# THE DIALECTIC FOR NATIONAL UNITY: RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM AND MULTICULTURAL CHALLENGES IN INDONESIAN COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

*The research examines religious discrimination against Christian communities in Salatiga City, a location frequently regarded as a model of religious tolerance and diversity in Indonesia. The novelty of the research lies in uncovering discriminatory practices within a city that officially promotes interfaith harmony, thereby revealing the gap between public discourse and lived experiences. Using a qualitative approach, the research provides insights into how religious exclusivism manifests even within contexts celebrated for their pluralistic values. Data are collected through interviews with three key informants—SH, M, and U—who experience forced displacement from the X subdistrict due to their religious identity. The interview data are analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analytical framework to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings indicate various forms of discrimination, including social ostracism, restrictions on property ownership, prohibitions on worship, and forced evictions based on religious affiliation. This discrimination emerges from deeply rooted beliefs that perceive Christianity as incompatible with predominant local traditions and practices. What distinguishes the research is its focus on the micro-level dynamics of intolerance and how these practices challenge Indonesia's constitutional principles of religious freedom and unity in diversity. To address these challenges, the research proposes a multi-stakeholder intervention framework emphasizing leadership engagement, public education, and interfaith dialogue. By integrating empirical evidence with practical solutions, the research strengthens scholarly understanding of the challenges faced by religious minorities in Indonesia. It offers recommendations for fostering genuine pluralism and enhancing social cohesion at the community level.*

*Keywords: religious discrimination, exclusivism, multiculturalism, unity*

## INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is often recognized as a strong foundation for the diversity that characterizes Indonesia. This concept embodies the principles of recognition, appreciation, and respect for the ethnic, cultural, and religious plurality present within Indonesian society. The primary goal of multiculturalism is to create a safe and secure environment for diverse communities to coexist harmoniously.

Indonesia exemplifies this as a nation that accommodates various beliefs, including Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and traditional faiths, all of which are legitimized by the government. The fundamental principles of multiculturalism are represented by the motto Unity in Diversity (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*), which underscores the importance of respecting and supporting religious diversity as a cornerstone of Indonesian national identity. However, despite these constitutional guarantees and multicultural ideals, significant challenges persist in translating these principles into lived realities at the grassroots level, particularly in communities that are often celebrated

for their tolerance and religious harmony.

Within Indonesia's multicultural framework, the nation not only acknowledges but also actively emphasizes religious freedom, as enshrined in the 1945 Constitution. This framework upholds individuals' rights to express, practice, and disseminate their religious beliefs without discrimination. The constitutional protection encompasses comprehensive rights, including the establishment of places of worship, the performance of religious rituals, and the free participation in religious activities (Groenewald et al., 2023; Safdar et al., 2023).

The multicultural approach theoretically fosters tolerance and interfaith dialogue, encouraging religious groups to respect one another, interact harmoniously, and build mutual understanding. It aims to create conducive environments for interfaith harmony that prevent the emergence of religious conflicts threatening social stability (Nababan, 2019). However, the reality reveals a concerning gap between these aspirations and the actual practices within communities. Religious conflicts, prejudice, and discrimination continue to manifest despite official commitments to inclusivity (Antameng, 2020; Kharisma & Wahid, 2022; Nurhamidin & Mashadi, 2021). Contemporary issues surrounding religious freedom in Indonesia remain closely intertwined with complex dynamics of tolerance and intolerance, the implementation of Pancasila, state–religion relationships, and formal religious recognition (Camnahas et al., 2022). This situation necessitates a deeper investigation into how discriminatory practices emerge even within communities that are outwardly regarded as tolerant.

The persistence of discrimination against minority religious communities underscores the necessity of examining the mechanisms through which exclusionary practices operate, particularly in contexts where tolerance is officially promoted and celebrated. This research addresses a critical question: how religious discrimination against Christian minorities manifests within communities recognized for their religious tolerance, and what underlying mechanisms of exclusivism sustain these discriminatory practices despite official multicultural policies. This inquiry provides a framework for understanding the dissonance between institutional ideals and social realities in plural societies.

The investigation focuses on the X subdistrict in Salatiga City, Central Java, where Christians constitute only 0.21% of the population compared to 99.75% Muslims (Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika Salatiga, 2023; Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Salatiga, 2023). The novelty of this research lies in its examination of religious discrimination within Salatiga, a city widely regarded as a model of religious tolerance and interfaith harmony in Indonesia. This phenomenon reveals how exclusionary practices persist even in communities that officially champion multicultural values and diversity. The paradox challenges conventional assumptions about tolerance and highlights the complex dynamics between formal policy frameworks and community-level implementations of multicultural principles.

Highlighting the case of discrimination in the X subdistrict is intentional, as it demonstrates that discrimination does not arise spontaneously within society. Instead, it develops through a series of interrelated social processes beginning with stereotypes that form the basis for generalized and often oversimplified understandings. These stereotypes establish the groundwork for prejudice, reflected in negative attitudes or assumptions that influence perceptions of certain groups. Over time, such prejudice can escalate into tangible harm, manifesting as discriminatory behavior. Social psychologist Gordon Allport (Intikah et al., 2020; Naich, 2022) emphasizes that stereotypes are exaggerated, narrow, and inaccurate representations of groups based on specific characteristics. Although stereotypes simplify social complexity into manageable categories, they fail to capture the individuality and diversity that exist within the targeted group.

For instance, widely held perceptions about the Batak ethnic group often associate them with traits such as decisiveness, bravery, and friendliness (Haloho, 2022). However, it is essential to recognize that such stereotypes do not accurately reflect the diversity of individuals within that community. They are simplistic constructs that obscure personal variation and reinforce generalized narratives. Furthermore, when stereotypes are intensified through negative labeling, they can result in stigmatization and social bias, perpetuating inequality and exclusion (Corpuz, 2021; Grasser & Jovanovic, 2022; Partow et al., 2021).

The relationship between discrimination and exclusivism demonstrates how exclusionary attitudes generate systematic barriers to equal participation, access, and treatment within society. Exclusivism is rooted in beliefs about fundamental differences that deem certain groups unworthy of equal opportunities in social, economic, or political domains (Join et al., 2021). This issue becomes particularly problematic in diverse societies such as Indonesia, where such attitudes intensify social tensions and contribute to structural injustices. Scholars such as Erik Baldwin, Michael Thune, and John Hick argue that exclusivism in multicultural societies is not only irrational but also fundamentally irrelevant, as pluralistic environments require openness and recognition of diversity to achieve genuine social cohesion (Kushardiyanti & Mutaqin, 2022).

Exclusivism directly contradicts the principles of equality and inclusivity, which are essential foundations for harmonious coexistence in diverse societies (Reitsma & van Nes-Visscher, 2023). In these societies, every individual should possess equal access to rights and opportunities without experiencing discrimination based on personal or group identity. When exclusivism manifests as discrimination through unequal treatment based on race, religion, ethnicity, or gender, it reinforces divisions and restrictions that perpetuate perceptions of inferiority and unworthiness

compared to dominant groups (Ronaldo & Wahyuni, 2022; Sukmayadi et al., 2023).

By examining the experiences of the Christian community in the X subdistrict, this research seeks to generate more profound insights into the challenges confronting multiculturalism in Indonesia. It aims to advance understanding of how discrimination undermines social harmony and disrupts the realization of equality envisioned in Indonesia's multicultural framework. Furthermore, this research emphasizes the importance of upholding authentic multicultural values, tolerance, and justice as integral components of Indonesian society, ensuring that diversity is genuinely reflected in both policy and everyday social practice.

## METHODS

The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study focus (Nababan, 2022), which is suitable for understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals facing religious discrimination in the X subdistrict. The methodology emphasizes an in-depth exploration of discriminatory practices against Christian minorities within their specific sociocultural context. This approach enables a comprehensive examination of complex social phenomena that are often overlooked by quantitative methods.

The research applies purposive sampling in conjunction with snowball sampling techniques to identify and recruit participants who have direct experience of religious discrimination. Purposive sampling is initially used to select individuals who meet specific criteria: (1) Christian residents of the X subdistrict, (2) individuals who have experienced discriminatory treatment based on their religious identity, and (3) individuals willing to share their experiences openly. This process is supplemented by snowball sampling, in which initial participants recommend other community members with similar experiences. The combination of these sampling methods facilitates access to a population that is typically difficult to reach due to the sensitivity surrounding experiences of discrimination.

The final sample consists of three key informants: SH (57 years old), M (23 years old), and U (23 years old), all of whom have personally experienced eviction and other discriminatory actions in the X subdistrict due to sociocentric attitudes and religious bias. The selection of three participants is based on several considerations, including the small Christian population in the X subdistrict (0.21% of the total population), the limited number of individuals willing to discuss their experiences of discrimination, and the attainment of data saturation after the third interview. Data saturation is confirmed when follow-up questioning yields repetitive information and no new themes emerge, indicating sufficient depth and comprehensiveness in understanding the phenomenon

of discrimination.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the research employs methodological triangulation through multiple data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews, participant observation of community interactions, and document analysis of local government records and community communications. In addition, source triangulation is conducted by comparing perspectives across the three informants, who represent varying age groups and distinct personal experiences. This multi-method and multi-source approach strengthens the validity of the research outcomes. It ensures that the findings accurately reflect the lived realities of religious discrimination in the studied context..

Data collection involves multiple methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of discrimination experiences. Primary data are obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants, direct observations of community dynamics, and documentation of relevant incidents (Englander et al., 2022; Muhoza et al., 2021). Each interview lasts approximately 60 to 90 minutes and is conducted in private and comfortable settings chosen by participants to promote openness and confidentiality, all in the Indonesian language. All interviews are digitally recorded using encrypted devices with participants' explicit consent, and comprehensive field notes are taken during and immediately after each session. Interview recordings are transcribed verbatim in Indonesian by the researcher within 24 hours of collection to maintain accuracy and preserve contextual integrity. Since all participants are native Indonesian speakers and the interviews are conducted in Indonesian, translation is not required for data analysis. However, key quotations selected for publication are carefully translated into English while maintaining cultural nuances and contextual meaning. Secondary data sources include existing literature, academic journals, government reports, online resources, and related publications, which provide broader contextual understanding and theoretical grounding for the findings.

Data analysis follows the systematic method outlined by Miles and Huberman (Kase et al., 2023), which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with verification. This structured framework ensures that data interpretation remains consistent, transparent, and logically organized throughout the analysis process. It also allows the researcher to move iteratively between stages, refining understanding and ensuring that interpretations remain grounded in empirical evidence.

During the data condensation stage, the researcher selects, reduces, simplifies, summarizes, and transforms raw data, focusing on information most relevant to the research questions. In the data presentation phase, the condensed information is organized into accessible formats such as matrices, charts, and narrative descriptions that emphasize

emerging patterns and relationships. The final stage involves drawing conclusions and verification, where the researcher interprets meanings, identifies explanations, notes regularities and themes, and verifies conclusions through member checking with participants and peer debriefing with academic colleagues. This analytical process highlights the interpretive and integrative dimensions of qualitative research, acknowledging that the data are narrative in form and rich in contextual detail. The triangulation approach employed allows for cross-verification of information and facilitates a deeper understanding of the discrimination phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

The research adheres to strict ethical protocols to protect participant welfare and maintain research integrity. Before data collection begins, informed consent is formally obtained from all participants. Participants receive a clear explanation of the research purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights, including the option for voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw at any time without consequences. Given the sensitive nature of discrimination experiences and the potential for community backlash, special attention is given to ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. All identifying information is removed from transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., SH, M, U) to prevent traceability.

At the same time, the research location is anonymized as "X subdistrict" to safeguard community members from possible retaliation or stigmatization. Digital recordings and transcripts are stored in password-protected, encrypted files accessible only to the research team, while physical documents are secured in locked storage. Participants are informed about data handling procedures and reassured that their identities will remain confidential in all publications and presentations. The research receives ethical approval from the institutional review board, and ongoing ethical considerations are maintained throughout the study, including continuous assessments of participant well-being and potential community safety implications. These measures ensure that the research process respects ethical standards while minimizing potential harm to participants and their communities.

The qualitative research methodology and comprehensive data analysis employed in this research facilitate a deep understanding of the experiences of religious discrimination in the X subdistrict. This methodological approach allows for the systematic exploration of participants' lived experiences and the sociocultural structures that influence them. Furthermore, it enables the generation of nuanced insights into the multicultural challenges faced by the Christian community in the region, contributing meaningfully to broader discussions on religious tolerance and social justice in Indonesia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings reveal various forms of religious discrimination against Christian individuals in the X subdistrict, ranging from subtle social exclusion to overt acts of eviction. This discrimination is manifested through degrading treatment, ostracism, ridicule, harmful gossip, restrictions on worship practices, and forced displacement from residential areas. As informant U stated, "We were told we couldn't put up Christmas decorations because it would disturb the neighbors, but the mosque loudspeakers are used five times a day, and we never complained about that" (Informant U, personal communication, 2024). This statement illustrates the double standards applied to religious expressions within the community and highlights the unequal enforcement of tolerance norms.

Worship restrictions become particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, even though government guidelines permit home-based religious activities. Informant U recounted, "When we held small prayer meetings at home during lockdown, neighbors complained we were trying to convert people, even though we were just following government health protocols like everyone else." The prohibition on displaying religious symbols, such as Christmas trees and decorations, within and around Christian homes further demonstrates systematic religious suppression. These restrictions directly contradict the Minister of Religious Affairs Circular Number 15 of 2020, which provides guidelines for conducting religious activities in places of worship to ensure a productive and safe community during the pandemic (Kementerian Agama R.I., 2020). This inconsistency underscores how local practices of exclusivism override formal state policies intended to promote equality and religious freedom.

Economic discrimination emerges as another significant issue, with Christians facing restrictions on property ownership, business operations, and access to essential services. Informant M reported, "When people found out we were Christians, they cut off our water supply and refused to sell us groceries. My Chinese neighbor faced similar treatment" (Informant M, personal communication, 2024). This example reflects how religious and ethnic biases intersect to marginalize minorities economically. The discriminatory treatment extends to real estate transactions, where Christian buyers are systematically rejected regardless of financial capacity or legal eligibility. Detailed discriminatory actions experience by Christians in X subdistrict can be seen in Table 1.

Law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations demonstrate concerning inaction in protecting victims' rights. As informant M revealed, "When we reported the discrimination to the police, they suggested that it would be easier for us to move somewhere else rather than cause trouble in the community." This response reflects a systemic failure to uphold constitutional guarantees of religious

freedom and equal protection under the law. Moreover, NGOs and human rights advocates fail to intervene effectively, exposing weaknesses in the existing human rights protection system. The absence of transparent reporting and the lack of public access to information about eviction cases further indicate deficiencies in institutional accountability and community awareness, which in turn perpetuate cycles of discrimination and silence.

Table 1 Actors and discriminatory actions experienced by Christian believers in X subdistrict

| Actors | Actions |
|---|---|
| 1. Neighborhood | 1. Derogatory treatment |
| 2. Hamlet | 2. Exclusion |
| 3. Public figures of religion | 3. Prohibition of religious worship during the COVID-19 pandemic |
| 4. X residents | 4. Eviction from the area of X subdistrict |
| | 5. Prohibition of showing religious attributes such as Christmas trees and decorations within and surrounding the house |
| | 6. Restrictions on property ownership, including buying and selling real estate |

The psychological and social impact on Christian families is severe, forcing them to relocate multiple times and abandon their long-established communities. Informant SH described the emotional toll: "I tried to participate respectfully in community mourning ceremonies, but when I didn't wear a headscarf, people stared and whispered. We felt constantly judged for being different" (Informant SH, personal communication, 2024). This persistent scrutiny creates an environment where Christian families feel pressured to conform to dominant religious norms to gain social acceptance. Over time, such pressures erode individual autonomy, foster insecurity, and weaken the sense of belonging among minority residents.

Discrimination extends beyond individual families and affects broader social cohesion. Informant SH noted, "Several families from our church tried to buy property here, but once people learned they were Christian, the sales were canceled. There seems to be an organized effort to keep Christians out." This systematic exclusion implies a coordinated effort among community members to maintain religious homogeneity and protect group identity. The resulting segregation undermines interfaith trust and reduces opportunities for meaningful social integration. Consequently, exclusionary practices become normalized within community life, perpetuating

structural inequality and social fragmentation.

Ultimately, persistent social pressure and systemic discrimination compel Christian families to relocate from the area. Informant SH explained, "We had to leave not because we wanted to, but because the constant discrimination made life unbearable for our children." This displacement reflects not voluntary migration but forced adaptation to an intolerant environment. The reluctance of victims to report incidents to authorities indicates deep mistrust toward legal institutions and fear of retaliation, which further hinders justice and reinforces the cycle of silence surrounding religious discrimination

The research identifies several factors contributing to exclusivist attitudes among residents of the X subdistrict, including strong religious convictions combined with fanatical attitudes, ignorance of religious diversity, instinctive group protectionism, and environmental influences. A strong sense of religious identity and collective belonging significantly shapes exclusivist perspectives, leading individuals to perceive rejection of other faiths as a moral or communal obligation. These attitudes are often reinforced by socialization processes within families, schools, and local institutions that emphasize conformity to dominant religious norms.

The social environment plays a critical role in sustaining exclusivist attitudes due to minimal interreligious interaction and limited exposure to alternative worldviews. Local Islamic boarding schools, in particular, sometimes function as institutional barriers to accepting religious diversity. As one community leader informally stated, "This has always been a Muslim area, and we want to keep it that way to preserve our local culture and values" (X subdistrict community leader, 2024). This statement exemplifies how cultural preservation is frequently invoked to justify exclusion, illustrating the tension between tradition and pluralism that continues to shape interfaith relations in the community.

The findings align closely with Gordon Allport's influential contact theory and model of prejudice formation, illustrating a clear progression from initial stereotyping to fully developed discriminatory behavior that has become institutionalized within the social fabric of the X subdistrict (Intikah et al., 2020; Naich, 2022). Allport's theoretical framework posits that prejudice develops through a series of stages, beginning with antilocution (negative verbal expressions), escalating to avoidance, then discrimination, physical attacks, and ultimately extermination. The situation in the X subdistrict exemplifies this progression, as Christian minorities experience systematic verbal harassment, social avoidance, discriminatory treatment, and forced displacement, representing four of Allport's five stages of prejudice manifestation. This parallel between theory and lived experience demonstrates how entrenched prejudice evolves into structural discrimination over time.

The exclusivism observed in the X subdistrict reflects deep theological and sociological tensions.

In this community, religious identity becomes closely associated with group belonging, cultural preservation, and territorial control. This creates what anthropologists refer to as "sacred geography," where physical space holds religious meaning that excludes perceived outsiders. Such a belief system reinforces community boundaries and sustains exclusionary practices that marginalize religious minorities.

This exclusivist mindset fundamentally contradicts Indonesia's constitutional principles of religious freedom as outlined in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution and the multicultural values expressed in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. The constitutional framework explicitly guarantees every citizen's right to practice their religion and worship according to their beliefs. However, the grassroots reality in the X subdistrict demonstrates a significant disconnect between these legal guarantees and their social implementation. This contradiction highlights what legal scholars refer to as the gap between law in books and law in action, where constitutional principles fail to translate into the lived experiences of religious minorities at the community level. This gap underscores the ongoing challenges of enforcing equality in pluralistic societies.

The systematic nature of discrimination in the X subdistrict, involving multiple community actors, institutional support, and coordinated exclusionary practices, indicates what social scientists call institutional discrimination. This phenomenon occurs when discriminatory practices become embedded in community structures, normalized through social processes, and passed down through generations as accepted cultural practices (Ronaldo & Wahyuni, 2022; Sukmayadi et al., 2023). Institutional discrimination manifests through both formal mechanisms, such as local government policies and religious leader directives, and informal social networks, including neighborhood pressure, economic boycotts, and social ostracism. Together, these practices create an environment hostile to religious diversity and sustain long-term exclusion.

The failure of local authorities, civil society organizations, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms to protect minority rights is described by contemporary scholars as discriminatory neglect. This form of systemic discrimination enables institutional inaction to perpetuate and legitimize existing inequalities (Reitsma & van Nes-Visscher, 2023). Such neglect is particularly troubling as it transforms discrimination from individual prejudice into a community-sanctioned practice. Over time, this form of neglect entrenches inequality and makes corrective interventions increasingly difficult to implement.

The discrimination patterns documented in the X subdistrict closely resemble cases found across Indonesia's diverse archipelago, particularly in regions where dominant religious majorities have maintained strong social and political influence over time. The experiences of the Ahmadiyya community in West Java serve as a notable parallel, where local authorities consistently fail to protect minority rights despite clear constitutional guarantees and international human rights obligations (Kharisma & Wahid, 2022). In both contexts, discrimination follows comparable mechanisms: community-driven pressure, complicity from local authorities, religious leaders legitimizing exclusionary practices, and law enforcement neglecting to enforce minority protections. The persecution of the Ahmadiyya illustrates how theological differences within Islam can trigger similar exclusionary mechanisms to those directed at Christians in the X subdistrict. This parallel demonstrates that religious discrimination in Indonesia transcends interfaith boundaries and reflects a deeper societal struggle to embrace genuine pluralism.

The Singkil case in Aceh Province provides another compelling comparison. Systematic church closures and the displacement of Christian communities exemplify the same exclusionary dynamics supported by intertwined local religious and political authorities (Antameng, 2020). The incidents in Singkil reveal how localized interpretations of Islamic law can be strategically employed to legitimize discriminatory actions against Christian minorities, transforming prejudice into legally justified persecution. As in the X subdistrict, the Singkil case involved collective community action, religious endorsement of exclusion, passive local governance, and nonresponsive law enforcement. Together, these elements created a structure that normalized minority suppression. These parallels demonstrate a broader national pattern in which dominant religious communities deploy similar strategies to preserve religious homogeneity, even as the Indonesian Constitution explicitly protects religious diversity and tolerance.

Expanding the analysis to an international scope, the case in the X subdistrict resonates with global patterns of minority persecution, particularly those observed in Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya Muslim population. In Myanmar, religious nationalism merges with ethnic prejudice, leading to systematic exclusion, displacement, and violence, often with direct or indirect support from local authorities (Chowdhury & Sifat, 2024). This example highlights the severe consequences when religious discrimination becomes embedded within state or community institutions. Likewise, Christian minorities in various parts of Egypt experience restrictions on property ownership (Artunç, 2019), limitations on worship, and persistent social ostracism. These global parallels underscore that the dynamics between majority and minority religious groups transcend cultural and national boundaries (Nurhamidin & Mashadi, 2021). The Egyptian case particularly mirrors the X subdistrict findings in its patterns of economic discrimination, where Christian entrepreneurs face organized boycotts and systematic rejection in property transactions, despite legal rights and economic capability.

The emerging pattern across international contexts demonstrates that the majority religious communities frequently employ a sophisticated

combination of informal social pressure, economic boycotts, institutional discrimination, and selective law enforcement to preserve religious homogeneity. These mechanisms enable communities to sustain exclusionary practices while technically avoiding formal legal violations that could prompt national or international scrutiny. By maintaining plausible deniability, such communities can continue systematic exclusion through coordinated social and economic pressure campaigns, reinforcing dominance without overtly breaching legal frameworks.

However, successful models of religious integration around the world provide a meaningful contrast to the exclusionary practices identified in the X subdistrict. For example, Canada's official multicultural policies, established under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), provide a comprehensive framework that not only protects minority rights but also encourages ongoing dialogue and cooperation among diverse communities. The Canadian approach promotes an active celebration of diversity, where government programs offer funding, legal protection, and cultural recognition to minority religious groups.

Similarly, Singapore's religious harmony laws exemplify a proactive and structured approach to managing diversity (Neo, 2020). These laws explicitly prohibit religious discrimination while fostering interfaith understanding through compulsory education initiatives and state-facilitated dialogue mechanisms. The Singaporean model demonstrates that robust legal frameworks, reinforced by consistent government intervention and civic education, can successfully maintain social stability and religious coexistence in highly pluralistic societies. It also underscores the critical role of long-term policy enforcement in preventing sectarian fragmentation and building inclusive national identities.

These international examples collectively suggest that legal protection alone is inadequate to guarantee religious harmony. Sustainable pluralism requires broad-based social education, institutional dedication to inclusivity at all levels of governance, and continuous civic engagement that nurtures interfaith understanding and cooperation. The contrast between successful multicultural societies and exclusionary environments such as the X subdistrict highlights the decisive importance of leadership accountability, policy enforcement, and educational reform in cultivating genuinely inclusive and resilient communities.

The systematic discrimination documented against Christian minorities in the X subdistrict stands in direct contradiction to Salatiga's official recognition as Indonesia's second most tolerant city in 2023, according to the Setara Institute's annual tolerance index (Setara Institute, 2023). This recognition previously identified Salatiga as the nation's most tolerant city, creating a striking disparity between institutional representation and social reality. The discrepancy exposes substantial methodological limitations in current tolerance measurement systems, which rely heavily on formal indicators such as policy frameworks, official government statements, and institutional commitments. These quantitative assessments often neglect to incorporate the lived experiences and narratives of minority groups, which are crucial to understanding the authenticity of tolerance within a community. Consequently, tolerance indices primarily evaluate administrative and procedural compliance while failing to capture the everyday manifestations of exclusion, informal discrimination, and community-level prejudice that persist beneath official representations of harmony.

The significant gap between institutional claims of tolerance and the lived experiences of minority communities indicates that current methods of measuring tolerance require fundamental revision. More sophisticated analytical tools are necessary—ones that meaningfully incorporate victim testimonies, ethnographic fieldwork, and longitudinal observation rather than relying primarily on policy analysis and official discourse. This methodological deficiency carries serious consequences for policy development, funding allocation, and intervention strategies. Communities that receive high tolerance rankings may escape scrutiny and oversight, while marginalized minorities continue to experience systemic discrimination without acknowledgment, advocacy, or support.

Similar discrepancies between institutionalized tolerance rankings and the actual experiences of minorities occur globally. Many cities, regions, and nations receive positive evaluations in human rights and democratic governance while simultaneously facing criticism from marginalized groups that endure discrimination, exclusion, and persecution. This recurring pattern demonstrates that tolerance and religious freedom often function as performative political ideals rather than lived realities. At the grassroots level—where social interactions, economic activities, and daily relationships unfold—these ideals are frequently undermined by persistent prejudice and inequality. The performative nature of institutional tolerance creates what sociologists term "tolerance theater," in which symbolic gestures of inclusivity mask ongoing exclusionary practices and communal hostility.

The case of the X subdistrict exemplifies how communities can publicly project an image of harmony and tolerance while concealing systematic discrimination that avoids legal scrutiny and external detection. This duality exposes the complex disjunction between formal policy commitments and on-the-ground realities. It underscores the need for tolerance measurement frameworks that center on minority voices through sustained ethnographic inquiry and experiential documentation. Such an approach is essential to move beyond institutional self-reporting and reveal the actual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at the community level.

The documented systemic discrimination in the X subdistrict presents profound challenges

to Indonesia's official multicultural framework. It raises questions about the practical enforcement of constitutional guarantees protecting minority rights in everyday social contexts where citizens live, interact, and engage in communal life. The findings reveal that local Islamic institutions—expected to embody the religion's values of justice, compassion, and coexistence—can instead serve as conduits for exclusionary practices. This occurs when religious education lacks interfaith competence, multicultural awareness, and inclusive theological interpretation. The result is an institutional deviation from Islam's foundational principles of social justice and communal welfare. These findings indicate the need for significant reform in religious education curricula to promote pluralistic understandings of Islamic teachings that embrace diversity rather than reinforce exclusivity.

The broader failure of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms—including religious leaders, community elders, neighborhood officials, local government representatives, and civil society organizations—demonstrates an urgent necessity for institutional reform and enhanced capacity in multicultural governance, interfaith mediation, and minority rights protection. These figures, historically responsible for fostering unity and resolving disputes, have increasingly become passive enablers or even participants in discriminatory acts. This breakdown signifies a critical erosion of Indonesia's social cohesion and conflict resolution systems. Consequently, achieving genuine multicultural governance requires more than tolerance promotion; it demands a structural transformation of power relations, accountability frameworks, and institutional mechanisms designed to safeguard minority rights and social equity.

The systematic and coordinated nature of discrimination observed in X subdistrict indicates that individual prejudice has evolved into community-wide exclusionary practices. These practices operate through complex social networks, economic pressures, and informal governance mechanisms, collectively threatening Indonesia's foundational principles of diversity and national unity. This shift from individual bias to institutional discrimination necessitates comprehensive intervention strategies that address structural inequalities, rather than merely changing individual attitudes. The prevalence of these exclusionary practices indicates that discrimination has become culturally normalized and socially acceptable within specific Indonesian communities, posing a significant challenge to the country's multicultural identity and constitutional democratic values.

Moreover, the research highlights how local interpretations of religious authenticity and cultural preservation can be manipulated to justify systematic exclusion of minorities. This creates theological and cultural justifications for discriminatory practices that violate both Islamic principles of social justice and Indonesia's constitutional commitments to religious freedom. Manipulating spiritual and cultural discourse in this manner poses a serious threat to Indonesia's pluralistic national identity. It underscores the need for more nuanced approaches to religious education, cultural interpretation, and national identity formation that explicitly contest exclusionary views while promoting inclusive alternatives.

The comprehensive findings from X subdistrict call for multi-level, coordinated interventions that address individual attitudinal changes, transformation of community practices, and restructuring of institutional responses across various sectors and governance levels. Education and awareness programs should extend beyond traditional outreach to systematically engage religious leaders, local government officials, law enforcement personnel, civil society organization staff, and educational administrators who currently act as facilitators of religious discrimination rather than preventers. These expanded educational interventions should feature sophisticated curricula that cover theological misconceptions, legal obligations, human rights principles, conflict resolution techniques, and multicultural governance practices. The focus should move beyond superficial messages of tolerance to foster a deeper competency in managing pluralistic societies.

The active involvement of stakeholders necessitates a fundamental shift from passive tolerance approaches, which accept diversity, to proactive protection of minority rights. This includes intervening in discrimination cases, systematically monitoring community relations, facilitating regular interfaith dialogues, and instituting immediate response protocols for addressing religious conflicts before they escalate into displacement or violence. Such reorientation demands significant institutional restructuring, including revised job descriptions for community leaders, enhanced accountability mechanisms for local officials, mandatory training programs for law enforcement, and performance evaluation criteria that explicitly include outcomes related to minority protection.

The presence of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in X subdistrict and similar communities presents both considerable challenges and unprecedented opportunities to promote inclusive religious interpretation and interfaith understanding. These influential educational institutions could serve as powerful platforms for fostering comprehensive Islamic interpretations that emphasize justice, compassion, social harmony, and acceptance of diversity, rather than exclusionary practices that contradict foundational Islamic principles. The positive modeling of interfaith respect, theological inclusivity, and advocacy for social justice by religious leaders could significantly impact community behavior, given their respected authority and ability to shape religious discourse. Achieving this requires systematic engagement with *pesantren* curricula, teacher training programs, and institutional policies to ensure that Islamic education promotes, rather than undermines, Indonesia's multicultural values and constitutional commitments.

Improvements in transparency and information accessibility are essential components of effective discrimination prevention and response systems, yet they are currently inadequate. The existing gap in information prevents victims of discrimination from accessing legal protections, understanding their constitutional rights, identifying appropriate reporting mechanisms, and obtaining necessary support services to address discriminatory treatment. This lack of information allows discriminatory practices to persist without official documentation, legal challenges, or systematic intervention, resulting in impunity for those who engage in discrimination.

To address this issue, comprehensive and transparent information systems must be developed, including accessible digital reporting platforms, clear explanations of legal procedures, rights education materials, directories for victim support services, and community-based monitoring systems. These elements are vital for both preventing and responding to religious discrimination. Such systems should also integrate multilingual access, confidentiality protections, and collaboration between government institutions, NGOs, and local communities to ensure trust and usability.

Furthermore, the research findings indicate a need for innovative intervention approaches that utilize technology, social media, and digital platforms. These tools can help promote interfaith understanding, document cases of discrimination, facilitate support networks for victims, and enable real-time monitoring of community religious relations. Such technological interventions could complement traditional face-to-face mediation and education programs, creating new opportunities to amplify the voices of minority communities and document instances of discrimination that existing systems fail to capture or address adequately. Expanding these initiatives through partnerships with universities, civil society organizations, and youth groups can further enhance their reach and ensure that interfaith awareness and digital advocacy become integral components of community development.

## CONCLUSIONS

The issue of religious discrimination against individuals in Subdistrict X is critical and requires immediate attention as well as sustained scholarly examination. This discrimination manifests in various forms, including degrading treatment, ostracism, restrictions on worship, negative discourse, and even eviction. It is deeply rooted in religious exclusivism, where Christianity is perceived as inferior to the dominant faith in the region. These findings underscore the urgent need to address religious discrimination in Subdistrict X and the broader challenges of maintaining unity and integrity within Indonesia's pluralistic society. Protecting human rights, promoting tolerance, and fostering inclusivity remain essential

pillars for national cohesion. Stakeholders—including community leaders, religious authorities, law enforcement agencies, and non-governmental organizations—must collaborate proactively to prevent and mitigate religious discrimination through sustained community engagement and policy intervention.

To evaluate the long-term effectiveness of such interventions, longitudinal studies that track the same communities over extended periods, such as five to ten years, are essential. These studies can provide valuable insights into how discriminatory attitudes evolve, whether tolerance-building programs produce sustainable behavioral changes, and how demographic or socioeconomic shifts influence interfaith relations over time. The systematic implementation of awareness campaigns, interfaith education programs, and inclusive dialogue mechanisms is vital to reducing religious exclusivism and strengthening Indonesia's multicultural foundation.

While this research provides meaningful insights into the dynamics of religious discrimination in Subdistrict X, several limitations must be acknowledged. The geographical focus on a single subdistrict may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions of Indonesia. Moreover, the emphasis on Christian communities could overlook the experiences of different minority religious groups who may face similar or intersecting forms of discrimination. Future research should therefore adopt a broader comparative framework that examines multiple regions and minority groups to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of religious discrimination in Indonesia. Longitudinal studies exploring the enduring effects of discrimination on community resilience and interfaith relations further enhance the existing body of knowledge.

Intervention-based research designs offer another promising direction for future studies. Controlled or quasi-experimental research can systematically test the effectiveness of strategies aimed at reducing religious intolerance. These strategies include randomized controlled trials evaluating educational programs in Islamic boarding schools, community dialogue initiatives, local government training protocols, and digital platform interventions designed to promote interfaith understanding. These evidence-based approaches can generate practical insights for policymakers and educators seeking to address intolerance through measurable and replicable means.

Furthermore, future investigations should evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and community-based initiatives aimed at reducing religious intolerance. This evaluation must be conducted through rigorous program evaluation methodologies that assess both short-term changes in attitudes and long-term modifications in behavior. Intervention studies can specifically examine the impacts of curriculum reforms in pesantren, interfaith dialogue programs, community leader

training initiatives, and digital literacy campaigns on improving interfaith relations and protecting minority rights. Strengthening institutional accountability and improving data transparency are also necessary to ensure that such interventions achieve measurable outcomes.

Evaluating the role of social media in shaping religious discourse and potentially escalating tensions provides valuable insights into contemporary drivers of discrimination. Additionally, longitudinal digital ethnography can track how online interactions influence offline community dynamics over extended periods. Natural experiment designs can utilize policy changes or demographic shifts to assess their impact on levels of religious tolerance. Participatory action research can also involve community members as co-researchers in developing and testing locally appropriate intervention strategies, thereby ensuring greater relevance, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability of implemented programs.

By broadening the scope of research, incorporating rigorous longitudinal and intervention methodologies, and addressing existing gaps through evidence-based approaches, scholars and policymakers can contribute to developing more robust, tested frameworks for fostering religious harmony and national solidarity. These efforts can strengthen Indonesia's multicultural foundation and ensure that constitutional guarantees of equality and freedom of religion are effectively realized at every level of society. The findings from Subdistrict X ultimately serve as a critical reminder of the ongoing need to transform tolerance from a mere policy ideal into a lived social reality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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