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Center for the Study of Religion and Democracy, Paramadina Foundation
(PUSAD Paramadina)

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Authors:

Ihsan Ali-Fauzi

Nathanael Gratiyas Sumaktoyo

Irsyad Rafsadie

Raditya Darningtyas

Husni Mubarak

Siswo Mulyartono

Cover photo: A mother and her child receive health care at a Posyandu (Village Integrated Health Post) in one of USAID MADANI's pilot location in Boyolali District, Central Java. (Image: Danumurthi Mahendra/USAID MADANI)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While sufficient attention has been given to the problems of both increasing religious intolerance and decreasing universal access to public services and civil liberties in Indonesia, the relationship between the two remains a puzzle. Efforts to understand the dynamics between the two so far have been hampered by conceptual and practical issues, given the vastness of the issues raised. The overall objective of this national study is to capture if and under what conditions social intolerance in Indonesia impacts universal access to essential public services (i.e., educational subsidies, population services, healthcare and social protection services), as well as civil liberties (i.e., the right to assembly and the right to free expression). We distinguish religious intolerance from religious conservatism, as the former is concerned more with whether fundamental social and political rights should apply to religious groups other than one's own, and the latter is concerned more with supporting public policies that include social regulations.

This study used quantitative data collection in mid-2022 through a national survey of 3,880 respondents in all 34 provinces of Indonesia, including an oversampling in USAID's eight priority provinces: Banten, East Java, East Nusa Tenggara, Jakarta, North Sumatra, Papua, South Sulawesi, and West Kalimantan. Eighty-seven percent of respondents are Muslim. This study also collected qualitative data from 82 key informants' in-depth interviews and case studies in 12 locations. This approach allows the study to explore social intolerance's relationship to the real-life context of discrimination or social exclusion in public services.

If we start with degrees of tolerance, in line with other studies (e.g., Mujani 2019; LSI 2019 and 2023), our survey found a substantial degree of intolerance in Indonesia in the religious-political dimension. We define religious-political intolerance as opposition or hostility toward other religious expressions exercising their socio-political rights, or negative attitudes, stereotypes, and resistance to social interactions with religious outgroups (Gibson 2010, Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003, Sumaktoyo 2020, Dunn and Singh 2014).¹ Among Muslims, the greatest opposition was to non-Muslims becoming public officials: 59 percent do not want non-Muslims to become regional heads in Muslim-majority regions, and 50.1 percent think non-Muslims should not become community leaders (*Rukun Tetangga/Rukun Warga* [RT/RW] heads) in their neighborhoods. Those who think non-Muslims should not protest against discrimination are also high (49 percent).

In terms of spill-over to public service, the picture is more complex. Among Muslim respondents, on average only 2.1 percent believe that Muslims should receive some priority when accessing a variety of public services, 5.2 percent believe that Shiites and Ahmadis should receive less priority than those not affiliated with those sects, and 1.8 percent agree that women who wear a jilbab headscarf must receive priority over women who do not wear a jilbab when accessing public services.²

¹ In measuring religious tolerance, we opted for a broad approach, asking respondents about the extent to which they are willing to respect the rights of religious outgroups on various issues.

² This reflects Muslim respondents' opinion about the prioritization of public services by religious groups (that Shiites and Ahmadists should receive less priority than those who are not Shia/Ahmadiyya when accessing public services). Interestingly, when the question was set into a hypothetical scenario, whether people would be more

When it comes to personal experience with public service access, 5.1 percent of all respondents perceived that the process of applying for an ID card is discriminative and 13.1 percent reported that the process of applying for an educational subsidy for poor students is discriminatory (Figure 10 on page 20). However, the main reason for discrimination was economic status and not religion or ethnicity (see below).. The survey did nevertheless find high discriminative attitudes against women, a trait often associated with Islamic conservatism. 60.7 percent of all respondents (63 per cent male respondents) agree that women who visit government offices should be required to wear the headscarf and dress modestly; 58.6 percent (60.5 per cent male respondents) agree that there should be a rule that prohibits male healthcare workers (doctors and nurses) from treating female patients; and 53.4 percent (53.6 per cent male respondents) agree that there should be a rule banning women from working at night. Twenty-nine percent (29.5 per cent male respondents) agreed that male and female students should be taught in separate classrooms. Even though only 1.8 percent felt that *jilbab*-wearing women should be prioritized in accessing the public services, this could mean that Muslim women are not prioritized even if they follow religious and moral norms. The impact is not only suffered by non-Muslim women but also by Muslim women, as they are forced to adhere to a single (conservative) interpretation of Islamic religious provisions. Women are currently shying away from protesting such policies for fear of social disapproval and even criminalization on social media.

Our study found that, among the respondents who perceived discrimination in access to ID cards or educational subsidies, economic status was the most cited reason for discrimination (79.5 percent) (Figure 12 on page 22), and not religion or ethnicity. Public services are considered more accessible to those who have money or contacts. This aligns with other studies (e.g., Rahmi et al. 2020) showing that economic reason is the most common discriminator for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. However, non-Muslim respondents are more likely to cite other reasons, such as ethnicity and religion. This suggests that Muslims and non-Muslims may have different experiences of discrimination. According to Peterman (2018), discrimination based on socio-economic status often reinforces and perpetuates other forms of inequality. Rahmi et al. (2020) identified three layers of structural barriers that individuals face when dealing with public services: (1) when individuals lack access due to poverty, remoteness, and immobility; (2) when individuals deal with services that are unresponsive to their specific needs or situations; and (3) when individuals experience discrimination due to their social identities, such as gender, religion, and ethnicity. Our case studies in Cirebon and Tasikmalaya found a similar link between economic status and discrimination. For example, while not necessarily impacting certain minority groups, the implementation of local bylaws, such as those on morality, affects the lower middle class, such as nightlife workers. We also suspect an interplay between economic factors and several other factors, which will be discussed further below.

Detailed disaggregation found that support for political Islam and level of religious observance are the two key variables associated with level of intolerance:

supportive of discriminative policies if the policies are framed as government efforts to follow the aspiration of society and religious leaders, the levels of support for discriminative policies was quite considerable. About 26 percent would support a policy that prefers Muslim students to non-Muslim students in education subsidy; 28 percent a policy that advocates denying Shiites and Ahmadists access to civil registration services (see page 34-35).

- Respondents who support political Islam show more agreement with restrictive attitudes toward women accessing public services.
- Respondents who perceived that public services were discriminative tend to agree with restrictive attitudes toward women accessing public services.
- Intolerance and support for political Islam are positively correlated with a preference for prioritizing women wearing a headscarf over women not wearing a headscarf in accessing public services.
- Intolerance and a higher level of religious observance are positively correlated with a preference for prioritizing non-heterodox Islamic sects over the so-called heterodox groups (i.e., Shiites and Ahmadis) in accessing public services.
- A stronger belief in Muslim religious norms and values is positively correlated with a preference for prioritizing Muslims over non-Muslims in accessing public services.

The pervasive influence of support for political Islam on public policy is sustained by the symbiosis between politicians and conservative groups during and between elections, a process sometimes referred to as “institutionalized discrimination” that occurs beneath the surface and is often not captured by surveys or indices. This includes discrimination or favoritism in policy and everyday practices (beyond access to basic public services). These forms of systemic or micro-discrimination are partly enabled by regional autonomy and an electoral system that encourages national and local political actors to win majority support by leaving minority groups behind. Our study found that support for discriminatory policies against women is considerable. As such, we cannot determine whether our findings reflect that access to public services is indeed inclusive or whether the public discourse on this particular issue is simply absent. It is also possible that people are timid to report discrimination or that the discrimination happens in another, invisible layer.

One topic related to freedoms of assembly on which there is a high level of intolerance is the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship in one’s neighborhood. Almost half of the total respondents (49.1 percent) oppose other religions’ places of worship being built (see Figure 2 on page 15). This figure is similar to the LSI surveys in 2019 and 2023, which has tracked an increase in this trend since 2017. 18.2 percent of Muslim respondent oppose having non-Muslims in their neighbors. This aligns with the findings of the Indonesian National Socioeconomic Survey (*Survey Sosial-Ekonomi Nasional*, or SUSENAS) as well as the Indonesian Family Life Survey (see for example Yusuf AA, et al 2020).

An oversampling in eight USAID priority provinces allowed us to make statistically significant comparisons between those regions. The study found geographic variations in religious intolerance, in restrictive attitudes toward women, in stances on mosque loudspeakers, in acceptance of government discrimination, and in acceptability of discussing sensitive topics publicly. These variations are likely related to the composition of religious groups or the relations between religious groups in these provinces. The Muslim-majority provinces of Banten, Jakarta, East Java and South Sulawesi showed the highest levels of intolerance, the most acceptance of government discrimination, and the most restrictive attitudes toward discussing sensitive topics. In contrast, in mixed provinces, Muslims tend to have lower levels of intolerance, acceptance of government discrimination, and restrictions on freedom of expression. Nevertheless, regarding restrictive attitudes toward women, all provinces tend to be similar, whether Muslim-majority, mixed, or non-Muslim-majority.

However, there are also variations between provinces where Muslims are a minority. For example, compared to other regions, minority Muslims in East Nusa Tenggara are more likely to consider criticism of the government off-limits. Muslims are also most resistant to complaints about mosque loudspeakers in places where they are a minority, such as East Nusa Tenggara and Papua. This implies that tensions or sensitivities around this issue are high in these areas. In other Muslim-majority provinces, such as East Java, Muslims tend to be more relaxed about complaints about mosque loudspeakers.

While our one-off survey does not enable us to capture trends, our findings align with the trends noted in other studies (LSI 2019 and LSI 2023). Among Muslims, most do not tolerate non-Muslims becoming public officials. Nearly 60 percent want non-Muslims to avoid becoming regional heads (i.e., mayors, regents, governors) in a Muslim-majority region. This resembles the finding in the recent LSI survey (2023), which has tracked an increase in this trend since 2016.

Regarding civil liberties, our survey found indications of self-censorship and hesitation to voice grievances or tolerate houses of worship from both the majority and minority communities alike, confirmed by the key informant interviews and case studies. This was apparent in the survey when respondents were asked about the mosque loudspeakers in people's neighborhoods. Only a few people complained about the volume when asked using direct questions. But when asked indirectly through a list experiment (see pages 48-49) more people complained about the volume. This suggests that people tend to conceal their actual view on this particular issue for reasons of communal harmony. We also asked who exactly could complain about the mosque's sound. Among Muslims themselves, only devout Muslims who regularly attend the mosque were considered legitimate to complain about the mosque's loudspeakers. Apart from them, complaints against mosque loudspeakers were deemed offensive. This strengthened the result of our qualitative study that shows some general mechanisms in which rising conservatism affected the narrowing of civil liberties, such as when under the pretext of defending Indonesia's pluralism, both state and non-state actors carry out threats and repression against individuals and groups they perceive to be dangerous.

We also found indications of support for the repression of freedom of speech. Of the six topics most often considered sensitive in previous surveys (communism, atheism, religious violence, LGBTQ rights, critiques toward government, and critiques toward the national armed forces and police, more than 70 percent of respondents supported banning discussions on communism, atheism, religious violence and LGBTQ (see Figure 22 on page 29). Banning criticism of the president or the armed forces was supported by 36 and 42 percent, respectively. Banning discussion is often justified under the pretext of defending pluralism and state ideology, as well as fighting hoaxes that are considered to threaten national unity and public order. This reminds of the increasing restrictions on free speech that we see in other countries around the world, such as discussions on monarchy in Thailand and "Don't Say Gay" in Florida.

In short, while the findings show that the magnitude of discriminative action in public services based on religion or ethnicity has not reached significant levels, a relatively high proportion of respondent report agreement on limiting women's roles in public spaces and tighter control by the state on freedom of expression by banning discourse on sensitive topics – and

that these opinions are correlated with Islamic conservatism. These findings indicate that there is still much work to be done in Indonesia for gender equity and freedom of speech and expression.

It is also worth noting that the degree of discrimination seems to increase with the complexity of the issue. Applying for educational subsidies is more demanding than getting an ID card, and more respondents perceive discrimination. Intolerance is higher regarding the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship, rather than just living next to a non-Muslim. Intolerance is higher towards people of a different sexual orientation or ideology rather than of different faith. In short, if tolerance would imply acceptance towards all, even though you may be LGBTQ or criticize the government, we may conclude that many Indonesians are fairly intolerant, and perhaps increasingly so.

Nevertheless, the study also found that these forms of intolerance can be contained through community counter-narratives, legal action, media advocacy, or personal action to complain against intolerant service providers. The case studies (pages 49-58) reported some notable civil society activists' initiatives, for example, on keeping up the public's awareness and pressure against draconian rules such as the Law on Electronic Transaction and Information (*Undang-Undang Informasi dan Transaksi Elektronik*, UU ITE) and recently against revisions to the Criminal Code (KUHP), on how to co-exist and delegitimize discriminative local regulations (*Peraturan Daerah, Perda*) that have been passed in Cirebon, Tasikmalaya, Banjarmasin, and Pontianak, on working smartly and politically with local influencers (e.g., on transgender issues in Islamic boarding schools [*pesantren*] in Yogyakarta), on a legal battle against mandatory headscarf-wearing in Padang City, and against intolerance within the government's systems (e.g., the case of the Law on Advancement of Culture). However, interviews also found that civil society activists can face challenges in legitimacy if they do not remain independent from political interests.