

# Indonesia's Religious Conflicts: Recent Developments, Causes and Policy Implications for Peace

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## Summary

Since the introduction of democracy, political and societal conflicts have become more visible in Indonesia. This article focuses on religious conflicts, highlights the recent developments and patterns, and analyzes the state's insufficient performance in protecting all of its citizens. The current Indonesian government tends to react rather passively to religious intolerance, discrimination and violence, and the many Indonesian non-governmental organizations and individuals committed to interreligious dialogue are running in place. Three main causes are identified that trigger religious discrimination and violence in Indonesia – namely, the legal framework and its implementation, Islamization and Christianization, and the military and police. The thesis of this article is that policy engagement with these three factors is crucial in order to foster religious peace.

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## Introduction

Since the introduction of democracy in Indonesia, political and societal conflicts that were suppressed during its authoritarian past have become more visible. This article focuses on religious conflicts and analyzes the recent developments and patterns, as well as the main conflict parties and victims. A main goal of this article is to demonstrate the state's passivity and, therefore, insufficient performance in granting religious self-determination to all of its citizens and protecting them from intolerance and violence. The structural, historical, juridical and educational causes at the heart of many conflicts are delineated, and policy recommendations for peace are given. The paper highlights three factors that are important contributions to the research on the current religious conflicts – namely, the legal framework and its implementation, Islamization and Christianization, and the military and police. The thesis of this article is that a reformation of the first factor along with transformations of the actors' behaviors associated with the second and third factors are necessary in order to foster religious peace in Indonesia. The current government has been standing on the sidelines for years, reacting rather passively towards religious discrimination and violence. Furthermore, there are many Indonesian non-governmental organizations

(NGO) and individuals committed to interreligious dialogue, but who are simply running in place due to insufficient financial funding. My analysis is based primarily on twenty interviews conducted in January and February 2012 in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Ambon with Indonesian intellectuals and NGO activists who work for religious harmony. I also refer to several publications on the topic of religious conflict in Indonesia, especially those published in the Indonesian market.

This article is structured as follows: Without detailing specific religious conflicts, I first give a very brief overview of the recent developments in conflicts in Indonesia. Then, the focus of the paper turns to the religious conflicts in the country, referring to patterns, categorizations and statistics on religious conflicts that can be found in current literature on the subject. After that, I describe five serious, current religious conflicts/debates that illustrate the discriminatory and/or passive role the Indonesian government plays. Next, I explain the main causes of the conflict-ridden religious situation – namely, the legal framework and its implementation, the trends toward Islamization and Christianization, and the poor performance of the military and the police. Finally, I propose measures of how to promote religious harmony in Indonesia's future.

### **Indonesia's conflicts: The overall picture**

Since the implementation of democracy in 1998, social and political conflicts, both violent and non-violent, have become increasingly articulated by the Indonesian society. This is because greater space has been given to the articulation of grievances and demands, which, in certain cases, has led to a relative mitigation of conflicts through political instruments like decentralization or the granting of special autonomy status (for example, in West Papua and Aceh).

For the most part, though, the characteristics of conflicts have been in flux since 1998. For example, a change in the geographic dimension of violent conflicts can be observed: While at the beginning of the democratization violence mostly occurred on the outer islands, recent years have shown that conflicts are less restricted by area and are, instead, “on the move” (Institut Titian Perdamaian 2010: 1). Another recent trend is the increase in organized crime that is taking over public security in some regions. Especially in large cities, gangs of petty criminals – so-called “*preman*” – act as security patrols and rule over whole areas, which in many cases leads to riots. The state largely fails to exercise its authority over public security and to create jobs for the socially disadvantaged. Unemployment is a structural factor that has resulted in the formation of an informal job sector that is closely knit with the criminal shadow economy. In addition, *preman* and the police cooperate frequently with one another (Institut Titian Perdamaian 2010: 9–10).

A particularly noticeable rise in violent conflicts was counted for the year 2010 by the Indonesian NGO Institut Titian Perdamaian based on online media observation (Institut Titian Perdamaian 2010). By June 2010, 117 conflict situations had been

recorded for the year up to that point, while for the whole preceding year 75 conflicts were recorded. This disparity can be traced back to provincial elections that were held in 244 provinces in 2010. The decentralization of the distribution of power fostered clientelism and patronage systems in some provinces. Local politicians often see themselves as “little kings” (*raja-raja kecil*) and try to reinforce their power through criminal networks. Conflicts between different networks usually intensify and surface during election times, so local elections can be identified as a major trigger for violent conflicts (Institut Titian Perdamaian 2010: 6). This conflict pattern reveals the weakness of the Indonesian state to secure peaceful political processes in the provinces. In 1998 Indonesia entered an era of power struggles that were openly and often violently carried out, conflicts that had been simmering under the Suharto regime. In many cases the outcomes of these struggles remain unclear.

## The religious conflicts

### Overview: Patterns and issues

Analyzing religious conflicts in Indonesia leads to the conclusion that the number, characteristics and locations of the conflicts have changed over time. A classification of Indonesia’s recent past into three distinct phases – the final years of the New Order dictatorship (1990–1998), the beginning of the democratic transition (1998–2004) and the established democracy (2004–present) – shows that most religious conflicts happened during the phase of democratic transition. This phase was characterized by communal conflicts between Muslims and Christians, while the established democracy phase mostly displays intrareligious conflicts between the Sunni majority and Muslim minority groups.

Moreover, location seems to have a large impact on the kind of religious conflict that is taking place in Indonesia. The outer islands of Sulawesi and Maluku can be identified with communal conflicts between the Muslim and Christian populations, in contrast to West Java, where the concern lies with discrimination against Muslim religious minorities. Greater Jakarta is dominated by moral conflicts over the social acceptance of alcohol, gambling, prostitution and pornography as well as certain terrorist acts. Most instigators of religious conflicts are regular citizens, followed by terrorist organizations, and religious organizations without any terrorist ideology (Ali-Fauzi et al. 2009).

Another classification distinguishes between three types of religious conflicts in Indonesia that took place at different times: religious riots (1995–1997), religious pogroms (1998–2001) and Islamic jihad (2000–present). According to this classification the absolute zenith of religious violence was between the years of 1999 and 2001, which were characterized by the interreligious escalations in Maluku, North Maluku and Central Sulawesi. By the end of 2001 a gradual de-escalation of conflicts was reached in these regions (Sidel 2006).

The phenomenon of Islamic terrorism marked a threat, particularly at the beginning of the democratic phase, best exemplified by the deadly attacks by Jemaah Islamiyah in Bali in 2002 and 2005. After this terrorist organization dissolved and split up into different, smaller groups, the threat of Islamic terrorism became less relevant. In 2011 sporadic bomb attacks occurred; others were thwarted. The thwarted letter bomb attack targeted at Ulil Abshar Abdalla, the founder of Jaringan Islam Liberal (Liberal Islamic Network), particularly caught the public's attention. Other attacks were a letter bomb attack in a church in Solo that left 28 people injured, a thwarted attack on a church in Serpong/Banten, and a suicide attack in a mosque situated in a police station in which 25 people were wounded. This particular police station was selected because it was active in a number of arrests that lead to Islamic terrorists being sentenced to death.

The intensity of the conflicts in terms of casualties has been declining since the zenith from 1999 to 2001. Since then the conflict pattern has changed: nowadays, conflicts take place primarily between the Sunni majority and the Muslim minorities – however, this is not to say that interreligious conflicts do not also transpire. As will be elaborated later, the current conflicts are rooted in Indonesia's legal framework, which constrains religious freedom. Therefore, the Indonesian state is an important player in the conflict-ridden religious situation. Through its often passive reactions to violations of religious freedom and attacks on religious minorities, the state positions itself increasingly in favor of a conservative, intolerant, anti-pluralistic interpretation of Islam. Because perpetrators of religious violence are frequently neither caught nor adequately punished, the mocking nickname *Negeri Autopilot* (“autopilot state”) is used in the media and by everyday citizens to refer to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's government (2004–present).

The negative image presented here of the current government is corroborated by the growing religious intolerance; so far, 2011 has seen the most cases of religious freedom violations of any year during Yudhoyono's mandate. An overall increase of 18 percent in comparison to the preceding year was noted for 2011, equaling 64 violations in 2010 and 93 cases in 2011. The violations registered for 2011 are subdivided into the following categories: prohibition or constraint on the exercise of religious duty/religious service (49 cases), intimidation/violent threat by the state (20 cases), allowance of religious violence to occur by the police (11 cases), use of violence and forced conversion (9 cases), ban on parish or prayer houses (9 cases), and criminalization of a faith (4 cases). Many of these violations were accompanied by violence – some casualties were even documented. The group most negatively affected by the religiously motivated incidents of 2011 was the Ahmadiyya Muslim minority (The Wahid Institute 2011: 2).

The regional dissemination and concentration of the incidents in 2011 must also be considered: Most cases of religiously motivated violence took place in West Java (55 cases), followed by Banten (9 cases) and Aceh (5 cases). The remaining

violations happened in East Java, Central Java, South Sulawesi and in other smaller regions. The high concentration of cases in West Java can be explained by the historical basis of the Darul Islam movement in this area. This movement was active in the struggle for independence against the Dutch from 1942 on and fought for the establishment of an Islamic state. Until the 1960s Darul Islam undertook guerrilla operations against the Indonesian state. Although the movement dissolved in the 1960s, many splinter groups emerged from Darul Islam that follow very similar ideologies. Because of this historical Islamist tradition, Salafi and Wahhabi organizations and educational facilities dominate the region of West Java today, while moderate, pluralism-friendly Muslim organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are less rooted and are not able to work as an ideological counter-balance (The Wahid Institute 2011: 53–54).

Although there is no current quantitative data available, my impression is that the intensity of the average religious conflict in Indonesia is on the decline, while the number of conflicts is on the rise.<sup>1</sup>

## **Recent religious conflicts and debates**

### ***Attacks on followers of Ahmadiyya Islam***

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community has been a major victim of recent religious intolerance in Indonesia. Radical civil groups destroyed their mosques at least twice since 2011. On February 6, 2011, around 1,500 citizens attacked a group of Ahmadis in the village of Cikeusik in Banten. Before the eyes of the police, three Ahmadis were killed. A video provides evidence of the police passively observing the aggressions, which were even extended to a corpse, which was beaten for minutes. Twelve men were identified as the main aggressors and were sentenced to only 3–6 months jail time by the court of Serang. This mild sentence lies far below the maximum penalty of 12 years for murder. Furthermore, the court concluded that the Ahmadis provoked the violent outbreak because of their refusal to follow police orders to leave their houses. One Ahmadi, whose hand was nearly hacked off by the aggressors, was sentenced to six months of jail for “provocation.” In 2006 thousands of citizens attacked an Ahmadiyya community on Lombok. The houses of forty families were totally destroyed and as a result 137 people were left homeless. A refugee camp was built for them in Mataram, where they continue to live under bad conditions (Nul Hakim 2011; The Jakarta Globe 2011).

### ***Attacks on adherents of Shia Islam***

On December 29, 2011, hundreds of Sunni citizens attacked a Shia *pesantren* compound in Sampang on Madura. Buildings were burned down, leaving 300 people, 155 of them children, homeless. Whether the state is going to reconstruct the *pesantren* or whether it will be relocated remains unclear.

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1 I draw this conclusion from the interviews conducted.

The relationship between the Sunni majority and the Shia minority was further strained on January 26, 2012, when Minister of Religious Affairs Suryadharma Ali, a member of the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), called Shiism a misguided interpretation of Islam whose adherents could not be an accepted part of the *ummah*. He based his opinion on an older *fatwa* released by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI: Council of Indonesian Islamic Scholars) as well as on one made public in 1980 by the Nahdlatul Ulama. In response, NU Chairman Said Aqil Siroj declared the 1980 *fatwa* invalid, having been contradicted in 2006 by another NU *fatwa* that explicitly stated that Shiism is not misguided. In contrast to the NU, the MUI did not take a firm stance in the debate. Even though Suryadharma Ali apologized for his statement a few days later, it is likely that this statement, since it was made by a government representative, has harmed the public image of the Shia (The Jakarta Post 2012).

### ***The building of churches and the case of GKI Yasmin***

An increasing matter of religious conflict surrounds the building of churches and the hindrance thereof as well as their demolition. A new law from 2006 on the building of churches did indeed make the bureaucratic process of granting building permits more transparent; on the other hand, it introduced additional legal obstacles. Aside from that, a growing civil opposition against the construction of prayer houses for religious minorities can be observed. Thus, the Muslim population's opposition to the building of churches in their neighborhoods rose from 51.4 percent opposed in 2008 to 57.8 percent opposed in 2010 (International Crisis Group 2010: 16 Fn113). Furthermore, violent attacks on churches are increasing. Violent conflicts between Christian communities and the Muslim majority population – which has sometimes led to local governments closing churches – are especially high in West Java. The city of Bekasi on the outskirts of Jakarta is a stronghold for this kind of conflict. This can be traced back to the population density of the region as well as to the high profile of evangelical churches that employ a strategic missionary agenda (International Crisis Group: 2010). The high presence of Salafist- and Wahhabi-oriented Islam due to the area's historical connection to the Islamist Darul Islam movement also triggers religious clashes.

A current hot topic that has garnered widespread media attention is the case of the Christian community Gereja Kristen Indonesia Yasmin (GKI Yasmin) in Bogor, West Java. Since 2002 this Presbyterian church has been unable to access its newly built prayer house. In spite of the church's conformance to all necessary requirements, the mayor of Bogor withdrew the legal building permit it had received in 2006 from the local government. A barrier prevents the church's members from entering the building, and they are therefore forced to hold their services on the street. GKI Yasmin's weekly services in front of the church are regularly accompanied by demonstrations and attacks by Muslim residents. Even though Indonesia's High Court found that the retroactive revocation of the building permit was an

illegal act, the reality for GKI Yasmin did not change. This case shows how the decentralization policy in Indonesia has given more authority to local politicians, who may choose to ignore law and order. The protests by the Muslim residents support the mayor and foster conflict, while the government in Jakarta has acted rather passively. Jakarta bows to the loud voices among the Muslim majority who oppose GKI Yasmin (Ali-Fauzi et al. 2011).

### ***Discrimination against Buddhists***

Because the Buddhist minority is simply too small to pose a threat to the status quo of Islam in Indonesia, the relationship between members of these two faiths is generally peaceful (Ekoputro 2011). Nevertheless, collectively, many Indonesians connect Buddhism with “the Chinese ethnos,” since this ethnic minority dominates the Buddhist religion in Indonesia. There is a prevalent stereotype of a connection between the Chinese ethnos and economic dominance, and sometimes even communism. Because of its “Chinese image,” Buddhism’s adherents are viewed negatively by some and are being discriminated (Interview with Jayamedho 2012). Deadly attacks on ethnic Chinese like the ones from 1965 and 1998 are rare these days, but there are occasional conflicts over the construction of Buddhist temples.

In 2011 in the city of Tanjung Balai in North Sumatra a conflict broke out between the Buddhist community, most of its members being ethnic Chinese, the Muslim residents and the local government. After a Buddha sculpture was installed on the roof of a Mahayana temple as a celebratory act under the auspices of the mayor and representatives of the Ministry for Religious Affairs, protests broke out and threats of violence were made by Wahhabi groups as well as by the organization Gerakan Islam Bersatu (GIB: United Islam Movement). The statue was seen as a provocation because it was higher than the roofs of the local mosques. The local branch of the MUI also expressed its dissatisfaction with the construction and demanded through a *fatwa* that the statue be removed. This public pressure caused the mayor and other representatives of the local government to withdraw their support for the statue and to order its removal. The progression of this incident demonstrates the typical caving of the Indonesian central and local governments in the face of conservative or Islamist protest (Harsono 2011).

### ***Non-acceptance of atheism***

Since Indonesian law does not accept atheism, citizens who do not believe in transcendental powers are forced to avow themselves to one of the six officially acknowledged religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism) for the bureaucratic record. Not declaring oneself a member of one of these religions on paper automatically leads to discrimination and the denial of public social security services. Being judged guilty of blasphemy can lead to a five-year prison sentence. An open discussion taking into account an atheist worldview cannot occur in the current societal environment of Indonesia.

That it is dangerous to broach the topic of atheism was evinced in January 2012, when civil servant Alexander A. from Sumatra posted the statement “God does not exist” on the wall of a Facebook group he founded, “Ateis Minang.” Shortly after his post, a Muslim mob stormed his office and attacked him violently. He was immediately put under arrest and was later sentenced to two years and six months of prison and ordered to pay the extremely high fine of 100,000,000 Indonesian rupiah (approximately 8,000 Euros) (The Jakarta Post 2012a). In July 2012 Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court Mohammad Mahfud MD publicly explained that no one could be punished for being an atheist (or a communist) as long as they did not form an organization that acts against the state's Pancasila (five principles) ideology (The Jakarta Post 2012b). However, this willingness to be flexible was not backed up by any legal decision, nor was it further elaborated. Needless to say, it also did not lead to the annulment of Alexander's punishment.

## Causes

### The legal framework and its implementation

The legal framework and its contradictions are crucial factors of religious conflicts in Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> In many cases, the legal framework is contradictory in itself or the legal practice of the law is neither consequent nor fair for all parties involved. Even though the state represents itself as supportive of cultural pluralism in its official motto, “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” (“Unity in Diversity”), the Pancasila that is included in the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution refers to “the belief in one God” that shall be embraced by each citizen; it purposely avoids the Muslim term “Allah,” making it evident that since its creation in 1945 the Constitution favors a religious state ideology of a monotheistic, but not necessarily Muslim, nature.

The Constitution itself underpins this statement in Paragraph 29, Article 1 by saying that the state is based on the belief in one God. Nevertheless, the Indonesian state contradicts its self-accredited image of being a pluralistic society in Paragraph 29, Article 2, which declares that “the state guarantees the freedom of every single citizen to avow oneself to his/her particular religion and to fulfill religious duties in compliance with his/her religion and his/her creed” (Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945, Paragraph 29, Article 2). Highly contradictory to this legal promise is the fact that as of now there are only six officially recognized religions, which were announced overtly in 1965 through the so-called Law on Blasphemy, Decree 1/Pencegahan Penyalahgunaan atau Penodaan Agama (Presidential Decree on the Prohibition of Abuse or Blasphemy of Religion). This decree states that Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and

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<sup>2</sup> This was emphasized by all interview partners.

Confucianism<sup>3</sup> are to be protected because they are understood as monotheistic, have historical roots in the country, and are represented by the majority of the Indonesian population. The decree tries to rectify the obvious discrimination against large parts of the population: “This does not mean that other religions, for example, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism or Taoism, are banned in Indonesia. They enjoy full protection of the state which is guaranteed in Paragraph 29, Article 2” (Penetapan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 1965 Tentang Pencegahan Penyalahgunaan dan/atau Penodaan Agama).

Here the impreciseness and antagonism inherent in the Indonesian law concerning religion become evident. The additional mention of Judaism, Shintoism and Taoism seems arbitrary and leaves questions as to the legal standing of other religions, like Sikhism, unanswered. No stand at all is taken on the numerous local animistic religions. Even today, the state does not regard animism as a religion but rather as a “belief,” and all forms of it are therefore legally not accepted.

Since 1978 it has been obligatory for every Indonesian citizen to register as a member of one of the six official religions on the national identity card. Leaving this information blank leads to the denial of basic civil documents like birth, wedding and death certificates, as well as the denial of social security services (Interview with Nurkristi 2012). Having this in mind, many Indonesians decide to adhere to one of the official religions on paper. Believers others than Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians intending to build a prayer or community house are not allowed to register their construction projects under the Ministry for Religious Affairs – rather, these religious minorities’ projects are administrated by the Ministry for Tourism and Creative Economy, which gives the impression of being a two-class system. Furthermore, the first paragraph of Presidential Decree 1/Pencegahan Penyalahgunaan atau Penodaan Agama declares, “It is forbidden to interpret a religion that is adhered to in Indonesia, to propagate and recommend this interpretation purposely in public or to carry out religious activities that resemble a

3 The legality of Confucianism was extremely unsettled until 2006. In 1965 it was accepted as one of the six legal religions, but lost this status in 1967 through Presidential Decree No. 14/1967, which banned Chinese culture and religion in general. This discreditation of Confucianism was reconfirmed through Ministry of the Interior Instruction No. 477/74054/BA.01.2/4683/95 in 1978, which spoke of five officially acknowledged religions in Indonesia, dismissing Confucianism. In a presidential cabinet meeting in 1979, Confucianism was once again denied legal status and the status as a religion, and was declared merely a belief, which put it in the same category as, for example, animism. The reason for this discrimination was the governmental identification of Confucianism with the Chinese ethnos. The Chinese minority in Indonesia was equated, on one hand, with the communist threat; on the other hand, the economic power of the Chinese minority was noted with resentment. The ban on Confucianism came along with a general prohibition of the Chinese language, and Chinese names and culture.

Only after the introduction of democracy did Indonesia, under President Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001), again officially allow Chinese culture, language and religion to be practiced in public. In 2006 the Ministry for Religious Affairs accepted Confucianism as the sixth legal religion in Indonesia. The case of Confucianism shows how religion can be conflated with ethnicity, resulting in discrimination based on stereotyping (Herianto 2005).

religion that is practiced in Indonesia, but that otherwise deviates from the basic teachings of this religion.” This somewhat cumbersome formulation was intended to regulate the activities of religious groups that are seen as syncretic or as sects.

Critics of this law are of the opinion that its ultimate aim is to consolidate and protect an orthodox Sunni version of Islam. In 2009 a group of human rights activists and representatives of a pluralism-friendly Islam filed a petition with the Indonesian Constitutional Court in order to change the presidential decree because it contradicts the religious freedom guaranteed in the Constitution. The court dismissed the case (Dja'far et al. 2010; Hasani 2010).

The consequence of the dismissed petition is a legal status quo that continues to foster discrimination, especially against Muslim minorities – above all, Ahmadis. In fact, members of the Ahmadiyya community have been the main victims of religious discrimination in Indonesia in recent history, and their legal right to exist was threatened in 2008 on the basis of the Law on Blasphemy. The Ahmadiyya minority claims to have approximately 500,000 followers in Indonesia (Interview with Pontoh 2012), whereas the Indonesian government speaks of 50,000 to 80,000 believers. The reason for discrimination against the group is of a theological nature: Ahmadiyya Muslims acknowledge their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, as a prophet, which contradicts the basic teaching of orthodox Sunni Islam that Muhammad shall remain the last prophet. Therefore, Ahmadiyya Islam is seen as a deviant sect in most Muslim societies, Indonesia being no exception. Although in 1953 Ahmadiyya Islam was accepted as a legal organization by the state, the MUI condemned it as a theologically deviant group and therefore prohibited it in a *fatwa* in 1980. The argumentation for this decision was based on the Law on Blasphemy from 1965 and was inspired by a precedent ruling in Saudi Arabia. In 2005, the MUI reiterated its position on Ahmadiyya Islam with another *fatwa*. This example shows how Indonesian law can be interpreted and implemented by civil actors to the disadvantage of certain minority groups. Even though the MUI's rulings are legally not binding, but are rather to be understood as recommendations for Muslims, they often do influence the mindset of other Muslims as well as government policymakers. This was the case in 2008 when a law intending to restrict the activities of Ahmadis was declared. In its opening, this law, registered as KEP-033/A/JA/6/2008, emphasizes the right of religious freedom in the country, but subsequently, by referring to the Law on Blasphemy from 1965, limits this freedom. It goes on to state that adherents of Ahmadiyya Islam are to be punished with five years' jail time for spreading their interpretation of Islam in Indonesia. That threat notwithstanding, the last paragraph calls upon Indonesia's Muslims to abstain from committing violence against Ahmadis; however, many see this law as a justification to discriminate and terrorize, even by violent means (Interview with Pontoh 2012). Because the state does not protect Ahmadis from attacks, but passively stands on the sidelines, violence does occur. Furthermore, the law from 2008 is not precise about

exactly which activities are restricted or allowed, which leaves Ahmadis in legal limbo and particularly vulnerable to attack.<sup>4</sup>

Another highly sensitive issue is the granting of building permits for the construction of prayer or community houses. The state strongly regulates these constructions, especially when it comes to Muslim minorities and Christians. In 1969 the Ministry of the Interior delegated the exclusive right to grant or dismiss building permits to the provincial governors through Law 1/1969. This new policy led in most cases to the introduction of harsher restrictions on houses of worship for religious minorities, the reduction of the number of religious meetings and practices, and lengthy extensions of the administrative processes for the granting of building permits, often taking up to decades to conclude. In general, Law 1/1969 made the issue of granting building permits highly arbitrary and nontransparent, causing many religious communities to hold their services and practice their rituals in private homes. This undermining of the law was answered by the state in 1975 with a ban on worship in private households. These regulations from 1969 and 1975 were exploited by violent Muslim groups to legitimize their attacks on illegal religious congregations. Mostly Christians were their victims. In 2006 these hitherto existing laws were replaced by Enactments No. 8 and No. 9, decided by the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of the Interior in order to foster religious harmony in issues concerning conflicts over building permits. The enactments ruled that a so-called "Religious Harmony Forum" (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/FKUB) be established in each of the 33 Indonesian provinces. Every FKUB is composed of 21 members in the provinces and, on an equal level, 17 members in the cities. These members are representatives of the six officially acknowledged religions and join the FKUB in proportion to the size of the respective religious community in the province or city. The FKUB is the central contact point for religious communities intending to build or re-build prayer houses, and it either hands out or refuses to submit letters of recommendation for the communities in order to get the bureaucratic process moving. In their building applications, every religious community has to make clear the urgency and necessity of their construction project; furthermore, the wider acceptance of the new building has to be proven by the signatures of at least 90 community members as well as at least 60 neighboring residents of other faiths. Another obligation is a written recommendation by a local chief person. Based on these documents, the FKUB has to rule on the case within six months. Although the paring down of the decision process down to six months is an enormous improvement compared to the law from 1969, the seemingly pluralistic FKUB must also be examined critically: a negative aspect is that the proportional religious representation often causes the Muslim majority to dominate over the religious minorities in the votes on building permits. Muslim minorities and Christians in particular who live in Sunni Muslim majority regions face structural obstacles that

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4 For a thorough discussion of the legal status of Ahmadiyya Islam, see Platzdasch 2011.

start with collecting the required number of signatures from residents of other faiths. Another point of criticism regards the social background of the FKUB members. Even though the basic idea of the FKUB was to bring various religious leaders into dialogue about the building of prayer houses, many members are government officials, police or military officers. Here, the implementation of the law is not according to its original idea and therefore can harm the rights of religious minorities. This and the aforementioned point reduce the forum *ad absurdum* and give the impression that the FKUB is just another strategy to bureaucratize and control religion (Crouch 2010). Still, the state celebrates the invention of the FKUB as a success (Interview with Mufid 2012; Mas'ud et al. 2011).

The state's monopoly in defining correct moral behavior was made clear by the passing of the so-called "pornography bill." Law No. 44/2008, using a very wide and abstract definition of pornography, bans "pictures, drawings, photographs, texts, voices, moving pictures, animations, cartoons, dialogues, body movements or other forms of communication through media and/or public presentation, that are suitable to encourage sexual exploitation and/or violate public morals through obscenity" (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 44 Tahun 2008 Tentang Pornografi dan Penjasarannya, Paragraph 1, Article 1). Violation of this law is punishable with a fine up to five billion Indonesian rupiah or a detention up to 10 years. The anti-pornography law caused loud protests from religious minorities, especially the Balinese Hindus, Christians, and animist Papuans, who are afraid that this law will serve as a legal basis to ban many of their cultural elements like ritual dances or traditional clothing. Many feel that the law represents conservative Islamic morals and that it contradicts the religious and cultural pluralism that is grounded in the Constitution. Even though this law is not implemented consequently, radical groups like the Front Pembela Islam (FPI: Islamic Defenders Front) feel assured in their violent attacks against clubs and bars whose lifestyles they regard as contradicting Islamic morals.

### **Islamization and Christianization**

Different critical junctures can be identified that are crucial for the increase of religious intolerance in Indonesia. Certainly one is the transmigration program that was initiated under Suharto. It was an act of planned and forced transmigration from overpopulated Java to the islands on the periphery. It led to the settlement of Muslims in many Eastern Indonesian regions whose majority populations were Christian, and caused a shift in the religious, political and socioeconomic power structures of these regions. In the affected regions, either Muslims became the dominant religious group or the Muslim-to-other ratio reached approximately 1:1, causing interreligious competition and, in places such as Maluku or Sulawesi, deadly civil wars.

By its end, the Suharto regime had initiated an Islamization process (Effendy 2003). This state-sponsored Islamization bred a strong conservative, anti-pluralistic Muslim lobby that is still today of importance for social developments. This lobby is present in political, social and religious fields and tends to foster and provoke religious intolerance that can lead to (violent) religious conflicts. Whereas Suharto had tried to de-politicize Islam for decades, in the 1990s he started to fill top-ranking positions in the military, bureaucracy and parliament with Muslims of a conservative *Santri*-Sunni background. Until then, these functions were dominated by Christians or Muslims adhering to the syncretistic *adat* Islam. This new policy was intended as a way for Suharto to win back the waning sympathies of the Muslim population in the country.

To be precise, state-sponsored Islamization and the establishment of a Muslim lobby first emerged in 1975 with the founding of the MUI. Even though the MUI was an NGO, it was founded by Suharto and intended to channel and control Muslim needs. It is Indonesia's clerical Muslim institution and declares *fatwas* on various topics concerning Muslim life. These *fatwas* have no direct legal consequences, but serve as recommendations for civil society as well as for the government. Originally, the MUI was used by the Suharto regime to legitimize governmental decisions about Islam and especially to weaken Islamist oppositions. This was intended to be achieved by requiring the *ulama* to pledge that they would base their decisions on the Pancasila and strive for interreligious peace. But since 1998 the MUI has become a player in boosting religious conflicts. Still, it is financially sponsored by the state and is officially supposed to represent the pluralism of Indonesian Islam. The council's members are representatives of the ten most important Muslim organizations, including the NU and Muhammadiyah, both known for their moderate interpretation of Islamic teaching. But Suharto's Islamization caused more conservative members to gain dominance in the MUI, resulting in a more anti-pluralistic shift in the *fatwas*. In 2005 eleven anti-pluralistic *fatwas* were published by the MUI that not only declared Ahmadis infidels, but also judged secularism, liberalism and pluralism to be un-Islamic (Gillespie 2007; Schröter 2008; Olle 2009). In some cases, the MUI's *fatwas* have been used by the state and by Muslim citizens to legitimize their discriminative acts towards religious minorities; in other cases, the president and ministers have distanced themselves from the MUI's statements. Because of the vagueness of its stance on religious freedom and pluralism as well as the unpredictability of its influence on the government, the MUI is a problematic factor for religious harmony in Indonesia.

Another Islamic lobby institution with a conservative-to-fundamentalist outlook that is counterproductive to religious peace is the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia (ICMI: Association of Muslim Intellectuals of Indonesia). This career network was founded by the state in 1990 with the official agenda of eradicating poverty and promoting education. Its true intention was to serve the state as a pious Muslim lobby whose members would be appointed to key positions in the

government, bureaucracy, military, police and economy, replacing Christians and *adat* Muslims. As the ICMI has built dense networks over the years, the successful and influential infiltration of its members into the state apparatus can still be observed today (Latif 2008). The ICMI pushes for Islamization and takes a conservative moral outlook using a top-down approach.

Since the 1970s, Indonesia has been moving out of its peripheral position in the Muslim world and is increasingly participating in transnational Muslim affairs (Bubalo and Fealy 2005; Hasan 2009). Transnational education is one important way intolerant and fundamentalist Muslim ideologies from abroad spread throughout the Indonesian nation-state, and this phenomenon is worth elaboration here. It illustrates how in this time of globalization Indonesian society is influenced not only by its own domestic affairs, but also by forces from abroad that can affect the religious climate in the country. Muslim education is especially effective in socializing and proselytizing (young) people (Tan 2012; Rosidin 2013). Besides Indonesia's educational connections with Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood as well as with Pakistan, another influential player in the country is Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism is a highly intolerant, anti-pluralistic version of Islam and fosters religious competition and conflicts. The Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII: Islamic Missionary Council of Indonesia), founded in 1967 by former Masyumi leaders, functions as the Indonesian office of the Saudi-based – and Saudi-dominated – Muslim World League, which aims to spread Wahhabi ideology in Indonesia (Schulze 1990). In 1980 the Saudi Kingdom started to systematically export Wahhabi ideology to Indonesia with the establishment of the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab (LIPIA: Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies) in Jakarta. This educational institution bridges a gap in Indonesia's Islamic education market by offering Arabic language classes taught by native speakers and high-level *Sharia* courses in Arabic. Due to the many shortcomings of its own educational system, Indonesia welcomes Saudi Arabia as a transnational education provider, not only because Saudi Arabia itself foots the bill. The fact that the Saudis have a hidden agenda – namely, to spread Wahhabism and build transnational alliances through their education programs – is tolerated by the Indonesian government. This is how it has come to be that Saudi Arabia is delivering books and brochures of critical anti-pluralistic content to many of Indonesia's schools and *pesantren*, mainly in rural areas where the Indonesian government has already lost control over the educational institutions. There is evidence that these Wahhabi-infiltrated schools have bred Islamic leaders who are active destructive forces vis-à-vis religious tolerance and in religious conflicts (Hasan 2008; Kovacs 2011).

A factor often neglected but worth considering is the issue of fundamentalist Christianization taking place parallel to the fundamentalist Islamization. Since the 1960s the general Muslim consciousness in Indonesia has been dominated by a fear

of Christianization.<sup>5</sup> Even today, this fear is being exploited by intolerant and radical Muslims and is used as an effective argument to mobilize against Christians. In summer 2012 a YouTube video by the Sydney-based Muslim organization Mercy Mission introducing the campaign “Save Maryam” appeared and has been circulating the Internet ever since. The video claims that every year two million Indonesian Muslims leave Islam and enter Christendom due to intense Christian missionary work. In 2025, it is claimed, Indonesia will not be a Muslim-majority country anymore; therefore, “Maryam” – a synonym for the Indonesian Muslim – must be saved.<sup>6</sup> A book written by an Indonesian Muslim aims to reveal this misguided and dishonest campaign (Syuhada: forthcoming).

However, a relative growth of the Christian community vis-à-vis the Muslim community *can* be observed in Indonesia, and West Java is the region with the highest increase in the number of Christians (International Crisis Group 2010). Because of the links maintained by many evangelical churches and organizations with sponsors from the Western world, the Muslim fear of Westernization is seen as proven true, and these Western links became the basis for many conspiracy theories. Particularly in Bekasi and its surroundings in West Java, Christianization plays a key role in religious conflicts. Here, evangelical churches often supported by foreign financiers are carrying out aggressive Christian missionary campaigns among the Muslim population. Numerous incidents of Muslims undergoing forced baptisms have been reported. The foundation Mahanaim is, financially, the strongest Christian missionary organization and strives to convert poor Muslims. Another foundation, the Bethmidrash Talmiddin, intentionally fooled Muslims by handing out Christian missionary brochures written in Arabic script, thereby appearing to present Islamic content. The school run by the foundation commits every student to convert a minimum of five people to Christianity before graduation day (International Crisis Group 2010). Systematic provocations from evangelical churches have been documented, like the positioning of a big wooden cross and flags displaying the Star of David and the Lion of Judah in front of a mosque (International Crisis Group 2010: 6). So it is that a part of the Christian population of West Java is showing a lesser degree of tolerance towards Islam, fueling religious conflicts (Interview with Magnis-Suseno 2012). The phenomenon of Christianization and the triggering role Christians can play in religious conflicts is indeed understudied, despite the fact that current events indicate that it is an important factor in some conflict-ridden regions.

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5 The complexity of the problems of Muslim–Christian relations during the Suharto regime are well documented in Mujiburrahman (2006).

6 See the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6oDKyPmDgk> (accessed: 2013-02-22)

## The military and police

The Indonesian military and police have always played decisive roles in the internal developments of religious conflicts. In the military dictatorship under Suharto, the military enjoyed the highest prestige in the state apparatus. The so-called “*dwi-fungsi*” (“double function”) characterized the ideological outlook of the military: it was responsible for security issues as well as for economic, social and political affairs. Military members were assigned key positions in national companies and in the regime administration and cabinet, and the political activities of military officials were explicitly supported. Until the fall of Suharto, the military strongly exerted its influence on religious conflicts. According to their own religious affiliation, specific religious communities were supported or weakened by military groups. This was particularly notable in the conflicts in Ambon and Poso that broke out in 1998. Rumors still say that it was the military that fueled and kept these conflicts running in order to legitimate its function as a security force and to prevent its own disempowerment (Interviews with Hendriks-Riri 2012, Wakano 2012, Syauta 2012 and Fofid 2012). Today it is the Indonesian police, the *Polisi Republik Indonesia* (PolRI), that significantly impact the development of religious conflicts. Since their separation from the military in 1999, the police have gained autonomy and power, but have not adequately fulfilled their mission to provide for the unconditional security of the Indonesian citizenry. A study on human rights violations in the years 2009 and 2010 shows that the police were involved in more violations than any other given group of people (Prasetyo 2012); corruption and bad training are also well-known structural problems in the police apparatus. In many cases, like in Ambon, police officers side with a particular religious community. In other conflicts, police react with passivity and do not attempt to stop violence, as was documented during the attacks on Ahmadiyya Muslims in Cikeusik in 2011. The main failure of the police is their passivity, demonstrated by their lack of counteraction in the face of religiously motivated violence that in many cases has targeted religious minorities (Human Rights Watch 2012; Human Rights Watch 2013). In 2012, they also failed to adequately protect artists, writers, and media companies targeted by militant Islamist groups, who disrupted the May book tour of Muslim-Canadian writer Irshad Manji in Jakarta and Yogyakarta. At the same time, the police regularly reject criticism of their behavior and make no effort to constructively improve the situation (The Jakarta Post 2013).

## Future prospects and policy implications

In this article I attempted to show how much room is given to religious intolerance, discrimination and violence in Indonesia and what the causes are of this status quo. These are to be found in the contexts of the legal framework, the trends of Islamization and Christianization, and the failure of the military and the police. To achieve religious peace, these three factors need to be addressed.

*“Are interreligious relations in Indonesia likely to change for the better or the worse?”* This question was answered negatively by all interview partners. In their opinion, the current trend of Islamization of the state and civil society is irreversible. Aside from that, transnational Islamic missionary movements, especially from rich Saudi Arabia, are contributing to Indonesia’s Islamization trend. Creating a solid educational system that reaches the whole society is a structural and financial problem in Indonesia. Transnational anti-pluralistic socialization (mainly through educational institutions) from foreign Muslim actors will be a long-term problem. The passivity of the state towards threats on religious minorities, its caving in to the demands of conservatives and Islamists (the pornography law, the deconstruction of the Buddhist statue in Tanjung Balai, etc.), the mild sentences for perpetrators of religious violence, and the general repressive legal situation concerning religious freedom and self-determination (for example, the Law on Blasphemy from 2008) have worsened in recent years.

Furthermore, since the era of democracy Pancasila has lost significance as a peace-building state ideology capable of holding society together (Kompas 2010). Nowadays, in many parts of society there is a kind of love-hate relationship towards the Pancasila because of the Pancasila indoctrination experienced in all areas of life under the New Order. Certain segments of the population also feel disappointed with democracy because the new political system has not managed to advance their living standards (Ali-Fauzi and Panggabean 2009). The ideological disorientation some parts of the population are experiencing enhances their search for alternative ideologies like those represented by an anti-pluralistic Islam and Islamism, and is likely to be channeled into religious intolerance and violence directed at specific scapegoats.

The current situation leaves little hope for religious peace or a decline in religious intolerance and religiously motivated violence. Indonesia’s peaceful future will basically depend on a reform of the law. Without a reform of specific laws (on blasphemy from 1965 and 2008 and on pornography from 2008) as well as a reform of the policies from 2006 regulating the construction of prayer and community houses and the formation of the FKUBs, religious harmony in Indonesia will not be possible. Equally important is a basic clarification of the status and, ideally, an official recognition of all religions adhered to in Indonesia. A realization of these necessary reforms seems unrealistic. The outbreak of religious conflicts also depends on the behavior of the (foreign) evangelical churches in West Java. As long as they refuse

to discontinue their often aggressive missionary attempts and provocations, the situation is unlikely to calm down.

The necessity of foreign aid and development cooperation projects that aim to prevent and/or de-escalate religious tensions was emphasized by all interview partners. Many interviewees also described the immediate necessity to implement training projects that sensitize the government, the judiciary, the police and the military to the concept of good governance. Values like neutrality, religious freedom, societal pluralism and freedom of speech should be taught to these groups. Additionally, the police and to a certain extent the military have to understand their function as neutral protectors and peacemakers for all societal groups.

In addition, efforts should be made to foster a tolerant version of Islam in institutions like the MUI and ICMI. Even though the MUI is dominated by a more conservative or Islamist ideology, some individuals have already attempted to engage in interreligious dialogue. For example, representatives of the Bandung branch of the MUI committed themselves to engage in interreligious dialogue with Christians and other religious minorities by signing the "Deklarasi Sancang"<sup>7</sup> (Interview with Samosir 2012; Interview with Kholil 2012). These key players should be understood as propagators and disseminators of religious tolerance. The Saudi Arabian anti-pluralistic missionary movement, being propagated through educational institutions, can be reined in by supporting pluralistic and open-minded schools like the Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah (UIN). This governmental Islamic university should be strengthened by keeping alive and even extending its international cooperation and exchange programs with states that have a firm democratic system and a good record of protecting the rights of religious minorities. Another valuable educational institution worth supporting that focuses on interreligious dialogue is the one-man-led Pesantren Nurul Umma in Yogyakarta, which for decades has engaged in international interreligious work (Interview with Khaimin 2012). Another *pesantren* very active in promoting interreligious peace is Pesantren al Muayyad Windan in Solo (Pohl 2009). The Fahmina Institute in Cirebon is also a good example: this organization comprises a dense network of *pesantren* alumni carrying out educational programs focusing on interreligious peace and tolerance in *pesantren* communities, mosque committees, and prayer and social groups in the region.<sup>8</sup> Associated with the organization is a higher education program with diverse courses on Islamic studies.<sup>9</sup>

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7 The Declaration of Sancang was signed 2007 by the leaders of numerous religious communities living in Bandung. The event took place in Nahdlatul Ulama's Western Java office, located on the street Jalan Sancang in Bandung. By signing, the religious leaders committed themselves to interfaith dialogue. See also the Indonesian website <http://deklarasi-sancang.org/main/> (accessed: 2013-03-08)

8 See the institute's website for further information: <http://www.fahmina.or.id/> (accessed: 2013-02-15)

9 Fahmina's higher education program can be accessed here: <http://www.isif.ac.id/> (accessed: 2013-02-15)

A special challenge is the improvement of the Muslim–Christian relationship. One approach could be to educate the Muslim society about the history, development, organizational structure and theological streams of Christianity. Many of the restrictions on the building of churches result from misunderstandings and ignorance of the pluralism of the Christian religion. Because Islam is organized non-centrally, and hence a mosque can be frequented by any Muslim no matter his or her theological stream, many Muslims do not comprehend the necessity of building special churches for every Christian community. This is why constructions of new churches are often conflated with Christian expansion and missionary work (Ali-Fauzi et al. 2011). In general, knowledge about the Christian religion is rudimentary, and Christian theological concepts cause confusion and distrust. For example, the doctrine of the trinity is not well understood and easily leads to the assumption that Christians are polytheists. Here, improved education could help dispel the potential for tension. In Indonesian governmental schools, religious education is segregated by belief and therefore does not support learning about the other faiths.

Indonesia is well known for its active civil society. There are numerous NGOs committed to interreligious dialogue, many of which work specifically with children and young adults. Meeting the representatives of many of these organizations in early 2012 revealed a persistent problem: lack of funding. Financial aid has to support promising organizations and projects like the Wahid Institute, the Maarif Institute, Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace, Institut Titian Perdamaian, the Muslim Moderate Society, Serikat Jurnalis untuk Keberagaman, and Setara – the Institute for Democracy and Peace (Interviews with Ahmad 2012, Ul Haq 2012, Ali-Fauzi 2012, Miqdad 2012, Misrawi 2012, Junaidi 2012, Mulia 2012 and Hasani 2012). Especially in post-conflict regions on the Indonesian periphery, there are ambitious NGOs and individuals working for a peaceful future on very low-scale budgets who sometimes feel forgotten and neglected (Interviews with Hendriks-Riri 2012, Wakano 2012, Syauta 2012 and Fofid 2012).

There may be hope for a decrease in religious conflicts given the decline of social grievances in the context of the ongoing economic growth in Indonesia. In 2010 the economy grew by 6.1 percent; from 2003 to 2010 the middle class rose by 61.7 percent, numbering 131 million citizens. Every year more than seven million people climb the social ladder from the lower classes to the middle-income group (Bagoglu 2012). However, these numbers do not specify whether all religious groups have profited from the economic growth. If only certain religious groups are benefiting from the boom, this is likely to create new potential for conflict. As long as the growth of the middle class is more or less equally distributed among members of all the religions adhered to in Indonesia, and as long as this goes hand in hand with a democratic, pluralistic, tolerant worldview of the middle class, there is a chance that religious tensions will decline.

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