

Distorting Extremism through Acceptability and Exploring Hindu Cultural Celebrations in Jember, Indonesia

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Abstract

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 promote interfaith coexistence. This study seeks to explore how interfaith openness in Jember builds social capital and prevents extremism, examine the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue and community leadership in preventing extremism, 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 cultural 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.

Keywords: Distorting Extremism; Acceptability; Hindu Cultural Celebrations.

1. Introduction

Religious extremism has become a global threat to peace and social stability. On a global scale, extremism not only endangers security but also triggers profound social conflicts in various nations, including Indonesia. The rise in religious intolerance and violence in Indonesia highlights the urgency of addressing this issue. According to the Setara Institute, there were 333 incidents of religious freedom violations in Indonesia in 2022, a 19% increase from the previous year (Farooq Abdullah, Hakim, and Syahidan, 2022). Minority religious groups, such as Hindus and Christians, are often targeted by social tensions that trigger conflicts. For example, a report by the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) revealed that in 2021, there were over 100 cases of the rejection of places of worship, with the majority of these cases targeting non-Muslim places of worship (Abdillah, 2022). This rejection reflects widespread intolerant attitudes in society, where approximately 60% of the population express dissatisfaction with the presence of certain religious groups (Hutabarat, 2023). Data from The Wahid Foundation also highlights the growing concern of religious intolerance in Indonesia, creating a fertile ground for the development of extremism that undermines social harmony (Mujani, 2019). A key factor behind these issues is the lack of acceptance of diverse religious cultures and practices. As a predominantly Muslim nation, Indonesia is home to religious minority communities, such as Hindus, who often face challenges in freely celebrating their cultural events. Studies show that religious moderation can be a solution to extremism by fostering open interfaith dialogue (Dodego and Witro, 2020; Haulid, 2023). Cases where Hindu celebrations face opposition from certain groups reflect a distorted acceptance of minority cultures. Therefore, researching this phenomenon is crucial to understanding how cultural acceptability can help address religious extremism and enhance interfaith coexistence in Indonesia (Bindaniji, 2022).

Currently, Indonesia faces several challenges that make religious moderation an essential strategy for maintaining social harmony and national unity. First, there has been a significant rise in extreme religious attitudes and practices that undermine human dignity and promote intolerance. These radical expressions of faith often conflict with the fundamental principles of respect for human rights and equality, highlighting the urgent need to reinforce the core values of religious teachings that promote peace, tolerance, and compassion in everyday life (Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan, 2010). Second, the increasing prevalence of subjective truth claims and the imposition of narrow interpretations of religion—often fueled by political, economic, or social agendas—further exacerbate tensions. These forces risk deepening societal divisions, leading to violent extremism and inter-group conflict (Suratno and Wantini, 2023). As a result, it is critical to manage religious diversity with wisdom and care, ensuring that it contributes to national cohesion rather than sowing division (Buana and Juwita, 2021). Lastly, the rise of extreme religious fervor in Indonesia often stands in direct opposition to the values of national patriotism, especially within the framework of a pluralistic state. Certain groups, such as those advocating for the establishment of the Indonesian Islamic State (NII) or the global caliphate, frequently reject Pancasila—the state ideology that promotes pluralism and unity—in favor of an exclusive religious framework. This ideological clash threatens the integrity of Indonesia's pluralistic identity and its commitment to social harmony (Mahpudin, 2021). In this context, religious moderation plays a crucial role in maintaining the

country's unique identity, helping to bridge the gap between fervent religious conviction and the national commitment to pluralism (Nabhani et al., 2023). In Indonesia, religion is deeply intertwined with national identity—practicing one's faith is not only a personal choice but also an integral part of what it means to be Indonesian. As such, the essence of being Indonesian is inherently connected to religious values that promote inclusivity, mutual respect, and a commitment to the common good (Jais and Sumin, 2023).

The absence of religious moderation fosters extreme religious attitudes and practices that overlook human dignity. For instance, the case of Dita Oepriarto and the family responsible for the May 13, 2018, suicide bombings at three churches in Surabaya illustrates how extremism can arise from non-moderate beliefs (Ichsan and Prasetyoningsih, 2019). The family was economically stable but avoided national ceremonies, viewing them as idolatrous acts (Parhan, Nugraha, and Islamy, 2022). Similarly, Nur Dhanita, a 15-year-old exposed to ISIS propaganda, illustrates how such messaging can influence youth (Wildan and Muttaqin, 2022).

Previous research on religious extremism and cultural acceptability spans several major areas. Numerous studies focus on extremism's impact on national security and social conflict, as examined by Juergensmeyer in *Terror in the Mind of God* (Wibisono, Louis, and Jetten, 2019). Additionally, Putnam and Campbell's research highlights the significance of interfaith contact in fostering peaceful coexistence (Listiawati, 2021). However, a notable gap remains, particularly in understanding how cultural acceptability and minority cultural celebrations—especially within Indonesia's Hindu community—could help alleviate distorted public perceptions of religious extremism (Abdurrahim, 2023). Few studies explore how cultural celebrations could enhance tolerance and counter extremism within Indonesia's diverse society (Karim, 2019).

This research aims to explore the role of interfaith interactions in fostering social cohesion and preventing extremism in Jember, Indonesia, through four primary inquiries. First, how does interfaith openness in Jember contribute to building social capital and mitigating extremism? This question focuses on how inclusive participation and shared trust across faith groups strengthen social structures. Second, how effective are interfaith dialogues and community leadership in preventing extremism? Here, the research investigates the mechanisms through which community leadership and open dialogue contribute to social stability. Third, how does interfaith participation in cultural celebrations enhance solidarity among community members? This question examines the unifying effect of shared celebrations in fostering a sense of inclusivity. Finally, how essential is interfaith harmony in shaping social identity and preventing future conflicts? This final inquiry delves into the broader impacts of religious harmony on community resilience and identity formation.

The initial hypothesis is that acceptance of minority religious practices, specifically Hinduism, in Jember significantly reduces extremist attitudes, fostering social harmony and coexistence. Higher levels of acceptance from the Muslim majority toward Hindu practices are predicted to correlate with a lower potential for religious conflict. Furthermore, Hindu cultural celebrations, such as Saraswati and Galungan, are expected to enhance interfaith social relationships by fostering dialogue and interaction, ultimately boosting tolerance and reducing religious tension in the region.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to understand tolerance and interaction among people of different religions in a village with both Hindu and Muslim residents. The focus is on a case study in Sukoreno Village, Jember Regency, which was selected due to its complex social and religious composition. Known as a “Pancasila Village” for its religious diversity—home to followers of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and the local Sapto Darmo faith—Sukoreno provides a suitable context for examining interfaith acceptability and social coexistence. For the interviews, the author established the following criteria for informants: 1) individuals directly involved in Hindu religious celebrations, and 2) individuals living in Sukoreno Village. Based on these criteria, the informants selected include the village head, a Hindu religious leader, a Muslim religious leader, Hindu followers, and Muslim followers. Non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation were used as the primary data collection methods. Observations focused on interfaith cultural celebrations, such as the Saraswati and Dharmasanti Hindu festivals, alongside other religious events, to understand how acceptance is realized in daily practice. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including religious leaders, community figures, and villagers from diverse religious backgrounds. Documentation involved collecting archives, celebration records, and reports related to social and religious life in the village. The data collection process took place over a period of six months.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with the village head, Hindu and Muslim religious leaders, as well as followers of both religions. In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was conducted, during which the researcher attended various cultural and religious activities involving both communities to understand their interactions in a social context. Documentation, such as religious event archives and records of joint celebrations, was also collected to enrich the data.

The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, which involve data reduction, presentation, and verification. The data obtained were then grouped into specific themes, such as perceptions of diversity, experiences of living side by side, and the role of religious leaders in fostering harmony. The results of this analysis provide an in-depth understanding of the role of tolerance and inclusivity in strengthening social capital in the community, as well as efforts to prevent the emergence of extremism through the active involvement of different religious groups in social and cultural activities in the village. To ensure the validity of the data, the author employed technique triangulation and source triangulation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Religious and Social Tolerance

This study was conducted in Sukoreno Village, Jember Regency. The selection of this location was based on the fact that Sukoreno Village was designated as a Pancasila village by the regent of Jember, Dr. Hj. Faida, in 2018. This designation was given because the village is home to a diverse religious community, including Islam, Hinduism, Catholicism, and the Sapto Dharma belief system, which coexist harmoniously. Given the presence of multiple religions in this area, there is significant potential for conflict. Within a single alley, one can find a mosque, a church, and a temple. The majority of the

population in this village practices Islam, while Hinduism is the second-largest religion in terms of adherents. As the second-largest religion in the village, Hindu religious celebrations hold a special place, particularly the Ogoh-Ogoh, a significant cultural and religious ritual in the Hindu community.

Interfaith openness within rural communities is an intriguing phenomenon, especially in the context of harmonious coexistence among diverse religions. This study reveals that the open attitudes exhibited by individuals like Bu Sari and Bu Suwanti, both Muslim, reflect an appreciation for the Hindu religious activities around them. They affirm that shared activities are conducted without discriminatory views, demonstrating values of respect and equality in daily social practices (Arif, 2021; Miftah, 2024). This shows that positive social interactions can foster an environment supportive of religious tolerance and harmony.

The implications of these findings are significant, particularly regarding the strong social capital within the community. Social capital, as defined by Putnam, includes norms and networks that support social stability through mutual trust and solidarity (Riansyah and Wulandari, 2017). In this context, interfaith engagement serves as a bridge connecting individuals from different backgrounds, thus creating informal social control that prevents extremist and intolerant behavior. Harmi's research supports this view, asserting that interfaith openness can reduce tensions arising from differing beliefs (Harmi, 2022).

Furthermore, inclusive social structures that are responsive to religious differences can serve as a replicable model, particularly in communities experiencing interfaith conflict. This aligns with Hanifah's study (Hanifah, 2023), which indicates that an understanding of religious tolerance can lead to more inclusive social structures. Thus, the tolerant behavior demonstrated by Bu Sari and Bu Suwanti is not only practically valuable but also serves as a concrete example for other communities seeking to manage religious diversity as a social asset.

In a broader context, these findings reflect a social trend where diversity is no longer seen as a threat but as a foundation for building strong social capital and collective harmony. Kazenin (Kazenin, 2017) emphasizes that the ability of communities to manage diversity is increasingly crucial in creating social stability amid globalization and technological advancements (Alfiansyah and Fajriyah, 2023). This harmonious interfaith interaction can be viewed as a societal response to the dynamic changes of the era, requiring cultural flexibility and openness.

Communities with positive interfaith social interactions tend to have higher social stability, forming a foundation that helps avoid social conflict (Witon, 2023). The trends observed in this study suggest that in communities with high levels of interfaith interaction, harmony is more likely, as differences become a basis for strengthening social cohesion rather than a source of tension. Furthermore, interfaith openness is linked to the potential for preventing extremist movements, which typically thrive in communities with weak social ties and interfaith conflict. If this trend continues, society may experience fewer religion-based conflicts, as diversity is increasingly valued as an asset that enriches social capital rather than as a threat (Nurmawati and Karneli, 2021).

3.2. Extremism and Social Response

Interviews with Pak Slamet, a Hindu, and his neighbors Pak Arif and Pak Nur, who are Muslim, show that despite differing views on some issues, local residents are able to

resolve disputes peacefully. For example, conflicts related to the construction of a Hindu temple were resolved internally without escalation, involving local religious leaders. This aligns with Yuslih's findings, which demonstrate that Islamic and Hindu communities not only respect each other but also actively promote tolerance and harmony in daily life, such as by assisting each other during significant religious events (Yuslih, 2023). Furthermore, Ercan emphasizes the importance of creating participatory spaces to discuss intercultural disagreements and tensions, which can help prevent extremism.

Horgan explains that extremism prevention can be achieved through positive social interactions and distancing from radical patterns. The community's approach to conflict resolution, as seen in the role of Hindu and Muslim religious leaders, exemplifies how extremism prevention can occur through peaceful and respectful conflict resolution (Ercan, 2017). Juergensmeyer posits that interfaith understanding and open dialogue are key to countering extremism, a view supported by the presence of FKUB (Interfaith Harmony Forum) as a communication bridge between religious leaders (Hambali, 2023; Zhang et al., 2015). FKUB serves to channel aspirations and prevent prolonged conflicts, thereby enhancing social stability among residents (Gumuruh, 2023).

The theory of extremism prevention through acceptability and social response suggests that open communication among residents, combined with religious leadership, can prevent extremism and minimize conflicts. In this context, Zhang et al. highlight the importance of intellectual humility in resolving religious conflicts, which can help reduce tension and create a respectful atmosphere (Zhang et al., 2015). This data demonstrates that internal efforts to resolve conflicts provide concrete evidence of the effectiveness of this social approach, in which differences are addressed inclusively and cooperatively. Hambali's research also shows that religious diversity can be a source of strength when managed well, fostering better tolerance within the community (Hambali, 2023).

Thus, an approach involving interfaith dialogue, wise leadership, and intellectual humility is essential for creating social harmony and preventing extremism. This aligns with Gumuruh's view, which emphasizes the importance of religious moderation in maintaining social stability (Gumuruh, 2023). These findings collectively suggest that collaboration among religious communities and their leaders can be key to fostering a peaceful and harmonious society.

3.3. The Cultural Celebration of Hinduism and Inclusivity in Diversity

The findings of this study provide an overview of how religious inclusivity serves as an effective medium for fostering interfaith solidarity within multicultural societies. These findings indicate that open religious practices, as observed in the participation of Hindus and Muslims in interfaith religious events, are a tangible manifestation of social cohesion and harmony amid religious plurality. This aligns with the argument put forth by Rissanen, 2019 and Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy, 2009, who emphasize the importance of cultural celebrations in creating stronger social bonds. This research also supports the view that interfaith interactions not only reflect passive tolerance but also foster deeper and more meaningful social interactions, which can reduce the potential for interreligious conflict (ibid.; Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, and Adelman, 2018).

Furthermore, this analysis reinforces the argument made by Dovidio et al. (2009), who argue that participation in open religious celebrations can strengthen harmony and coexistence. In the context of Indonesian society, known for its religious pluralism, this

is particularly relevant to the socio-political situations that sometimes become tense due to religious differences. Interfaith participation, as observed in the Saraswati and Dhar-masanti celebrations by Hindus, provides concrete evidence of how religion can serve as a powerful tool for building social cohesion beyond the boundaries of specific religions (Bedigen, 2022). This research also shows that inclusivity in religious practices can serve as a bridge to strengthen social relationships and prevent potential conflicts, in line with the findings of Rissanen, 2019 and Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy, 2009.

From a theoretical perspective, the theory of inclusivity in cultural celebrations suggests that when individuals from various religions feel welcomed at religious events, they are more likely to form stronger relationships with communities of different beliefs. This reduces the potential for interreligious conflict and, in turn, enhances social stability (ibid.; Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, and Adelman, 2018). Based on this observation, inter-faith participation is not merely symbolic but serves as a significant medium for strengthening social relationships, supporting the theory that inclusive practices can foster social solidarity in multicultural societies (ibid.).

In a broader context, the emerging trends from this research point toward the strengthening of the concepts of pluralism and social cohesion. The fact that individuals from various religious backgrounds attend each other's religious events, despite differences in beliefs, signifies a significant shift toward a more inclusive and open society (Sherpa, 2019). This is not only relevant at the local level but also has broader implications at the national level, where interreligious harmony is a central issue. This research provides deeper insights into how socio-religious practices at the community level can serve as a model for efforts to build harmony in a religiously diverse country like Indonesia (ibid.).

Practically, the findings of this research provide a foundation for the development of policies based on inclusivity in communities with high religious plurality. Interfaith religious events can serve as a means to strengthen social bonds and reduce interreligious tensions (McVittie and Tiliopoulos, 2007). These findings also offer recommendations to policymakers to support and facilitate more inclusive interfaith celebrations in order to build stronger social cohesion and promote peace in multicultural societies (Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, and Adelman, 2018).

3.4. Coexistence and Multicultural Life

This research reveals that interfaith coexistence practices in multicultural communities have reached a high level, marked by the active involvement of residents from various religions—especially Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity—in interfaith religious events, including sacred ceremonies such as funerals. These findings align with studies suggesting that religious diversity can be a source of social strength, where interfaith interactions contribute to enhanced social cohesion (Ezzy et al., 2020; Hutabarat, 2023). This suggests that these social practices provide tangible evidence that peaceful and harmonious coexistence among residents is not merely rhetoric but a deeply rooted social reality within local culture. Joint attendance at religious events reflects strong social bonds that transcend religious boundaries (ibid.). These findings reinforce the view that local cultural values play a central role in fostering social harmony, supported by other research indicating that multicultural education can strengthen social identity and intercommunity cohesion (ibid.).

In a broader context, these findings support theories suggesting that multicultural communities that successfully coexist are often built on solidarity and the ability to overcome negative stereotypes. Research indicates that when diversity is viewed as an opportunity, it can lead to more inclusive and respectful policy responses (Ezzy et al., 2020). The fact that residents of different faiths are not only tolerant but also actively participate in each other's religious events shows that coexistence has become part of their community identity. This community no longer views religious differences as obstacles but as a component of diversity to be celebrated and supported, aligning with the concept of positive social interaction within diversity (Hutabarat, 2023).

Understanding this phenomenon is crucial, as in the global context—especially in an era frequently marked by religious conflicts—this research offers an optimistic perspective on how communities can build harmony through inclusive social practices. These observations provide a logical explanation that mutual presence and support in religious ceremonies function as a social mechanism to reduce potential interfaith tensions, supporting the concept of peaceful coexistence proposed by various theories (*ibid.*). The practical implications of these findings are significant. Firstly, the model of coexistence observed in this community could serve as a reference for other regions with high diversity. Efforts to strengthen interfaith interaction through celebrations and social events can serve as strategies to counter potential conflicts and foster mutual respect. Secondly, for policymakers, these findings offer a foundation for designing programs that encourage participation from various religious groups in joint activities, ultimately strengthening social cohesion (*ibid.*).

When comparing these findings with previous literature, a general pattern emerges whereby solidarity and involvement in interfaith activities reinforce social solidarity. However, this study adds a new contribution by demonstrating that in rural societies with high religious plurality, harmony is not merely functional but has become part of the cultural habits and identity of the residents (*ibid.*). The trends observed in this study suggest that inclusive multicultural societies can create sustainable social stability, reduce conflict potential, and build bridges between religions (*ibid.*).

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study specifically focus on the interfaith dynamics between the Muslim and Hindu communities in Sukoreno Village. First, the Theory of Religious and Social Tolerance is evident in the active participation of both Muslim and Hindu residents in religious activities. Their involvement in interfaith celebrations and mutual support during religious festivals, such as Hindu Ogoh-Ogoh celebrations, fosters strong social capital and cohesion. This non-discriminatory engagement between Muslims and Hindus creates social networks that not only strengthen ties but also contribute to social control, preventing potential dysfunctions like extremism by fostering mutual trust and solidarity. Second, regarding Extremism and Social Response, the study shows how religious leaders in Sukoreno—both Muslim and Hindu—play a crucial role in conflict resolution. These leaders engage in interfaith dialogues that effectively defuse tensions, demonstrating that open communication and collaborative leadership are essential in preventing extremism. The peaceful resolution of religious differences in Sukoreno serves as a model for conflict prevention, where both communities work together to resolve issues in a harmonious

manner.

Third, Hindu Cultural Celebrations and Inclusivity in Diversity illustrate how interfaith participation in events like Hindu religious rituals or communal activities strengthens the social bonds between Muslims and Hindus. Rather than merely tolerating each other, both groups engage inclusively in each other's religious celebrations, which significantly reduces interfaith tensions and fosters deeper social cohesion. The active involvement in such celebrations builds solidarity and exemplifies the role of cultural inclusivity as a bridge between the communities. Lastly, the Theory of Coexistence and Multicultural Life reflects how the Muslim and Hindu communities in Sukoreno have integrated interfaith coexistence into their social identity. The diversity in the village is not only accepted but celebrated, becoming a core part of the community's daily life and identity. The harmony between these two religious groups has become a local cultural norm, reinforcing the view that multicultural societies, like Sukoreno, can foster long-term social stability while reducing the potential for religious conflicts. The success of this model suggests that fostering interfaith dialogue and collaboration in diverse communities can play a critical role in ensuring sustainable peace and social stability in the future.

These findings can be applied beyond Sukoreno, especially in communities with religious and cultural diversity. The fundamental principle of these findings is that, through active participation in interfaith religious activities and open communication, communities can create spaces for mutual understanding, reduce tensions, and prevent potential extremism. This is highly relevant in many places with similar social contexts, where different religious or ethnic groups live side by side. The Sukoreno model offers an approach that can serve as an example in building greater social resilience, particularly in addressing interfaith or interethnic tensions.

One limitation of this study is its focus on a single village, Sukoreno, which may not fully represent the broader dynamics of interfaith relations in other regions with different social, cultural, or political contexts. While the findings offer valuable insights into how religious and cultural diversity can foster social cohesion, the unique characteristics of Sukoreno, such as its relatively peaceful coexistence and active participation in interfaith activities, may not be generalizable to communities experiencing higher levels of religious or ethnic conflict. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on the dynamics between the Muslim and Hindu communities and may not capture the perspectives of other religious or belief groups present in the area, such as Catholics or followers of Sapta Dharma. Including these perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of interfaith relationships in this multicultural setting. Furthermore, the study's reliance on qualitative data from interviews may be subject to the biases of both the participants and the researcher, limiting the objectivity and generalizability of the findings.

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