



## Religious Figures as Unifiers of Moderation in Multicultural Societies

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe the role of religious leaders in building tolerance in a society that has religious diversity. This paper uses a literature study method by analyzing social media using content analysis. The findings show that religious lectures, interfaith dialogue, and social activities led by religious leaders have a significant contribution in encouraging harmonious relations and mutual understanding between religious groups. In addition, religious leaders have proven to play a role in reducing negative stereotypes and mediating conflicts based on religious differences. This study concludes that the existence of religious leaders as a driver of tolerance values is a key element in maintaining harmony in a pluralistic society.

**Keywords:** *Religious Tolerance; Society; Multicultural*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguraikan peran tokoh agama dalam membangun sikap toleransi di masyarakat yang memiliki keragaman agama. Tulisan ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan menganalisisnya media sosial menggunakan konten analisis. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa ceramah keagamaan, dialog antaragama, serta kegiatan sosial yang dipimpin oleh tokoh agama memiliki kontribusi yang signifikan dalam mendorong hubungan harmonis dan saling pengertian antar kelompok agama. Selain itu, tokoh agama terbukti berperan dalam mengurangi stereotip negatif dan memediasi konflik berbasis perbedaan agama. Penelitian ini memberikan kesimpulan bahwa keberadaan tokoh agama sebagai penggerak nilai-nilai toleransi merupakan elemen kunci dalam menjaga kerukunan di masyarakat pluralistik.

**Kata Kunci:** *Toleransi Beragama; Masyarakat; Multikultural*

### INTRODUCTION

The role of religious figures is a figure or role model in society who has a great position and influence in the midst of society, because he has advantages, both in knowledge, integrity, and so on. Religious figures also play a role as community leaders, as imams in religious matters and social issues as well as state issues in order to make government programs and foster harmony in community life a success. Religious figures basically have a very important and strategic position and role, especially as a spiritual, moral and ethical foundation in the life and life of humanity. Religion as a value system must be understood, internalized and practiced by all its adherents in the



order of life of each individual, family and society and inspire the life of the nation and state.

the role of religious figures as role models It can be stated that the community environment as an educational institution has a specialty, namely that students/communities live together with religious figures in an integrated manner. This condition causes a pattern of close and intimate relationships between religious figures and their communities. The behavior displayed by religious figures in everyday life can be seen and imitated by their communities (Umami, 2018) .

The definition put forward about the lecture method can be explored into several important parts to be explained. First, how to deliver material with oral narration. Here what needs to be discussed is the existence of "oral narration". Oral narration illustrates that the material taught must be narrated using oral. Speaking well and regularly and politely in explaining learning materials to students. Volume of voice, voice pressure, intonation of voice, and self-expression are very important in this oral narration. So a teacher in using this method must pay attention to verbal communication techniques In language skills, especially speaking, it cannot be separated from how to speak with a certain method, one of which is a lecture.

Lectures from a language aspect are oral narration or explanation by the speaker to the speech partner. The main interaction tool in this case is "speaking". In his lecture, the teacher may include questions related to the educational material, especially the Indonesian language subject being taught. Lectures are a method that provides explanations of a material, lectures are "a technique for delivering teaching messages that are commonly delivered by teachers in schools. Lectures are interpreted as a way of delivering material orally by teachers when needed". Lectures are also called activities to provide information with words (MUHAMMAD RIZAL AKBAR H, 2024) .

Interfaith dialogue is one of the main efforts to increase religious tolerance, understanding and cooperation among people of different backgrounds is one of the main efforts to increase tolerance, mutual understanding, and cooperation among people of different backgrounds in today's multicultural and multireligious context religious leaders have a strong incentive to promote constructive dialogue and harmony among adherents of different religions . Multicultural and multireligious society religious leaders have a strong incentive to promote constructive dialogue and harmony among adherents of different religions in this essay the importance of the role of religious leaders in fostering interreligious dialogue will be discussed clearly.

interfaith dialogue to achieve religious moderation, religious leaders use a number of strategies to promote harmony, tolerance, and mutual understanding among followers of different religions. They act as liaisons and mediators between adherents of different religions, utilizing the power of their platforms and authority to foster productive dialogue. The strategies used by religious leaders include efforts to expand understanding and openness between religious communities, encourage cooperation and peace, voice unity and tolerance, and handle conflicts and prevent extremism with an inclusive and empathetic approach, religious leaders become a unifier in creating an environment that is peaceful, harmonious, and respects religious diversity. Through interfaith dialogue led by religious leaders, the goal of religious

moderation can be achieved by strengthening the values of justice, peace, and equality in a multicultural and multireligious society (Agus, Ahmad Darussalam, 2024) .

Religious tolerance or respect for other religions can emerge when people or communities visit each other (according to Tung Desem). "Not so that we look for their weaknesses. But to learn each other's strengths without being afraid of leaving their religion," he said. In addition, the purpose of visiting each other between our brothers and sisters of different religions is to learn about the positive things about the religion, as well as respecting and appreciating each other. In addition to the community who must equally respect and honor the teachings of other religions, religious leaders must also visit each other to achieve this desire.

Tolerance is a very important attitude in religious life. Tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect and respect for all differences. In Religious Moderation there is the word Moderate. Moderate in Islamic thought is prioritizing an attitude of tolerance and difference. Openness to accept diversity or inclusivism, both diverse in schools of thought and in religion. Differences will not hinder cooperation and believe that Islam is the most correct religion and does not insult other religions. Thus, brotherhood and unity will be established. Islamic Moderation is a view or attitude that always prioritizes the middle in taking a stance on disparities or differences that exist in society. And taking a stance by trying to take a middle position or being fair to two opposing and excessive attitudes is the attitude of Islamic Moderation (Rahmat, 2022) .

## **METHOD**

This study uses a literature study method, with primary sources consisting of theses, dissertations, books, journal articles, websites, newspapers, and magazines that are relevant to the research topic. Data were collected from these sources to understand the contribution of religious figures in developing attitudes of tolerance between religious communities. Data analysis was conducted using the literature study method, which aims to extract important information from each source and identify themes related to interfaith tolerance. The analysis process involves three main stages: data reduction to filter relevant information, data presentation to visualize key findings, and drawing conclusions to connect the results of the analysis with the research objectives. With this approach, this study provides deeper insight into the role of religious figures in promoting tolerance in society.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study provides a deep understanding of the role of religious figures in building interfaith tolerance in Indonesia. As a country known for its religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity, Indonesia faces a major challenge in maintaining social harmony amidst this diversity. Religious figures, as spiritual leaders, have a significant influence in guiding their followers to understand the importance of peaceful coexistence. In addition to playing a role in building moral values, religious figures are also agents of social change who are able to reduce prejudice, strengthen solidarity, and create positive interactions between religious groups. This position emphasizes the

importance of their role in creating a peaceful and inclusive society. In the teachings of major religions in Indonesia, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, there are principles that support tolerance, such as love, harmony, and respect for others. These values become the moral foundation for religious figures in teaching the importance of respecting diversity.

### **Religious Figures as Respected and Trusted Figures**

Religious figures are leaders who can be used as examples and whose good qualities can be emulated. Religious figures in this study are focused on Islamic religious figures, not figures from other religions. Religious figures are seen as having an equal position with a ulama, kiyai, and ustadz. This view is not that far-fetched, because the duties of these activists both include the treasure of da'wah. As individuals who are respected and trusted by the community because of their educational and spiritual history, kiyai or ustadz have a fairly dominant role, especially in religiosity. The relationship between the kiai and his community is bound by religious emotions that make his legitimate power increasingly influential. The charisma that accompanies the actions of the kiai also makes the relationship full of emotion. Because the kiai has become a helper for the residents in solving their problems, which are not only limited to spiritual problems. Based on the explanation above, the author understands that the role of religious figures is the task or behavior/actions carried out by religious figures who are competent and able to provide assistance to the community in terms of religiosity. Public trust arises through the manifestation of religious figures' piety in worship, behavior, and helping the community.

Religious figures as leaders can influence and direct individuals or groups towards the nature of Allah SWT, namely religious humans. Many conveniences are given by Allah to his people who are willing to struggle to carry out religiousness. However, the activity of inviting goodness is also not easy. There are certain stages to achieve it. It is not surprising that in the journey of religious figures, apart from encountering conveniences, there are often also various obstacles that can hinder or even thwart. Each supporting and inhibiting factor in the role of religious figures is divided into two parts, namely internal and external factors (Neliwati et al., 2022) .

Religious figures can also be interpreted as scholars, priests, monks, etc., who have contributed to their religion, so that they are often used as role models and examples for society or followers of the religion. 166 Strengthening Informal and Non-Formal Islamic Education While religious leaders are people who are appointed and trusted by a group of religious leaders as their leaders, and usually religious leaders are chosen based on the extent of their contribution and devotion and knowledge in the religion, for example, in Catholicism there is the Pope, in Buddhism there is the Dalai Lama, in Islam there is the Caliph, etc.

The term role of religious figures means an important part and is played by someone individually or in groups (society), or institutions, or organizations in carrying out efforts. In every community life there is someone who plays a role, namely a leader (leadership) usually attached to a religious figure and community figure who plays a central role in religious affairs, namely: Successors in the spread of religious teachings and beliefs As a

religious figure and community figure means the successor to the planting of religious teachings and beliefs according to the religion they each adhere to. In this regard, Allah SWT said in the letter An Nisa '(4): 136 (Ismail & et al., 2016).

### **Religious Lectures as a Medium for Spreading Tolerance Values**

Sermons are one of the effective means of religious propagation. Through sermons, religious leaders/clerics can interact directly with the congregation. A good sermon can persuade the congregation towards goodness. Therefore, a preacher must have a good background in religious knowledge. In addition, a preacher must have good communication skills so that the message conveyed can be received well by the congregation. The speaker must have good language skills. Unfortunately, not all speakers have that ability and awareness. As a result, some speakers are rejected by the congregation because of the content and use of language in the lecture. In addition, the lecture that was delivered actually invited debate with other speakers. Such lectures, in addition to causing heresy, also caused opposition from the congregation (Kusno & Rahman, 2016) .

A lecture is a speech that aims to provide advice, guidance, and information while the audience acts as listeners. The audience here is intended for the entire community or the general public. So, a lecture is a text delivered orally that aims to inform the community or the general public about something. The purpose of a lecture is to provide information. Therefore, the text or material to be delivered must be prepared thoroughly and carefully. A lecture is a public speaking in which information, knowledge, and so on are delivered. To avoid mistakes, the person who will deliver the lecture must really understand the lecture material because the listeners usually consist of many people.

Lecture is a tool or way to convey information in oral or written form. Lectures begin with a text that is read and understood and then delivered orally by the speaker. Lectures can also be delivered through television, newspapers, magazines, books, and the internet, for example on YouTube. The purpose of a lecture is to provide information and knowledge. The purpose of a lecture text is to provide information or knowledge, so that listeners or readers can increase their insight and views . Therefore, it can be concluded that a lecture is a text that is delivered verbally in front of many people with the aim of providing information and knowledge. In addition, lectures can also be delivered via internet media such as YouTube, Instagram and so on. (Trianto, 2017) .

### **Interfaith Dialogue**

Interfaith dialogue is used to address problems that occur within the scope of religion. For example, problems/disputes between Christians and Muslims or other communities. So in this forum the causes of the dispute will be discussed, then in the forum a solution will be sought to resolve this problem (JASMINE, 2014) .

Interfaith dialogue is a dialogue carried out by people of different religions in a structured manner because it carries the name of a religious institution. This dialogue does not only discuss matters of faith, but also involves social institutions. As in social reality, religion has a tendency towards positive and negative things . Dialogue is likened to blood with the body. If the

blood stops flowing, the body will not function or die . Dialogue begins when people meet. Dialogue depends on mutual understanding and mutual trust. It is through dialogue that sharing in serving is possible. Dialogue becomes a medium for authentic testimony . Interfaith dialogue can display several forms of dialogue, such as dialogue of civilization, dialogue of life, dialogue of action or treatment and if dialogue between religions is increasingly widely cultivated among religious adherents, this will create a harmonious religious life.

Interfaith dialogue is a meeting of hearts and minds between adherents of different religions. It is a meeting between adherents of different religions, without feeling inferior and without any secret agenda or purpose. Interfaith dialogue is one of the efforts to establish harmonious relations in maintaining harmony between religious communities. Interfaith dialogue can ward off various perceptions and suspicions in building interfaith relations in society. It also opens up the religious insights of the adherents of the religion itself; an inclusive understanding of religion will be embedded in the mindset and behavior, so that there is no opportunity for the penetration of radical understandings that tend to be exclusive in religion, which leads to acts of terror in society due to not can accept the truth that exists outside his group (Ichwayudi, 2020) .

### **Social and religious activities as a means of social harmony**

After discussing religious figures and religious lectures, next we will discuss social religious activities. Social harmony is also a picture of a dynamic and creative society that can be realized by implementing religious teachings as actions or behavior . Another word for harmony is rukun which means peaceful. Many social activities have developed and have an influence in order to become an effort to create harmony between religious communities. There are three components in realizing ideal conditions in religious life, namely the attitude of mutual recognition and awareness of plurality, the attitude of mutual respect (tolerance), and the attitude of mutual cooperation (reciprocity) . As with activities that exist and are held by society, communities, governments, and groups other groups.

The role of religion can also help create peace in society. In essence, all religions teach good or positive things, none teach bad or negative things. Even religion also teaches pluralism and tolerance to its followers. Religious people must believe that their religion is the best and truest religion, and other people are also welcome, even appreciated, to believe and be sure that the religion they embrace is the best and truest religion. (Ramadan, 2019) .

Social harmony in Islamic teachings is reflected as one of the central values that guide social interaction. This concept is not just an aspect that is applied, but has a solid foundation in religious teachings. The verses of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW provide clear guidelines regarding the key elements needed to create harmony in society . The concept of social harmony reflects the basic principles of Islamic teachings. The Qur'an emphasizes that every individual must be treated fairly, regardless of background, ethnicity, or religion. Justice is not only a moral goal, but also the foundation for creating harmony within the Islamic social framework. In this case, a deep understanding of the values of Islamic

teachings, especially regarding justice, provides a clear direction in efforts to maintain balance and peace in society.

In the context of social relations, this active involvement can be interpreted as a way to form a positive interaction network and build a foundation for healthy interpersonal relationships. Religious activities become a forum that not only gathers spiritual support, but also creates a space to share common values and strengthen emotional bonds. Therefore, active involvement in religious activities can form leaders who have a strong commitment to religious values and play an important role in maintaining social harmony in society. Social activities involving various levels of society have a significant impact in creating social harmony.

Social activities provide a platform for active participation from individuals with diverse backgrounds, creating opportunities for collaboration and synergy for the common good. The togetherness that is realized in social projects not only creates closer relationships between individuals, but also forms a strong foundation for building a social environment that supports harmony and cooperation. Social activities become an effective instrument in achieving the goal of social harmony. The togetherness formed in the process of social projects can penetrate into a wider network of social relations, creating a society that is more caring, inclusive, and able to overcome differences with mutual understanding. (Ahmad Nilnal Munachidlil Ula, 2024).

### **Tolerance in religious communities**

Tolerance in religious communities is a social mechanism carried out by humans in responding to religious diversity and plurality. In everyday life, tolerance can be seen clearly from social activities carried out daily in the community through mutual cooperation, both activities related to public interests and individual interests. Indonesia is a very diverse country consisting of various ethnicities and religions that are embraced by everyone who believes in it. Among them are Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. From each religion, there are teachings that call for goodness towards fellow human beings, especially in terms of tolerance or mutual respect between religious communities.

Diversity and tolerance between religious communities in Indonesia are better compared to Western countries. Tolerance in Indonesia is still highly respected in order to create harmony and peace between religious communities. Tolerance is a human attitude or behavior that is in accordance with the rules, where a person can appreciate and respect the behavior of others. Tolerance is not actually just accepting differences but recognizing each other, being open to each other, and being kind to each other. understand the differences and do not question the differences even though they do not agree. Tolerance is one form of mutual respect for each other and not imposing one's will. People who consider themselves superior, good, and right tend to create an anti-tolerant attitude.

Religious tolerance is tolerance that includes issues of belief in humans that are related to the faith or divinity believed in by religious people. Everyone must be given the freedom to believe in and embrace the religion of their choice and to respect the implementation of the teachings they adhere to or believe in. Religious tolerance is a form of accommodation in social

interaction. Religious people socially cannot deny that they must socialize not only with their own group, but also with groups of different religions. Religious people must strive to bring up tolerance in order to maintain social stability so that there are no ideological and physical clashes between people of different religions.

Religious tolerance is when each religious community allows or permits and maintains a conducive, safe and peaceful atmosphere for other religious communities to carry out their religious worship and teachings without being obstructed by anyone. True religious tolerance is one of the main pillars for the realization of harmony between religious communities. Living side by side, respecting and appreciating adherents of other religions is one form of manifestation of a sense of tolerance. True tolerance is not mixing the worship of one religion with that of another religion. (Fitriani, 2020) .

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Religious leaders have a strategic role in instilling the value of tolerance in a pluralistic society through informal education such as lectures, interfaith dialogue that builds mutual understanding, and interfaith social activities that strengthen solidarity. Despite being faced with challenges such as exclusive groups, religion-based hoaxes, and low public understanding of tolerance, they remain the driving force of social harmony. By collaborating with governments, civil society organizations, and the media, as well as leveraging technology and innovation, religious leaders can create effective strategies to build an inclusive environment, strengthen religious moderation, and facilitate dialogue that brings peace in the midst of diversity.

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