

## THE DIMENSION OF RELIGION IN POLITICAL CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF INDONESIA



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### Abstract

This article aims to discuss the religious dimension in political conflict and violence in Indonesia Indonesian society is heterogeneous, especially in religious affiliation. A series of cases of violence in Indonesia involving religion, such as the events in Pekalongan (1995), Situbondo (1996), Poso (1998), Ambon (1999), Tasikmalaya (1996), Sukabumi (2008), and also other violence in several parts of Indonesia . This incident caused various kinds of losses both in terms of community facilities and the many casualties that fell. This is based on an excessive commitment to the religious aspects of Indonesian society... The method used in this article is a qualitative research method that consists of library research. Thus, the data obtained comes from literary sources such as books, scientific articles, research reports, and so on. The data analysis technique is a qualitative data analysis technique of Miles et al. The results of the study show that the religious dimension is the main factor in the various events of political conflict and violence in Indonesia. These religious – based conflicts are used by political elites to gain political power. The various religious and political conflicts and violence is due to hyper commitment in most religious societies and the factor of religious differentiation.

*Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membahas mengenai dimensi agama dalam konflik dan kekerasan politik di Indonesia. Masyarakat Indonesia bersifat heterogen, khususnya dalam bidang agama yang menganut berbagai macam agama. Hal ini memberikan implikasi terhadap terciptanya suatu tindak kekerasan ataupun lahirnya konflik. Rentetan kasus kekerasan di Indonesia yang melibatkan agama, seperti kejadian di Pekalongan (1995), Situbondo (1996), Poso (1998), Ambon (1999), Tasikmalaya (1996), Sukabumi (2008), dan juga kekerasan lainnya di beberapa wilayah Indonesia. Peristiwa tersebut menimbulkan berbagai macam kerugian baik bersifat sarana fasilitas masyarakat maupun banyaknya korban jiwa yang berjatuhan. Hal tersebut dilandasi oleh adanya komitmen berlebihan pada aspek keberagaman masyarakat Indonesia. Metode yang digunakan dalam penyusunan artikel ini adalah metode penelitian kualitatif yang bersifat penelitian pustaka, oleh karena itu data-data yang diperoleh berasal dari sumber yang bersifat pustaka seperti buku, artikel ilmiah, laporan penelitian, dan lain sebagainya. Teknik analisis data adalah teknik analisis data kualitatif Miles dkk. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dimensi agama menjadi faktor utama dalam berbagai peristiwa konflik dan kekerasan politik di Indonesia, konflik berbasis agama dimanfaatkan oleh oknum elite politik untuk meraih kekuasaan politik. Hubungan agama dengan berbagai konflik dan kekerasan politik adalah karena adanya hyperkomitmen dalam kebanyakan masyarakat beragama dan faktor diferensi agama.*

## Background

Indonesia has a very large population.<sup>1</sup> This can be seen from the latest population figures reported by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri), which states that the total population in Indonesia as of December 2020 is 271,349,889 people.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Indonesian state is also recognized as a nation consisting of various ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>, each of which has their own characteristics.<sup>4</sup> Indonesia's cultural wealth consists of the following attributes. First, there is a diversity of ethnic groups that unite into a single unit, such as the Toraja, Ambon, Ternate, Javanese, Batak, etc.; Second, the variety of beliefs (religion). There are six major religions that are officially recognized, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Third, the diversity of languages, each region has its language characteristics, which foster local identities, such as Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Banjari cultures. Fourth, the diversity of arts and culture is a product of the diversity of these ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup>

When viewed from the structure of its society, Indonesia has two distinctive characteristics, which are divided into horizontal and vertical differences. Horizontal differences are differences in culture, customs, and ethnic groups that are characteristic of each region, as well as differences in beliefs or religion. Meanwhile, vertical differences are marked by differences of social attributes such as job status, profession, residence characteristics (rural and urban), etc.<sup>6</sup>

Differences that often occur in the context of social life frequently lead to social conflicts. This can be seen from several historical events in the lives of Indonesian people. Conflicts of this kind occur due to various interests, such as the competition for economic resources, which also has political dimensions and is often exacerbated by religious issues, like the conflicts in Sumbawa (2013), Poso (1998), and Ambon (1999).<sup>7</sup>

The political aspect is very closely related to social life, as expressed by Aristotle, who stated that humans are *zoon politicon* (political animals). Humans are social beings and are unable to live alone. Fulfilling their life's need requires the means to obtain it.

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<sup>1</sup> Doli Witro, "Ulama and Umara in Government of Indonesia: A Review of Religion and State," *Madania* 24, no. 2 (2020): 135 – 44, <https://doi.org/10.29300/madania.v24i2.3778>.

<sup>2</sup> Kompas.com, "Jumlah Penduduk Indonesia Terkini Mencapai 271,34 Juta," 2021, <https://money.kompas.com/read/2021/01/22/090554926/jumlah-penduduk-indonesia-terkini-mencapai-27134-juta?page=all>.

<sup>3</sup> Bibi Suprianto, Zaenuddin Hudi Prasajo, and Doli Witro, "The History of Islamic Kingdoms in Kapuas Hulu District: A Manuscript Translation of Pangeran Kesoema Anom Soeria Negara," *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 10, no. 2 (2021): 274 – 309, <https://doi.org/10.31291/hn.v10i2.633>; Betria Zarpina Yanti and Doli Witro, "Islamic Moderation as a Resolution of Different Conflicts of Religion," *Andragogi: Jurnal Diklat Teknis Pendidikan Dan Keagamaan* 8, no. 1 (2020): 446 – 57, <https://doi.org/10.36052/andragogi.v8i1.127>.

<sup>4</sup> Ida Bagus Brata, "Kearifan Budaya Lokal Perikat Identitas Bangsa," *Jurnal Bakti Saraswati* 5, no. 1 (2016): 10, <http://ojs.unmas.ac.id/index.php/Bakti/article/view/226>.

<sup>5</sup> Made Antara and Made Vairagya Yogantari, "Keragaman Budaya Indonesia Sumber Inovasi Industri Kreatif," *Senada* 1, no. 1 (2018): 295, <https://eprosiding.idbbali.ac.id/index.php/senada/article/view/68>.

<sup>6</sup> Ismail Ismail, "Penggabungan Teori Konflik Strukturalist – Non – Marxist Dan Teori Fungsionalisme Struktural – Talcott Parsons: (Upaya Menemukan Model Teori Sosial – Politik Alternatif Sebagai Resolusi Konflik Politik dan Tindak Kekerasan di Indonesia)," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 13, no. 1 (2012): 68, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v13i1.722>.

<sup>7</sup> Katon Galih Setyawan and Kusnul Khotimah, "Politik Akomodatif dalam Masyarakat Multi Agama," *The Journal of Society & Media* 3, no. 1 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v3n1.p1-16>.

Politics becomes one of these means.<sup>8</sup> Religion is also another means. Max Weber has written that religiosity encourages a person to fulfill worldly expectations and desires. Thus, it is not uncommon when humans make sacrifices to meet these expectations even though they contain violence, whether based on religion or magic.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the political and religious contexts are often interrelated in social life. This is because politics and religion are used as a tool to achieve what is desired and to fulfill life's needs. In essence religion is a way of life for humankind that originates from their God. It aims to provide peace and prosperity and to help believers achieve salvation in the Hereafter. Thus, all religions focus on brotherhood, peace, and unity. However, in practice, religion sometimes produces conflict, violence, and other harmful effects. This illustrates that religion has two dimensions, one side contains elements of peace, and on the other hand, it also includes aspects of violence and conflict.<sup>10</sup>

As for previous research on religion in political conflict and violence, these are "Religion in the Maelstrom of Conflict (Resolution Analysis Study of the Emergence of Religion – Based Social Violence in Indonesia)" written by Buyung Syukron in the journal of *Ri'ayah* Volume 02 Number 1 of 2017.<sup>11</sup> This article contains various resolutions against violence in the name of religion in Indonesia. This is of course different from research articles written by the author, which focus on the study of the religious dimension in political conflict and violence in Indonesia.

Second, an article entitled "Socio – Political Dimensions of the Ambon Conflict" written by Didit Rudiansyah in the journal *Sosiologi Reflektif* Volume 10 Number 1 of 2015.<sup>12</sup> This article contains the social and political dimensions of the Ambon incident. Obviously, this is different from the present article, which focus on the religious dimension in political conflict and violence in Indonesia.

Third, an article entitled "Violence in the Name of Religion" written by Ahmad Isnaeni in the *Kalam: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam* Volume 8 Number 2 of 2014.<sup>13</sup> This article discusses the factors that generate violence in the name of religion, namely because there are different doctrines and beliefs. This is certainly different from the present paper which focuses on the study of the religious dimension in political conflict and violence in Indonesia.

Fourth, an article entitled "The Complexity of Religious Violence in the Life of Religious People in Indonesia: A Sociological Review" written by Haedar Nashir in the journal *Asy-syir'ah* Volume 49 Number 1 of 2015.<sup>14</sup> This article discusses the roots and

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<sup>8</sup> Muhamad Ridwan Effendi and Iqbal Syafrudin, "Pertalian Agama Pada Pilkada DKI Jakarta Tahun 2017," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mimbar Demokrasi* 19, no. 2 (2020): 3, <https://doi.org/10.21009/jimd.v19i02.14528>.

<sup>9</sup> M. Yusuf Wibisono, "Agama, Kekerasan dan Pluralisme Dalam Islam," *Kalam: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 2 (2015): 198, <https://doi.org/10.24042/klm.v9i2.328>.

<sup>10</sup> Angga Natalia, "Faktor – Faktor Penyebab Radikalisme dalam Beragama (Kajian Sosiologi Terhadap Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia)," *Al-Adyan; Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 11, no. 1 (2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v11i1.1436>.

<sup>11</sup> Buyung Syukron, "Agama Dalam Pusaran Konflik (Studi Analisis Resolusi Terhadap Munculnya Kekerasan Sosial Berbasis Agama di Indonesia)," *Ri'ayah* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–28, <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/riayah/article/view/960>.

<sup>12</sup> Didit Rudiansyah, "Dimensi Sosio – Politik Konflik Ambon," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 10, no. 1 (2016): 161 – 74, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v10i1.1143>.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad Isnaeni, "Kekerasan Atas Nama Agama," *Kalam* 8, no. 2 (2017): 213–28, <https://doi.org/10.24042/klm.v8i2.221>.

<sup>14</sup> Haedar Nashir, "Kompleksitas Kekerasan Keagamaan dalam Kehidupan Umat Beragama di Indonesia: Suatu Tinjauan Sosiologis," *Asy-Syir'ah: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Hukum* 49, no. 1 (2015): 49 – 61, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajish.2015.49.1.49-61>.

dimensions of religious violence in everyday life of Indonesian society using a sociological perspective. Of course, this is different from the present article, which focus on the study of the religious dimension in political conflict and violence in Indonesia.

Based on the description above, the present authors are interested in the theme of religion and violent conflict. Religion should be a mission of peace, but there have been several cases of violence in the name of religion. Of course, this is an interesting topic. Therefore, the author compiled this paper to answer the formulation of the problem, namely the religious dimension in political conflict and violence.

The authors explore more deeply how the religious dimension has affected political conflicts and violence in Indonesian history. However, it should be noted that in this discussion, the authors do not explicitly examine one by one the incidents or political conflicts and violence that have occurred in Indonesia because there have been many incidents that have occurred so far. However, the authors examine a few events, which will then be analyzed.

This article uses a qualitative research method that is library research. The use of qualitative research methods is because this article uses qualitative data.<sup>15</sup> Qualitative data is data that is in the form of thoughts, understandings, and in the form of narratives that are meaningful. Qualitative research aims at obtaining comprehensive analysis and conclusions. The object of research in this article is religion and violent political conflicts. The data in this article were obtained from library sources such as books, scientific articles, research reports, etc. that are related to the object of research. The data is presented in a narrative – descriptive way, in the sense of narrating or describing the results of the analysis from the sources that have been obtained. The data analysis technique used is a documentary study. The data analysis uses the qualitative data analysis technique of Miles et al., namely, data condensation. The way this works is by selecting data contained in field notes or other sources. Then the data is presented based on data collection and analysis. Then a conclusion is drawn. This is based on the findings.<sup>16</sup>

### **Religion and the Maelstrom of Conflict in Indonesian Society**

In the KBBI (Big Indonesian Dictionary), quoted by Rachmad Abdullah in his article, "religion" is teachings in which there are rules regarding procedures of faith (belief) and forms of worship to God Almighty. It contains a set of rules regarding policies relating to other human beings, as well as to the environment.<sup>17</sup>

According to Max Muller, the word "religion" comes from English, namely "religion." In Latin, it is known as "religio", which originally meant only "fear of God, contemplating the heart about things that are divine, piety." Cicero perfects this understanding by giving the meaning of "diligence".<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, according to Thouless, quoted by Abdul Hamid

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<sup>15</sup> Sugiyono Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R & D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaca, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Rachmad Abdullah, "Pengaruh Agama Liberalisme Radikal dalam Kurikulum Pendidikan Nasional," *Tawazun* 8, no. 2 (2015): 126, <http://ejournal.uika-bogor.ac.id/index.php/TAWAZUN/article/view/1139>.

<sup>18</sup> Sumarto Sumarto, "Agama dan Budaya (Suatu Kajian Parsialistik – Integralistik)," *Ri'ayah* 2, no. 2 (2017): 23, <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/riayah/article/view/977>.

in his article, religion is a practical relationship that exists within a person and is felt as a belief in a higher being than humans.<sup>19</sup>

According to Harun Nasution religion is, firstly, a belief that recognizes the existence of a relationship between humans and supernatural things, which must be obeyed. Second, it is an acknowledgment of supernatural powers that control and influence humans. Third, it is to attach oneself to the supernatural power in order to influence human action. Fourth, it gives rise to a particular way of life as a result of the existence of the supernatural power. Fifth, it creates a system of behavior (code of conduct) originating from the belief in supernatural powers. Sixth, it is trust in and acknowledgment of the existence of an obligation that humans must carry out because human positions are lower and also weak compared to these magical powers. Seventh, it is a teaching that comes from God and then conveyed to humans through an apostle or messenger.<sup>20</sup>

From some of the descriptions above, it can be concluded that religion is a teaching that originates from God and places humans lower than God's position, thus giving rise to a form of obedience to various kinds of rules contained therein, both those governing one's relationship with God or one's relationship with other humans and the environment.

In the context of social life, religion can never be separated therefrom because it stipulates a way of life that also regulates one's relationship with other individuals in a social context, the goal of which is to create peace and tranquility.

According to Hendropuspito in his book entitled "Sociology of Religion," which was later quoted by Angga Natalia in his research, the functions of religion in society are, first, to assume educational functions in providing guidance in living life. Secondly, religion has the function of helping humans to achieve happiness. Third, religion imposes social control to create public peace and tranquility. Through various kinds of teachings and rules that uphold good moral norms, religion provides social control. In addition, religion also provides strict sanctions for actions that violate good ethical standards that can cause divisions and conflicts in social life. Fourth, religion has a function of fostering brotherhood. Faith can provide comfort, which is the desire of every human being. No one in this world wants animosity and division, which harm human beings in their life. Fifth, religion has a transformative function. It can help change old habits and form ones, creating an ideal human personality. This transformation also does not mean leaving good traditional values, but developing them into something that can be useful for broader concerns.<sup>21</sup>

In communal life, religion occupies a central position because religion harmonizes social life to achieve collective peace and unity. It offers guidelines for human survival through various rules and teachings.

However, the nature of Indonesian society itself is very diverse, especially in terms of religion. However, religious differences should not be used to achieve political goals.<sup>22</sup> The phenomenon of violence in the name of religion emerge partly because religion is exploited for political ends.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Abdul Hamid, "Agama dan Kesehatan Mental dalam Perspektif Psikologi Agama," *Jurnal Kesehatan Tadulako* 3, no. 1 (2017): 3, <http://jurnal.untad.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/HealthyTadulako/article/view/8714>.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammadiyah Muhammadiyah, "Kebutuhan Manusia Terhadap Agama," *Jurnal Pencerahan* 12, no. 2 (2018): 203, <http://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/JIA/article/view/464>.

<sup>21</sup> Natalia, "Faktor – Faktor Penyebab Radikalisme dalam Beragama (Kajian Sosiologi Terhadap Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia)," 5.

<sup>22</sup> Syukron, "Agama dalam Pusaran Konflik (Studi Analisis Resolusi Terhadap Munculnya Kekerasan Sosial Berbasis Agama di Indonesia)."

<sup>23</sup> Isnaeni, "Kekerasan Atas Nama Agama."



The religious conflicts are conflicts that involve the various values, claims, and identities that are framed in religious slogans or expressions.<sup>24</sup>

Religion should give birth to peace in the face of conflicting interpretations. Conflicts between adherents of religions or between religious communities are complex phenomena that involve not only beliefs in their respective religions, but also involves social, economic, and political interests. Therefore, this kind of conflict can be easily exploited in the name of religion.<sup>25</sup>

Religion fosters social integration by binding its adherents to uphold mutual solidarity. In addition, religion is also a vehicle for creating peace, developing and maintaining the common good in the long term. However, religion also provides an opportunity to create social disintegration, which creates conflict, division, and tension in society. This indicates that religion in its practice often conflicts with the noble mission of God's messengers who are sent to establish peace and unity.<sup>26</sup>

Conflicts that occur because of social disintegration and which result in religious violence can be motivated by several factors. First, the emergence of a truth – claim (trust claim). Truth is one aspect that cannot be separated from religion. In this context, the truth is based on the belief in God, who is the source of that truth. The existence of differences in the realm of speculation opens the possibility of social conflict, which is usually motivated by the various differences in understanding and practicing religion. Secondly, the emergence of misperceptions between adherents of different religions, and which are also influenced by ethnicity, customs, and culture. In practice, the tendency is to align religious issues with the cultural aspects of a certain region. This tendency increases risk of creating conflict and gives rise to the seeds of sectarianism. Third, the emergence of religious doctrines which later in practice lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. This leads to intolerance towards adherents of other religions. It may even lead to attacking them. Fourth, there is still little understanding of the concept of pluralism.<sup>27</sup>

Pluralism influences the attitudes of people who practice religion in the context of social life. However, problems arise when someone does not distinguish between religious pluralism and religious plurality. According to Terrence W. Tilley in his book entitled "Postmodern Theologies and Religious Diversity," which was later cited by Tasmin in his research, there is a difference between understanding religious plurality and religious pluralism. According to him, religious plurality is a reality that exists in the diversity of religions. On the other hand, religious pluralism in terms of the study of religions is a form of behavior in responding to the reality of religious plurality. This is the subject of such disciplines of sociology, philosophy of religion and also theology. This concept is important to understand in the context of globalization in the West.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, and adherent's understanding of his religion influences his behavior. This is because a religious view can change its function to become an ideology. When this happens, two characteristics will be attached to a person. First, an ideology based on religious teachings can be formulated to achieve a specific goal, whether in the realm of

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<sup>24</sup> Abdul A'la Al – Maududi, "Konflik Kekerasan: Antara Politisasi Agama, Etnisitas, dan Politik Kekuasaan," *Paramedia* 8, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>25</sup> Syukron, "Agama dalam Pusaran Konflik (Studi Analisis Resolusi Terhadap Munculnya Kekerasan Sosial Berbasis Agama Di Indonesia)."

<sup>26</sup> Tasmin Tasmin, "Ambivalensi Agama di Tengah Pluralitas Agama," *Empirisma* 16, no. 1 (2007): 2.

<sup>27</sup> Nur Latifah, "Agama, Konflik Sosial dan Kekerasan Politik," *Fondatia* 2, no. 2 (2018): 157, <https://doi.org/10.36088/fondatia.v2i2.131>.

<sup>28</sup> Tasmin, "Ambivalensi Agama di Tengah Pluralitas Agama," 3.

worship and rites, or in social aspects. Secondly, the ideology can be used as one of the tools to achieve political goals, which is usually used as a reinforcement and incentive to create violence and conflict through action. In this context, religious ideology can be used as political weapons.<sup>29</sup>

Religion and politics will always go hand in hand in practice because, as previously explained, both are indeed tools to achieve the goals of social life. An adherents' understanding of religion is one of the underlying causes of religious and political violence.<sup>30</sup>

The existence of facts like this shows that religion is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, it offers moral guidance. But on the other face, it also provides justification for conflict and violence. According to Charles Kimball in his book "When Religion Becomes a Disaster," quoted by Tasmin in his first book, there are five things that can cause religion to become corrupt.

First, the claim that a certain religion the the only source of absolute truth. This provides an opportunity for abuse by adherents of religion who use religious literature to encourage division. In this context, religion is used as a tool to justify the practice of *takfir* (making someone a heretic) against other people who have a different understanding of the sacred sources.

Second, there is blind obedience to religious leaders. This fosters blind adherence to religious leaders who have strong charisma.

Third, the emergence of passionate desires becomes the ultimate goal in upholding a theocratic ideal, namely, the religious state. This arises due to the desire for an ideal and perfect system, which is guaranteed by religion, since it comes from God.

Fourth, there is religious Machiavelism. In this case, religious adherents use religion to achieve personal desires and goals when they are morally wrong way and can harm other people.

Fifth, inviting people to "holy war" without understanding and justification.<sup>31</sup>

Abdul Aziz Ustman Altwaridji has argued that there were several factors for the occurrence of violence in religion. The first is due to the need for security. Second, widespread deprivation in society of basic human needs. These needs include earning a living, access to politics, and identity formation. Third, the government is unable to satisfy the basic desires of an individual or a group.

In the Indonesian context, religion cannot be separated from social life. As a pluralistic and multicultural country, religion can unify the nation. At the same time, religion can also trigger violent conflicts. Religious conflicts and violence in Indonesia often occur due to political interests as well as social conflicts.<sup>32</sup>

This can be seen in the various cases of religious conflicts in Indonesian history, such as in Pekalongan (1995), Purwakarta (1995), Situbondo (1996), Sampang and Bangkalan (1997), Rengasdengklok (1997), Poso (1998), Ambon (1999), Mataram (2000), Maluku (2000), Tasikmalaya (2006), Sukabumi (2008), and Sumbawa (2013).<sup>33</sup>

Given these various incidents, this paper explores the religious dimension of social and political conflicts in Indonesian history.

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<sup>29</sup> Umi Sumbulah, "Agama, Kekerasan dan Perlawanan Ideologis," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 1, no. 1 (2006): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2006.1.1.1-11>.

<sup>30</sup> Wibisono, "Agama, Kekerasan dan Pluralisme Dalam Islam," 194.

<sup>31</sup> Tasmin, "Ambivalensi Agama di Tengah Pluralitas Agama," 10.

<sup>32</sup> Syukri Syukri UR, "Upaya Penyelesaian Konflik Politik di Indonesia," *Jurnal Al-Harakah* 2, no. 2 (2019): 33, <https://doi.org/10.30821/alharakah.v2i02.6419>.

<sup>33</sup> Latifah, "Agama, Konflik Sosial dan Kekerasan Politik," 156.

## Conflicts and Political Violence in the Name of Religion in Indonesia

Randall Collin has stated that religion is in fact economics, politics is in fact religion and economics is in fact politics. Thus, religion cannot be separated from politics and economics.<sup>34</sup> Politically-oriented religious movements will give birth to militant revivalism, for example, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaida who has carried out acts of violence in the name of religion.

According to Azyumardi Azra, a professor at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, political conflict and violence in Indonesia, which has been present since the post-independence era of Indonesia, can be seen from the emergence of the DI/TII rebellion. This movement used the religious pretext to achieve his political goals. Even though this movement failed during the era of President Suharto, it has reappeared. Ali Moertopo and Bakin recruited the former members of DI/TII. They were recruited and ordered to carry out a series of actions, one of which was the *jihad*. After the end of the Suharto regime, this group appeared more visible, vocal, and militant. This can be seen in the various mass media, which at that time covered the activities of this group.<sup>35</sup>

There have been many series of violence and riots in the history of Indonesian society since 1995 which use religion as a pretext for violence, such as in Situbondo (1996), Tasikmalaya (1996), Rengas Dengklok (1997), and Banjarmasin (1997). These events occurred ahead of the monetary crisis. Places of worship became targets of mob rampage. Likewise, in the New Order era, such as the Ambon incident (1999), many victims and lives lost were claimed due to the interreligious conflicts in Kupang (1998), where Christians destroyed Muslim places of worship, and also in Poso (1998), where religious communities were killing each other in the name of religion.<sup>36</sup>

The violence and conflict that occurred in Poso cannot be forgotten, because this conflict took place many times (over the course of five phases) and has caused many victims to fall and many areas of worship destroyed. The conflict occurred from 1998 to 2001.<sup>37</sup>

The series of conflicts in Poso started with a clash between youths of different religious communities on December 24, 1998. However, as time passed, the dispute transformed into a conflict between adherents of Islam and Christianity. In its later development, this conflict was used by corrupt political elites to gain votes in the competition for the post of Regent of Poso. They mobilized the masses by citing religious identity. The residents who are Muslim call their group the "white" group, while the Christians call themselves the "red" group. Furthermore, in April 2000, the political dimension of the conflict was also present in the conflict because it coincided with the election of a new district head. This led to a division of the positions of power in the local government between the elite Muslim and elite Christian groups. However, these demands were not carried out by the government authorities at that time. This led to

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<sup>34</sup> Nashir, "Kompleksitas Kekerasan Keagamaan dalam Kehidupan Umat Beragama Di Indonesia: Suatu Tinjauan Sosiologis."

<sup>35</sup> Cornelis Lay, "Kekerasan Atas Nama Agama: Perspektif Politik," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* 13, no. 1 (2009): 4, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.10964>.

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Hisyam, "Agama Dan Konflik Sosial," *Jurnal Masyarakat dan Budaya* 8, no. 2 (2006): 141, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v8i2.192>.

<sup>37</sup> Masyrullahushomad Masyrullahushomad, "Mengokohkan Persatuan Bangsa Pasca Konflik Bernuansa Agama di Ambon dan Poso," *Istoria* 15, no. 1 (2019): 93, <https://doi.org/10.21831/istoria.v15i1.24378>.



conflict in December 2001. It became a prolonged religious conflict. The Islamic religious group viewed the struggle as a *jihad*, and the Christian group viewed it as a crusade.<sup>38</sup>

Another conflict in Tasikmalaya was perpetrated against the Ahmadiyya congregation. This conflict also contained a political element, because it occurred when general elections (elections) were taking place. The political elites and parties used the stigma associated with the Ahmadiyya to get sympathy from the public.<sup>39</sup>

Another conflict occurred recently during the elections for the governor of DKI Jakarta in 2017. During this period there was a massive action initiated by Muslim groups that demanded that one of the governor candidates, Basuki Cahya Purnama (Ahok) be jailed due to a statement he made that was considered insulting to Muslims. In response to this, the MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council), through KH. Ma'ruf Amin gave his *fatwa* (religious opinion), which decided that, indeed, what Ahok had done was an act that insulted Islam. This caused Ahok to lose the contest for the election for the governor of DKI Jakarta because he received fewer votes compared to his political opponent, namely Anis Baswedan.<sup>40</sup>

The same thing happened in the 2019 presidential election contestation, in which religion became an essential issue in political contestation. There were lots of demonstrations held by those two opposed the incumbent candidate. These were related to the 212 Action related to the 2017 DKI Jakarta election. The conflict was also exacerbated by the allegations of the "criminalization of the clergy" because, at that time, many religious figures who provided support and defended the opposition were summoned by government security forces, and some of them were detained due to several cases of violations.<sup>41</sup>

This gave rise to the perception that the the opponents of the incumbent candidate, Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin, were suppressing the opposing religious scholars. After the victory of the incumbent was declared by Elections Commission, demonstrations were held accusing the Commission of fraud. Clashes between the masses and the security forces occurred and this resulted in many victims falling from the incident.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Dimension of Religion in Political Conflict and Violence in Indonesia**

Religion has a great potential in giving rise to conflict. However, on the other hand religion is also the only solution towards peace. Thus, religion can trigger and encourage war as well as being a deterrent to war and violence.<sup>43</sup>

Religion as a social reality does not only contain doctrinal aspects but also includes the adherents, religious concepts, religious institutions, holy places, and ideological

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<sup>38</sup> Igneus Alganih, "Konflik Poso (Kajian Historis Tahun 1998 – 2001)," *Criksetra: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah* 5, no. 10 (2016): 170, <https://doi.org/10.36706/jc.v5i2.4814>.

<sup>39</sup> Muhamad Zuldin, "Konflik Agama dan Penyelesaiannya: Kasus Ahmadiyah di Kabupaten Tasikmalaya, Jawa Barat," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 2 (2013): 444, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i2.91>.

<sup>40</sup> Agus Saputro, "Agama dan Negara : Politik Identitas Menuju Pilpres 2019," *Asketik* 2, no. 2 (2018): 116, <https://doi.org/10.30762/ask.v2i2.912>.

<sup>41</sup> Febrihada Gahas Candramukti, "Peranan Agama dalam Menyikapi Konflik Komunal Pada Pemilihan Presiden Tahun 2019," *ENTITA (Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial)* 2, no. 2 (2020): 251, <https://doi.org/10.19105/ejps.v2i2.3406>.

<sup>42</sup> Candramukti, 252.

<sup>43</sup> Isnaeni, "Kekerasan Atas Nama Agama."

structures. Therefore, whenever there is conflict between religions these variables are always involved.<sup>44</sup>

It has been mentioned above that religion and politics cannot be separated. This development is called identity politics. According to Gutmann, political identity is classified into three models based on the effects it produces. These are: good (harmless), sour (less dangerous), and ugly (very dangerous). Good and evil are considered suitable for the progress of democracy because the existence of good identity politics will generate public awareness about the importance of being a citizen as well as being an ideal in the fight against injustice. This occurs with the condition that the political identity does not generate hatred against other people. The "ugly" model is not conducive to democracy because it prioritizes the interests of one's own group and is detrimental to other identity groups. This can lead to the legitimization of violence that can harm other people.<sup>45</sup>

The cases discussed has shown that identity politics is indeed a major factor in religious conflict. These events fall under the "ugly" model of identity politics, which undermines democracy.

Thus, Abdul Aziz Ustman Altwaridji's theory is true regarding the factors of religious –based conflict, one of which is the deprivation of human needs in terms of political access. These conflicts are caused by the assimilation of various local political interests into religious symbols. Relations between community groups can lead to conflict if there is political content in it. In this case, conflicts are deliberately created to serve the interests of the political elite.<sup>46</sup>

Then another conflict involving religious authorities also occurred in Ambon (1998), where there was a prolonged conflict between Muslims and Christians. The conflict, however, started from a fight between a thug and a city transport driver. However, it led to clashes between the Muslim Ambonese community groups and Christian Ambonese community. The conflict went on for two years, from 1998 – 2000, which, of course, caused the deaths of many people.<sup>47</sup>

The conflict in Tasikmalaya (1996) was permeated with religious language. The local community firmly adhered to religious values in a homogeneous and absolutist manner. With this trend, bigotry emerged, and a lack of respect for non – indigenous ethnicities, namely the Chinese ethnic group, which incidentally had better economic conditions than the natives. Jealousy and disappointment arose, and this turned to violence that was couched in religious symbols. As a result, there were riots around the Tasikmalaya Grand Mosque, destruction and attacks on churches and shops owned by the Chinese minority, attacks on the police station, because it was considered to be defending , and other damages.<sup>48</sup>

In Situbondo (October 10, 1996), a violent action occurred involving the destruction and burning a church. Someone insulted the clergy and the kyai (religious leaders) prominent in Situbondo. The teachings spread by this person did not acknowledge the presence of the Prophet Muhammad as the Messenger of God, and as the last Prophet.

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<sup>44</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essay in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Idham and Suaib Amin Pranowo, "Pilkada, Politik Identitas dan Kekerasan Budaya," *Jurnal Renaissance* 5, no. 2 (2020): 653, <https://doi.org/10.53878/jr.v5i2.117>.

<sup>46</sup> Rudiansyah, "Dimensi Sosio – Politik Konflik Ambon."

<sup>47</sup> Suheri Harahap, "Konflik Etnis dan Agama di Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Sosiologi Agama (Jisa)* 1, no. 2 (2018): 15, <https://doi.org/10.30829/jisa.v1i2.5096>.

<sup>48</sup> Moh. Soehadha, "Kekerasan Kolektif dan Dialog Kebudayaan: Belajar dari Pengalaman Kekerasan Menjelang Reformasi di Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 15, no. 1 (2014): 9, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v15i1.761>.

This immediately caught the attention of the Indonesian people at that time. The conflict from this incident arose when the judge's verdict on the young man was far below the demands of the public prosecutor, thus provoking the anger of the Muslim residents of Situbondo at that time. The anarchic action began with throwing objects on the civil servants and the court officials who tried to protect the victims from the mob. The acts of violence spread to various places in Situbondo and started targeting the minorities, namely, the Christians and ethnic Chinese. Ethnic Chinese facilities, a priest's house, and six churches were burned in Banyuputih District, and there were seven victims who died from the families of a priest at that time.<sup>49</sup>

In Pekalongan City (22 November 1995), riots occurred on Jalan Hayam Wuruk, Pekalongan City. Various facilities, such as shops and places with Chinese identities, became the target of the residents' anger. This happened due to the news that a member of the ethnic Chinese minority tore and urinated on the Muslim holy book (the Qur'an). Even though the results of the investigation by the authorities showed that the perpetrators of religious blasphemy had mental disorders and had recently been released from a mental hospital, riots could not be avoided, which had a tremendous impact on the people of Pekalongan.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, an incident occurred in the city of Sukabumi (27 April 2008), where there was an attack on the Ahmadiyah congregation in Parakansalak Village RT.02/RW.02, Parakansalak District, Sukabumi Regency. This act of violence was motivated by the Muslim population's antagonism against the teachings of Ahmadiyah, which are considered heretical. The attack set fire to the Al – Furqon Mosque, which was the place of worship for the Ahmadiyya congregation at that time. Burned down with the mosque were 30 copies of the Qur'an published by the Ministry of Religion. Furthermore, one of the residents' houses, an teacher who belonged to the Ahmadiyya congregation, was the target of the mob's fury.<sup>51</sup>

These events are linked with religious authority. Indonesia is one of the countries with the most significant number of religious adherents. The facts show that the factors underlying the occurrence of violence were due to hyper – commitment of the people involved. This hyper – commitment includes the radical and uncompromising attitude in reaching a particular goal, which is related to political objectives or religious doctrine.<sup>52</sup>

This is also coupled with the factor of religious differentiation in the general public. Religious differentiation can lead either to the attitude of intolerance or mutual respect between adherents of each religion. Coupled with the condition of a pluralistic Indonesian society, tolerance and mutual respect are efforts to prevent conflicts from arising. However, most people who lack understanding of the nature of religion are people who have high religious enthusiasm but shallow religious knowledge, or are easily

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<sup>49</sup> Carluna IXHI Carmin, "Kerusuhan 10 Oktober Tahun 1996 Situbondo," *Avatara* 6, no. 1 (2018): 138, <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/avatara/article/view/22406>.

<sup>50</sup> Ribut Tulus Rahayu, "Konflik Cina – Jawa Di Kota Pekalongan Tahun 1995," *Journal of Indonesian History* 5, no. 1 (2016): 6, <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/jih/article/view/19723>.

<sup>51</sup> Koeswinarno Koeswinarno and Fakhrudin Fakhrudin, "Persepsi Penyuluh Agama Tentang Konflik Berbasis Agama ( Kasus Ahmadiyah dan Tijani di Kabupaten Sukabumi )," *Jurnal Multikultural & Multireligius* 12, no. 2 (2013): 29, <https://jurnalharmoni.kemenag.go.id/index.php/harmoni/article/view/178>.

<sup>52</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Religious Dimensions of Political Conflict and Violence," *American Sociological Association* 33, no. 1 (2015): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275115572153>.

indoctrinated by teachings that justify violence in the name of religion by believing in a sacred mission to eradicate evil by wrongful and unjust means.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

Indonesian society, which adheres to various religions, can be a site of violence and conflict. From the cases of violence and political conflict discussed above, religion was a major factor. The religious dimension is a major factor in these conflicts. Religion was used as a tool to gain power or to achieve the political ideals of the elites who exploited and even created the conflict in the first place. The relationship between religion and the various political conflicts is due to hyper-commitment. This fosters radical attitudes and behaviors and justifies forms of violence. However, the essence of religion is to create peace and tranquility in society. In addition, the factor of religious differentiation also contributes to creating a conflict, due to the lack of tolerance and mutual respect between adherents of different religions.

In addition, elite political groups also use religion to achieve their practical goals and maintain their high position. This indicates the existence of identity politics. Religion is used as a tool for the realization of these practical political goals. Bigotry and an ideological approach to religion in the context of Indonesian society has resulted in many conflicts and acts of violence.

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<sup>53</sup> Rudiansyah, "Dimensi Sosio – Politik Konflik Ambon."

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