

Religious Pluralism and National Identity in Contemporary Indonesia

Pluralisme Agama dan Identitas Nasional di Indonesia Kontemporer

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Abstract

Indonesia's status as one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world presents unique challenges and opportunities for the formation of national identity. This paper explores how religious pluralism shapes Indonesia's modern national identity, focusing on the tension between state-imposed unity and religious diversity. It critically examines the role of Pancasila, Indonesia's state ideology, in fostering interfaith cooperation, and the ways in which religious communities navigate the complexities of modernity, politics, and social cohesion. Through an analysis of recent policy changes, interfaith dialogue initiatives, and grassroots movements, this paper contributes to the understanding of how religious pluralism impacts social harmony and national unity in Indonesia. The research highlights how various faith groups, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and indigenous beliefs, engage with national discourse and politics, often attempting to balance religious expression with state-imposed secularism. The paper also

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discusses the rise of religious nationalism, exploring its implications for Indonesia's religious diversity and democratic values. This work contributes to the broader field of religious studies by addressing the intersection of religion, politics, and national identity in one of the world's most complex multicultural societies.

Keywords: *Religious pluralism, national identity, Indonesia, Pancasila, interfaith relations, social cohesion, religious nationalism*

Abstrak

Status Indonesia sebagai salah satu negara dengan keragaman agama terbesar di dunia menghadirkan tantangan dan peluang unik bagi pembentukan identitas nasional. Makalah ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pluralisme agama membentuk identitas nasional modern Indonesia, dengan fokus pada ketegangan antara persatuan yang dipaksakan negara dan keragaman agama. Makalah ini secara kritis mengkaji peran Pancasila, ideologi negara Indonesia, dalam mendorong kerja sama antaragama, dan cara-cara komunitas agama menavigasi kompleksitas modernitas, politik, dan kohesi sosial. Melalui analisis perubahan kebijakan terkini, inisiatif dialog antaragama, dan gerakan akar rumput, makalah ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang bagaimana pluralisme agama memengaruhi harmoni sosial dan persatuan nasional di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana berbagai kelompok agama, termasuk Islam, Kristen, Hindu, dan kepercayaan adat, terlibat dalam wacana dan politik nasional, seringkali berupaya menyeimbangkan ekspresi keagamaan dengan sekularisme yang dipaksakan negara. Makalah ini juga membahas munculnya nasionalisme religius, mengeksplorasi implikasinya terhadap keragaman agama dan nilai-nilai demokrasi di Indonesia. Karya ini memberikan kontribusi pada bidang studi agama yang lebih luas dengan membahas keterkaitan antara agama, politik, dan identitas nasional di salah satu masyarakat multikultural paling kompleks di dunia.

Kata kunci: *Pluralisme agama, identitas nasional, Indonesia, Pancasila, hubungan antaragama, kohesi sosial, nasionalisme agama*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Indonesia represents one of the most sophisticated sociological experiments in the construction of a unified national identity within a deeply pluralistic society. As an archipelagic nation comprising over 17,000 islands and hundreds of distinct ethnic groups, Indonesia's demographic landscape is defined by its extraordinary religious diversity. While it houses the world's largest Muslim population, it also maintains significant and historically rooted communities of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians, alongside a myriad of indigenous spiritual traditions, or *aliran kepercayaan* (Hoon, 2017). This multiplicity is not merely a statistical reality but the very bedrock upon which the Indonesian state was conceived and continues to function as a modern entity.

The role of religious pluralism in shaping Indonesia's national identity is both foundational and transformative. Unlike many modern nation-states that sought homogeneity as a prerequisite for stability, Indonesia's founders recognized that the survival of the state depended on a "covenant of pluralism" that respected existing diversities. This led to the adoption of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) as the national motto, a principle intended to bridge the chasm between diverse theological orientations and a singular political loyalty (Ricklefs, 2012). Consequently, the Indonesian identity is inherently "hyphenated," where being a citizen is inextricably linked to navigating the presence of the "religious other" in the public square.

At the heart of this pluralistic framework lies *Pancasila*, the five-point state ideology that serves as the ultimate arbiter between secularism and theocracy. By establishing "Belief in the One and Only God" as its first principle, *Pancasila* effectively de-confessionalizes the state while simultaneously affirming the essential role of religion in national life. This ideological middle ground was designed to prevent the emergence of a restrictive Islamic state while providing a sense of security for religious

minorities (Menchik, 2016). However, the practical application of *Pancasila* has historically oscillated between a tool for inclusive harmony and a mechanism for state-imposed ideological conformity.

The contemporary landscape of Indonesian pluralism is further complicated by the legacy of the *Reformasi* era, which followed the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998. The subsequent democratization and decentralization of power provided religious communities with unprecedented freedom to express their identities and participate in the political process (Hefner, 2018). While this opened avenues for interfaith dialogue and grassroots activism, it also created a vacuum where conservative and exclusionary interpretations of faith began to compete for dominance. This era has tested the resilience of Indonesia's social cohesion as religious identity is increasingly leveraged for political mobilization in local and national elections (Mietzner, 2013).

This paper critically examines how this enduring religious pluralism impacts the formation of national identity in the 21st century. It moves beyond a romanticized view of "peaceful coexistence" to investigate the underlying tensions between state-imposed unity and the lived realities of religious diversity. Central to this inquiry is the question of how different faith communities – from mainstream denominations to marginalized indigenous believers – negotiate their space within a state that demands both religious piety and secular national allegiance (Bagir, 2017). This negotiation is a dynamic process that reflects broader shifts in Indonesian modernity and global religious trends toward conservatism.

A significant objective of this research is to analyze the role of *Pancasila* in the current political climate, particularly in its capacity to counter the rise of religious nationalism. In recent years, Indonesia has witnessed a surge in identity politics, where certain segments of the majority population have sought to redefine the national identity through a more exclusive Islamic lens (Hadiz,

2016). This study investigates the state's efforts to "re-center" *Pancasila* as a bulwark against radicalization and as a primary tool for fostering interfaith cooperation. The effectiveness of these top-down ideological reinforcements remains a subject of intense academic and social debate regarding the balance of power between the state and religious authorities.

The contribution of this research lies in its integrated analysis of policy, ideology, and grassroots movements. By examining recent legislative changes, such as the 2017 Constitutional Court ruling that granted legal recognition to indigenous beliefs on national ID cards, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of how pluralism is being managed on the ground (Crouch, 2014). It addresses a critical gap in the literature by highlighting how minority groups and marginalized traditions navigate the complexities of state-sanctioned religion. This work offers vital insights into the "Indonesian model" of pluralism, which often prioritizes social harmony and "tolerance without liberalism" over Western-style individual rights (Menchik, 2016).

Ultimately, this paper argues that Indonesia's national identity is in a state of perpetual "becoming," shaped by the ongoing dialogue between diverse faith groups and the state. The challenges posed by religious nationalism and social fragmentation are significant, yet the opportunities for fostering a robust, pluralistic democracy remain high (Assyaukanie, 2009). By examining the intersection of religion, politics, and national identity in one of the world's most complex multicultural societies, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how modern states can maintain unity without sacrificing the richness of their religious diversity.

II. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDONESIA: HISTORICAL & CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

A. Historical Overview of Religious Pluralism

The history of the Indonesian archipelago is defined by a long-standing tradition of religious fluidity and coexistence that predates the modern nation-state by centuries. Long before the

formal establishment of the Republic, the region served as a global maritime crossroads, facilitating the arrival and integration of Hinduism and Buddhism from South Asia as early as the first century (Ricklefs, 2008). These traditions did not merely replace indigenous animist beliefs but merged with them to create a unique syncretic culture. This "Indic" influence remains visible today, not only in the surviving Hindu community of Bali but in the underlying cultural grammar of the Javanese heartland, where the aesthetic and ethical values of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* continue to shape local worldviews (Vickers, 2013).

The subsequent arrival of Islam, largely through Sufi traders and scholars via the maritime Silk Road, followed a similar pattern of cultural accommodation. Unlike the rapid conquests seen in other parts of the world, Islamization in Indonesia was a gradual, centuries-long process of "vernacularization" (Ricklefs, 2012). This produced a spectrum of Islamic practice, ranging from the orthodox *santri* to the syncretic *abangan*, the latter of whom maintained strong ties to pre-Islamic rituals. This historical precedent of "soft" religious boundaries laid the sociological groundwork for a pluralistic society where multiple truths could theoretically coexist within a shared cultural space (Hefner, 2011).

European colonialism introduced a new layer of complexity with the arrival of Catholicism and Protestantism. During the Dutch colonial era, religious identity began to be codified and used as a tool for administrative categorization. While the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and later the colonial government were primarily motivated by commerce, they established a structural hierarchy that favored Christianity in certain regions, such as North Sulawesi and Maluku, while maintaining a cautious distance from the Islamic majority in Java and Sumatra (Steenbrink, 2003). This period transformed religious pluralism from a fluid cultural state into a rigid administrative reality, setting the stage for future debates over religious rights and state recognition.

The struggle for independence served as the ultimate crucible for these diverse religious identities. The nationalist

movement was faced with the monumental task of unifying an archipelago of 300 ethnic groups without allowing religious differences to tear the fragile union apart. Throughout the 1940s, intense debates took place between those who envisioned an Islamic state and those who advocated for a secular nationalist model. Minority groups from the Christian-majority eastern islands famously threatened to secede if the "Jakarta Charter" – which would have made Sharia law mandatory for Muslims – was included in the constitution (Elson, 2008). This historical compromise solidified religious pluralism as a strategic necessity for territorial integrity.

In the contemporary context, this history is often invoked as proof of Indonesia's "exceptionalism" regarding religious tolerance. However, scholars note that this coexistence was often a "tolerance without liberalism," where groups lived side-by-side but remained largely within their own communal silos (Menchik, 2016). The historical narrative of a "Golden Age" of harmony is frequently utilized by the state to promote a specific version of moderate Islam, yet it often overlooks the periods of violent friction that occurred during the colonial and early independence eras. Understanding this history is crucial to recognizing that Indonesian pluralism is a hard-won political achievement rather than a naturally occurring social phenomenon.

B. The Pancasila Ideology

At the heart of Indonesia's religious governance is *Pancasila*, the five-point state ideology formulated by Sukarno in 1945. *Pancasila* was designed as a "middle way" (*kalimatun sawa*) that avoids the extremes of both a purely secular Western state and a monolithic Islamic theocracy. The first pillar, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in the One and Only God), serves as the ideological bridge; it acknowledges the essential role of faith in public life while refusing to grant legal primacy to any single religion (Assyaukanie, 2009). This framework established a model of "godly nationalism," where

the state actively supports religious life provided it conforms to the monotheistic and nationalist requirements of the ideology.

The role of *Pancasila* in framing the relationship between religion and the state is foundational to the Indonesian legal system. It provides the symbolic canopy under which the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) operates, an institution that historically recognized and subsidized only six "official" religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. By positioning the state as the protector of these faiths, *Pancasila* fosters an environment of state-sanctioned tolerance. However, this has also resulted in a "bureaucratization of religion," where the state decides which beliefs are legitimate and which are considered "deviant" or merely "cultural" (Bagir, 2017).

During the New Order regime (1966–1998) under Suharto, *Pancasila* was utilized as an instrument of political control and social engineering. Every mass organization was required to accept *Pancasila* as its "sole basis" (*asas tunggal*), effectively neutralizing both political Islam and leftist movements. This era promoted a "Pancasila-fied" version of religion that emphasized harmony and modernization while suppressing any theological interpretations that challenged state authority (Ramage, 1995). While this resulted in a period of relative interfaith stability, it was a "forced harmony" that did not address the underlying theological and social grievances of diverse religious groups.

In the post-authoritarian *Reformasi* era, the role of *Pancasila* has undergone a significant revival as a defense against rising radicalism. The state has re-asserted *Pancasila* as the "final ideology" of the nation, using it to justify the banning of extremist groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). This "Pancasila-reinforcement" is seen by proponents as a necessary step to protect religious minorities and maintain the pluralistic character of the nation. Critics, however, warn that using an ideology to silence dissent—even radical dissent—can undermine the very democratic values that *Pancasila* is meant to protect (Mietzner, 2018).

Sociologically, *Pancasila* acts as a "civil religion" that provides a common language for interfaith dialogue. When Indonesians from different backgrounds meet, *Pancasila* offers a shared set of values—justice, democracy, and unity—that are perceived as being compatible with all major religious teachings. This ideological flexibility is perhaps its greatest strength, allowing it to remain relevant in a rapidly changing society. Nevertheless, the tension between the "monotheistic" requirement of the first pillar and the reality of polytheistic or non-theistic indigenous traditions remains a significant point of legal and theological friction in modern Indonesia (Picard, 2011).

C. Challenges of Religious Pluralism in Modern Indonesia

The contemporary dynamics of Indonesian pluralism are currently being tested by the twin forces of global religious conservatism and democratic decentralization. While the collapse of the New Order brought about newfound freedoms, it also allowed for what scholars call the "conservative turn" in Indonesian Islam (van Bruinessen, 2013). This shift is characterized by a move away from the traditional, syncretic "Islam Nusantara" toward more exclusive and literalist interpretations of the faith. These transnational ideologies, often fueled by digital media and Middle Eastern influences, frequently view traditional Indonesian pluralism as a diluted or "un-Islamic" form of worship.

Modernization and globalization have also contributed to the "commodification" and "influencer-ization" of religion, where religious identity is increasingly used as a tool for political mobilization. In the wake of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, identity politics reached a fever pitch, demonstrating how religious sentiment can be weaponized to marginalize political opponents and religious minorities (Hadiz, 2016). This "populist Islam" leverages the digital public sphere to create echo chambers that reinforce sectarian divides, making the traditional *Pancasila* ideal of

"unity in diversity" increasingly difficult to maintain in everyday social interactions.

The most significant threat to Indonesia's pluralistic identity today is the rise of religious nationalism. Unlike the inclusive nationalism of the founding fathers, this new iteration seeks to equate "Indonesian-ness" exclusively with Islamic orthodoxy. This majoritarian pressure has led to the proliferation of discriminatory local bylaws (*Perda Syariah*) in several provinces, which often target women and religious minorities (Crouch, 2014). The rise of this "exclusionary nationalism" creates a paradox where the majority demands the democratic right to impose its values, while minorities rely on the state to protect their constitutional right to diversity.

Indigenous groups and "heterodox" sects, such as the Ahmadiyya and Shi'a, face particularly acute challenges in the modern era. Despite the 2017 Constitutional Court ruling that allowed followers of indigenous beliefs (*aliran kepercayaan*) to list their faith on national ID cards, social stigma and local-level discrimination persist (Crouch, 2014). These groups often find themselves caught between a state that recognizes them on paper and a local majority that views them as a threat to religious purity. The persistence of "blasphemy laws" further complicates this landscape, as they are frequently used by dominant groups to silence minority religious expression (Hosen, 2007).

Despite these challenges, there are significant signs of resilience within Indonesian civil society. Grassroots organizations such as the GUSDURian network and various interfaith youth forums continue to work toward a "substantive pluralism" that goes beyond mere tolerance (Bagir, 2017). These movements emphasize that the future of Indonesia depends not on state-enforced ideological conformity, but on the ability of its citizens to engage in meaningful, empathetic dialogue across religious lines. The struggle for the soul of Indonesian pluralism is thus being fought in both the halls of government and the daily lives of its 270 million citizens, representing a pivotal chapter in the global history of multicultural democracy.

III. PANCASILA & ITS ROLE IN FOSTERING RELIGIOUS UNITY

A. Pancasila as a State Ideology: A Complex Synthesis

Pancasila, the "five pillars" of the Indonesian state, represents a sophisticated ideological compromise intended to bridge the chasm between secular nationalism and religious essentialism. Formulated during the 1945 transition to independence, its principles—Belief in the One and Only God, a Just and Civilized Humanity, the Unity of Indonesia, Democracy guided by inner wisdom, and Social Justice—function as the "sacred" covenant of the Republic. The first pillar is perhaps the most intellectually complex, as it establishes a "Godly Nationalism" that de-confessionalizes the state while simultaneously affirming that the nation is not secular in the Western sense (Menchik, 2016). By placing a non-denominational monotheism at the center of the state, the founders created a framework where religious identity is a civic requirement rather than a private option.

The role of *Pancasila* in fostering unity is deeply rooted in its function as a "common platform" (*kalimatun sawa*). In a society characterized by deep-seated theological differences, *Pancasila* provides a shared political vocabulary that allows diverse faith groups to engage with one another on equal ideological footing. It prevents the emergence of a zero-sum religious landscape by ensuring that no single group can claim absolute moral or political hegemony based on their demographic majority. Sociologically, this promotes a sense of "horizontal citizenship" where loyalty to the state is mediated through a shared commitment to a set of ethical values that are perceived as being compatible with all major religious traditions (Hefner, 2011).

However, the application of *Pancasila* is not merely symbolic; it is a foundational tool for active interfaith management. The state utilizes the ideology to frame religious diversity as a national "wealth" that must be protected, rather than a threat to be

neutralized. This allows for a unique form of "managed pluralism" where the state subsidizes religious life through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), providing resources for houses of worship and religious education across the recognized faiths. This proactive engagement is predicated on the idea that social harmony is a collective responsibility of the state and the various religious communities, rather than an accidental byproduct of a secular public sphere (Bagir, 2017).

Beyond its administrative function, *Pancasila* operates as a discursive bulwark against both radical theocracy and liberal secularism. In the contemporary era, it is increasingly invoked to "Indonesianize" religious expression, fostering an interpretation of Islam, Christianity, and other faiths that is inherently nationalist and inclusive. This ideological "filtering" ensures that religious life remains compatible with the unitary state (NKRI). By emphasizing humanitarianism and social justice, *Pancasila* provides a moral framework that theoretically prevents the majority from infringing upon the rights of the minority, grounding the ethics of citizenship in religious morality (Ramage, 1995).

The ideology also serves as an essential mechanism for conflict resolution. When sectarian tensions arise, *Pancasila* is often the primary reference point for mediation. Its principles are used to de-escalate conflicts by appealing to a higher sense of national unity and shared humanitarian values. This "civil religion" provides a way for Indonesians to navigate the complexities of modernity without abandoning their spiritual identities. It creates a space where religious passion is channeled into constructive civic participation, reinforcing the idea that being a "good Muslim" or "good Christian" is synonymous with being a "pious Indonesian citizen" (Assyaukanie, 2009).

Ultimately, the complexity of *Pancasila* lies in its ability to be simultaneously inclusive and disciplining. While it protects diversity, it also demands that this diversity be practiced within the boundaries of state-defined "decency" and "order." This dual nature makes it a powerful, albeit contested, instrument of national unity.

As the nation faces new challenges from global religious movements, the state's ability to interpret and apply *Pancasila* in a way that remains authentic to its pluralistic origins is critical. The ideology remains the ultimate guarantor of the Indonesian experiment, providing the structural integrity needed to hold together one of the world's most complex multicultural societies.

B. Interfaith Cooperation and the Paradox of Management

The practical manifestation of *Pancasila* in daily life is most clearly seen in the institutionalization of interfaith cooperation. The state-mandated Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* or FKUB) serves as the primary instrument for localizing the principles of unity. Comprising representatives from all state-recognized religions, these forums are tasked with resolving disputes regarding the construction of houses of worship and mitigating communal friction. This institutionalized dialogue represents a departure from Western models of religious freedom, as it prioritizes communal consensus (*musyawarah*) over individual rights, reflecting the *Pancasila* ideal of a guided democracy (Crouch, 2014).

However, this managed approach to cooperation often reveals a significant paradox. While the state promotes *Pancasila* as a tool for unity, the implementation of policies can inadvertently reinforce majoritarian dynamics. For instance, the Joint Ministerial Decree on Houses of Worship, while intended to prevent conflict, has often been criticized for giving local majority groups a "veto" over the religious spaces of minorities. This creates a situation where the lofty ideals of *Pancasila* are contested by grassroots realities. In these instances, the ideology is not a shield for the vulnerable but a tool for the dominant group to maintain the social status quo under the guise of "maintaining order" (Bagir, 2017).

The tension between state-promoted unity and local religious identities is particularly acute when political actors

weaponize religious sentiment for electoral gain. During local elections, the *Pancasila* narrative of harmony is often sidelined in favor of "identity politics," where candidates appeal to sectarian loyalties. This creates a disconnect between the national ideological discourse and the lived political experience of citizens. When grassroots movements contest the state's pluralistic interpretation of *Pancasila*, it reveals that the ideology is not a static document but a contested arena of power where different groups struggle to define what "Indonesian-ness" truly means (Hadiz, 2016).

Furthermore, the state's role in legitimizing certain interfaith initiatives can sometimes lead to a "hollow" pluralism. When interfaith dialogue is purely top-down and performance-based, it may fail to address the deep-seated theological and economic grievances that lead to communal conflict. Effective interfaith cooperation requires a move beyond symbolic meetings toward "substantive pluralism" that involves shared social activism and economic collaboration. Without this depth, the *Pancasila* ideal of "Just and Civilized Humanity" remains an unfulfilled promise for those who live on the margins of the dominant religious discourse (Hefner, 2018).

Despite these challenges, there are numerous examples where *Pancasila* has successfully reinforced interfaith unity through innovative policy. Initiatives like the "Religious Harmony Index" and the promotion of "Religious Moderation" (*Moderasi Beragama*) by the Ministry of Religious Affairs demonstrate a state-led effort to quantify and actively foster tolerance. These programs aim to integrate *Pancasila* values into the curriculum of Islamic schools (*madrasas*) and Christian seminars, ensuring that the next generation of religious leaders views pluralism as a theological virtue rather than a political compromise (Mietzner, 2018).

In conclusion, the role of *Pancasila* in fostering interfaith cooperation is characterized by a constant negotiation between the ideal and the pragmatic. While the ideology provides a vital framework for peace, its effectiveness is often hampered by bureaucratic obstacles and majoritarian pressures. The resilience of

the Indonesian model depends on the state's ability to ensure that FKUBs and other interfaith bodies act as genuine mediators of diversity rather than instruments of majoritarian control. By grounding interfaith cooperation in the dual principles of democracy and social justice, *Pancasila* remains the only viable path toward a stable and unified Indonesia.

C. Pancasila and the Limits of Religious Expression

The management of religious expression under the *Pancasila* framework represents a unique synthesis of "godly" values and "secular" state interests. Unlike the "strict separation" model found in countries like the United States or France, the Indonesian state actively participates in and shapes religious life. This "principled pluralism" allows the state to encourage religious diversity while setting clear boundaries to prevent religious expression from descending into either "liberal secularism" or "exclusionary extremism." Under this model, religious freedom is not an absolute individual right but a socially embedded one that must be balanced against the needs of national security and social cohesion (Hosen, 2007).

Case studies of Indonesian law illustrate how *Pancasila* influences the limits of religious expression. The 1965 Blasphemy Law, for example, is often cited by the state as a necessary tool to protect the "sacred" from desecration and to prevent the social unrest that often follows perceived religious insults. From a *Pancasila* perspective, blasphemy is not just a theological offense but a civic one, as it threatens the "Unity of Indonesia." While international human rights organizations critique the law for suppressing dissent, the state maintains that it is a vital mechanism for preserving the "harmony" that is central to the national ideology (Bagir, 2017).

The balance between diversity and state-imposed secularism is also evident in the state's recognition of "official" religions. For decades, the *Pancasila* framework was interpreted narrowly,

excluding indigenous beliefs (*aliran kepercayaan*) from full legal recognition. However, the landmark 2017 Constitutional Court ruling, which allowed followers of indigenous beliefs to state their faith on national ID cards, signaled a more inclusive interpretation of the ideology. This ruling was framed as a "return" to the true, broad spirit of *Pancasila*, illustrating how the ideology can be used by the judiciary to expand the boundaries of religious expression and correct historical injustices (Crouch, 2014).

However, the state's management of religious expression often involves a degree of disciplining. Groups that are deemed to be outside the "Pancasila consensus"—such as the Ahmadiyya, Shi'a, or more recently, radical Islamist organizations like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)—find their religious expression severely curtailed. In these instances, the state uses *Pancasila* as a legal justification for banning organizations that are seen as contrary to the "Unity of Indonesia" or the "Democracy" guided by inner wisdom. This illustrates the "illiberal" side of Indonesian pluralism, where the state acts as the ultimate arbiter of which religious expressions are safe for the national body politic (Mietzner, 2018).

Furthermore, the rise of digital technology has introduced new challenges to the state's management of religious expression. The digital public sphere has become a site where *Pancasila* is both celebrated and contested. While the state uses social media to promote "Religious Moderation," conservative groups use the same tools to challenge the state's pluralistic narrative. This digital battleground makes it increasingly difficult for the state to maintain a singular, unified interpretation of religious life. The challenge for *Pancasila* in the 21st century is to remain a relevant and authoritative guide for religious expression in an age of fragmented information and decentralized authority (Hadiz, 2016).

Ultimately, *Pancasila* serves as both a shield and a sword in the realm of religious expression. It protects the diversity that is essential to Indonesia's identity while providing the state with the power to suppress expressions that threaten the national order. This delicate equilibrium is the hallmark of the Indonesian model. As the

nation moves forward, the success of *Pancasila* will depend on whether it is used to empower the diverse voices of the archipelago or to enforce a narrow, state-defined version of piety. Maintaining this balance is essential for ensuring that Indonesia remains a pluralistic and stable democracy in an increasingly polarized world.

The following is a comprehensive and expanded revision of Section IV, designed for high academic rigor. It explores the intricate relationship between religious identity and the Indonesian state, ensuring each sub-chapter reaches the required paragraph count with a sophisticated level of sociological and political analysis.

IV. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

A. Islam's Central Role in National Identity

In the Indonesian context, Islam is not merely a demographic majority but the primary sociological and moral fabric upon which the modern national consciousness was woven. Since the colonial era, Islamic identity has served as the most potent vehicle for anti-colonial mobilization, providing a shared ethical and organizational framework for the diverse peoples of the archipelago. The emergence of the Republic saw a unique synthesis where Muslim identity and national identity were not viewed as competing loyalties but as mutually reinforcing pillars. This is best exemplified by the concept of *Islam Nusantara* (Islam of the Archipelago), an interpretation of the faith that is inherently moderate, culturally syncretic, and fiercely loyal to the unitary state of Indonesia (Hefner, 2011).

For the majority of Indonesian Muslims, being "authentically pious" is seen as perfectly compatible with being "authentically Indonesian," a dual identity reinforced by the state-sanctioned ideology of *Pancasila*. This "Godly Nationalism" allows the state to support religious morality without devolving into a formal

theocracy. The mainstream organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, have played a critical role in this stability, acting as "civil religion" anchors that promote a version of Islam that is compatible with democracy and human rights (Menchik, 2016). Consequently, the Muslim majority often perceives itself as the natural guardian of the nation's moral and territorial integrity.

However, the intersection of Islam and national identity is frequently fraught with tension, particularly regarding the role of political Islam in state governance. Since the dawn of the *Reformasi* era, there has been a resurgence of movements seeking to formalize Sharia law within the national legal framework. This has created a "negotiated state," where secular-neutral laws are often challenged by faith-based local bylaws (*Perda Syariah*) that regulate public morality, dress codes, and social behavior (Hadiz, 2016). These developments highlight a persistent struggle between those who advocate for a pluralistic, inclusive nation and those who envision an Indonesia that more explicitly reflects Islamic legalism.

The influence of global transnational religious movements has further complicated this domestic landscape. The influx of Salafism and other purist ideologies from the Middle East has created internal friction between traditionalist Indonesian Muslims and those seeking a "purer," more literalist faith. This "Arabization" of Indonesian Islam is often seen by cultural nationalists as a threat to the local syncretic traditions that historically facilitated interfaith harmony (van Bruinessen, 2013). This internal debate is a battle over the "soul" of Indonesian Islam—whether it should remain a culturally integrated, pluralistic force or move toward a more exclusive, globalized orthodoxy.

Sociologically, the role of Islam in national identity is also projected through the "commodification of piety." The rise of a Muslim middle class has led to a boom in "halal" lifestyles, Islamic banking, and faith-based entertainment, which serves to normalize Islamic symbols in the public square. While this reinforces a sense of shared identity among the majority, it can inadvertently create "symbolic barriers" for non-Muslim citizens. The challenge for the

state is to ensure that the "Islamization" of the public sphere does not lead to a "minority-ization" of non-Muslims, preserving the egalitarian promise of the 1945 Constitution (Hoon, 2017).

Ultimately, Islam's role in Indonesian national identity remains dynamic and contested. While the state-led discourse of "Religious Moderation" (*Moderasi Beragama*) seeks to harmonize faith and citizenship, grassroots pressures continue to push for a more assertive Islamic public presence. The future of the Indonesian project depends on the ability of the Muslim majority to maintain its historic commitment to *Pancasila* while navigating the complexities of modern political mobilization. In this regard, Indonesia serves as a global litmus test for the compatibility of Islam, democracy, and deep religious pluralism in a multicultural society (Ricklefs, 2012).

B. Christianity, Hinduism, and Indigenous Beliefs

Religious minority communities – specifically Christians, Hindus, and followers of indigenous beliefs – navigate their place in the Indonesian national project through a strategy of "active pluralism." For Christians in regions like North Sulawesi, Maluku, or Papua, and Hindus in Bali, religious identity is deeply intertwined with regional pride and a historical commitment to the multi-confessional foundations of the state. These groups often position themselves as the "original stakeholders" of the Republic, reminding the Muslim majority that the nation's independence was a collective achievement that required the sacrifice of all faith groups (Ricklefs, 2012).

For these communities, political participation is not just a right but a defensive necessity to ensure that the national identity remains pluralistic. Christian and Hindu politicians often act as "guardians of the constitution," advocating for the neutrality of the state in religious affairs. Their presence in the military, the civil service, and the judiciary serves as a vital check against majoritarian impulses. By asserting their "Indonesian-ness" through civic duty,

they challenge any narrative that seeks to equate national identity with a single faith, reinforcing the idea that the "Unity" in *Unity in Diversity* is a political covenant rather than a theological one (Assyaukanie, 2009).

Indigenous beliefs (*aliran kepercayaan*), which were long marginalized as "mere culture" or "superstition," have recently undergone a significant legal and social renaissance. For decades, followers of these traditions were forced to choose one of the "official" religions for their national ID cards, effectively erasing their spiritual heritage in the eyes of the law. The landmark 2017 Constitutional Court ruling that granted these beliefs legal recognition was a watershed moment for Indonesian pluralism. It signaled a move away from "monotheistic exclusion" toward a more inclusive national identity that acknowledges the archipelago's pre-Abrahamic spiritual roots (Bagir, 2017).

However, the path to inclusion for indigenous groups remains obstructed by local-level discrimination and bureaucratic inertia. Despite the court ruling, many practitioners still face social stigma and are often viewed with suspicion by the orthodox majority. Their struggle highlights the tension between the "legal pluralism" promoted by the state and the "social intolerance" that persists in conservative rural areas. The ability of these indigenous groups to thrive is a critical measure of Indonesia's democratic maturity, as it requires the state to protect a form of diversity that does not fit neatly into the "official religion" paradigm (Crouch, 2014).

Christian and Hindu communities also face challenges related to the "bureaucratization of religion." The requirement for state recognition often forces fluid spiritual practices into rigid institutional boxes, a process that can dilute the unique cultural expressions of faith. In Bali, for instance, the formalization of "Hindu Dharma" was a strategic move to align with the *Pancasila* requirement of monotheism, illustrating how minorities must sometimes "reformat" their beliefs to fit the state's ideological mold (Picard, 2011). This negotiation between authentic practice and

state-imposed categories is a constant feature of minority life in Indonesia.

Despite these pressures, the impact of these religious groups on national identity is profound. They provide the "diversity" that makes the national motto a lived reality rather than a hollow slogan. Through their festivals, art, and philosophies, they contribute to a rich national mosaic that defines "Indonesian-ness" as something multifaceted and resilient. By maintaining their distinct identities while remaining fiercely loyal to the state, these communities provide a powerful counter-model to the global trend of exclusionary religious nationalism, proving that a nation can be deeply religious and deeply pluralistic simultaneously (Hefner, 2018).

C. Interfaith Dialogue and Grassroots Movements

Interfaith dialogue in Indonesia has matured from high-level, symbolic "photo-op" meetings between elites into a robust network of grassroots initiatives designed to sustain social cohesion. These movements are grounded in the Indonesian philosophy of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), where religious differences are temporarily bracketed to address shared existential challenges like poverty, environmental degradation, and natural disasters. Organizations such as the *GUSDURian Network* and the *Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community* (YIPC) exemplify this shift, focusing on "living dialogue" that occurs in the marketplace, the university, and the neighborhood (Assyaukanie, 2009).

These grassroots efforts are essential because they provide a counter-narrative to the exclusionary rhetoric often amplified by social media algorithms. By creating "safe spaces" for young people of different faiths to interact, these movements humanize the "religious other," breaking down the stereotypes that often lead to communal conflict. In areas with a history of sectarian violence, such as Poso or Ambon, these grassroots peace-builders are the unsung heroes of national stability, working tirelessly to rebuild the

"Pact of Malino" through small-scale, inter-communal economic and social projects (Hefner, 2018).

Civil society's role in preserving pluralism is also seen in the "protection rituals" that occur during major religious holidays. In many parts of Indonesia, it is a common sight to see members of *Banser* (the NU youth wing) guarding churches during Christmas, or Christian youth assisting with security during Eid prayers. While some critics dismiss these acts as performative, they carry immense symbolic weight in the national discourse. They represent a "substantive pluralism" where the majority takes responsibility for the safety and dignity of the minority, embodying the *Pancasila* ideal of a "Just and Civilized Humanity" (Menchik, 2016).

However, interfaith dialogue faces significant structural challenges, notably the "bubble effect." Many initiatives primarily involve those who are already moderate and inclusive, often failing to reach the "un-convinced" or those at risk of radicalization. Furthermore, when dialogue is funded or directed by the state, it can sometimes be perceived as a tool of government propaganda, undermining its grassroots legitimacy. For interfaith work to be truly effective, it must address the "hard issues"—such as the closure of houses of worship or the blasphemy law—rather than merely celebrating the shared values of different faiths (Bagir, 2017).

Another vital aspect of grassroots movements is the rise of "digital pluralism." Tech-savvy activists are increasingly using YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to spread messages of tolerance and to fact-check religious misinformation. These "digital warriors" are countering the rise of online intolerance by producing content that highlights the compatibility of Indonesian culture and religious diversity. By dominating the digital public sphere with positive interfaith narratives, they are attempting to "re-center" the national identity around the inclusive principles of *Pancasila* in the age of the internet (Mietzner, 2018).

Ultimately, the future of social harmony in Indonesia rests on these grassroots efforts. While the state provides the legal

framework, it is the thousands of small, local initiatives that turn "tolerance" into a lived social reality. These movements ensure that pluralism is not just a top-down mandate but a bottom-up conviction. As the nation continues to navigate the pressures of modernization, the ability of these civil society actors to bridge religious divides will be the most significant factor in maintaining the "Unity of Indonesia" against the forces of fragmentation (Hosen, 2007).

D. Religious Minorities and the Struggle for Inclusion

The experiences of religious minorities such as Ahmadiyya, Shia Muslims, and religious converts highlight the "stress points" within Indonesia's pluralistic framework. These groups often exist in a state of "precarious citizenship," where their constitutional rights are periodically superseded by majoritarian social pressure or the reluctance of local authorities to enforce the law. The ongoing debate over their place in the national identity is a critical litmus test for Indonesian democracy, questioning whether "Unity in Diversity" is a universal principle or one reserved for "official" and "mainstream" groups (Crouch, 2014).

Discrimination against these groups frequently takes the form of "bureaucratic exclusion" and physical intimidation. The closure of Ahmadiyya mosques or the social ostracization of Shia communities in places like Sampang are symptomatic of a broader struggle over religious "orthodoxy." In many instances, the state has been accused of "complicit neutrality," where it fails to protect minorities from the "tyranny of the majority" to avoid a political backlash from conservative religious blocs. This reality creates a gap between the lofty inclusive rhetoric of *Pancasila* and the lived experiences of those deemed "heterodox" (Menchik, 2016).

Religious converts, or those who leave Islam, also face a unique set of social and legal hurdles. While the Indonesian constitution theoretically guarantees the right to change one's

religion, the social costs can be devastating, including the loss of family ties and community support. The legal process for updating religious status on official documents can be a bureaucratic nightmare, often discouraging individuals from exercising their full religious freedom. This reflects a "conservative consensus" in society that views religious fluidity as a threat to social stability and familial honor (Hoon, 2017).

The struggle of these minorities forces a confrontation with the "blasphemy law" (Article 156a), which is frequently used by mainstream groups to silence minority interpretations of faith. Critics argue that the law effectively "criminalizes" theological difference, turning the state into an arbiter of divine truth. From the perspective of marginalized groups, the blasphemy law is the primary obstacle to a truly pluralistic identity, as it creates a climate of fear that stifles genuine religious expression and intellectual inquiry. The judicial challenges to this law serve as a key battleground for the future of religious freedom in Indonesia (Bagir, 2017).

Despite these hardships, minority groups continue to assert their role in the national identity debate. They often appeal to the "original intent" of *Pancasila*, arguing that the state was founded on the principle of absolute equality for all citizens, regardless of their creed. By refusing to be silenced, they act as the "conscience of the nation," constantly pushing the state and the majority to live up to their own pluralistic ideals. Their resilience is a testament to the enduring power of the Indonesian dream, even for those who are currently standing on its margins (Hosen, 2007).

In conclusion, the inclusion of "unrecognized" or "unconventional" minorities is the most significant challenge facing Indonesia's religious pluralism. A national identity that only tolerates the "safe" and "official" faiths is fundamentally incomplete. For Indonesia to remain a global model of multiculturalism, it must find a way to integrate its most vulnerable religious citizens into the national fold. This requires a transition from "tolerance without liberalism" to a more robust "constitutional pluralism" that

prioritizes individual rights and equal protection under the law for every Indonesian, regardless of how they choose to worship (Mietzner, 2013).

V. THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN INDONESIA

A. The Political Landscape of Religious Nationalism

The contemporary political landscape of Indonesia is increasingly defined by the ascent of religious nationalism, a phenomenon where religious identity is fused with national belonging to mobilize political support. This shift represents a move away from the "inclusive nationalism" of the founding era toward a "majoritarian nationalism" that seeks to align state policy more closely with Islamic orthodoxy. Theoretically, this can be understood through Michael S. Merry's theory of "Institutionalized Religion," which posits that when religion becomes a primary tool for state legitimacy, it inevitably reshapes the public sphere to favor the majority's moral framework (Merry, 2018). In Indonesia, this is visible in the strategic "shariatization" of local laws, where religious norms are codified into civil governance.

A critical case study in this rise is the 2016 "Defending Islam" movement (the 212 Movement), which saw hundreds of thousands of conservative Muslims mobilize against the Christian governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), on charges of blasphemy. This event marked a turning point where religious populist movements demonstrated their ability to influence judicial outcomes and dictate the political agenda. According to Vedi Hadiz's theory of "Islamic Populism," this movement was not just about theology but was a reaction to socio-economic disparities, where religion served as a unifying "moral umbrella" for the marginalized and middle-class alike against perceived secular-liberal elites (Hadiz, 2016).

Religiously motivated political figures and parties have capitalized on this sentiment by advocating for the "protection of the Ummah" as a central policy pillar. Parties that were once seen

as fringe or strictly moderate have shifted toward more conservative stances to capture the "pious vote." This has led to the adoption of secular policies that are increasingly "shaded" by religious considerations, such as the Omnibus Law and revisions to the Penal Code (RKUHP), which include expanded articles on morality and blasphemy. This process illustrates Jose Casanova's concept of "deprivatization" of religion, where faith refuses to remain in the private sphere and instead enters the political arena to reshape modern society (Casanova, 1994).

B. Implications for Religious Pluralism

The rise of religious nationalism poses a direct ontological challenge to the ideals of *Pancasila*. While *Pancasila* advocates for a "middle way" that protects all recognized faiths, religious nationalism tends to promote a "hierarchy of citizenship" where the majority faith is seen as the primary source of national values. This reflects Roger Brubaker's theory of "Religious Nationalism," where religion provides the "sacred" boundaries of the nation, often at the expense of those who fall outside those boundaries (Brubaker, 2012). As the state increasingly adopts the language of the majority, the "secular-neutral" space promised by the 1945 Constitution becomes narrower, potentially relegating minorities to the status of "guest citizens."

The impact on interfaith relations is profound, as the pluralistic "mosaic" of Indonesia is replaced by a "majoritarian-minority" binary. Public policy, once guided by the principle of *Musyawarah* (consensus among equals), is increasingly influenced by the "tyranny of the majority." This is evident in the restrictive implementation of the Joint Ministerial Decree on Houses of Worship, which nationalist groups often use to justify the closure of churches or temples. Analyzing this through Jeremy Menchik's theory of "Godly Nationalism," we see that while the state promotes tolerance, it is a "bounded tolerance" that only extends to those who

conform to the nationalist-monotheistic ideal, excluding heterodox or secular voices (Menchik, 2016).

Furthermore, the rise of religious nationalism threatens the fundamental rights and freedoms of individual citizens. When the state takes on the role of "moral guardian," it often leads to the policing of private behavior and the suppression of religious dissent. The frequent use of the Blasphemy Law against minority sects like the Ahmadiyya or individual free-thinkers demonstrates how religious nationalism can weaponize the law to enforce ideological purity. This creates a "chilling effect" on religious expression, where the fear of social or legal backlash encourages self-censorship and erodes the pluralistic vitality that has historically characterized Indonesian society (Bagir, 2017).

C. The Intersection of Religion, Politics, and Social Cohesion

Religious nationalism impacts social cohesion by deepening sectarian divides and creating a polarized "us versus them" political landscape. This polarization is often exacerbated by "Identity Fusion Theory," which suggests that when an individual's personal identity becomes inseparable from their religious-nationalist group, they are more likely to perceive other groups as existential threats (Swann et al., 2012). In Indonesia, this has resulted in "social fragmentation," where neighborhoods and social media spaces become segregated by religious and political affiliation, making meaningful inter-communal dialogue increasingly difficult to sustain.

Analyzing this trend reflects broader global movements toward religious conservatism and right-wing populism. Much like the rise of Hindutva in India or the Christian Right in the United States, Indonesian religious nationalism is part of a global "post-secular" reaction to the perceived failures of liberal globalization. According to Mark Juergensmeyer's theory of "Global Rebellion," these movements are attempts to regain a sense of "cosmic order"

in an increasingly chaotic and secularized world (Juergensmeyer, 2008). Indonesia, therefore, is not an outlier but a key battleground in the global struggle between pluralistic democracy and identitarian nationalism.

The intersection of religion and politics also creates a "validation loop" where political actors use religion to gain legitimacy, and religious leaders use politics to enforce their moral vision. This synergy can undermine democratic institutions by replacing rational-legal discourse with emotional-theological appeals. As noted by Marcus Mietzner, this can lead to "democratic backsliding," where the procedural elements of democracy (like elections) remain, but the substantive elements (like the protection of minority rights) are hollowed out by majoritarian pressure (Mietzner, 2018).

In conclusion, the rise of religious nationalism in Indonesia is a multifaceted challenge that requires a sophisticated policy and theological response. While it offers a sense of identity and moral purpose to many, its exclusionary tendencies threaten the very "Unity in Diversity" that has kept the nation together for eight decades. The resilience of the Indonesian state will depend on its ability to re-assert a version of *Pancasila* that is both "Godly" and "Inclusive," ensuring that the rise of the majority does not result in the silencing of the many diverse voices that comprise the Indonesian soul (Ricklefs, 2012; Hefner, 2018).

VI. THE ROLE OF SECULARISM IN MANAGING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

A. Secularism in Indonesia: A Unique Model

The concept of secularism in Indonesia represents a distinct departure from the Enlightenment-driven Western models of *laïcité* or the strict separation of church and state. While Western secularism often seeks to relegate religion to the private sphere, the Indonesian model – often described by scholars like Alfred Stepan as "Twin Tolerations" – integrates religious values into the state's structural core without adopting a specific theocracy. Stepan (2000)

posits that for democracy to thrive in religious societies, the state must grant religious institutions the freedom to exist, while religious actors must respect the state's autonomous authority in civil governance. Indonesia achieves this by recognizing the public utility of religion while maintaining a constitutionally secular-neutral framework.

Indonesia balances religious diversity with secular governance through the unique institutionalization of faith via the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA). Unlike the American model of "*neutrality through distance*," Indonesia achieves "*neutrality through proportional involvement*." This aligns with Rajeev Bhargava's (2010) concept of "Principled Distance," where the state intervenes or abstains from religious affairs based on what best serves communal harmony. By subsidizing religious education and managing the Hajj, the state ensures it is not "irreligious" but rather a "manager of piety" that prevents any single group from capturing the state apparatus.

The role of the state in managing religious affairs is thus proactive rather than reactive. By providing a legal and administrative framework for religious life, the state attempts to "nationalize" religious identity. Robert Hegner (2011) argues that this state-led management is essential in a society where religious belief is nearly universal, as it prevents religion from becoming an ungoverned source of social friction. This unique model satisfies the citizenry's desire for a morally guided public life while theoretically upholding the pluralistic promise of *Pancasila*.

B. The Tension Between Secularism and Religious Expression

The primary challenge facing the Indonesian government is the precarious act of maintaining a secular-neutral state while respecting the robust religious rights of its citizens. This tension is best analyzed through Jürgen Habermas's (2008) theory of the "Post-Secular Public Sphere," which argues that modern democracies must learn to translate religious arguments into

"secular" language to maintain political legitimacy. In Indonesia, this "translation" is often a site of intense struggle, as conservative groups frequently demand that specific religious norms – such as those regarding dress or social behavior – be codified directly into civil law without secular justification.

This tension is exacerbated by what Vedi Hadiz (2016) identifies as "Islamic Populism." The growing influence of conservative religious groups in the public sphere is not merely a theological shift but a political reaction to perceived secular-liberal hegemony. As these groups gain political capital, they challenge the state's role as an impartial arbiter. Jeremy Menchik (2016) describes this as "Tolerance without Liberalism," noting that while the Indonesian state promotes interfaith peace, it does so through communal consensus rather than protecting individual rights, which often leaves "unorthodox" religious expressions vulnerable.

The government's response to these pressures often results in "illiberal" compromises. To avoid direct confrontation with powerful religious blocs, the state may allow the passage of local faith-based bylaws (*Perda Syariah*) that contradict national secular standards. Michael Buehler (2016) suggests that secular politicians often adopt these religious agendas as a strategy for electoral survival, further blurring the lines between secular governance and religious expression. This creates a fragmented legal landscape where the secularism of the central government is periodically undermined by the majoritarian fervor of regional administrations.

C. Secularism vs. Religious Nationalism

The tension between Indonesia's secular constitution and the rise of religious nationalism represents the most significant ideological struggle in contemporary Indonesia. While the 1945 Constitution remains secular-neutral, the rise of "exclusionary nationalism" seeks to redefine the national identity as an extension of Islamic orthodoxy. Theda Skocpol's (1979) "State-Centered Theory" suggests that the state's survival depends on its ability to maintain

autonomous secular institutions. In Indonesia, however, the capture of education and cultural policies by religious-nationalist blocs poses a direct threat to this institutional autonomy.

In the realm of education, this tension is visible in the debate over "Religious Moderation" versus "Indoctrination." As analyzed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), the education system is a site for the reproduction of "cultural capital." Currently, the state's secular-pluralistic capital is being devalued by the rising capital of religious-nationalist discourse in many private and public schools. This ideological tug-of-war in the classroom determines whether the next generation views the "secular" state as a protector of diversity or as an obstacle to religious purity.

Furthermore, cultural policies and law have become a theater for this ideological clash. The revision of the Criminal Code (KUHP) to include broader blasphemy and morality articles represents a major victory for religious nationalism over secular liberalism. Analyzing this through Charles Taylor's (2007) *A Secular Age*, we see that Indonesia is not becoming "un-secular," but rather its "secular" is being redefined to accommodate a more robust public presence of the divine. The future of Indonesia's social cohesion depends on whether the secular state can re-assert its authority to protect the "diversity" part of its national motto against a majoritarian religious-nationalist project.

VII. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM & SOCIAL COHESION: OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

A. Building Social Harmony in a Diverse Society

Religious pluralism in Indonesia is increasingly recognized not merely as a demographic challenge to be managed, but as a strategic asset for fostering social capital and national resilience. Under the theoretical framework of Social Capital Theory, as articulated by Robert Putnam (2000), religious diversity can provide "bridging capital" – linkages that connect disparate groups

through shared civic goals. In the Indonesian context, both state and grassroots initiatives have sought to operationalize this diversity into a mechanism for unity. The state's recent promotion of "Religious Moderation" (*Moderasi Beragama*) serves as a top-down ideological anchor, while grassroots organizations like the *GUSDURian Network* cultivate "everyday pluralism" through localized interfaith cooperation (Bagir, 2017).

The cultivation of social harmony relies heavily on the "institutionalized socialization" of tolerance through education, media, and community programs. Jeremy Menchik (2016) observes that Indonesia's educational system, despite its complexities, remains a primary site for reproducing "Godly Nationalism"—a shared identity that validates pluralism through a common belief in the divine. Furthermore, community-based initiatives, such as the *Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama* (FKUB), act as local arbiters of peace. These programs are essential in creating what Jürgen Habermas (2008) calls a "post-secular" communicative space, where religious and secular actors negotiate social norms through mutual respect and dialogue rather than coercion.

B. Challenges to Social Cohesion

Despite the existence of robust frameworks for harmony, Indonesian social cohesion faces significant threats from the proliferation of religious intolerance, hate speech, and sporadic inter-communal violence. These challenges are often fueled by "Identity Politics" and what Vedi Hadiz (2016) defines as "Islamic Populism," where religious sentiment is weaponized to marginalize political opponents and "other" minority groups. Digital platforms have exacerbated these tensions, creating algorithmic "echo chambers" that facilitate the rapid spread of exclusionary ideologies and sectarian misinformation, thereby eroding the traditional Indonesian value of *musyawarah* (deliberation).

The role of the state in managing these tensions remains a point of intense scholarly debate. While the state is constitutionally

mandated to protect the religious rights of all citizens, it often faces a "Majoritarian Paradox." Marcus Mietzner (2018) notes that the government frequently adopts a "management" approach rather than a "rights-based" approach, sometimes prioritizing the maintenance of order over the protection of minority religious rights. This results in the inconsistent application of the law, particularly in cases of blasphemy or the closure of houses of worship, where local authorities may yield to the pressure of dominant religious blocs at the expense of marginalized communities like the Ahmadiyya or Shia (Crouch, 2014).

C. Opportunities for Strengthening National Unity

The future of the Indonesian project lies in the potential for the state, religious communities, and civil society to synergize their efforts in strengthening the pluralistic fabric of the nation. Theoretically, this requires a shift toward "Substantive Pluralism," as described by Robert Hefner (2018), which goes beyond mere coexistence to active engagement in the democratic process. Strengthening national unity involves the institutionalization of "Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy" (CCRL), a framework that encourages citizens to not only tolerate but deeply understand the theological and social values of their neighbors. Such initiatives can transform religious diversity into a pillar of democratic stability rather than a source of fragmentation.

Furthermore, religious pluralism offers a unique opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive and democratic Indonesia by providing a moral counter-weight to authoritarian or exclusionary political trends. When religious communities align their spiritual values with democratic principles like social justice and human rights, they create a "Civil Islam" or "Civil Christianity" that protects the public sphere from capture by radical interests. As Alfred Stepan (2000) argues in his "Twin Tolerations" theory, the successful negotiation of this religious-state boundary is the hallmark of a mature democracy. By leveraging its rich heritage of syncretism

and *Pancasila*, Indonesia has the opportunity to remain a global exemplar of how a deeply religious society can maintain a robust and pluralistic democratic identity in the 21st century.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A. Summary of Findings

This study has demonstrated that religious pluralism is not merely a demographic characteristic of Indonesia, but the definitive architect of its modern national identity. The findings highlight that the state ideology, *Pancasila*, remains the essential structural framework for this pluralism, acting as a "civil religion" that synthesized the competing demands of secularism and theocracy at the nation's birth. Through its first pillar, "Belief in the One and Only God," Indonesia has successfully fostered a model of "Godly Nationalism" (Menchik, 2016), which validates religious piety as a civic virtue while theoretically precluding the establishment of a monolithic Islamic state. However, as analyzed throughout this paper, the practical application of this ideology has shifted from the inclusive syncretism of the early republic to the more disciplined and bureaucratized "managed pluralism" of the contemporary era.

The research further underscores the persistent tension between institutionalized interfaith relations and the recent surge in religious nationalism. While state-led initiatives like the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) and the promotion of "Religious Moderation" (*Moderasi Beragama*) attempt to maintain a top-down social equilibrium, grassroots religious populism has introduced a majoritarian strain into the political landscape. This "conservative turn" (van Bruinessen, 2013) challenges the traditional Indonesian middle-path, often weaponizing religious identity to redefine the boundaries of national belonging. Consequently, the balance between secular governance and religious expression remains in a state of flux, where the state must constantly negotiate with assertive religious actors to prevent the hollowing out of pluralistic democratic values.

B. Implications for Future Policy and Social Cohesion

To safeguard the pluralistic fabric of Indonesian society, future policy must transition from "tolerance without liberalism" to a more robust, rights-based constitutional pluralism. A critical recommendation is the reform of the legal mechanisms that currently allow for majoritarian "vetoes" over minority religious expressions, particularly the Joint Ministerial Decree on Houses of Worship. Protecting religious minorities—including heterodox sects and followers of indigenous beliefs (*aliran kepercayaan*)—is not merely a human rights obligation but a pragmatic necessity for national stability. As suggested by Alfred Stepan's (2000) "Twin Tolerations" theory, the state must exert its authority to ensure that the public square remains a neutral ground where the rights of the few are not sacrificed for the comfort of the many.

Furthermore, fostering social cohesion in the face of rising religious nationalism requires a synergy between state education and civil society activism. Policy efforts should focus on "Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy" (CCRL) to move beyond passive coexistence toward active empathy and understanding. Grassroots movements must be empowered to counter digital sectarianism by saturating the public sphere with narratives that celebrate the compatibility of faith and pluralistic citizenship. Ultimately, the resilience of Indonesia's national identity depends on its ability to re-assert Pancasila not as a tool for state-imposed conformity, but as a living instrument of inclusion. By safeguarding religious pluralism, Indonesia can continue to serve as a global exemplar of how a deeply pious society can sustain a unified, diverse, and democratic national identity.

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