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Indistortion of Extremism Through the Acceptability and Exploration of Hindu Cultural Celebrations in Jember, Indonesia: Implications for Da'wah and Socio-Cultural Management

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Keywords	Abstract
Distorting Extremism; Acceptability; Hindu Cultural Celebrations	*Religious extremism poses a significant threat to peace and social stability, particularly in Indonesia, where religious intolerance and violence are on the rise. According to the Setara Institute, there were 333 incidents of violations of religious freedom in Indonesia in 2022, marking a 19% increase from the previous year. Research is needed to understand how cultural acceptability can help mitigate extremism and enhance interfaith coexistence. This research seeks to explore how interfaith openness in Jember builds social capital and prevents extremism, examine the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue and community leadership in extremism prevention, investigate how interfaith participation in cultural celebrations strengthens community solidarity, and assess the importance of interfaith harmony in shaping social identity and preventing conflict. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with members of the Hindu community and surrounding residents. The findings include: 1) Theory of Religious and Social Tolerance: Interfaith openness in Jember fosters social capital through non-discriminatory participation, strengthening social cohesion and control, and preventing extremism through mutual trust. 2) Extremism and Social Response: Interfaith dialogue and community leadership effectively prevent extremism and maintain social stability. 3) Cultural Celebration and Inclusivity: Interfaith participation in celebrations enhances solidarity among residents. 4) Theory of Coexistence: Interfaith harmony is integral to the community's social identity, supporting social stability and preventing future conflict.*
Kata Kunci	Abstrak
Indistorsi ekstrimisme; akseptabilitas kultural Hinduisme	*Ekstremisme agama menjadi ancaman signifikan bagi perdamaian dan stabilitas sosial, terutama di Indonesia, di mana intoleransi agama dan kekerasan semakin meningkat. Menurut Setara Institute, terjadi 333 insiden pelanggaran kebebasan beragama di Indonesia pada tahun 2022, yang meningkat sebesar 19% dibandingkan tahun sebelumnya. Penelitian diperlukan untuk memahami bagaimana akseptabilitas budaya dapat membantu mengurangi ekstremisme dan meningkatkan koeksistensi antaragama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana keterbukaan antaragama di Jember membangun modal sosial dan mencegah ekstremisme, menguji efektivitas dialog antaragama dan kepemimpinan komunitas dalam pencegahan ekstremisme, menyelidiki bagaimana partisipasi*

antaragama dalam perayaan budaya memperkuat solidaritas komunitas, dan menilai pentingnya keharmonisan antaragama dalam membentuk identitas sosial serta mencegah konflik. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif dan wawancara mendalam dengan anggota komunitas Hindu dan warga sekitar. Temuan penelitian meliputi: 1) Teori Toleransi Agama dan Sosial: Keterbukaan antaragama di Jember mendorong modal sosial melalui partisipasi yang tidak diskriminatif, memperkuat kohesi sosial dan kontrol, serta mencegah ekstremisme melalui saling percaya. 2) Ekstremisme dan Respons Sosial: Dialog antaragama dan kepemimpinan komunitas efektif dalam mencegah ekstremisme dan menjaga stabilitas sosial. 3) Perayaan Budaya dan Inklusivitas: Partisipasi antaragama dalam perayaan meningkatkan solidaritas di antara warga. 4) Teori Koeksistensi: Keharmonisan antaragama merupakan bagian integral dari identitas sosial komunitas, mendukung stabilitas sosial, dan mencegah konflik di masa depan.

Introduction

Religious extremism has become a significant global threat to peace and social stability. In the global context, extremism not only threatens security but also triggers profound social conflicts in various countries, including Indonesia. The increasing number of cases of religious intolerance and violence in Indonesia indicates that this issue is both relevant and urgent to be examined. According to data from the Setara Institute, in 2022 there were 333 incidents of violations of religious freedom in Indonesia, representing a 19% increase compared to the previous year. One of the factors contributing to this problem is the lack of acceptance, or acceptability, of different cultures and religious practices. As a country with a Muslim-majority population, Indonesia also has religious minority communities such as Hinduism, which often face challenges in freely celebrating their cultural festivals. For example, several cases in which Hindu celebrations encountered rejection from certain groups demonstrate distortions in the acceptance of minority cultures. In conclusion, it is important to investigate this phenomenon in order to understand how acceptability can serve as a solution to addressing religious extremism and enhancing interreligious coexistence in Indonesia.

Previous research on religious extremism and cultural acceptability has developed along several broad trajectories. First, many studies focus on the impact of extremism on national security and social conflict, as examined by Juergensmeyer in Terror in the Mind of God.[1] Second, a number of studies explore the relationship between religious pluralism and social tolerance; for example, the research by Putnam and Campbell explains the importance of interfaith contact in creating

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[1] Mark Juergensmeyer dan Wade Clark Roof, *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* (SAGE Publications, 2012).

peaceful coexistence.[2] Third, studies related to minority cultural celebrations within majority-religion contexts have also been conducted, such as Bowen's research on Muslim minority communities in Western countries. However, a significant gap remains unaddressed, namely how cultural acceptability and minority cultural celebrations particularly those of Hindu communities in Indonesia can help reduce distortions in public perceptions of religious extremism. There is still a lack of research exploring how cultural celebrations, such as Vesak, can function as a means to enhance tolerance and counter extremism within Indonesia's pluralistic context.

This study aims to fill the research gap by exploring the role of cultural acceptability in reducing distortions of religious extremism in Indonesia. Specifically, this study examines how Hindu cultural celebrations in Indonesia, such as Vesak, can shape public perceptions of minority communities and promote greater tolerance. The primary objective of this research is to assess whether cultural celebrations can serve as an effective platform for countering religious extremism through approaches that prioritize acceptability and cross-cultural understanding. This study also seeks to provide empirical insights into how strategies of religious moderation can be implemented within Indonesian society through the appreciation of minority cultural celebrations.

Based on preliminary analysis and empirical evidence, the hypothesis proposed in this study is that cultural acceptability toward Hindu cultural celebrations in Indonesia has the potential to reduce distortions of religious extremism. By emphasizing respect for human dignity and inclusive cultural values, celebrations such as Vesak can function as instruments for building communication bridges between majority and minority communities. This argument is grounded in the premise that when the majority society demonstrates acceptability toward minority cultures, tendencies of religious extremism that reject pluralism may be diminished. This study will examine whether cultural celebrations can function as a form of "soft power" to moderate extremist perspectives and foster social cohesion within diverse societies.

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. In 2010, Indonesia accounted for 13.07% of the global Muslim population, totaling 207,176,162 individuals. At present, the Muslim population of Indonesia, in terms of absolute numbers, is clustered with Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, while the next countries with the largest Muslim populations are Turkey and Iran. In Indonesia, Muslims constitute 87.18% of the population. The remainder consists of adherents of other religions, including Christians at 6.96%, Catholics at 2.91%, Hindus at 1.69%, and Buddhists and Confucians, whose numbers are each less than 1%. Considering the current national and religious conditions, religious moderation has become an urgent necessity for sustaining and nurturing Indonesian nationhood.

Indonesia is a country with a religious and plural society. Although it is not a religious state, its society is characterized by vibrant religious life, and freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution. Maintaining a balance between the right

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[2] S. Campbell dan E. Prasse-Freeman, "Revisiting the Wages of Burman-Ness: Contradictions of Privilege in Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 52, no. 2 (2022): 175–99, Scopus, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2021.1962390.

to religious practice and commitment to national unity remains a challenge for every Indonesian citizen.

At present, there are various challenges that render the urgency of religious moderation necessary: 1) The development of perspectives, attitudes, and religious practices that are excessive (extreme) and that marginalize human dignity. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the essence of religious teachings in everyday life; 2) The current proliferation of subjective truth claims and the imposition of will through religious interpretations, as well as the influence of economic and political interests that have the potential to trigger conflict. Thus, it is necessary to manage the diversity of religious interpretations by fostering a more enlightened religious life; 3) The development of religious enthusiasm that is not aligned with love for the nation within the framework of the NKRI. Religious moderation is important for nurturing Indonesian identity.

Religious moderation serves as a cohesive force between religious enthusiasm and commitment to the nation-state. In Indonesia, being religious is essentially being Indonesian, and being Indonesian is essentially being religious. Indonesian society, which adheres to diverse religions, needs to develop insights and attitudes of religious moderation in order to build mutual understanding, maintain diversity, and strengthen unity among followers of different religions. The perspective of religious moderation refers to the view that religious communities should take a middle path in the practice of religious life.

"Perspectives, attitudes, and religious practices in shared social life must be carried out in ways that affirm the essence of religious teachings that protect human dignity and promote the common good, based on principles of justice, balance, and adherence to the constitution as the foundation of national consensus." Religious moderation has four indicators, namely national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and an accommodative attitude toward local culture.

Figure 1. Indicators of Religious Moderation

The impact of the absence of religious moderation is the development of perspectives, attitudes, and religious practices that are excessive, or what we recognize as extremist, which marginalize human dignity. One example is Dita Oepriarto, the perpetrator of suicide bombings along with his family at three churches in Surabaya on Sunday, 13 May 2018. The bombs detonated by Dita and his family targeted three churches in Surabaya, namely Santa Maria Tak Bercela Church, GKI Diponegoro, and GPPS Arjuna. The perpetrators came from a family that was economically well-off. Based on information obtained from his colleagues, Dita

refused to participate in flag-raising ceremonies. According to him, showing respect to the flag constituted an act of shirk. "He refused to take part in the flag ceremony because he considered saluting the flag to be shirk, singing the national anthem to be bid'ah, and the Indonesian government to be thaghut."

This constitutes one form of religious extremism. A different case is that of Nur Dhania, who was 15 years old when she was exposed to ISIS propaganda. Nur Dhania first learned about ISIS from her uncle, who is currently serving a prison sentence for terrorism-related offenses. This uncle also attempted to persuade other members of the extended family to travel to Syria.

Similarly, the case of Dwi Djoko Wiwoho (50) illustrates this phenomenon. Initially, ISIS was said to promise that every family relocating to Syria would be provided with employment, food, and health security, and would not be required to participate in combat. In the testimony given by Dwi Djoko and his family after returning to Indonesia, they stated that life under ISIS was marked by brutality and was far removed from any sense of humanity.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the phenomenon of interreligious openness and cultural celebrations in Jember, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of members of the Hindu community and the surrounding society regarding interreligious interactions within their social context. Data were collected through two main methods, namely participant observation and in-depth interviews. Participant observation was conducted at various cultural celebrations involving interreligious interaction, such as Hindu religious rituals and joint community events, to directly observe how interfaith engagement in these activities fosters social solidarity and prevents extremism. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 members of the Hindu community and 10 local residents from diverse religious backgrounds to explore their understandings of tolerance, social conflict, and the role of cultural celebrations in maintaining harmony. Data analysis was carried out using a thematic approach, in which the collected data were grouped according to emerging key themes, such as religious tolerance, community leadership, and social solidarity. Furthermore, this study also involved an analysis of the broader social and cultural context in Jember to understand how cultural celebrations can strengthen interreligious coexistence and build social capital at the local level. The findings of this study are expected to provide new insights into the role of culture in preventing extremism and fostering social peace in multicultural societies.

Results and Discussion

Religious and Social Tolerance

The author conducted observations of Bu Sari and Bu Suwanti, both of whom are Muslim, which demonstrate their openness toward the presence of other religions in their surrounding environment. They acknowledged that religious activities, both Islamic and Hindu, are carried out together without any differences

in treatment. In their conversation, they stated, "if there is a gathering, then it is simply a gathering, without looking down on followers of other religions," which reflects an attitude of appreciation and respect for other religions.

These findings reflect the existence of social order constructed through harmonious coexistence and mutual respect among religious groups. In a broader social context, this openness can be seen as an indication of the functioning of kerukunan (social harmony), which operates not merely as a formal norm but also as a social norm internalized in everyday life. The fact that village residents express a willingness to gather together "without looking down on followers of other religions" indicates the presence of social control mechanisms and patterns of interaction that reinforce social stability, which align with social capital theory. According to Putnam, strong social networks and cross-community religious connections can generate social capital that serves to strengthen trust and solidarity within society.

The implication is that the presence of these networks of tolerance can function as a buffer against social dysfunction, such as extremism. Through active participation in cross-religious social activities, community members exercise more effective social control, whereby intolerant or extremist actions find no space within the community.[3] Thus, these findings reinforce the idea that in communities with high levels of interreligious interaction, stability and harmony are more likely to be achieved and sustained.[4]

This interreligious openness demonstrates that, although religious differences often become a source of conflict in various regions, within this community such differences instead serve as a foundation for strengthening social bonds. The attitudes of Sari and Suwanti in accepting the presence of Hindu adherents in their religious events illustrate that the community has moved beyond religious boundaries and found ways to coexist. This indicates that, in a broader social context, practices of interreligious tolerance can be associated with the success of local social structures that are inclusive and responsive to diversity.[5]

The practical implication is that attitudes of interreligious openness can be replicated in other communities seeking to achieve social harmony. When communities in other regions of Indonesia, and even in countries with multicultural societies, adopt a similar approach to respecting religious differences, they may likewise experience greater stability and reduced conflict.[6] Theoretically, this

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[3] Agus Subaqin dkk., "Patterns of Sacred Spaces in the Settlement with Religious Plurality: Balun Village, Lamongan," *Journal of Islamic Architecture* 7, no. 3 (2023): 493, 3, https://doi.org/10.18860/jia.v7i3.20020.

[4] Tri Susanto dkk., "The Message of Peace From the Village: Development of Religious Harmony From Nglinggi Village," *Al-Balagh Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 7, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v7i1.5016.

[5] Muhammad Zainuddin, "PLURALITY OF RELIGION: Future Challenges of Religion and Democracy in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 9, no. 2 (2015): 151, https://doi.org/10.15642/jiis.2015.9.2.151-166.

[6] Yonatan Alex Arifianto dkk., "Christian Perspective on the Tolerance of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Students in the Era of Disruption," *Kurios* 7, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v7i2.295.

supports the concept of tolerance articulated by Esposito and Mogahed,[7] which holds that mutual acceptance can reduce tensions. If such interreligious tolerance is adopted more broadly, the outcome may be stronger harmony and a reduction in discrimination within society.[8]

More broadly, the trend emerging from the findings of this study is an increasing capacity of communities to manage religious diversity as a strength rather than a threat. Amid globalization and the rapid flow of information, tolerant and open attitudes become key to maintaining harmony.[9] The tendency indicated by these findings is that communities with positive cross-religious social interactions tend to exhibit higher levels of social stability.[10] They are able to create a peaceful climate in which differences do not become sources of conflict, but instead serve as a foundation for the development of social capital and collective cohesion.[11]

The contextual significance of this trend is crucial in addressing the rise of extremist and intolerant movements in various parts of the world.[12] As this community succeeds in maintaining stability through tolerance, it offers an example that diversity can function as a source of strength.[13] This is particularly relevant in countering global tendencies toward religion-based conflict. The application of similar approaches in other multicultural communities may contribute to enhanced social stability in regions characterized by diverse religious differences.[14]

Putnam, in his concept of social capital, emphasizes the importance of strong social networks in building trust and tolerance among individuals. In this context, the social interactions established between Muslim and Hindu communities create bonds that support peaceful coexistence. Community members share similar perspectives in religious activities, enabling cooperation without prejudice.

Esposito and Mogahed demonstrate that interreligious mutual openness is capable of reducing tensions and creating spaces for dialogue. The open attitudes of residents in this village, reflected in their attendance at religious events of other

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[7] JL Esposito, *The future of Islam* (books.google.com, 2010), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=5z7RCwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=islam&ots=TMHRBxZM6O&sig=5_UpngpmDbDgHEk12Kh6SPONL5w.

[8] Harriet Zilliacus, "Addressing Religious Plurality – A Teacher Perspective on Minority Religion and Secular Ethics Education," *Intercultural Education* 24, no. 6 (2013): 507–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2013.867761.

[9] Konstantin Kazenin, "Islamic Law in the Situation of Rivalry of Different Legal Systems: The Case of the North Caucasus," *State Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* 35, no. 3 (2017): 234–64, https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2017-35-3-234-264.

[10] Susanto dkk., "The Message of Peace From the Village: Development of Religious Harmony From Nglinggi Village."

[11] Pangeran, "Toleransi Beragama Sebuah Keniscayaan Bagi Muslim Dalam Hidup Bermasyarakat."

[12] Arifianto dkk., "Christian Perspective on the Tolerance of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Students in the Era of Disruption."

[13] Yanto Sufriadi dkk., "The Violence in Conflict of Natural Resources Tenure Rights- Companies vs Traditional Communities in Indonesia," *Uum Journal of Legal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2024): 197–220, https://doi.org/10.32890/uumjls2024.15.1.9.

[14] Patrick Eisenlohr, "The Politics of Diaspora and the Morality of Secularism: Muslim Identities and Islamic Authority in Mauritius," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 2 (2006): 395–412, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00297.x.

faiths without discrimination, foster a harmonious environment and eliminate potential tensions among them.[15]

With the presence of strong attitudes of tolerance, the concept of social acceptability in tolerance theory becomes highly relevant. The participation of community members in religious events of other faiths demonstrates that cross-religious presence in religious activities can create social harmony that functions as a foundation for preventing conflict.

Extremism and Social Responses

Slamet, a Hindu adherent, and his neighbors Arif and Nur, who are Muslim, demonstrate that despite differences in viewpoints on certain matters, local residents are able to resolve issues peacefully. For example, a conflict related to the construction of a Hindu temple was successfully resolved internally without escalation, through the involvement of local religious leaders.

Horgan explains that the prevention of extremism can be achieved through positive social interaction and disengagement from radical patterns. The community-based approach to conflict resolution, as demonstrated by the roles of Hindu and Islamic religious leaders, reflects how the neutralization of extremism can occur through peaceful and mutually respectful conflict resolution.[16]

Juergensmeyer argues that interreligious understanding and open dialogue are the primary keys to overcoming extremism. FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama) functions as a bridge of communication, enabling each religious leader to convey their aspirations. The presence of FKUB in this area helps prevent protracted conflicts and enhances social stability among community members.[17]

Theory and Insight: The theory of mitigating extremism through social acceptability and social responses posits that open communication among community members, combined with the leadership of religious figures, can prevent extremism and minimize conflict. In this data, internal efforts to resolve conflicts serve as concrete evidence of the effectiveness of this social approach, in which differences are addressed in an inclusive and cooperative manner.

Cultural Celebrations of Hinduism and Inclusivity in Diversity

Residents from various religious backgrounds frequently attend interreligious religious events, even though in some areas Buddhists are a minority. When observations recorded the presence of Hindu and Muslim adherents at each other's religious events, this indicated inclusivity in the culture of religiosity within the village. For example, the Hindu community in this village holds special events such as Saraswati and Dharmasanti that are open to the public, although cross-religious participation varies depending on the context.

Nattier notes that cultural celebrations play an important role in creating social bonds and a sense of collectivity. Interreligious participation in this village

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[15] Esposito, *The future of Islam*.

[16] John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Routledge, 2009).

[17] Juergensmeyer dan Roof, *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*.

demonstrates that the community has reached a high level of inclusivity in its religious life, reflecting how residents from diverse backgrounds are able to coexist peacefully.

Mitchell explains that Hindu celebrations that are open to non-Buddhist residents are capable of strengthening harmony and coexistence. In the context of Indonesian society, the participation of religious adherents in interfaith events indicates that religious celebrations have become a bridge for enhancing solidarity and inclusivity across belief systems.

Theory and Insight: The theory of inclusivity in cultural celebrations illustrates how religious festivities that are open to followers of different faiths can reduce the potential for conflict and enhance social harmony. Observations record shared participation in celebrations as a medium for strengthening social relationships, supporting the theory that inclusive practices can foster social cohesion in multicultural societies.

Coexistence and Multicultural Life

Data from observations indicate that residents from diverse religious backgrounds are able to live side by side with mutual respect. Village residents, particularly those from Islamic, Hindu, and Christian communities, regularly gather at religious events. This includes occasions of death, during which members of different religions attend ceremonies in turn to honor each other's religious beliefs, as stated by Pak Slamet and Pak Nur.

Geertz, in The Interpretation of Cultures, states that local cultural values support harmony within society. Practices of mutual assistance and attendance at one another's religious ceremonies demonstrate that residents have internalized local values to maintain social harmony.[18]

Said explains that multicultural communities whose coexistence is grounded in togetherness are able to overcome negative stereotypes. In the observed community, residents do not problematize religious backgrounds; instead, they even provide support during religious events of different faiths. This indicates that coexistence among them has become an integral part of the community's identity.

The theory of coexistence in multicultural societies suggests that harmony can be achieved through mutual support and by providing space for diverse forms of religious expression. Observations showing residents from various religions assisting one another and attending religious celebrations demonstrate genuine coexistence among them, resulting in a community that is not only diverse but also harmonious.

Conclusion

Based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that the community within the context of this study has developed a mature form of multicultural coexistence through interreligious tolerance, inclusive social interaction, and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms. The openness of residents—as reflected in the practice of joint participation in Islamic, Hindu, and Christian religious activities—serves as a

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[18] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).

strong foundation for the formation of social capital that fosters trust and solidarity. The presence of religious leaders, FKUB, and participation in cross-religious cultural celebrations strengthens responsive social structures capable of mitigating the potential for extremism. Conceptually, these findings support Putnam's social capital theory, Esposito and Mogahed's interreligious dialogue framework, and Geertz's cultural approach, all of which affirm that communities that regard diversity as a strength tend to achieve higher levels of social stability. Thus, this community demonstrates that harmony is not merely a formal norm, but a lived daily practice that can be replicated as a model of concord in other multicultural regions.

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