen Nationalism (8.80). Then, religion can also strengthen Nationalism if it is interpreted and used as a humanist life guide and rahmatan lil alamin (8.47). Furthermore, the third statement also received a relatively high score from the students. The Indonesian national army is an essential instrument in maintaining the country's sovereignty and national integration (8.37). When further confirmed to the students, they provided several reasons shared in the interview. To increase love for the motherland, it is clear that the legal factor is, in my opinion, the main factor. Why is that? Because without a fair and reasonable law, the law only applies to those who can afford the law, while most people who are unable to access the law will feel disadvantaged when justice and law are unequal (Rac, Zoom Interview, 23 November 2020). Indonesia is a multicultural and multi-religious country and has proven to be a peaceful, safe, and peaceful country since Indonesia became independent even before independence. In my opinion, as the religion of the majority, Islam is a protector and an essential factor in maintaining the nation's integrity. Why is because in Islam, Rahmatan Lil Alamin's principle applies Islam as a blessing for all mankind regardless of religion, ethnicity, and race (Mar, Zoom Interview, November 22, 2020). In my opinion, at this time, the presence of the TNI provides security and comfort in living as a state and society in Indonesia. The involvement of the TNI in various sectors can train discipline. For example, at school, I participated in an activity that involved the TNI. The result is that I feel more disciplined, responsible and my concern for Indonesia increases because we are given knowledge about the wealth and advantages of the Indonesian state (Yog, Zoom Interview, 23 November 2020).

### Students' perceptions on how to build a new nationalism

The questionnaire data documented that the students posit that the empowerment of local communities, clean and good government, upholding human rights values, building pluralistic ethics, and paying attention to the development of marine areas and borders are salient so that the quality of citizen's awareness towards various aspects of their understanding of the nation are increasing. According to Aspinall (2016) the reproduction of a form of Nationalism adapted to current conditions encourages the rise of contemporary Nationalism (Aspinall, 2016). The following table shows the priorities for the development of new Nationalism.



**Table 4.**  
How to Build Nationalism

No.	Statement	Score
1	Empowerment of local communities, clean and good governance, uphold human values (HAM), build pluralistic ethics, pay attention to the development of marine and border areas.	8.40
2	Raising awareness of the basic assets of strong integration (Youth Pledge, Proclamation 17 August 1945)	8.37
3	Developing a tolerant attitude towards various ethnic, religious, class differences and so on in the framework of developing multicultural Nationalism	8.23
4	The ideal of national unity and integrity emphasises the mindset of prioritising the creation of social welfare and justice	8.23
5	Equitable distribution of economic development results	8.17
6	Awareness to develop self-confidence, courage, and responsibility to maintain the dignity of the nation	8.13
7	Equality before the law and law enforcement in a fair manner	8.10
8	Fair economic and political allocation	8.03
9	Award for achievement or meritocracy	8.00
10	Citizen political education, allocation of power and fair policies, and role models	7.97
11	Increase the sensitivity of leaders to see social signs in society about deviations in the implementation of national integration if aspects of justice do not accompany it.	7.93
12	Learn and take lessons from the history of other nations in managing the quality of their national ties (nationhood)	7.83
13	The professionalism that focuses on the aspects of defence and security and humanists	7.83
14	The socialisation of the spirit and spirit of the struggle for independence to the next generation and the wider community by the predecessors and elite leaders	7.77
15	Emphasis on the principle of justice (central-regional and between all aspects) to balance the agreement in integration.	7.70
16	Developing national ties based on the broader community (bottom-up) and not national ties by the authorities (top-down) can lead to indoctrination, abuse of human rights, and violent conflict (SARA).	7.60
17	Encouraging the role of religious and ethnic institutions in developing themselves within the framework of a unitary state. Indonesia has low ethnic homogeneity (<50%) and high religious homogeneity (> 50%)	7.40

When confirmed through interviews with students, they agreed that contemporary Nationalism should be introduced to the younger generation. This is to prevent the demise of nationality love and prioritise the national interests over one's own interests. State officials should think about the Indonesian nation and be wiser in choosing investors who invest in our country because I personally do not like foreign investors who invest but destroy Indonesia's natural conditions (Cit, Zoom interview, 23 November 2020). The development of a new nationalism should be carried out by all parties, including the younger generation, to build a better country. We should feel proud to have been born on earth rich in history, great and famous. Do not ever feel inferior in front of other nations because we are a great nation. It takes a clean and fair government and protects the whole society regardless of the interests of a few groups to foster a sense of Nationalism (Rac, interview Zoom, 22 November 2020). The interview data captured that students are aware that being reform agents contribute significantly to developing new Nationalism. In addition, Indonesia's strategic existence encourages a sense of love for the country development. In this respect, the growth of new Nationalism can be in the form of respect for the achievements of nation generation, fair and legal equality, and the nation's potential (Muttaqin, 2006).

## Conclusion

The present study has portrayed students' perceptions of Nationalism in present-day viewed from the concept of Nationalism, contemporary Nationalism, and fostering new forms of Nationalism. Findings suggest that, in the context of the concept of Nationalism, the students considered the concept of Nationalism as loyalty and pride of their homeland. Albeit colonisation existed, for students, it was not a salient issue. In the context of contemporary Nationalism, students reflected on their nationality level. The majority of the students self-assessed that the level of Nationalism was quite high as measured by the comparison between Indonesia and other countries, such as love for Indonesian art, culture, and music that can generate respect for the state and nation. Lastly, building a new nationalism can be enacted through a clean and good government, leading to betterment in Indonesia so that the young generation's love for their country is maintained. Small number of participants and universities in this study prevent from well-established generalisation. This study suggests that the inculcation of Nationalism in students can be integrated into all courses in the history education study program. This can help students find new perspectives on Nationalism.

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