

Ummah Without a Nation: Latent Asabiyyah in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity

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To cite this article with APA style:

Athallah, I.D., Khairia, H., Husna, T., Aisy, R.R., Hermawan, K.E.K. (2026). Ummah Without a Nation: Latent Asabiyyah in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. *Journal of Asian Wisdom and Islamic Behavior*, 4(2), 125-137.

ARTICLE INFO

Submitted:

11 May 2026

Received:

1 June 2026

Revised:

17 August 2026

Accepted:

16 September 2026

Available online:

30 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Under this analytical approach, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity places Muslim-majority Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam inside a secular, investment-oriented clean-economy framework while all three also belong to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. When sovereign states bargain through a non-Islamic climate club, this institutional overlap creates a problem for Islamic International Relations: whether the ummah functions as a politically consequential community. This article treats asabiyyah as the mechanism that could convert membership in the ummah into felt obligation and coordinated action. Using structured discourse analysis, policy-network mapping, and process tracing of public agreements, official statements, and implementation materials from 2022–2024, the study examines both activation and non-activation. The evidence shows no public Islamic caucus and almost no explicit ummah-based language. Coordination proceeds through technocratic vocabularies of mutual benefit, inclusivity, investment, and national transition needs. Asabiyyah is best understood here as a latent, conditional resource as opposed to an active coalition mechanism; when cooperation is organised through sovereign states, forum-specific secular codes, and heterogeneous domestic transition costs, the finding clarifies the ummah–nation relationship: transnational solidarity remains politically weak.

Keywords: Asabiyyah, Ummah, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, Climate Club Diplomacy, Islamic International Relations

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Introduction

Across contemporary climate governance, limited-membership arrangements increasingly connect decarbonisation to investment, technology, supply chains, and industrial policy. Among these arrangements, IPEF followed a November 2023 substantial conclusion with the signing of the Clean Economy Agreement in Singapore on 6 June 2024 and its entry into force later in 2024; the agreement links clean-energy transition, carbon-market cooperation, sustainable infrastructure, labour considerations, and project-based collaboration without replacing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or the Paris Agreement. Through the inaugural Clean Economy Investor Forum, governments, investors, and project sponsors were also connected around more than US\$23 billion in identified priority infrastructure opportunities (Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry Malaysia, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024a). In this institutional setting, questions of climate responsibility enter a framework whose public language is primarily economic and technocratic rather than civilisational or religious.

Among IPEF's partners, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam make that institutional setting especially useful for Islamic International Relations. Each is a Muslim-majority state and a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), yet each participates in IPEF as a sovereign national government rather than as a representative of an Islamic bloc (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2026). Outside IPEF, a transnational Islamic climate vocabulary is nevertheless available: the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change frames climate action in explicitly religious and ethical terms, while the OIC system has treated environmental degradation and climate change as shared challenges facing its member states (Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, 2015; SESRIC, 2023). When Muslim-majority governments enter a non-Islamic plurilateral forum, IPEF therefore provides a bounded test of whether membership in the ummah becomes politically salient. The case is not about whether Islam matters in the abstract; it concerns whether a shared communal identity becomes observable as interstate diplomatic practice.

Between transnational belonging and sovereign representation, the conceptual distinction among ummah, asabiyyah, and nation is central to that test. Ummah denotes a transnational community of Muslim belonging and obligation; it supplies the possible in-group boundary. Asabiyyah, derived from Ibn Khaldun, denotes the social cohesion through which belonging can generate mutual obligation and collective action (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Irwin, 2018). Nation in the title is not used as a synonym for state. Beyond IPEF, it identifies the political tension that structures the case: the ummah is transnational and has no single sovereign apparatus inside IPEF, whereas bargaining authority, implementation costs, and formal commitments remain organised through states and their national policy priorities, and ummah without a nation describes an institutional asymmetry. Against this institutional background, a community may exist across borders without possessing a unitary diplomatic actor capable of converting communal attachment into a negotiated position. Asabiyyah is the mechanism that would have to bridge that asymmetry.

In conceptual terms, existing work does not adequately explain when that bridge is built. Since Huntington's (1996) civilisational formulation, macro-level accounts have treated Islam as politically salient but offer limited explanatory precision for variation in day-to-day diplomatic practice. Within constructivist scholarship, identities and norms can shape appropriate behaviour, yet classic formulations do not by themselves specify when a religious in-group becomes a coalition inside a secular economic institution (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999). Studies by Adams (2021) and Haynes (2021) show that religious effects vary across institutional and political contexts. Following Voeten (2000), the evidence does not support treating cross-state alignment as sufficient for asabiyyah; identity-specific coordination is inferred only when the public record links common Muslim belonging to observable diplomatic practice (Dreher & Jensen, 2013). Alatas (2014) provides a mechanism-oriented route back to Ibn Khaldun, but empirical application to plurilateral climate-economic diplomacy remains limited.

When national governments negotiate within a secular climate club, the problem addressed in this article is the absence of a mechanism-level account of how a transnational Muslim community becomes—or fails to become—a diplomatic coalition. Following the November 2023 substantial conclusion, the study focuses on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei during the 2022–2024 IPEF Clean Economy cycle and treats both activation and non-activation as observable outcomes. Its central finding is conservative: the public record does not show an Islamic caucus or sustained ummah-based diplomatic language, and the three governments operate through IPEF-wide institutions and justify cooperation through mutual benefit, investment, inclusivity, energy transition, and national development needs. Unless common Muslim belonging is converted into observable mutual obligation, this article treats *asabiyyah* as latent and conditional in the IPEF case. Where sovereign states remain the decision-making units, non-activation reveals the limits of transnational solidarity because forum-specific secular language supplies a broader legitimacy code and decarbonisation distributes costs unevenly across national economies.

Methods

For analytical purposes, this study uses a qualitative explanatory design combining structured discourse analysis, policy-network mapping, and within-case process tracing. The empirical scope runs from IPEF's launch in 2022 through the signing and early institutionalisation of the Clean Economy Agreement in 2024, and because they share two relevant attributes—Muslim-majority populations and OIC membership—while participating in the same IPEF framework, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam are selected. Before a solidarity claim is made, the design requires observable evidence that the shared attributes were translated into diplomatic practice. It asks whether the public record contains the practices that would make a Khaldunian mechanism observable. The unit of analysis is a public diplomatic act or text: an agreement provision, ministerial or presidential statement, documented coordination event, Cooperative Work Program, or implementation-oriented forum. Because the available evidence cannot support inferences about them, domestic mass opinion, non-state religious mobilisation, and closed bargaining are outside the design.

Across four collection steps, the documentary base combined the Clean Economy Agreement and related IPEF materials with official statements and national policy documents from the three focus states. In the first step, public government archives and IPEF materials were searched for IPEF, Clean Economy, climate, energy transition, investment, and cooperation, then cross-read for explicit references to Islam, Muslims, ummah, religious duty, or brotherhood. Around the November 2023 substantial conclusion and the June 2024 Singapore meetings, relevant public statements were then compiled. For comparison with IPEF discourse, OIC and Islamic climate materials were collected as a parallel repertoire, not as evidence that the states used that repertoire inside IPEF. To identify the domestic contexts in which flexibility and national circumstances were invoked, UNFCCC submissions and energy-profile evidence were also used (International Energy Agency, 2023; UNFCCC, 2020, 2021, 2022). Official documents receive greater evidentiary weight than media summaries; Reuters is used for the Investor Forum and meeting context where it adds observable detail rather than claims about governmental motive (Reuters, 2024).

Through three analytical stages, the documentary material was evaluated. By structured discourse analysis, three frames were coded: an Islamic in-group, a technocratic-developmental frame, and a national-interest frame. Alongside discourse coding, policy-network mapping was used to classify coordination as either an exclusive Muslim-majority caucus or participation through IPEF-wide mechanisms such as Cooperative Work Programs, ministerial meetings, bilateral contacts, and the Investor Forum; process tracing then compared the sequence of public framing with the agreement's flexible institutional design and each state's transition constraints. For inference, four indicators were used: explicit ummah-based discourse, exclusive in-group

consultation, observable alignment attributable to shared Islamic identity, and attenuation where national transition costs are salient. For analytical purposes, a negative finding is recorded only when the reviewed public corpus contains no evidence of the indicator; it is not treated as proof that private solidarity did not exist. While the inability to observe closed negotiations remains the study's principal limitation, triangulation across agreement text, government statements, OIC materials, and national transition documents reduces dependence on any single source.

Literature Review

Ummah, Nation, and Asabiyyah

Ibn Khaldun's concept of asabiyyah provides the article's causal mechanism, but it must be separated from both theology and a fixed civilisational bloc. In the Muqaddimah, asabiyyah refers to the cohesion that enables members of a group to support one another and act collectively (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). Modern interpretations likewise connect a recognised in-group to capacities for mutual support, political organisation, and collective action rather than merely naming a shared identity (Alatas, 2014; Irwin, 2018). That distinction is decisive here. Muslim-majority states can share religious affiliation without acting through asabiyyah. Under a mechanism-based reading, activation occurs only when actors translate belonging into obligation, coordination, or a cost they are willing to bear for one another.

Ummah identifies the relevant transnational community but does not itself supply a diplomatic command structure. In this article, the ummah is treated as a potential community of political reference that crosses state borders, and the nation-state remains the institutional carrier of IPEF commitments: national ministries negotiate, national governments decide which Cooperative Work Programs to join, and national economic structures bear transition costs. The title's phrase without a nation captures a structural mismatch as opposed to denying the existence of Muslim-majority states. A transnational community lacks a single sovereign agent in IPEF. According to the Khaldunian mechanism, asabiyyah would matter politically only if governments make the communal relationship salient enough to overcome or re-order the incentives attached to sovereign decision-making. Under a mechanism-based reading, this formulation keeps state, nation, and ummah analytically distinct and prevents religious identity from being assumed as a constant cause.

The distinction also clarifies what would count as evidence for or against activation. If the three governments repeatedly framed a Clean Economy position as an obligation to fellow Muslims, convened exclusive consultation around that identity, and sustained a common position despite differing national costs, the case would provide strong evidence of activated asabiyyah. If they coordinated only where their economic interests already converged, common religious identity would add little explanatory value. This counterfactual standard prevents the concept from becoming unfalsifiable: cooperation cannot be labelled solidarity simply because Muslim-majority states act in parallel. A mechanism-based approach requires an observable conversion from communal membership to political action. Without that conversion, non-activation is analytically meaningful rather than a gap to be filled by assumption.

Religious Identity in International Relations

Under a mechanism-based reading, the wider International Relations literature offers competing expectations about the role of identity. Against Huntington (1996), the evidence does not support treating shared civilisational membership as sufficient for coalition behaviour; an Islamic identity mechanism is inferred only when the public record shows identity-specific obligation or coordination. Despite civilisational expectations, its weakness for this case is over-aggregation: the existence of a civilisational category does not specify the diplomatic mechanism linking three governments to a shared position on carbon markets, clean technology,

or infrastructure finance; constructivism is more sensitive to context. Following Wendt (1999), forum-specific vocabulary is analytically relevant only when it is linked to observable diplomatic practice; the evidence does not support treating shared language alone as an Islamic solidarity mechanism (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Those approaches make forum-specific language and role expectations visible, but they do not automatically distinguish an Islamic solidarity mechanism from ASEAN practice, development status, or institutional incentives.

Under a mechanism-based reading, research on religion in International Relations further cautions against treating religious identity as uniformly activated. Adams (2021) and Haynes (2021) describe a field in which religion can shape international behaviour but does so through institutions, actors, and contexts that vary considerably. According to the Khaldunian mechanism, this contingency is compatible with a Khaldunian approach if *asabiyyah* is understood as a variable social force and not as an essence. Voting studies add another layer. Voeten (2000) and Dreher and Jensen (2013) demonstrate that international voting patterns can cluster, yet observed alignment alone cannot identify the causal source of cohesion. In Khaldunian terms, a common vote may follow identity, common development interests, institutional bargaining, or strategic incentives, and when it is linked to an activated Islamic in-group as opposed to inferred from similarity alone, the present study treats coordination as evidence for *asabiyyah* only.

Climate Clubs, IPEF, and Forum-Specific Cooperation

The climate-club literature helps explain why the institutional venue may alter the political value of identity. Climate clubs and other minilateral arrangements coordinate subsets of states outside universal treaty processes, often through flexible participation, sectoral cooperation, finance, or technology as opposed to a single comprehensive obligation (Koppenborg, 2025), and IPEF's Clean Economy Agreement fits this broad logic. It is connected to, but institutionally distinct from, the UNFCCC process; it organises cooperation through interested-party programmes, investment mobilisation, technical assistance, and issue-specific work. Because states can cooperate selectively without converting every shared identity into a permanent coalition, such variable geometry lowers the need for a stable bloc.

This institutional form also helps define climate club diplomacy as a keyword used in this article, and climate club diplomacy refers to bargaining and coordination inside a limited-membership climate-economic arrangement in which participation is selective and cooperation is organised through programme-based instruments. As used here, the concept is narrower than climate governance generally and does not imply that IPEF is legally equivalent to a treaty-based emissions club. It identifies the diplomatic environment in which the evidence is observed. Beyond universal treaty processes, the Clean Economy Agreement's repeated emphasis on fair and inclusive transition, national circumstances, investment, and implementation provides a common secular vocabulary that can be used by states with very different religious and political identities (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024).

For the *ummah*-nation distinction, a forum effect should not be confused with secularisation. The claim is not that participation in IPEF makes Muslim-majority governments less Islamic, nor that economic diplomacy excludes moral reasoning. The narrower expectation is communicative: actors select vocabularies that are intelligible and legitimate to the audience and institutional purpose of the venue. An investment forum rewards bankable projects and financing, whereas an OIC environmental forum can make Islamic stewardship or communal obligation more salient. The same government can draw from different identity repertoires without contradiction. According to the Khaldunian mechanism, this possibility is especially important for *asabiyyah* because the mechanism requires activation. Under a mechanism-based reading, a transnational identity may remain socially available while another institutional code performs the immediate work of coordination.

Islamic International Relations and the Analytical Gap

Islamic International Relations is used here to denote scholarship that treats Islamic concepts and political thought as sources of analytical categories for international life rather than as objects of cultural description alone. The value of Ibn Khaldun for this study lies in specifying *asabiyyah* as a mechanism with observable conditions, not in attaching an Islamic label to IPEF (Alatas, 2014). The literature gap is therefore narrower than the absence of prior work pairing the concept with this institution. Where the forum does not organise participants through religious identity, the unresolved issue is whether a transnational Islamic community changes diplomacy. Answering that question requires evidence of activation, coordination, and scope conditions, together with an account of cases in which the mechanism remains dormant.

The conceptual model makes a deliberately demanding prediction. If *asabiyyah* is activated, public or institutionally documented practice should show more than three Muslim-majority states occupying the same room, and because of perceived obligation among group members, it should show the Islamic in-group being invoked, exclusive or identity-specific coordination, or a willingness to align. Where those indicators are absent and cooperation follows IPEF-wide incentives, the mechanism is not observed. Where national transition costs become salient, the expectation becomes weaker still. This allows non-activation to carry theoretical information: it identifies conditions under which the *ummah* remains a cultural and institutional affiliation while the nation-state remains the effective unit of climate-economic bargaining.

The framework also separates *asabiyyah* from three alternative explanations. Because geopolitical and economic uncertainty can encourage strategic flexibility regardless of shared religion, a structural account expects states to preserve manoeuvring room. Liberal institutionalism expects repeated meetings, work programmes, and financing arrangements to sustain cooperation by reducing coordination costs. Within constructivist scholarship, governments are expected to adopt identities and vocabularies appropriate to the social setting (Wendt, 1999). Unless the public record links shared Muslim belonging to an obligation these alternatives do not already predict, the evidence does not support *asabiyyah* as an independent explanation. The empirical task is to determine whether the case requires an identity-specific mechanism and, when it does not, to identify the conditions that keep the *ummah* from becoming a coalition.

Results and Discussion

The Ummah Is Not Publicly Activated as an IPEF Caucus

On the evidence examined, the first finding is a negative one, and it is the clearest result in the public record. Across the Clean Economy materials reviewed for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, explicit Islamic in-group language is rare to absent. Indonesia's public IPEF framing emphasises openness to cooperation, mutual benefit, the needs of developing countries, the green economy, energy transition, and critical-mineral supply chains (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2023). Malaysia's ministerial communication emphasises clean-energy technology, carbon markets, carbon capture, sustainable transport, industrial strategy, and practical benefits from implementation (Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry Malaysia, 2024); public reporting on Brunei's participation similarly centres on the clean-economy transition, net-zero objectives, and resilient energy supply chains as opposed to on Muslim solidarity (Stars, 2024). In none of these public materials does the *ummah* become the stated constituency through which IPEF participation is justified.

The absence matters because an Islamic environmental vocabulary was available outside IPEF. The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change and OIC environmental reporting demonstrate that climate responsibility can be articulated through explicitly Islamic ethical language (Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, 2015; SESRIC, 2023), and the empirical result is not that

the three governments lacked access to religious concepts. It is that this repertoire was not publicly activated in the reviewed IPEF venue. In Khaldunian terms, common Muslim identity did not visibly become *asabiyyah*: the record contains membership in a possible in-group without the accompanying diplomatic practice of mutual obligation. Beyond IPEF, this is the first way in which the title's ummah–nation tension becomes observable. Against the available Islamic climate repertoire, the ummah is present as a transnational affiliation, but the national governments speak in the policy language of the forum and not as a collective Islamic political subject.

The sequence from November 2023 to June 2024 reinforces that interpretation. The substantial conclusion of negotiations, the Singapore signing, and the associated investor-oriented implementation activities gave leaders and ministers repeated opportunities to attach a distinctive identity frame to the pillar. Across those episodes, the reviewed statements repeatedly used the language of mutual benefit, development needs, clean technology, financing, and implementation, while explicit ummah-based language was not observed (Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry Malaysia, 2024; Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2023). The sources cannot establish what negotiators said privately, but they do show what governments chose to make public. Public legitimation therefore points away from an ummah-centred account and towards a forum-compatible, nationally filtered account of cooperation.

Climate Club Institutions Substitute for Identity-Based Coordination

Over the 2022–2024 cycle, the second finding concerns institutional coordination. IPEF provides many opportunities for collaboration, but the visible nodes are issue-based as opposed to Islamic. While the Singapore meetings and Investor Forum connect governments, firms, investors, and project sponsors across the wider partnership (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024b; Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2024), the Clean Economy Agreement creates Cooperative Work Programs through which interested partners can collaborate on specific areas. Public descriptions of the Cooperative Work Programs cover technical and sectoral priorities as opposed to identity-defined caucuses, and the Investor Forum follows the same logic: it was organised around projects, finance, and investment readiness, and Malaysian participation highlighted national firms and investment institutions as vehicles for clean-economy opportunities (Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry Malaysia, 2024; Reuters, 2024).

While IPEF-wide mechanisms enable coordination (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024b), no evidence was found of an exclusive Indonesia–Malaysia–Brunei Islamic caucus in the reviewed 2022–2024 record. That absence does not prove that informal private consultation never occurred, but it prevents the stronger causal claim that such consultation drove the observed coordination. Following the June 2024 signing, the safer inference is institutional substitution; while investors can join a project pipeline because the instrument provides an economic opportunity, IPEF makes cooperation available without requiring a pre-existing communal obligation: interested states can enter a work programme because the issue fits national priorities. Under this architecture, the marginal diplomatic value of *asabiyyah* is reduced. The climate club supplies channels that can produce cooperation independently of the ummah, allowing national governments to coordinate without first constructing an Islamic coalition. IPEF cooperation is publicly visible without an observed *asabiyyah* mechanism.

National Transition Costs Bound Asabiyyah

Following the June 2024 signing, the third finding appears in the relationship between flexible agreement design and heterogeneous national transition profiles. Within IPEF, the Clean Economy Agreement recognises national circumstances and uses cooperative, programme-oriented language across problem areas that include methane reduction, clean energy, carbon

markets, transport, and investment (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024). Alongside this design, national transition constraints differ materially. Indonesia's electricity system remains heavily dependent on coal, making the pace and distribution of decarbonisation a consequential domestic issue (International Energy Agency, 2023; UNFCCC, 2022). Malaysia's NDC expresses mitigation through an economy-wide carbon-intensity approach, while Brunei's NDC is framed relative to a business-as-usual pathway in a hydrocarbon-dependent economy (UNFCCC, 2020, 2021). When transition burdens differ across the three Muslim-majority IPEF cases (International Energy Agency, 2023; UNFCCC, 2020, 2021, 2022), the agreement preserves policy flexibility; the evidence does not establish a trilateral bargaining split caused by those costs.

On the evidence examined, the public diplomatic language is consistent with that heterogeneity. Indonesia stresses mutual benefit and the needs of developing countries as opposed to a collective obligation to fellow Muslim states (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2023), and Malaysia links IPEF cooperation to its national industrial and energy-transition strategies and repeatedly stresses tangible benefits from implementation (Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry Malaysia, 2024). Brunei's public positioning likewise centres on its clean-energy transition and resilient supply chains (Stars, 2024). Because closed negotiating disagreements are not reconstructable from the public record, the article does not claim that national costs caused a documented trilateral split. What it does establish is a scope condition: the treaty and state discourse preserve national policy space precisely where transition burdens differ. Under those conditions, any obligation generated by the ummah would have to compete with costs borne through national economic structures. Given the national transition differences, the public record shows the national frame winning that contest of emphasis.

Comparison across the three national positions sharpens the point. Indonesia enters clean-economy cooperation while managing a coal-intensive power system and an energy transition that must coexist with development priorities. While its mitigation commitment remains framed through carbon intensity, Malaysia publicly connects IPEF to industrial upgrading and investment in technologies such as green hydrogen and carbon capture, and Brunei approaches transition from a hydrocarbon-dependent economy and a nationally defined net-zero pathway. These are not interchangeable political economies. Viewed against these distinct transition profiles, the same nominal IPEF commitment encounters different domestic opportunity costs after the June 2024 signing. Given the national transition differences, a theory of transnational solidarity that ignores these national distributions would overstate the capacity of common identity to produce uniform behaviour.

Forum-Specific Secular Language Makes Asabiyyah Latent

The fourth finding is comparative. Non-Muslim IPEF partners also describe the Clean Economy pillar through a technocratic repertoire of energy transition, finance, innovation, infrastructure, labour, and implementation. Following the June 2024 signing, the agreement itself cross-references the UNFCCC and Paris architecture and adopts the language of fair and inclusive transition as opposed to a civilisational vocabulary (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024); this shared communicative code matters for interpretation. If Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei use the same language as the rest of the forum, their silence on Islamic identity may reflect adaptation to the institutional audience as opposed to the disappearance of religious affiliation. Given the national transition differences, the public venue rewards a vocabulary intelligible to governments, investors, firms, and international organisations across religious boundaries.

Australia's public account adds a useful anomaly. Although Australia's Clean Economy account recognises Indigenous Peoples' relationships to land and oceans (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024), no evidence was found that the three Muslim-majority governments used an Islamic register in IPEF. An absolute prohibition on moral or spiritual language is not a sufficient explanation for the missing Islamic markers. Against the available Islamic climate repertoire, venue selection is the more cautious reading: the three governments have access to an Islamic environmental vocabulary but do not choose it as the dominant public code inside IPEF. Because the evidence supports availability without activation, *asabiyyah* is best described as latent in this setting. Latent does not assume an unseen causal force; it records that a relevant transnational identity exists in parallel institutions while the observable IPEF record does not show its conversion into coalition behaviour.

Adjudicating the Ummah–Nation Mechanism

Read together, the four findings narrow the range of defensible explanations: a civilisational account would expect Islamic commonality to provide a relatively durable basis for alignment, yet the public Clean Economy record is dominated by national and forum-wide vocabularies rather than bloc formation (Huntington, 1996). Unlike that civilisational expectation, constructivism makes the forum-specific code visible, but technocratic convergence counts as identity evidence only when it is tied to observable diplomatic practice (Wendt, 1999). Liberal institutional logic also explains why repeated meetings, work programmes, and financing platforms can sustain cooperation without an identity-based coalition. The Khaldunian contribution lies elsewhere: *asabiyyah* specifies the additional evidence required before shared Muslim identity can be treated as a mechanism of coordination. On that stricter test, the case is one of non-activation rather than successful Islamic caucusing.

Table 1 makes that adjudication explicit. It does not score hidden motives. Table 1 compares the proposed mechanism with the public evidence and states the narrowest verdict supported by the sources. When the forum supplies alternative coordination channels and when the material consequences of climate policy remain nationally heterogeneous, the strongest support lies not in proof that *asabiyyah* caused cooperation, but in the theory's scope condition: transnational solidarity is least likely to become an overt coalition.

The alternative explanations fit different parts of the record. A realist or strategic-autonomy reading is parsimonious where behaviour follows state-specific benefits, especially Indonesia's insistence on openness to cooperation with any partner and Malaysia's emphasis on tangible industrial gains. Without a single identity frame, liberal institutionalism explains why programme-based mechanisms can keep cooperation moving. Constructivism accounts for convergence on a vocabulary suited to an investor-facing, multi-religious forum (Wendt, 1999). Following the June 2024 signing, the evidence supports an explanatory division of labour: national interests help explain what each state seeks; institutional design explains how selective cooperation remains possible; forum-specific norms help explain how that cooperation is narrated. On the evidence examined, *asabiyyah* does not displace these accounts because the identity-specific mechanism is not observed in the public record.

Table 1.

Adjudicating Asabiyyah Against Public IPEF Clean Economy Evidence

Theoretical expectation	Observable public evidence	Verdict for this case
When asabiyyah is activated, shared Muslim identity should appear through explicit in-group discourse.	Across the reviewed statements, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei emphasise mutual benefit, investment, energy transition, and national development; sustained ummah-based language is not observed (Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry Malaysia, 2024; Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2023; Stars, 2024).	Activation is not observed in the public discourse examined.
If asabiyyah shapes coordination, identity-specific diplomatic practice should be observable.	Within IPEF, cooperation is visible through ministerial meetings, Cooperative Work Programs, the Investor Forum, and bilateral contacts; no public evidence establishes an exclusive three-state Islamic caucus (Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 2024; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024b).	Institutional coordination is observed, but an Islamic causal mechanism is not established on the available evidence.
Under materially costly conditions, communal obligation should weaken.	Across the three states, the agreement preserves flexibility and national circumstances while transition structures and mitigation pathways differ (International Energy Agency, 2023; UNFCCC, 2020, 2021, 2022).	Within the proposed scope condition, the pattern is treated as consistent without being used to infer closed-door divergence.
When forum-specific legitimacy dominates, religious identity can remain latent.	Within IPEF, discourse is broadly technocratic and investor-facing even though an Islamic climate vocabulary exists in OIC-related settings (Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, 2015; SESRIC, 2023).	On the evidence examined, a bounded claim of non-activation and venue-based compartmentalisation is supported.

Source: Author's synthesis of the Results and Discussion; theoretical expectations derived from Ibn Khaldun (1967), Alatas (2014), and Irwin (2018).

What the Evidence Shows About Ummah Without a Nation

Against the available Islamic climate repertoire, the phrase ummah without a nation has a precise analytical meaning. The ummah supplies a transnational category of belonging, but IPEF has no institutional seat for that community as such. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei participate through national governments, and their obligations under the Clean Economy Agreement, exposure to transition policies, and choices among Cooperative Work Programs are mediated by sovereign institutions. For asabiyyah to influence interstate diplomacy, political elites would therefore have to activate the transnational community and translate it into observable coordination. This is the conversion problem at the centre of the article. On the evidence examined, the public record shows no such conversion. National governments cooperate beyond and within IPEF, but they do so through instruments whose membership and justification are not organised around the ummah.

In comparative terms, this result refines rather than discards asabiyyah. If any divergence could be explained away as temporary weakness, treating asabiyyah as a constant would make

the concept difficult to falsify because any cooperation among Muslim-majority states could be labelled solidarity. Treating it as an activation mechanism imposes a harder evidentiary standard. The analyst must identify an observable in-group invocation or identity-specific coordination and a behavioural consequence that is not already explained by the forum. Within IPEF, the case does not meet that stronger test in the public record. What remains analytically useful is the boundary condition: national political organisation, forum-specific legitimacy codes, and distributional heterogeneity can keep a transnational identity politically dormant.

Beyond IPEF, the finding contributes to Islamic International Relations by making non-activation theoretically legible. For a mechanism-centred concept, analytical value lies not only in cases where its causal pathway is visible but also in identifying conditions under which the mechanism remains dormant. In this case, a religious climate vocabulary is demonstrably available outside IPEF, yet it is absent from the forum's public diplomatic record. Across institutional venues, modern states can therefore compartmentalise identities: Islamic environmental responsibility may be articulated in OIC or explicitly religious settings while IPEF diplomacy uses a vocabulary of investment, technology, inclusivity, and development. Within that pattern, distinguishing identity availability from activation avoids assuming that a Muslim-majority state necessarily acts as an Islamic actor in every institution.

With that evidentiary limit, the policy implication remains narrow. IPEF designers do not need to suppress identity-based coalitions; the current architecture already permits selective cooperation through work programmes and investment platforms. For OIC climate diplomacy, the result suggests that moral solidarity alone will not automatically carry into external economic forums, especially where national transition costs are uneven. Translating shared ethical commitments into cooperation may require instruments that respect national policy space while creating concrete, mutually beneficial projects. Because the present study identifies only the public conditions under which explicit *asabiyyah* was not activated, that proposition should be tested rather than assumed.

Once identity availability is separated from activation, the interpretation avoids two opposite errors. Against the available Islamic climate repertoire, the first is civilisational determinism, which assumes that Muslim-majority states should form an Islamic bloc whenever they encounter a common issue, and the second is secular reductionism, which treats the absence of religious vocabulary as proof that religion is irrelevant. Nevertheless, the evidence supports neither. While the IPEF record shows that governments can bracket that repertoire when another institutional code is more useful, OIC membership and Islamic climate discourse show that an Islamic repertoire exists. Beyond IPEF, the resulting picture is one of compartmentalised identity as opposed to disappearance: the *ummah* remains a possible community of reference, but national institutions and the forum determine whether that reference is politically activated.

Given the national transition differences, this point matters for the transfer of classical concepts into contemporary International Relations. Beyond IPEF, the empirical payoff should not depend on proving that an Islamic mechanism is always present, and a concept becomes more useful when it identifies both the conditions under which it should operate and the conditions under which it should not. The IPEF case places a ceiling on the claim. Across the three cases, the three states are connected to the *ummah*, but the public evidence supports no more than a latent repertoire; it does not support an assertion that hidden solidarity caused their behaviour. Accepting that negative result preserves the specificity of *asabiyyah* while avoiding a civilisational shortcut.

Given the national transition differences, the mechanism-level result also reframes earlier findings on international alignment. Following Voeten (2000), the evidence does not support inferring a common mechanism from a common outcome; alignment is attributed to *asabiyyah* only when identity-specific obligation is observable, a restriction that also addresses the ambiguity identified by Dreher and Jensen (2013). IPEF offers a different empirical environment:

participation is selective, cooperation can be organised through multiple programmes, and there is no single recorded vote that stands in for coalition behaviour. That makes the absence of identity-specific coordination more visible, and when the same language is used across a much wider set of partners and is embedded in the agreement's own institutional vocabulary, similar policy language among Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei cannot be treated as evidence of *asabiyyah*. When outcomes are less discrete than UN voting, the case extends alignment research by showing why mechanism identification matters.

Conclusion

The principal finding is that the IPEF Clean Economy case does not show the *ummah* operating as a visible interstate caucus. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei share Muslim-majority status and OIC membership, yet their public IPEF diplomacy is organised around mutual benefit, investment, energy transition, inclusivity, and national development priorities. No reviewed public record establishes sustained *ummah*-based rhetoric or an exclusive Islamic coordination mechanism. The novelty of the article lies in treating this non-activation as evidence and not as a failed search for solidarity; *asabiyyah* becomes analytically useful when it is specified as the mechanism that would convert transnational belonging into mutual obligation and collective action. In this case, that conversion is not observed. Beyond this case, the title's *ummah* without a nation captures the institutional reason: the transnational community lacks a unitary diplomatic agent inside IPEF, whereas cooperation and its costs are mediated through sovereign national governments.

Two recommendations follow. For research on Islamic International Relations, future applications of *asabiyyah* should require observable activation before inferring solidarity from shared religious identity or parallel state behaviour. Across comparative studies, forums where Islamic language is more institutionally salient—such as humanitarian finance, explicitly OIC-centred climate initiatives, or other plurilateral negotiations—should be examined while public discourse is kept analytically distinct from closed coordination. For OIC-related actors seeking cooperation beyond Islamic institutions, attention should centre on instruments that convert ethical commonality into projects with identifiable reciprocal benefits. From the IPEF experience, flexible work programmes, finance, and capacity-building appear better able to accommodate heterogeneous national transition profiles than expectations of uniform communal alignment, although this proposition requires testing beyond the present case. These recommendations do not imply that IPEF's design was produced by Islamic solidarity.

Beyond this single case, the research implication concerns how identities move across institutional venues. Across such venues, religion can remain politically relevant as a repertoire without becoming the operative identity of every negotiation. Although only public documents from 2022–2024 are observable, this study cannot rule out private Islamic networks, closed-door coordination, or domestic religious legitimisation because those activities lie outside the documentary design. Because the design covers only Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, generalisation beyond the three Muslim-majority IPEF partners is limited. Even with those limits, the distinction between identity availability and identity activation offers a replicable way to study transnational solidarity. If the same governments use explicitly Islamic obligation and identity-specific coordination in an OIC-centred climate setting but not in IPEF, the forum effect would become more credible because the states are held constant across venues. If no such activation appears across venues, the case for *asabiyyah* as a contemporary diplomatic mechanism would weaken. Future comparative work should hold states constant while varying the forum, and policy analysis should avoid assuming that religious affinity automatically lowers bargaining costs. Concrete cooperation still has to survive national distributional politics, especially where climate policy redistributes costs across industrial and energy structures.

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