

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE PRACTICES: A STUDY IN DOKO DISTRICT, BLITAR REGENCY

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Abstract

This study aims to understand public perceptions of religious tolerance practices in Doko District, Blitar Regency, an area inhabited by a multicultural community with diverse religious backgrounds including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and symbolic interactionism theory, the study explores how tolerance values are shaped through social interaction, symbols, and interfaith communication. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews and participant observations of local socio-religious activities. The results reveal that the Doko community exhibits a high level of interreligious tolerance, supported by factors such as a culture of mutual cooperation, strong kinship ties, and communicative leadership. Each religion expresses tolerance based on its own teachings, yet collectively upholds the values of unity and peace. This study highlights the importance of cultivating tolerance through real social practices to foster a harmonious society in diversity.

Keywords: Tolerance, Religion, Multicultural

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami persepsi publik terhadap praktik toleransi beragama di Kecamatan Doko, Kabupaten Blitar, sebuah wilayah yang dihuni oleh masyarakat multikultural dengan latar belakang agama yang beragam seperti Islam, Kristen, Hindu, dan Buddha. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan teori interaksionisme simbolik, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana nilai-nilai toleransi dibentuk melalui interaksi sosial, simbol, dan komunikasi lintas agama. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif terhadap kegiatan sosial-keagamaan masyarakat setempat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Desa Doko memiliki tingkat toleransi antarumat beragama yang tinggi, didukung oleh faktor-faktor seperti budaya gotong royong, ikatan kekerabatan yang kuat, dan kepemimpinan yang komunikatif. Setiap agama di desa ini menampilkan bentuk toleransi berdasarkan nilai ajaran masing-masing, namun tetap menjunjung nilai-nilai kebersamaan dan perdamaian. Studi ini menegaskan pentingnya membangun toleransi melalui praktik sosial nyata untuk menciptakan kehidupan masyarakat yang harmonis dalam keragaman.

Kata kunci: Toleransi, Agama, Multikultural



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INTRODUCTION

The term "religious harmony" is often associated with the meaning of tolerance. Tolerance implies mutual understanding, mutual respect, and openness in a spirit of brotherhood. If this meaning is used as a foundation in community life, it will create a harmonious social order that is desired by all humans. In Islamic teachings, the value of tolerance is highly valued. However, the concept of religious tolerance in Islam does not mean equating all religions or justifying the teachings and rituals of other religions, because these concerns the faith and belief that must be upheld by every Muslim. Tolerance in Islam does not include aspects of belief and worship, because in the Islamic perspective, the only religion that is approved by God is Islam.

Tolerance is more focused on social relations and interactions between religious communities in community life (muamalah). Indonesia is a highly diverse country, encompassing ethnicity, culture, and religion. Therefore, fostering tolerance among these groups is crucial to prevent conflicts that could escalate into violence. Unfortunately, within the context of religious pluralism, mutual respect in Indonesia remains relatively low. This is evident in numerous cases of conflict often accompanied by acts of violence in the name of religion. This phenomenon undoubtedly poses a serious threat to the integrity and unity of the Indonesian nation.¹ Freedom of religion is a principle that guarantees the right of every individual to choose, believe in, and practice religious teachings according to their respective beliefs.

The state has a role to guarantee this right by not imposing a particular religion or belief on its citizens. The primary goal of religious freedom is to create a harmonious religious life. Harmony between religious communities does not simply mean the absence of conflict or debate between beliefs, but rather the creation of a shared life based on love, respect, and a spirit of mutual support. True harmony will have a positive impact in the form of peace. Peace itself does not mean eliminating differences, but rather appreciating them. In peace, uniformity is not a requirement; the key is mutual respect. Religious tolerance includes acceptance of differences in beliefs, especially those related to faith and belief in God. Every individual must be given the freedom to choose their religion and be respected in practicing its teachings. Tolerance arises from close social interactions within society. In social life, humans cannot avoid interacting with others, whether of the same religion or of different faiths. Therefore, religious communities should continue to foster a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere through a spirit of tolerance, so that social stability is maintained and the potential for ideological conflict between religious adherents can be avoided.²

¹ Ibnu Rusydi and Siti Zolehah, "Makna Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama Dalam Konteks Keislaman Dan Keindonesian," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 170–81, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1161580>.

² Muhammad Jalari and Muhammad Fajrul Falaah, *Toleransi Pendekatan Kearifan Lokal*, n.d., 242–50.

In religious life, tolerant behavior is a primary prerequisite for every individual who desires a form of safe and respectful communal life. This is expected to create good interaction and understanding in their obligations in social life consisting of various differences in ethnicity, race, religion and nation. The word "tolerantia" comes from Latin which means "leniency," "gentleness," "lightness," and "patience." Historically, this term became a motto that underlies the values of brotherhood, equality, and freedom that later became the basis of the French Revolution. In English, tolerance is defined as an attitude of accepting, acknowledging, and respecting the beliefs of others without having to agree with them. Meanwhile, in Arabic it is known as *tasamuh*, which means mutual agreement or providing convenience. According to the Indonesian dictionary, tolerance is defined as broadness in thinking, an open attitude towards differences, allowing others to have different views or feelings, and not wanting to limit the freedom of thought and belief of others. Experts provide various definitions of tolerance. One of them, Micheal Wazler, stated that tolerance is important to practice both in private and public life. One goal is to create a harmonious and peaceful life amidst differences in history, culture, and identity between community groups.³ Indonesia officially recognizes six religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Each religion has its own distinct beliefs and worship practices, in accordance with the teachings held by its adherents. This is in line with the provisions of Article 29 Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, which states that "The State guarantees the freedom of every citizen to embrace their respective religion and to worship according to their respective religion and beliefs." Every individual has the right to choose, determine, and practice their religion and beliefs freely without pressure or coercion from any party. Therefore, the implementation of tolerance among religious adherents is crucial to creating a harmonious and peaceful society.

Society itself is a group of individuals forming a system, either open or closed, where social interactions occur that create interdependence among members. Thus, society can be understood as a group of people interacting with each other and sharing a common goal. In this context, society plays a crucial role in fostering and implementing tolerance, and is an indicator of the success of implementing these values.⁴In this study, the sociology of religion serves as the analytical foundation for understanding how tolerance and the public perceive the practice of religious tolerance. This study aims to delve deeper into how religious communities in Doko Village, Blitar Regency, apply the values of tolerance towards other religions.

³ Ine Ratu Fadliah, "Menyikapi Perbedaan Dalam Islam Sebagai Wujud Toleransi Umat Beragama," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Sigli* 5, no. 2 (2022): 222–31, <https://doi.org/10.47647/jsh.v5i2.928>.

⁴ F. S. B. Butar and D. Sari, *Implementasi Sikap Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama: Antar Umat, Beragama, Sikap Toleransi*, no. 1 (2023): 395–99.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Symbolic Interactionism Theory (George Herbert Mead & Herbert Blumer)

This theory views social reality as being shaped by interactions between individuals who mutually interpret symbols, meanings, and language. In the context of religious tolerance, symbolic interactionism explains how society forms a shared understanding of the values of tolerance through social symbols such as interfaith greetings, holiday greetings, or participation in shared religious activities. The symbolic interactionism theory was put forward by several sociologists to challenge the radical behaviorism theory pioneered by Watson. These sociologists include John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Herbert Blumer. This theory was put forward in depth by George Herbert Mead.⁵

In everyday life, these symbols can strengthen harmonious relationships or even create prejudice if interpreted differently by different groups. Therefore, public perception of tolerance practices is heavily influenced by the communication and social interactions that occur within a community.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative study type. This approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand public perceptions of the practice of religious tolerance in Doko District, Blitar Regency. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, and social and cultural dynamics that shape public attitudes toward interfaith harmony. Qualitative research methods are research approaches that aim to understand social, cultural, or human behavioral phenomena in depth through the collection of non-numerical data. This research focuses on the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups within a specific context, rather than on statistical measurement and analysis.

Qualitative research methods involve direct interaction between researchers and research subjects, and allow researchers to gain in-depth insights into the complexities and variations within a given context. Qualitative data collection techniques include observation, interviews, content analysis, and other techniques that are more open to interpretation.⁶

Data collection technique

Data collection was carried out using several methods:

⁵ Erwan Efendi et al., "Interaksionisme Simbolik Dan Praktis," *Da'watuna: Journal of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting* 4, no. 3 (2024): 1088–95, <https://doi.org/10.47467/dawatuna.v4i3.514>.

⁶ Raden Isma Anggraini M. Fathun Niam, Emma Rumahlewang, Hesti Umiyati, Ni Putu Sinta Dewi, Suci Atiningsih, Tati Haryati, Illia Seldon Magfiroh and Farid Rullyana Puspitaningrum Mamengko, Safira Fathin, Maria Septian Riasanti Mola, Ahmad Anif Syaifudin, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, in *General and Specific Research*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2024).

1. In-depth interviews

Conducted face-to-face with informants who play a significant role in socio-religious life, the interviews were semi-structured to allow researchers to flexibly gather information.

2. Participatory Observation

Researchers directly observed community activities such as religious holiday celebrations, interfaith mutual cooperation, and interfaith dialogue. These observations recorded attitudes, actions, and expressions of tolerance in real life.

The analysis was conducted thematically by identifying patterns of perception, forms of tolerance practices, and sociocultural factors that support or hinder interfaith harmony. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and member checking to ensure the validity and credibility of the information obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islam is a religion of harmony or tolerance because Islam came to Indonesia not through colonization but through hospitality and mutual respect brought by traders and Muslim preachers who were polite and open, this made Islam very easily accepted by the Indonesian people. Islam, the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad SAW in Indonesia, is very tolerant. This is in line with the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet which was implemented by the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his followers, because the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet never forced others to follow Islam, but with deep understanding, understanding and not playing around, even having the freedom to choose a religion according to their heart's desire. Recognizing religious diversity cannot be denied because it is part of the sunnah of Allah, respecting and appreciating differences in beliefs.⁷

The Concept of Tolerance from the Perspective of Each Religion

1. Islam: Tolerance, in Islamic perspective, often called as-samahah (Arabic), is an attitude of mutual respect and cooperation amidst ethnic, cultural, political, or religious differences. Islam teaches that there is no compulsion in religion, and every individual has the freedom to choose their own beliefs. Islam was revealed by Allah SWT not only to maintain its existence as a religion, but also to recognize the existence of other religions and grant them the right to coexist while respecting their adherents.⁸ Islam emphasizes the importance of

⁷ Arlina et al., "Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam," *Al-Ubudiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam* 4, no. 1 (2023): 44–51, <https://doi.org/10.55623/au.v4i1.143>.

⁸ Laila Hami Harahap, "Penguatan Kecerdasan Sikap Multikultural (Sosiologis)," *Journal of Islamic Education El Madani* 2, no. 1 (2023): 53–59, <https://doi.org/10.55438/jiee.v2i1.62>.

living in peace and harmony with people of different faiths. Islam teaches Muslims to respect differences in religion, ethnicity, and culture and not to force others to adopt their religion. In situations of conflict, Muslims are also asked to act fairly towards others and not to violate their rights. In Islam, tolerance does not mean surrendering or joining another faith. There are boundaries that must not be crossed, especially those related to aqidah (belief) and worship. In Islam, the concept of tolerance is based on verses in the Quran, such as "There is no compulsion in religion" (Quran 2:256) and "For you is your religion, and for us is our religion" (Quran 2:6).

2. Christianity: In Christianity, tolerance is an important principle that emphasizes mutual respect and acceptance of differences, especially in matters of faith and religion. Tolerance in Christian teachings is not only limited to faith, but also includes an attitude of mutual respect, love, and kindness towards others, even those who are different. Christianity emphasizes the importance of having love for one's fellow human beings, which is the basis for tolerance. Because of this love, Christians are asked to respect the freedom of each person to hold their own beliefs in matters that are not fundamental. In Christian belief, tolerance is not just understanding, but also active actions to appreciate differences, accept diversity, and live in harmony with others, regardless of their beliefs. Tolerance is always linked to love. Jesus' teaching to love our enemies and pray for those who hurt us shows how important it is to remain open and tolerant towards those who may disagree or agree with us. Tolerance helps Christians to establish good, harmonious, and dynamic communication with others, including people of other religions. Christian religious education adheres to Jesus, who in his teachings taught how important it is to love, without having to see any differences that exist, so we must also adhere to his teachings to instill respect without seeing differences.⁹
3. Hinduism: In Hinduism, tolerance is embodied through several key concepts that teach unity, oneness, and compassion among people, as well as respect for differences. These concepts include Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Tat Tvam Asi, and Tri Hita Karana.¹⁰

Concepts of Tolerance in Hinduism:

- a. Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam: This concept means "the world is one family." It emphasizes that all living beings in this world are brothers and sisters, regardless of religious, ethnic, cultural, or other backgrounds. This teaching encourages Hindus to

⁹ Ferdi Eka Darma et al., "Pentingnya Pendidikan Agama Kristen Untuk Membangun Toleransi Pada Masyarakat Majemuk," *Anugerah : Jurnal Pendidikan Kristiani Dan Kateketik Katolik* 1, no. 4 (2024): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.61132/anugerah.v1i4.195>.

¹⁰ Dena Agustina, "Tiga Ajaran Hindu Dalam Menumbuhkan Sikap Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin* 3, no. 2 (2023): 185–97, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpiu.24163>.

treat everyone with compassion and without discrimination.

- b. Tat Twam Asi: This concept means "You are I" or "I am You." It teaches the unity of oneself with others, as well as the unity of all living beings with the universe. By understanding this concept, Hindus are expected to develop empathy and compassion for all beings.
 - c. Tri Hita Karana: This concept emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships between humans and God (parahyangan), humans and humans (pawongan), and humans and nature (palemahan). By maintaining harmony in these three aspects, it is hoped that peace and tolerance will be created in society.
4. Buddhism: From a Buddhist perspective, tolerance is not merely an attitude of mutual respect, but also a reflection of the teachings of loving-kindness (Metta) and compassion (Karuna) towards all living beings. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of understanding and accepting differences, both in beliefs and perspectives, as part of the existing diversity. Pluralism in Buddhism accepts the differences that exist within Buddhism and then accepts and acknowledges that each individual has the freedom to choose a spiritual path that aligns with their respective beliefs and understanding. When someone holds the belief and practices of the Theravada school, there are certainly differences with someone who holds the belief and practices of the Mahayana school. However, these differences are not considered a form of division within Buddhism because of these differences. Because both can be respected as forms of expression in studying the Dharma.¹¹Tolerance is built on the concepts of mettā, meaning universal love, and karunā, meaning compassion. These two principles encourage people to treat others with compassion regardless of their religion, race, or perspective on life. Buddhists are taught to avoid all forms of violence, both physical and verbal, as demonstrated by the principle of ahimsa (non-harming). Tolerance is also reflected in the Kalama Sutta, where the Buddha encourages his followers not to accept teachings dogmatically, but rather through clear understanding and personal experience. This demonstrates the recognition of freedom of thought and belief in Buddhist teachings. Thus, Buddhism teaches tolerance not only as an ethical value, but also as a life principle that fosters harmonious relationships between religious communities and between individuals in a pluralistic society.

¹¹ Panir Selwen and Winja Kumari, "Transformasi Pluralisme Dalam Agama Buddha: Buddhayana Sebagai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," *Kamaya: Jurnal Ilmu Agama* 7, no. 2 (2024): 180–91, <https://doi.org/10.37329/kamaya.v7i2.3254>.

Level of Tolerance for Each Religion in Doko Village

According to the results of interviews with several religious figures in Doko Village, Blitar Regency:

Tolerance between religious communities is a crucial pillar in maintaining social harmony, especially in areas with diverse beliefs. In Doko Village, Blitar Regency, the diverse community reflects a high level of tolerance among religious adherents, particularly Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. The social life of the community in this village serves as a clear example of how religious differences do not hinder peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

From the perspective of Muslims in Doko Village, according to Sudaryanto, tolerance is highly valued. This is reflected in the strong bonds of kinship among residents, the enduring culture of mutual cooperation, and the communicative leadership of religious and community leaders. Community leaders actively foster interfaith communication and cooperation in various social and religious activities, such as joint religious study groups, community service, and village activities involving all elements of the community. However, there are still conflicts within several Islamic organizations in Doko Village.

Meanwhile, Christians in this village also demonstrate a strong sense of tolerance. According to Mr. Andrias Jemari, a Christian community leader, the existence of a social group involving all religions has created a space for positive dialogue and togetherness. The level of mutual cooperation in Doko Village is very high, allowing Christians to feel comfortable and involved in communal activities without discrimination.

According to Mr. Supandi, a Hindu resident of Doko Village, tolerance is reflected in their active participation in interfaith activities, such as communal prayers during Independence Day celebrations on August 17th and the village cleaning tradition. They also demonstrate solidarity during Eid al-Fitr celebrations, where they help maintain security and order and offer greetings to Muslims as a sign of respect for differing beliefs.

Tolerance is also deeply rooted in the lives of Buddhists in Doko Village. The principles of compassion and peace, core to Buddhist teachings, encourage followers to live in harmony with others. They actively participate in interfaith social activities, celebrate religious holidays with other communities, and participate in community service activities involving the entire village.

Overall, the community of Doko Village in Blitar Regency is a living example of interfaith tolerance that thrives and develops organically. Local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, mutual respect, and communicative leadership play a significant role in maintaining this harmony. The four religions present in this village demonstrate that living with diversity can be a strength, not a threat, to social unity and peace.

Based on the research findings, it is clear that religious tolerance in Doko District is not

merely a slogan, but is manifested concretely in everyday social life. This practice of tolerance is inseparable from the role of the community and religious leaders in building open communication and participation in interfaith activities. The multicultural context in Doko, consisting of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists, provides a broad space for interaction and becomes a social arena for the formation of values of tolerance through symbols and meanings shared collectively, in accordance with the framework of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism theory explains that social meaning is formed from continuous interaction and is interpreted by individuals. In this case, social symbols such as interfaith greetings, joint celebrations of major holidays, and interfaith community service serve as powerful symbols in shaping collective awareness of the importance of tolerance. Residents' participation in joint socio-religious activities, such as visiting each other during holidays or maintaining security during celebrations of other religions, reflects social values that support community cohesion and harmony. Local cultures such as mutual cooperation and kinship ties serve as highly effective social capital in maintaining values of tolerance. Practices such as helping to build places of worship for other religions, working together in village events, and interfaith involvement in community discussion forums show that the people of Doko Village do not simply live side by side, but live together in a spirit of mutual respect.

However, internal dynamics also persist, as noted in the findings, indicating tensions between Islamic organizations, reflecting that tolerance is not simply formed without conflict. This suggests that despite strong interfaith harmony, attention must be paid to internal harmony within a single religion to prevent it from becoming a source of conflict. This highlights the importance of a dialogical and educational approach between religious communities, both internally and externally, to strengthen the foundations of existing tolerance. Overall, these findings support the notion that religious tolerance in Doko is a social construct influenced by local cultural values, positive symbolic interactions, and leadership that supports diversity. Tolerance is not merely an individual awareness but is shaped within a broader social framework that prioritizes togetherness, mutual understanding, and concrete social practices.

Thus, it can be concluded that the practice of religious tolerance in Doko District is a concrete manifestation of social harmony built through active and positive interfaith interactions. Strong local cultural values, communicative leadership, and a collective awareness of the importance of coexisting despite differences are the main foundations for creating a harmonious and peaceful society. This study demonstrates that tolerance cannot simply be understood as a concept but must be instilled through real and ongoing social experiences in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the level of interfaith tolerance in Doko District, Blitar Regency, is relatively high and represents the practice of harmonious multicultural living. Through a qualitative approach and symbolic interactionism theory, it was found that tolerance is not only understood as an abstract concept, but is manifested concretely through social interactions, interfaith symbols, and active participation in joint activities. The people of Doko Village, whether Muslim, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist, respect each other's beliefs, maintain good communication, and build cooperation in various aspects of social and religious life.

Factors such as a culture of mutual cooperation, strong kinship ties, and the communicative leadership of religious and community leaders are key to creating harmony. Despite theological differences, communities do not view them as threats, but rather as treasures that must be preserved with mutual respect. This research emphasizes the importance of fostering values of tolerance through social practices, interfaith education, and strengthening local cultures to maintain peace and unity in a pluralistic society.

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