

INTERFAITH HARMONY IN INDONESIA: BETWEEN THE IDEALITY OF VALUES AND THE REALITY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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Received: 2-2-2025; Revised: 28-03-2025; Accepted: 10-4-2025

Abstract: Interfaith harmony is a fundamental pillar in maintaining social integrity and diversity in Indonesia. Normatively, the values of harmony are enshrined in religious teachings, the Pancasila, and various state regulations that emphasize the importance of tolerance, dialogue, and mutual respect between religious communities. However, in social practice, the ideals of these values often encounter various problems, such as horizontal conflict, intolerance, the politicization of religious identity, and the spread of hate speech through digital media. This study aims to analyze the gap between the ideals of interfaith harmony and the reality of social problems in Indonesia, as well as to identify the causal factors and strategies for strengthening them. The method used is Systematic Literature Review (SLR) by reviewing national and international journal articles, scientific books, and policy reports relevant to the theme of interfaith harmony in Indonesia. The SLR process involved formulating research questions, selecting literature based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, conducting thematic analysis, and synthesizing research findings. The results and discussion indicate that the challenges of interfaith harmony are influenced by structural, cultural, and instrumental factors, such as weak moderate religious literacy, social inequality, and the use of religion as a tool for political gain. On the other hand, various good practices, such as interfaith dialogue, the role of religious leaders, and policies of religious moderation, have been shown to strengthen social harmony. In conclusion, strengthening interfaith harmony in Indonesia requires an integrative approach involving multicultural education, strengthening the role of religious institutions, and ongoing collaboration between the state and civil society.

Keywords: Interfaith Harmony; Religious Pluralism; Social Conflict; Moderation of Religion; Multicultural Society

Abstrak: Kerukunan umat beragama merupakan salah satu pilar fundamental dalam menjaga keutuhan sosial dan kebhinekaan bangsa Indonesia. Secara normatif, nilai-nilai kerukunan telah tertuang dalam ajaran agama, Pancasila, serta berbagai regulasi negara yang menegaskan pentingnya toleransi, dialog, dan saling menghormati antarumat beragama. Namun, dalam praktik sosial, idealitas nilai tersebut kerap berhadapan dengan berbagai problematika, seperti konflik horizontal, intoleransi, politisasi identitas agama, serta penyebaran ujaran kebencian melalui media digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesenjangan antara idealitas nilai kerukunan umat beragama dan realitas problematika sosial yang terjadi di Indonesia, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor penyebab dan strategi penguatannya. Metode yang digunakan adalah Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan menelaah artikel jurnal nasional dan internasional, buku ilmiah, serta laporan kebijakan yang relevan dengan tema kerukunan umat beragama di Indonesia. Proses SLR dilakukan melalui tahapan perumusan pertanyaan penelitian, seleksi literatur berdasarkan kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi, analisis tematik, serta sintesis temuan penelitian. Hasil dan pembahasan menunjukkan bahwa problematika kerukunan umat beragama dipengaruhi oleh faktor struktural, kultural, dan instrumental, seperti lemahnya literasi keagamaan moderat, ketimpangan sosial, serta penggunaan agama sebagai alat kepentingan politik. Di sisi lain, berbagai praktik baik seperti dialog lintas iman, peran tokoh agama, dan kebijakan moderasi beragama terbukti mampu memperkuat harmoni sosial. Kesimpulannya,

penguatan kerukunan umat beragama di Indonesia memerlukan pendekatan integratif yang melibatkan pendidikan multikultural, penguatan peran institusi keagamaan, serta kolaborasi negara dan masyarakat sipil secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Harmoni Antar Agama; Pluralisme Agama; Konflik Sosial; Moderasi Agama; Masyarakat Multikultural*

Introduction

Interfaith harmony is a fundamental pillar in maintaining social integrity, national stability, and the sustainability of Indonesia's diversity. As a country with a very high level of religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic pluralism, Indonesia faces significant challenges in maintaining social harmony amidst diversity. Harmony is not simply understood as a state without conflict, but rather as a dynamic social process, in which society is able to manage differences in a mature, just, and civilized manner (Effendy, 2023). In this context, interfaith harmony is a primary prerequisite for creating a peaceful, inclusive, and just society. Without harmony, plurality, which should be a wealth, has the potential to turn into a source of tension and prolonged social conflict.

Normatively, the values of interfaith harmony have a very strong foundation in Indonesia. All state-recognized religions fundamentally teach the values of compassion, peace, tolerance, and respect for human dignity. These teachings are reinforced by the philosophy of Pancasila, particularly the first to third principles, which emphasize the importance of a civilized divinity, a just and civilized humanity, and Indonesian unity. Furthermore, the state has also introduced various regulations and policies aimed at maintaining harmonious relations between religious communities, such as the guarantee of religious freedom in the constitution, the role of the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), and the government-initiated religious moderation program (Hefner, 2024). This normative ideal demonstrates that conceptually and policy-wise, Indonesia has an adequate foundation for building a harmonious and peaceful religious life.

However, social reality shows that the ideal value of harmony has not been fully realized optimally in society. Various incidents of religious conflict, both small and large scale, still occur frequently in several regions. Intolerance toward minority religious groups, rejection of the establishment of houses of worship, belief-based discrimination, and even symbolic and verbal violence are recurring phenomena (Abdullah, 2019). In the digital era, the problem of harmony is increasingly complex with the massive spread of hate speech, religious hoaxes, and provocative narratives through social media. The politicization of religious identity in political contests also exacerbates social fragmentation and weakens mutual trust among citizens. This condition indicates a clear gap between the ideal value idealized and the social reality faced by society.

The study of interfaith harmony was chosen because this issue is not only academic but also has broad practical implications for social, political, and national life. Interfaith harmony is directly related to national stability, social development, and the quality of democracy in Indonesia. When interfaith relations are harmonious, the potential for conflict can be suppressed and social energy can be directed toward productive efforts for the common good. Conversely, when harmony weakens, identity-based conflicts are easily exploited by various narrow interests, potentially threatening national unity. Therefore, this study is crucial for a deeper understanding of the root causes that hinder the realization of harmony, as well as for formulating strengthening strategies relevant to the current Indonesian social context (Bagir, 2018).

The uniqueness of this study lies in its multidimensional and interdisciplinary nature. Interfaith harmony cannot be understood from a single perspective but requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing theological, sociological, political, legal, and cultural dimensions. On the one hand, there are ideal values within religious teachings that promote

tolerance and peace, but on the other hand, there are social realities influenced by economic factors, power, education, and media dynamics (Bush & Fealy, 2020). This tension between ideals and reality is what makes the study of interfaith harmony always authentic and relevant for critical examination. Furthermore, developments in information technology and social media have presented new challenges that have not been fully accommodated in classical studies of interfaith harmony, thus opening up space for more contextual and sophisticated research.

Various previous studies have examined interfaith harmony from various perspectives. Several studies emphasize the role of interfaith dialogue as a key instrument in building mutual understanding and reducing prejudice between religious communities (Hoon, 2019). Other studies highlight the importance of religious leaders and institutions in instilling values of moderation and tolerance in the community. Furthermore, several studies have revealed that religious conflict is often not caused solely by differences in religious doctrine, but by non-theological factors such as social inequality, economic injustice, weak law enforcement, and the manipulation of religious identity for political gain. These findings deepen our understanding that the problems of harmony are complex and cannot be reduced to a single factor (Klinken, 2021).

Nevertheless, previous research still reveals gaps, particularly in integrating the ideals of harmony values derived from religious teachings and state policies with the reality of evolving social problems (RI, 2020). Many studies emphasize normative aspects or specific case studies, without comprehensively synthesizing the various existing findings. Furthermore, there are still limited studies that systematically map the causal factors of harmony problems and formulate integrative and sustainable strengthening strategies. This situation demonstrates the need for studies that can integrate various perspectives and previous research findings within a single, coherent analytical framework.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the gap between the ideal values of interfaith harmony and the reality of social problems occurring in Indonesia. This study seeks to identify structural, cultural, and instrumental factors that influence the dynamics of interfaith harmony, and examines how ideal values can be translated more effectively into social practice. Furthermore, this study also aims to formulate strategies for strengthening interfaith harmony that are relevant to contemporary challenges, including addressing the influence of digital media and identity politics. With this approach, it is hoped that this research can provide theoretical contributions to the development of interfaith harmony studies, as well as practical recommendations for policymakers, religious leaders, and the community in building a harmonious and civilized religious life in Indonesia.

Method

The research method used in this study is Systematic Literature Review (SLR), a research approach that aims to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize various previous research findings relevant to the topic of interfaith harmony in Indonesia. The selection of the SLR method is based on the consideration that the issue of interfaith harmony is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon, thus requiring comprehensive knowledge mapping from various scientific and policy sources. Through SLR, this research not only collects previous research findings but also analyzes patterns, trends, and research gaps that are still open for further study.

The SLR process began with the formulation of research questions focused on the gap between the ideal values of interfaith harmony and the reality of social problems in Indonesia. These research questions served as the basis for determining literature search keywords, such as interfaith harmony, religious tolerance, religious conflict, religious moderation, and religious pluralism. The literature search was conducted in national and international journal databases,

academic repositories, and other relevant credible sources. In addition to journal articles, this research also included scholarly books and policy reports from government and independent institutions directly related to the study theme.

The next stage is literature selection based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria include publications discussing interfaith harmony in Indonesia, published within a specific timeframe, and possessing theoretical and empirical relevance to the research focus. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria include publications that have no direct relevance to the Indonesian context, are non-scientific opinion pieces, or do not provide adequate data and analysis. This selection process is carried out in stages to ensure that the analyzed literature is of high academic quality and relevance.

The selected literature was then analyzed using the approach thematic analysis, namely by grouping research findings into key emerging themes, such as the causes of religious conflict, the role of the state and religious leaders, the influence of digital media, and strategies for strengthening interfaith harmony. Thematic analysis allows researchers to understand the relationships between variables in greater depth and identify recurring patterns across studies. Next, a synthesis of research findings is conducted to formulate comprehensive conclusions regarding the dynamics of interfaith harmony in Indonesia, while also designing strategic recommendations based on scientific evidence.

To clarify the stages of the SLR method used in this research, the following table presents the research stages:

Table 1. Stages of Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Research Stage	Activity Description
Formulation of Research Questions	Determining the focus of study and scope of research on interfaith harmony
Literature Search	Search for relevant journal articles, scientific books, and policy reports
Literature Selection	Filter sources based on inclusion and exclusion criteria
Thematic Analysis	Grouping research findings into main themes
Synthesis of Findings	Integrate analysis results to draw conclusions and recommendations

Based on the table, it can be explained that the SLR method in this study was conducted systematically and sequentially, thus ensuring the traceability and validity of the research process. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of interfaith harmony in Indonesia and serve as a strong scientific basis for formulating contextual and sustainable harmony-strengthening strategies.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion in this study indicate that the problem of interfaith harmony in Indonesia is a complex phenomenon influenced by various interrelated factors, both at the structural, cultural, and instrumental levels (Menchik, 2018). These three factors do not stand alone but interact to shape the dynamics of interfaith relations in a pluralistic society. These

findings confirm that interfaith harmony cannot be understood solely as a matter of differences in theological beliefs, but rather as a social issue influenced by economic, political, and cultural contexts, as well as developments in information technology.

From a structural perspective, literature reviews indicate that social and economic inequality is a key driver of weakening interfaith harmony (Misrawi, 2020). Unequal access to education, employment, and economic resources often gives rise to a sense of social injustice, which is then expressed in religious sentiment. In many cases, religious identity becomes the most easily mobilized symbol to express social frustration, particularly in communities experiencing structural marginalization. This situation is exacerbated when the state fails to fully and fairly guarantee the basic rights of citizens without discrimination based on religion. As a result, interfaith relations are vulnerable to latent conflict that can surface at any time (Mujiburrahman, 2021).

Besides social inequality, other influential structural factors include weak law enforcement and inconsistent policies regarding religious life. Several studies have shown that religious conflict often arises from ambiguous regulations or indecisive and discriminatory law enforcement (Nurrohman & Nisa, 2023). When the state fails to act as a fair arbiter in resolving religious issues, the public sphere is filled with non-state actors pursuing specific ideological and political interests. This situation ultimately weakens public trust in state institutions and increases the potential for horizontal interfaith conflict (Qodir, 2021).

Cultural factors also have a significant influence in shaping the challenges of interfaith harmony. A literature synthesis shows that low levels of moderate religious literacy are a major challenge in multireligious societies. Exclusive, textual, and ahistorical religious understandings tend to foster intolerance toward differences. In this context, religion is no longer understood as a source of universal ethical values that uphold humanity and peace, but rather is reduced to a narrow identity that defines the boundaries between "us" and "them." This mindset reinforces prejudice, stereotypes, and suspicion between religious communities, ultimately hindering interfaith dialogue and cooperation (Rahman, 2022).

Social cultures passed down through generations also influence how society views religious differences. In some regions, segregated social relations patterns persist, where interactions between religious communities are limited by specific social barriers. The limited space for interfaith meetings and dialogue leads to a lack of understanding of the religious beliefs and practices of others (Institute, 2019). This lack of understanding is then easily manipulated by provocative narratives that marginalize certain religious groups. In this context, a culture of dialogue has not yet fully become a deeply rooted social habitus within society.

In the digital era, these cultural factors are further amplified by the uncontrolled flow of information (Syamsuddin, 2021). Social media has become a new arena for the spread of hate speech, religious hoaxes, and intolerant narratives disguised as religious advocacy. Studies show that social media algorithms tend to reinforce echo chambers, where individuals are only exposed to information that aligns with their own religious views. This narrows the space for dialogue and increases social polarization based on religious identity. As a result, previously local conflicts can quickly escalate and shape negative public opinion against particular religious groups.

Instrumental factors are another crucial dimension in the problem of interfaith harmony. Religious instruments are often exploited as a means of legitimacy for political, economic, and power interests. In the context of electoral politics, for example, religion is often used as a commodity to gain mass support through the mobilization of identity sentiments. This politicization of religion not only undermines the essence of religious teachings but also leaves residues of social conflict that are difficult to resolve (UGM, 2022). The literature analyzed shows that religious conflicts fueled by instrumental interests tend to be destructive because they involve collective emotions and strong identity loyalties.

The use of religion as a tool for personal gain is also evident in the exclusivist practices of certain groups, who claim a single truth and deny the existence of others. These claims of absolute truth are often justified by religious arguments that are only partially understood (Turner, 2022). As a result, the public sphere loses its inclusive character and becomes an arena for ideological contestation rife with symbolic conflict. In the long term, this situation can erode social cohesion and weaken the foundations of national unity, which is based on diversity.

Nevertheless, the results and discussions also demonstrate various good practices proven to strengthen interfaith harmony and reduce the potential for conflict. One of the most prominent practices is interfaith dialogue, conducted on a sustainable basis based on equality (Foundation, 2021). Interfaith dialogue serves not only as a means of communication between religious communities but also as a space for shared learning to understand the universal values taught by each religion. Through dialogue, prejudice and stereotypes can be eroded, while empathy and mutual trust can be strengthened.

The role of religious leaders is also a key factor in maintaining and strengthening social harmony (Yewangoe, A. A. (n.d.). *Agama dan kerukunan sosial di Indonesia*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia. Yewangoe, 2019). Religious leaders possess moral and symbolic authority that significantly influences the attitudes and behavior of their followers. The literature shows that religious leaders who promote messages of moderation, tolerance, and humanity can be effective agents of peace within society. Conversely, religious leaders who engage in the politicization of identity have the potential to exacerbate tensions and deepen social polarization. Therefore, strengthening the capacity and commitment of religious leaders to the values of harmony is a crucial strategy for building interfaith harmony (Zulkifli, 2023).

The state-initiated religious moderation policy has also been shown to positively contribute to strengthening interfaith harmony. Religious moderation emphasizes the importance of a just, balanced religious attitude that respects differences, without sacrificing one's own beliefs. Various studies have viewed this policy as a strategic effort to bridge the gap between ideal religious values and pluralistic social realities. However, the effectiveness of religious moderation policies depends heavily on implementation at the grassroots level, including through inclusive education, training, and strengthening of religious literacy.

To summarize the findings and discussions, the following table presents a map of problematic factors and strategies for strengthening interfaith harmony:

Table 2. Problematic Factors and Strategies for Strengthening Interfaith Harmony

Factor Dimensions	Form of Problems	Strengthening Strategy
Structural	Social inequality, weak law enforcement	Inclusive policies, social justice, legal protection
Cultural	Low religious literacy, intolerant attitudes	Moderation education, interfaith dialogue
Instrumental	Politicization of religion, claims of exclusive truth	Political ethics, the role of moderate religious figures

Based on the table, it can be explained that the challenges of interfaith harmony require an integrative and cross-sectoral strengthening strategy. A structural approach must be accompanied by fair policies that support social justice, while a cultural approach requires strengthening moderate religious education and literacy. On the other hand, an instrumental

approach demands an ethical commitment from political and religious actors to prevent religion from being used as a tool for narrow interests. Thus, interfaith harmony will not only be a normative ideal but can be realized concretely in Indonesian social life.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study confirms that interfaith harmony in Indonesia is the primary foundation for maintaining national unity amidst the reality of a multicultural and multireligious society. Although normatively, the values of harmony are firmly embedded in religious teachings, Pancasila, and state regulations, social reality shows that the implementation of these values still faces various structural, cultural, and instrumental challenges. This gap between ideal values and social practice demands more systematic, contextual, and sustainable efforts to strengthen harmony.

Strengthening interfaith harmony cannot be achieved through a single approach but requires an integrative strategy involving various stakeholders. Multicultural education and moderate religious literacy are key to building an inclusive and tolerant understanding from an early age. Through education, the values of respect for differences, dialogue, and social empathy can be continuously internalized, so that society is not easily provoked by intolerant narratives or the politicization of religious identity. Education oriented toward the formation of national character also plays a crucial role in strengthening collective awareness that diversity is a social asset that must be safeguarded together.

Beyond education, strengthening the role of religious institutions and religious leaders plays a strategic role in maintaining social harmony. Religious institutions serve not only as centers of ritual but also as agents of social transformation, instilling the values of peace, justice, and humanity. Religious leaders, with their moral authority, are expected to serve as role models in fostering interfaith dialogue and rejecting all forms of violence and exclusivism in the name of religion. The commitment of religious institutions to religious moderation is a crucial factor in building trust and solidarity between religious communities.

Furthermore, ongoing collaboration between the state and civil society is a crucial prerequisite for strengthening interfaith harmony. The state plays a role in providing fair, inclusive, and consistent policies, while civil society contributes through dialogue, advocacy, and community empowerment initiatives. Synergy between these two actors will create a social ecosystem conducive to the growth of tolerance and harmony. With this integrative approach, interfaith harmony in Indonesia will not merely be a normative discourse but will manifest as a vibrant and sustainable social practice.

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