

# Navigating Contemporary Political Challenges : Managing Multiculturalism and Intolerance in Indonesia Toward Social Harmony

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## Abstract

A multicultural society living peacefully amidst differences is a universal goal, but reality shows that major challenges still stand in the way of achieving it. Intolerance, intercultural conflict and discrimination are the main obstacles that need to be overcome. This research explores the dynamics of multiculturalism and intolerance in Indonesia, identifies triggering factors, and presents a case study on the formation of social integration in the multicultural community of Banuroja. The results show the need for a comprehensive approach through multicultural education, inclusive policies, as well as the role of community leaders and social media in promoting tolerance. With concerted efforts, Indonesia can serve as an example for other countries in building an inclusive and harmonious society amidst diversity.

**Keywords:** *Multiculturalism, intolerance, social integration, multicultural education, inclusive policies, community leaders, social media, Indonesia.*



## INTRODUCTION

Creating a multicultural society that lives peacefully amidst differences is the goal of all humans. However, reality shows that efforts to build this multicultural society are still far from expectations. Small differences can sometimes lead to large and severe social conflicts in society. Differences in skin color have triggered discrimination issues in the United States, leading to the Black Lives Matter social movement in 2020 (Azevedo et al., 2022). Differences in faith created social problems in the Rohingya region of Myanmar (Mithun, 2018). Ethnic differences have also triggered social conflict between the Shely Cathrin and Reno Wikandaru ethnic groups in Kalimantan, Indonesia (Nakaya, 2018). Similar cases occur in other countries, where conflicts occur due to differences in religion, differences in political preferences, differences in culture, and differences in race or nation.

The fact that multicultural societies are still difficult to realize is a serious problem, not just for one or two countries but for all countries in the world (Carnoy, 2009; Hassanpour et al., 2022; Ndwandwe, 2022; Reed, 2019). The problem lies in a fundamental philosophical argument. By nature, humans are born in different and varied conditions, not only in terms of culture but even skin color and character (Khasinah, 2013). Unfortunately, this difference and diversity is often seen as a problem rather than considered a wealth. Human groups sometimes want to dominate other human groups, want uniformity, and eliminate differences. Differences are things that must be accepted, inevitable. This situation has made it difficult to realize the dream of peaceful coexistence (Karyadi, 2020).

In recent decades, increased intercultural interaction has raised important questions about how societies can manage diversity more effectively (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). There is a new approach in addressing issues of multiculturalism and intolerance, with a particular focus on education and public policy and an emphasis on the influence of multicultural education and inclusive policies on social tolerance (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Siritheeratharadol, P., Tuntivivat, S., Intarakamhang, 2021). In the long history of the Indonesian nation, plurality has given birth to beautiful collaborations in various cultural forms that are rich in diversity. Tolerance has characterized Indonesian society in respecting and accommodating differences (Syah, 2022). However, in this increasingly complex digital era, the role of information technology and social media is also an important aspect that must be considered in building perceptions, strengthening understanding, and countering the spread of discrimination and hatred (Lestari & Sudarsri., 2018; Suni Astini, 2020). It is important to understand the dynamics of multiculturalism and intolerance in the Indonesian context, not only as a social phenomenon but also as an issue with significant political, economic and security implications (Saputra, Hardi, & Rahmat, 2022; Suradi, 2018). Previous research shows that the impacts of intolerance include socio-economic and political losses, threats to national stability, social coherence, and democratic values (Sunarno, Firman, Ikbal, & Indrawati, 2023). These findings suggest that intolerance causes damage at the interpersonal and community levels and has farreaching consequences at the national and global levels.

In this context, efforts to understand and address intolerance are crucial. A comprehensive approach is needed, including policies and regulations, educational initiatives, and intercultural dialogue to build understanding and tolerance. Effective multicultural education and inclusive public policies can play an important role in transforming narratives of intolerance into narratives of tolerance and respect for diversity (Azkiya, Tamrin, Yuza, & Madona, 2022; Khairun, Sihotang, & Mulyadi, 2023). In addition, the role of social media and information technology in shaping public perceptions must be addressed. With more and more information available online, education on media literacy and a critical attitude towards information is crucial. In an era where information can be quickly

disseminated and accessed by many people, efforts to counter disinformation and spread messages of tolerance and diversity should be a priority. world, this research has become very relevant and urgent. The aim is to understand the existing dynamics of diversity and create a framework that policy makers and educators can use to promote social harmony and tolerance. As such, this article aims to identify the challenges faced in managing multiculturalism and intolerance in Indonesia and explore comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses the literature review method to explore multiculturalism and intolerance and understand the dynamics of diversity in society. The literature review method involves a structured process of collecting and analyzing various literature sources relevant to the research topic. The search for literature sources was conducted through academic databases, libraries, and trusted online sources. These sources were selected based on their scholarly rigor, topical relevance, and contribution to the understanding of multiculturalism and intolerance. The research adopted strict selection criteria to ensure the validity and reliability of the sources. Literature sources had to meet high academic standards, be published in reputable journals or publishing houses, and be directly relevant to multiculturalism, intolerance, and the dynamics of societal diversity.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Multiculturalism as Ideology**

Multiculturalism is a different concept from multiculturalism. Since its emergence, the issue of multiculturalism has often been discussed by many people, especially after European and American countries discussed and used this approach to solve problems related to diversity in their countries (Firdaus et al., 2015).

In general, multiculturalism refers to a situation in which people with 'different' customs, traditions, languages, and/or religions coexist in the same social space, willing to maintain relevant aspects of their own differences and to acknowledge them publicly. Multiculturalism is closely related to 'identity politics', 'politics of difference', and 'politics of recognition', all of which consider proper acknowledgement of cultural diversity as a necessary step towards reassessing unappreciated identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that exclude certain groups (Song, 2010 as cited by Colombo, 2015:801). Multiculturalism here not only emphasizes cultural diversity, but also the importance of understanding such cultural diversity in the context of equality.

### **B. Factors that Trigger Intolerance**

Intolerance, prejudice and discrimination in Indonesia have complex root causes and are influenced by factors such as history, identity politics, economic inequality, media, and education, which has not been effective in teaching tolerance values. The occurrence of intolerance in Indonesia is caused by several factors,

including historical factors, which are one of the triggers of intolerance in Indonesia, which has long roots. Conflicts between ethnic, religious, and cultural groups have occurred for a long time, and these conflicts have increased the level of intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination between the groups (Parker, L. 2014; Mu'ti, A., & Burhani, A. N. (2019).

Identity politics plays an important role in fueling intolerance in Indonesia. Politicians often use identity politics, such as nationalism, religion and ethnicity, to gain political support. However, this can reinforce divisions and increase intolerance, prejudice and discrimination between groups Simas, E. N. et al. (2020). Economic inequality also contributes to the problem of intolerance. This inequality can lead to social injustice and reinforce negative stereotypes about certain groups, exacerbating the problems of intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination (Inayatillah, I., 2021). (2021). Media, both social media and mainstream media, have a role in increasing the level of intolerance, prejudice and discrimination in Indonesia: The spread of fake news, the use of discriminatory language, and negative stereotypes can reinforce negative perceptions of certain groups.

#### **A. Case Study on the Formation of National Integration in Banuroja Multicultural Society**

First, national character values are instilled through national and religious activities in the community. One of the Banuroja community's efforts to strengthen social integration is to provide guidance on national character values to the community through religious and national activities. These activities aim to instill the value of tolerance in the community. As expressed by Jenson (in Kærgård, 2010), this is called social cohesion, namely "social cohesion is formed through conflict management of mobilized differences (or distinctions) of all kinds - cultural, linguistic, and economic." This means that coaching is done to manage conflicts from differences in cultural, linguistic, and economic aspects. With guidance, we can realize the rise of the multiculturalism debate because multiculturalism will only cause divisions in society when it is not sufficiently guarded. So far, every ethnicity or religion has always provided continuous guidance to live in harmony and peace in social life. This is instilled through Isra Mi'raj activities, Halal bi Halal, and recitation at the Ta'lim Assembly for Muslims. For Hindus, there is something called Darmasanti. For Christians, it is instilled in their respective churches through events such as Christmas.

In addition, fostering national character values is done through formal village meetings and customary forums. During formal village meetings, the community reminds each other to maintain the spirit of kinship amidst religious and ethnic diversity. Likewise, when customary forums take place, ethnic leaders always remind their members to tolerate each other's differences to strengthen community unity. However, the customary forum only applies to the Balinese ethnicity, as revealed by I Wayan Ase, that "within the Balinese ethnicity, there is a customary

forum organized every month to exchange views on village development and instill the value of tolerance in its members." These diverse efforts have had a positive impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the Banuroja community for the better. In Budimansyah's (2010) terminology, "in communities, efforts are made to ensure that there is a process of strengthening community leadership towards noble behaviors that are developed into daily activities in their respective communities."

Second, national character values are instilled by giving advice to children in the family environment. The cultivation of national character values can also be done within each family environment, where parents have an important role in instilling character values to children in the form of advice to have good attitudes and behave well in the family and society. In addition to advice, parents also provide direct examples that can be emulated, such as the social relationships that parents develop in a harmonious and tolerant society that can be emulated by their children. Therefore, the formation of national character values in the family environment is important for the formation of social integration, so parents must be equipped to educate character because it requires intermediaries to form and develop it.

Third, national character values are instilled through the learning process in the school environment. The cultivation of national character values can also be done in the school environment, such as teaching children to have good attitudes and behave well. Banuroja village has three schools, namely Banuroja State Elementary School (SDN), Vocational High School (SMK), and Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Islamic Boarding School. Based on observations at SDN and SMK, national character values are learned through the subject of Civic Education (PKN). This subject aims to provide children with knowledge about citizenship so that the hope is that they will be able to demonstrate good character in their interactions. At Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Islamic Boarding School, they are equipped with comparative religious knowledge to strengthen their aqidah and high sense of nationalism. Through this material, it can form a moderate personality towards religious views. So that they can live in harmony with others while minimizing fanaticism towards ethnic and religious identity.

#### **D. Examples of Community Leaders as Models in Building National Character**

The success of the Banuroja community in strengthening social integration cannot be separated from the role of community leaders, such as ethnic leaders, youth leaders and religious leaders. The community leaders provide examples in the form of good attitudes and behaviors to their citizens. This example is an example of character behavior in their daily lives. An example is imitation, which is the imitation of students towards educators; the process of imitation that children do towards adults; the process of imitating children towards their parents; and imitating a student towards his teacher or imitating a community member towards a community leader. Consistency of behavior is necessary because there is a process of imitation (Suhono & Utama, 2017).

Another form of example can be seen in the mutual respect and appreciation among community leaders. This attitude is demonstrated by attending each other's religious activities to set an example for their followers. As expressed by I Made Suardana that "people here are very respectful of the diversity of each ethnicity, in each religion, having figures who provide enlightenment or foster tolerance to their respective followers." Likewise, when facing disputes in the community, friendship and communication between community leaders effectively resolve these disputes.

National character is the character or characteristic of a nation that distinguishes it from other nations. In the terminology of Budimansyah (2010), national character is "a national personality that is infused with the values of Pancasila, and the norms based on the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia." National character values are the guidelines for Banuroja people in maintaining harmony and intimacy amidst the diversity of society, be it ethnicity, religion, or culture. These values are reflected in the community's character of respecting and appreciating each other, working together, and building mutual understanding.

## CONCLUSIONS

A multicultural society is the dream of many countries in the world, including Indonesia. However, reality shows that managing this diversity is not easy and often poses challenges, especially in the face of intolerance. In the Indonesian context, intolerance is triggered by various factors, including a history of conflict, identity politics, economic inequality and media influence. However, there are efforts being made to overcome intolerance and strengthen social integration, such as fostering national character values through religious activities, village meetings, and learning in the school environment. The role of community leaders is also very important in setting a good example and facilitating intercultural dialogue.

Thus, it is important to continue developing a comprehensive approach to managing multiculturalism and intolerance in Indonesia. Effective multicultural education, inclusive public policies, and the active role of social media and information technology can help transform narratives of intolerance into narratives of tolerance and respect for diversity. Through these efforts, it is hoped that Indonesia can become an example for other countries in building a harmonious and peaceful multicultural society amidst differences.

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