DOI: 10.15642/JIIS.2026.20.1.151-174

LEARNING TOLERANCE FROM SINGKAWANG CITY FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: This study examines interfaith dynamics in Singkawang City, West Kalimantan Province, and its broader implications for Indonesian diversity. Utilising a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis The findings indicate strong interreligious harmony supported by formal policy, specifically Mayor regulation No. 129 of 2021 on the Implementation of Community Tolerance. These institutional and social frameworks reinforce Singkawang's recognition as the most tolerant city in Indonesia. Ultimately, Singkawang serves as a model for national multicultural integration, demonstrating how local governance and social cohesion can foster religious tolerance across diverse communities in Indonesia.

Keywords: Tolerance, Interreligious Harmony, Singkawang West Kalimantan.

Introduction

Indonesia is a country that has a heterogeneous society of ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity. It can be called a multicultural country and adheres to the concept of multiculturalism.[1]

[1] Muhammad Hendri Nuryadi, Zamroni, and Suharno, 'The Pattern of the Teaching of Multiculturalism-Based Civics Education: A Case Study at Higher Education Institutions', *European Journal of Educational Research* 9, no. 2 (2020): 799–807, https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.9.2.799.; Sahri and Ali Usman Hali, 'Building Character in Sufism-Based Students in Madrasah West Kalimantan', *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2023): 240–52, https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v6i2.2974; Syarif Syarif, Faisal Abdullah, and Saifuddin Herlambang, 'Multiculturalism among Students in

As a diverse nation and a multicultural country, diversity in Indonesia is not only reflected in the thousands of islands but also the tolerance in social interaction between communities,[2] in many regions in Indonesia.[3] Multiculturalism is the understanding of regulating differences based on the principles of recognition of differences themselves. This understanding is related to the regulation of social relations between groups, the existence of immigrant groups, indigenous peoples, and cultural acculturation.[4] The multiculturalism that has developed in Indonesia is a result of socio-cultural conditions of its diverse societies and its broad geographical landscape. Based on the geographical conditions, Indonesia has thousands of islands; each island has a group of people who form a certain society. The society forms a culture; this phenomenon has implications for the existence of a very many and diverse cultures.

Indonesia, which is a multicultural country, has the basis of the state of *Pancasila* with the motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* as the main foundation in the life of the nation and state.[5] Tolerance is the main key in implementing the values of *Pancasila* and *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* to build harmony in life in the midst of a diverse Indonesian society.[6] It happens also within different groups in Islam.[7] However, this is a paradox because, recently, several regions in Indonesia have experienced

Madrasah: Knowledge, Challenges, and Social Capital', *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2024): 390–408, https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.4710.;

[2] Chang-Yau Hoon, 'Putting Religion into Multiculturalism: Conceptualising Religious Multiculturalism in Indonesia', *Asian Studies Review* 41, no. 3 (2017): 476–93, https://-doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2017.1334761.

[3] I Nengah Punia, "Unveiling Bali's Hidden Facet: The Narrative Identity of the Pegayaman Village Muslim Community in Buleleng," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 18, no. 2 (2024), 403-426.

[4] S. Safdar, S. Chahar Mahali, and C. Scott, 'A Critical Review of Multiculturalism and Interculturalism as Integration Frameworks: The Case of Canada', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 93 (2023): 101756, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2023.101756.

[5] Zico Junius Fernando et al., 'Preventing Bribery in the Private Sector through Legal Reform Based on Pancasila', *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (2022) https://doi.org/-10.1080/23311886.2022.2138906.

[6] Aim Abdulkarim et al., 'Development of a Unity in Diversity-Based Pancasila Education Text Book for Indonesian Universities', *International Journal of Instruction* 13, no. 1 (2020): 371–86, https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.13125a.

[7] Khoirul Faizin et.al., "Islamic Political Thought without Sovereignty: Sunni–Shia Coexistence, Authority, and Pancasila in Bondowoso, Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 30, no. 1 (2026), 220-245.

conflicts arising from differences, including religious conflicts in areas such as in Poso (1998-2001), Ambon (1998), Tolikara (2015), as well as inter-ethnic conflicts in regions like Sambas (1999), Sampit (2001), Lampung (2010-2013), and Papua (2021).[8] National unity, as emphasized by secular ideology of Pancasila, never ceases to prevent Indonesia from breaking up.[9] The special staff of the Chairman of the Board of the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP/*Badan Pembinaan Ideologi Pancasila*) revealed that incidents of intolerance from year to year in Indonesia are increasing, such as conflicts between ethnicities and between religious communities; the dominating case is the establishment of houses of worship. Minority rights in Indonesia are still very difficult to fulfill, especially in religious freedom.[10]

The results of research conducted by the Imparsial Institute show that in 2022 there were twenty-five violations of intolerance that occurred in Indonesia, including seven violations of destruction of houses of worship, five prohibitions on the establishment of houses of worship, three cases of destruction of religious attributes, and ten other cases of intolerance: conflicts between beliefs, sealing houses of worship, and others.[11] Acts of intolerance basically undermine the harmony of diversity in Indonesia, even though the people of Indonesia are considered a country that has a high level of tolerance, but in reality

[8] Kathryn Robinson, 'Communal Peace and Conflict in Indonesia: Navigating Inter-Religious Boundaries', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 5 (2016): 475–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2016.1217761.; Syarif and Saifuddin Herlambang, 'Building Peace Through Qur'anic Interpretation in Muslim Communities in the Post-Conflict West Kalimantan', *Ulumuna* 27, no. 1 (2023): 141–71, https://doi.org/-10.20414/ujis.v27i1.629.; Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeddin et al., 'Inequality and Violent Conflict: New Evidence from Selected Provinces in Post-Soeharto Indonesia', *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 26, no. 3 (2021): 552–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/135478-60.2020.1773607.; Richard Chauvel, 'West Papua: Indonesia's Last Regional Conflict', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32, no. 6 (2021): 913–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/095923-18.2021.1990491.

[9] Badrun etal., "Pancasila, Islam, and Harmonising Socio-Cultural Conflict in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2023), 137-156.

[10] Pusdatin, 'BPIP: Kasus Intoleransi Di Indonesia Selalu Meningkat', 2020, https://bpip.go.id/berita/1035/352/bpip-kasus-intoleransi-di-indonesia-selalu-meningkat.html.

[11] APSN, 'State Actors Involved in Almost All Violations of Religious Freedom: Imparsial', Asia Pacific Solidarity Network., 2022, https://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/news/2022-12-28/state-actors-involved-almost-all-violations-of-religious-freedom-imparsial.html.

there are many violations of acts of intolerance, both inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-religious conflicts, and intra-religious conflicts.[12]

Acts of intolerance have also occurred in several areas in West Kalimantan, such as in Sambas Regency, namely the conflict between the Malay and Dayak ethnicities and the Madura Ethnicity in 1999, which led to an act of massacre that killed hundreds of people. However, conflicts that occurred in the past can be resolved well, and the people in Sambas Regency have begun to improve to uphold the values of tolerance. Singkawang City during the 1999 conflict was part of Sambas Regency and became an autonomous area in 2001 after the emergence of Law Number 12 of 2001 concerning the Establishment of Singkawang City, so that administratively Singkawang City became an independent and separate city from Sambas Regency.[13] After becoming an autonomous region, Singkawang City began to transform into a city that is comfortable and conducive to a diverse society by upholding the values of tolerance. From 2021 to 2023, Singkawang City has the highest tolerance index in Indonesia and received an award from the Setara Institute as the most tolerant city in Indonesia.[14] Based on this, it is undeniable that many local governments from various regions in Indonesia visited Singkawang City to learn about the city of tolerance.[15]

Several studies on tolerance in Singkawang City show that the diversity in Singkawang City is sourced from the local wisdom of ethnic communities, Dayaks, Chinese, Malays, and others. Communal awareness makes the people of Singkawang prioritize tolerance so that

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[12] Sri Winarni and Rusli Rutan, 'Emphaty and Tolerance in Physical Education: Cooperative Vs Classical Learning', *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan* 39, no. 2 (2020): 332–45, https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v39i2.31851.

[13] Dina Karlina, 'The Legal Protection of Ngajat Lesung Dance as a Copyright for Traditional Cultural Expressions', *Jurnal USM Law Review* 6, no. 2 (2023): 873, https://doi.org/10.26623/julr.v6i2.7334.

[14] Dwi Surya Atmaja et al., 'Islam and the Struggle for Multiculturalism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan: Local Ulama, Theological-Economic Competition and Ethnoreligious Relations', *Ulumuna* 27, no. 1 (2023): 172–200, https://doi.org/-10.20414/ujis.v27i1.516.

[15] Susi Yuliawati, Reiza D. Dienaputra, and Agusmanon Yunaidi, 'Coexistence of the Ethnic Chinese and Sundanese in the City of Bandung, West Java: A Case Study on Kampung Toleransi', *Asian Ethnicity* 24, no. 3 (2023): 390–405, https://doi.org/-10.1080/14631369.2022.2158784.; Elyta Elyta and Herlan Herlan, 'Politics of Harmony, Social Capital and Tolerant Cities', *GATR Journal of Finance and Banking Review* 6, no. 1 (2021): 51–61, https://doi.org/10.35609/jfbr.2021.6.1(2).

the city becomes a tolerance tourist attraction. Solidarity and mutual respect between ethnicities in the city can support the development of the city of Singkawang as a tolerant tourist attraction in Indonesia.[16] In addition, the cooperation of the multicultural community in the city of Singkawang has made the city's economy develop. The role of religious leaders is important in building a tolerant life and developing the economy in the city, so it is undeniable that the city of Singkawang, which has a multicultural society, becomes a comfortable and conducive place to live for heterogeneous people.[17]

There are differences with research conducted by several previous researchers. The research conducted by Setyowati et al. emphasizes the communal awareness of the community in the city of Singkawang to develop tolerance tourism, while this research emphasizes the city of Singkawang as a center for learning tolerance for the diverse society of Indonesia.[18] Then the research conducted by Dwi Surya Atmaja et al. emphasized that the role of religious leaders is important to develop tolerance and the economy in the city of Singkawang, which has a multicultural society.[19] While the research conducted by the author emphasizes the city of Singkawang as a center of tolerance education for diverse Indonesian people. According to Lailial Muhtifah et al.'s research, for example, tolerance that occurs in Singkawang City is due to Islamic moderation through *aqidah* and *sharia*.[20] The research conducted by the author has a distinction from several previous studies, namely to find out the portrait of interreligious life in Singkawang City and to find out the implications of interreligious life in Singkawang City on diversity in Indonesia.

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16 Dewi Liesnoor Setyowati, Tri Marhaeni Puji Astuti, and Edi Kurniawan, 'Communal Awareness of Diversity to Enforce Tolerance Tourism in Singkawang City', *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism* 11, no. 2 (2020): 460, https://doi.org/10.145-05//jemt.v11.2(42).24.

17 Atmaja et al., 'Islam and the Struggle for Multiculturalism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan'.

18 Setyowati, Astuti, and Kurniawan, 'Communal Awareness of Diversity to Enforce Tolerance Tourism in Singkawang City'.

19 Atmaja et al., 'Islam and the Struggle for Multiculturalism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan'.

20 Lailial Muhtifah et al., 'The Theology of Islamic Moderation Education in Singkawang, Indonesia: The City of Tolerance', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6552.

This research is qualitative with a phenomenological approach, where the author observes the diversity of culture and religious practices as a space to build tolerance in the city of Singkawang. Data collection was carried out in the city of Singkawang between January and June 2024, through field research consisting of interviews, observations, and documentation. The author conducted semi-formal interviews with five informants using an in-depth, semi-structured format and with four religious leaders in a structured interview format. For data collection, the author conducted participant observation using pre-designed systematic guidelines while directly engaging with the community in Singkawang City. The observations in this study consist of three indicators, namely a) Place, namely in the Singkawang city environment, especially in the *Cap Go Meh* Festival and coffee shops (drinking coffee is one of the cultures of the people of Singkawang City), b) Actor, namely the people of Singkawang City, and c) Activity, namely the activities of the people of Singkawang city, especially during the *Cap Go Meh* Festival. To strengthen the data findings, the author also collected data through documentation in the form of Singkawang City Mayor Regulation (*Peraturan Walikota Kota Singkawang*) No. 129 of 2021 concerning the Implementation of Community Tolerance, photos, journal articles, books, proceedings, and online news related to tolerance in Singkawang City.

This study used a phenomenology approach to data analysis, conducted concurrently with data collection and synthesized into a final comprehensive analysis upon completing fieldwork. This research has several procedures, namely, *first*, data collection. This research was carried out starting from data collection through in-depth interviews with a total of five informants, field observations (*Cap Go Meh* Festival and social interaction in Singkawang City), and the study of documents related to the portrait of life in Singkawang City, the reason why Singkawang City was awarded as the most tolerant city in Indonesia, and its implications for diversity in Indonesia. *Second*, data sorting. The author sorts data to make it easier for researchers to focus on studies related to the portrait of a tolerant life in the city of Singkawang and its implications for diversity in Indonesia. *Third*, data analysis. Once data collection and condensation were complete, the study applied aphenomenology analysis. Preliminary analysis took place concurrently with data collection, followed by a comprehensive re-analysis of the full dataset to ensure optimal research outcomes. *Fourth*, drawing

conclusions. Drawing conclusions is a critical phase following data analysis. If initial findings fail to address the research questions or objectives, data re-analysis is conducted until valid conclusions are reached. Ultimately, the study's conclusions highlight Singkawang as a model for intergroup harmony in Indonesia and provide actionable recommendations for local governments, educational institutions, and social organisations.

Portrait of Diversity in Singkawang City

The people of Singkawang City are a heterogeneous society, with a diversity of ethnic religions. Singkawang City is the center of cultural development for the Chinese community in Indonesia, and the majority of the population is Chinese. The Chinese community in Singkawang City is approximately 40.38% of the total population in Singkawang City, so it is undeniable that the city of Singkawang gets the nickname Amoy City. Amoy basically refers to young Chinese women who are not married. There are so many Amoy in Singkawang City that the name Amoy City is attached to Singkawang City.[21] The majority of people in the city of Singkawang adhere to Islam, while the majority of ethnicities in Singkawang City are ethnic Chinese.[22] In addition to several ethnicities in Singkawang City, such as Malay, Dayak, Madura, Javanese, Bugis, and others, the number of ethnicities in Singkawang City is around 19 ethnicities. Rather than posing an obstacle, this cultural diversity has allowed the resident of Singkawang to build a harmonious community. Consequently, Singkawang was named the most tolerant city in

[21] Wasis Suprapto, 'Cap Go Meh Sebagai Media Pendidikan Resolusi Konflik Di Tengah Keragaman Etnis Kota Singkawang', *Jurnal PIPSI (Jurnal Pendidikan IPS Indonesia)* 4, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.26737/jpipsi.v4i1.1001.; Sachiko Yokota, 'Marrying out of Indonesia and Global Householding: Chinese Indonesian Women from West Kalimantan across Taiwan and Transnational Chinese Community', in *When East Asia Meets Southeast Asia*, by Yumi Kitamura, Alan H Yang, and Ju Lan Thung (World Scientific, 2022), 231–55, https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811250668_0009.; Evi Nurvidya Arifin, M. Sairi Hasbullah, and Agus Pramono, 'Chinese Indonesians: How Many, Who and Where?', *Asian Ethnicity* 18, no. 3 (2017): 310–29, https://doi.org/-10.1080/14631369.2016.1227236.

[22] Ahmad Sahide, Muhammad Azhar, and Sidik Jatmika, 'The Role of Local Elite in the Transformation of Intolerant Values in Indonesia', *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 9, no. 12 (2022), https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i12.4-138.; Emily Zoe Hertzman, 'Performing Piety in Public: Ethnic Politics and Interreligious Harmony in Indonesia', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 13, no. 3 (2023): 526–42, https://doi.org/10.1086/729896.

Indonesia for three consecutive years (2021 to 2023), further complementing its moniker as the City of a Thousand Temples. A key symbol of this religious tolerance is the physical proximity of different places of worship, such as mosques, temples, and churches, standing side by side.[23]

Based on an interview with Antonius Hanjak, a resident of Singkawang City, it is shown that the adjacent places of worship in Singkawang City are a symbol of tolerance for the people of the city. However, adjacent places of worship are not only in the city center but also in several sub-districts in Singkawang City. There are several places of worship that are side by side, such as in West Singkawang, East Singkawang, and Central Singkawang Districts. The majority of religious adherents in Singkawang City are Muslims, Christians, Catholics, Confucians, and so on. Religious and ethnic differences in Singkawang City are not a barrier or barrier for the people of Singkawang to build harmony and diversity.[24] Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS/*Badan Pusat Statistika*) of Singkawang City in 2024, the population in Singkawang City will be 244,706 people.[25] The following is the number of residents in Singkawang City based on religion:

[23] Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon, *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: History, Religion and Belonging*, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series 52 (New York: Routledge, 2013).; Bien Chiang and Jean Chih-yin Cheng, 'Chinese Capital and Chinese Cultural Capital: A Case Study of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia', in *The Sociology of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia*, ed. Yos Santasombat (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2019), 315–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0065-3_14.

[24] Interview with Antonius Hanjak, April 23, 2024.

[25] Ester Amelia Erika Wibowo, ed., *Kota Singkawang Dalam Angka 2024* (Singkawang: BPS Kota Singkawang, 2024).

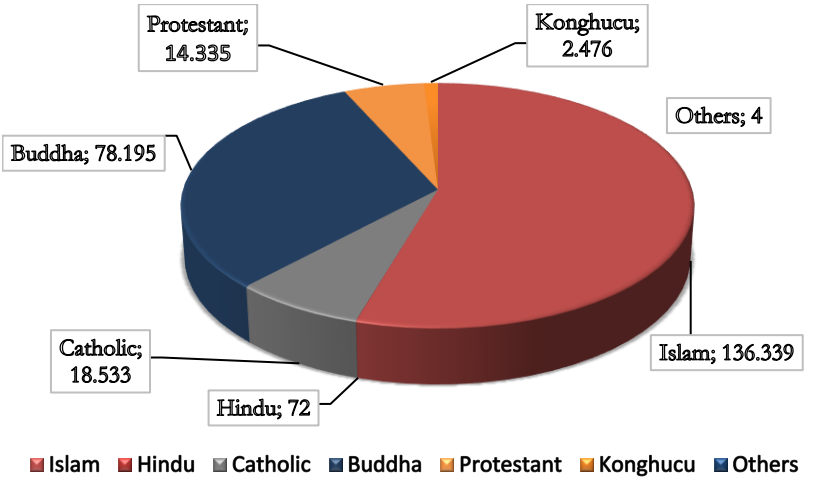


Figure 2. Population of Singkawang City Based on Religion[26]

Based on an interview with Hartono, one of the residents of Singkawang City explained that the diversity of religious adherents in the city of Singkawang shows that the people of Singkawang City are a heterogeneous society, and for more than 10 years there have been no conflicts between religions or ethnicities. There is also no prohibition on the establishment of houses of worship, sealing houses of worship, and so on. This can happen because the people of Singkawang City understand and realize the importance of a harmonious life, despite having religious and ethnic differences.[27]

Based on observations in the field carried out on April 25, 2024, it shows that there are many houses of worship from all religions, ranging from mosques, churches, temples, with unique building shapes, and several houses of worship standing side by side. A prominent symbol of interfaith harmony is proximity of Singkawang's three oldest houses of worship: the Singkawang Grand Mosque (located on Merdeka street No. 21, Pasiran, West Singkawang), the Tri Dharma Bumi Raya Temple, and the Catholic Church of Santo Fransiskus Asisi. Standing adjacent to one another, these landmark sites are deeply regarded by locals as enduring symbol of religious unity.[28]

[26] Ibid.

[27] Interview with Hartono, April 25, 2024.

[28] Based on observations April 25, 2024

Firman Santya, Singkawang resident, noted that interfaith and interethnic relations in the city are deeply harmonious, as visually represented by adjacent houses of worship. Furthermore, despite the city's rich ethnic diversity, social interactions remain peacefull; following the 1999 Sambas riots, no further interethnic conflicts or acts of intolerance have occurred in Singkawang. This stability underscores effective synergy between the local government and community members in preventing socio-religious discord.[29]

Harmony between differences in Singkawang City can be well established, inseparable from the role of various parties who synergize with each other based on their respective authorities and obligations. For example, the Forum for Inter-Religious Harmony (FKUB/ *Forum Kerukunan antar Umat Beragama*) of Singkawang City conducted dialogues with religious leaders from various religions and community leaders to accommodate the aspirations from religious community organizations, as well as recommendations to the Mayor and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD/*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*) of Singkawang City. The forum also participate in the dissemination of policies concerning religion, community empowerment and interfaith harmony, as well as issuing written for house of worship permit application.[30]

The Setara Institute conducted research related to the index of tolerant cities in Indonesia in 94 cities in Indonesia, and the results showed that Singkawang City was in the first position as the most tolerant city in Indonesia, the second position was occupied by the city of Bekasi, and the third position was occupied by the city of Salatiga. The following is data on the top ten tolerant cities in Indonesia[31]:

Table 2. Top Ten Cities of Tolerance in Indonesia

No	City	Index Score
1.	Singkawang	6,500
2.	Bekasi	6,460
3.	Salatiga	6,450

[29] Interview with Firman Santya interview, April 26, 2024.

[30] Sri Sudono Saliro, 'Perspektif Sosiologis Terhadap Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama Di Kota Singkawang.', *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 17, no. 2 (2019): 283, https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v17i2.3214.

[31] Ikhsan Yosarie et al., *Indeks Kota Toleran Tahun 2023* (Jakarta: Pustaka Masyarakat Setara, 2024).

4.	Manado	6,400
5.	Semarang	6,230
6.	Magelang	6,220
7.	Kediri	5,073
8.	Sukabumi	5,997
9.	Kupang	5,953
10.	Surakarta	5,800

The Setara Institute evaluates municipal tolerance based on key benchmark indicators. Singkawang was designated as Indonesia's most tolerant city because it satisfies these criteria: 1) enacting effective regulations to practice and promote tolerance; 2) maintaining constructive rhetoric and actions by local officials to preserve social cohesion; 3) demonstrating a minimal or non-existent record of religious freedom violations; and 4) actively managing religious diversity.[32] A primary example of these regulatory efforts is Singkawang Mayor Regulation No. 129 of 2021 concerning the Implementation of Community Tolerance, which has drawn widespread praise from NGOs, the central government, and local community members.

Hartono, a resident of Singkawang City, shows that so far the government apparatus has never said anything that can cause division, such as SARA (ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup issues); even during the election or regional elections, it is very rare to give statements to the public regarding issues that cause division between differences. For example, in the 2019 and 2024 elections, although in some areas in Java there was a little friction related to SARA (ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup issues), in Singkawang City it ran safely and conducively. In addition, Tjhai Chui Mie, as the Mayor of Singkawang, when giving a speech or opening an activity, always stops talking when listening to the call to prayer (*adzan*). This is the attitude of tolerance shown by a mayor of Singkawang.[33]

Field observations during the Cap Go Meh Festival on April 24, 2024, held at the Tri Dharma Bumi Sui Kheu Thai Pak Kung Temple on Sejahtera No. 28, Melayu, West Singkawang, revealed active participation across multiple ethic groups, including Chinese, Malay,

[32] Era Tazkiyah and Sugeng Utaya, 'Pancasila-Driven Character Education as a Foundation towards Multicultural Society A Case Study at Bruder Singkawang Elementary School', *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1341–50, https://doi.org/10.58230/27454312.674.

[33] Interview with Hartono interview, April 25, 2024.

Dayak, Javanese, and Madurese communities. This multi-ethnic engagement was evident in the widespread use of local regional languages throughout the event. Furthermore, participation extended beyond Confucianism to include followers of Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism.

Subsequent observations on April 25, 2024, highlighted the local pride in the city's recognition by Setara Institute as Indonesia's most tolerant city. Residents were observed discussing diversity and tolerance with visiting non residents in popular local gathering spots, such as Tiam Rusen coffee shop on Budi Utomo street, Condong, and Armor coffee shop on Bukit Pakar Utara Street No. 10. Through these informal interactions, Singkawang resindents actively promote the city's culture of tolerance and inclusivity to outside visitors.

Voices of Peace: The Role of Religious and Cultural Leaders in Building Tolerance

Emily Hertzman revealed that representation and discourse on social media help change the image of Singkawang as a multiethnic, multireligious, and harmonious place, but it is still defined by its majority Chinese Indonesian identity.[34] The Chinese ethnic group plays a significant role in building tolerance in Singkawang City. The stereotype that the Chinese ethnic group lacks nationalism in Indonesia is debunked in Singkawang City, where the Chinese ethnic group has successfully built trust with the local community in the post-conflict context.[35] The success of the city of Singkawang in building tolerance among ethnic groups and religions is inseparable from the role of religious leaders in fostering harmony, peace, and tolerance.

[34] Emily Hertzman, 'Digital Branding in the City of a Thousand Temples', *Indonesia* 119, no. 1 (2025): 147–71, https://doi.org/10.1353/ind.2025.a961931.

[35] The Chinese ethnic group in Singkawang City builds harmonious interethnic relationships through social interaction and community involvement. Through inclusive communication and participation in cultural activities, the Chinese ethnic group demonstrates that social identity can strengthen interethnic and interreligious relationships. See. Muhammad Jailani et al., 'Reconstructing Identity and Rebuilding Trust: Ethnic Chinese Strategies for Post-Conflict Social Integration in West Kalimantan', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* (2025), 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2025.2521516. See also. Reynaldo De Archellie et al., 'Ethnic Chinese in the Post-Reform Indonesia: Re-Assimilation of Chinese Community in Seven Cities to Counteract Prejudice', *Asian Ethnicity* (2025), 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2025.2476149.

The city of Singkawang has learned from the latest social conflicts that impact political, economic, and social stability, enabling the entire community to maintain harmony and uphold peace amidst diversity.[36] The society of Singkawang consistently upholds tolerance and is not easily provoked, thereby forming a strong foundation for preserving tolerance and maintaining ethnic and religious diversity.[37] This success is inseparable from the role of religious leaders who have a significant impact on fostering tolerance and harmony. Religious leaders regularly conduct interfaith dialogues.[38]

The efforts made by religious and cultural leaders in maintaining and building tolerance are carried out through three forms. *First*, providing understanding to the community to practice religious values that emphasize tolerance, mutual respect, and building peace. The messages of peace conveyed by religious leaders are delivered through sermons and other religious activities that serve as media in fostering harmony and peace. In Islamic religious leadership (*Ulamā*), messages of peace are conveyed through contextual interpretations of religious texts so that the messages delivered are relevant to the social, cultural, political, and religious contexts in the city of Singkawang.[39] Likewise, Buddhist religious leaders emphasize the importance of building peace and tolerance among different faiths by providing understanding to the community about the religious rituals of other faiths. In fact, several Vihara (temples) in Singkawang have become centers for inclusive activities, allowing the entire community to visit the temples, which is why it is not surprising that several temples in Singkawang have become tourist spots and venues for various other activities for the public. Places of worship become centers for social interaction among different

[36] In the last decade, several social conflicts have occurred between ethnic groups and religions in West Kalimantan. See. Andry Fitriyanto, Syamsul Kurniawan, and Lisyati Fatimah, 'The Social Capital of Religious Harmony: A Study of Desa Sadar Kerukunan in Ilir Kota, Sanggau Regency, West Kalimantan', *Religió Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 14, no. 1 (2024): 90–123, https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v14i1.2520.

[37] Sri Buwono et al., 'Exploring Multicultural Education: A Case Study of Singkawang', *International Journal of Educational Research & Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2023): 1051–58, https://doi.org/10.51601/ijersc.v4i6.747.

[38] Interviews with religious figures in Singkawang City, June 2024.

[39] In relation to this, efforts that have been made in the contextual interpretation of religious texts have been carried out in West Kalimantan. See. Syarif and Herlambang, 'Building Peace Through Qur'anic Interpretation in Muslim Communities in the Post-Conflict West Kalimantan'.

religions and cultures, thereby strengthening social cohesion.[40] Places of worship act as inclusive media in social interaction, which is a characteristic of the cultural community of Singkawang, because they socially coexist in a multicultural society.[41]

Second, religious leaders in Singkawang engage in routine activities in interfaith dialogue both organized by the government, the Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*/FKUB), and through religious organizations. Religious leaders have been involved in various efforts to build peace and harmony among religions; even after the ethnic conflict in 1999 in Sambas, they have actively promoted religious teachings as a means of reconciliation.[42] Interreligious dialogue is not only formal but also discusses issues that have the potential to cause division among religions, such as permits for places of worship, the practice of religious holidays, and social issues occurring in society.

Third, the symbolic role held by religious leaders can serve as a source of legitimacy for society in building peace amid diversity. Religious leaders become representatives of values of religious moderation such as commitment to nationalism, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation towards culture.[43] In practice, religious moderation is the true character of Islam in Indonesia,[44] and any deviation to this feature is restream lined in one way or another,

[40] Based on the author's observations in Singkawang City in April 2024.

[41] Amar Wisnu Setiawan, 'Spatial Perception towards Social Conflicts and the Built Environment in Indonesia', *International Review for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development* 9, no. 2 (2021): 134–50, https://doi.org/10.14246/irspsdc.9.2_134.

[42] Sumanto Al Qurtuby, 'Resurgent Religion and the Challenges for Inter- and Intra-Religious Relations and Dialogue in Southeast Asia', *Religious Inquiries* 14, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.22034/ri.2024.418540.1799.; Muhammad Fahmi et al., 'Multicultural Islamic Education as Strategy for Strengthening Social Cohesion in Islamic School', *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2025): 154–75, https://doi.org/10.31538/-nzh.v8i1.67.

[43] Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, 'Religious Moderation as Good Life: Two Responses to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Directive on Religious Moderation in Indonesia', *Exchange* 52, no. 3 (2023): 220–40, https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543x-bja10038.; Abdul Syukur et al., 'Empowering Islamic Community in Understanding Democracy and Shura Through the Wasathiyah Da'wa Movement in Indonesia', *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 18, no. 1 (2024): 98, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2024.18.1.98-126.

[44] F. Fadil et.al., "Religious Moderation and Family Resilience in the City of Malang, Indonesia: The Historical Perspectives of the Islamic Law," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (2024), 236-256.

including education.[45] The involvement of religious leaders in religious, social, and cultural activities has symbolic significance in the message of peace and tolerance in Singkawang. Furthermore, religious leaders possess charismatic authority, which serves a social function in resolving political, religious, and ethnic conflicts.[46] In Singkawang, charismatic religious leaders play a symbolic role in maintaining stability among different religious communities. The moderate character of the Singkawang community in practicing their faith becomes a social capital in fostering tolerance, preventing conflicts, and strengthening social cohesion.

The Implications of Inter-Religious Harmony in Singkawang City on Indonesia's Diversity

Based on observations in the field of the *Cap Go Meh* Festival on April 24, 2024, it shows that the sequence of *Cap Go Meh* events is road cleaning, lantern parades at night, and *Tatung*[47] parades, while those who participate in the celebration of the tradition are not only ethnic Chinese but also from the Dayak, Malay, and Javanese ethnic communities, and there are no boundaries between ethnicities so that harmony between ethnicities is established in the implementation of the Cap Go Meh Festival.

The uniqueness of the Cap Go Meh Festival in Singkawang City is that when the *Tatung* parade is held and the sound of the *Dzuhur* call to prayer is pronounced, the parade pauses for a moment to wait for the call to prayer to be completed, then after the call to prayer the activity continues. This phenomenon is very rare in Indonesia, and it is a form

[45] M. Muhlisin, Nur Kholis, and Juwita Rini, "Navigating the Nexus: Government Policies in Cultivating Religious Moderation Within State Islamic Higher Education," Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies 11, no. 1 (2023).

[46] Bryan S. Turner, 'Max Weber and the Sociology of Islam':, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* no. 2 (2016): 213–29, https://doi.org/10.3917/rip.276.0213.; Jennifer L Epley, 'Weber's Theory of Charismatic Leadership: The Case of Muslim Leaders in Contemporary Indonesian Politics', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no. 7 (2015): 7–17.; Wiwik Setiyani, 'The Exerted Authority of Kiai Kampung in the Social Construction of Local Islam', *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 1 (2020): 51, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.1.51-76.; Masdar Hilmy, 'The Political Economy of Sunni-Shi'ah Conflict in Sampang Madura', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2015.531.27-51.

[47] Tatung is someone who is possessed by spirits, ancestors, or supernatural powers. See. Elena Chai, *Of Temple and Tatung Tradition in Singkawang* (Sarawak: Unimas Publisher, 2017).

of tolerance between religious communities, so it is undeniable that the Setara Institute gives an award to Singkawang City as the most tolerant city in Indonesia. The festival can also invite various parties outside Singkawang, even from outside West Kalimantan, to watch the *Cap Go Meh* Festival so that the economic turnover in Singkawang City is very high. The *Cap Go Meh* Festival is basically not only held in Singkawang City but also in Sambas, Pontianak, and several other areas, but the biggest peak of the celebration is in Singkawang City.

According to local resident, Abdul Aziz, the annual *Cap Go Meh* festival stands a longside the city's adjacent places of worship as a primary symbol of tolerance in Singakwang. This existing cultural diversity ad local architecture make 'city of tolerance' a highly effective city branding strategy. The festival yields significant economic and socio-cultural benefits: economically, it drives tourisim from outside West Kalimantan, while socio-culturally, it strengthens interethnic and interfaith ties by actively involving Chinese but also from Dayak, Malay, and Javanese communities alike.[48] Ultimately, Cap Go Meh reinforces Singkawang's identity as a beacon of tolerance, drawing visitors from across the region who seek to experience and learn from its harmonious social framework.

The city of Singkawang, which is known as the most tolerant city in Indonesia, can attract various regions to study in the city, one of which is the Magelang City government. On January 30, 2023, several representatives from the Magelang city government visited Singkawang to learn about tolerance. Magelang City itself is ranked 6 (six) as a tolerant city in Indonesia.[49] The Magelang City Government want to learn from the City of Singkawang as the most tolerant city in Indonesia. Besides that, they also want to learn about the policies issued by the Singkawang City Government and the implementation of policies related to the management and maintenance of harmony and diversity in religion, ethnicity, race, and others.

Tolerance is essential to achieve harmony amidst religious, racial, ethnic diversity. Grounded in the foundation of *Pancasila* and the national motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, Indonesia consistently upholds

[48] Interview with Abdul Aziz interview, April 24, 2024.

[49] Asef Amani, 'Pemkot Magelang Belajar Toleransi Ke Pemkot Singkawang', *Suara Merdeka*, 2023, https://kedu.suaramerdeka.com/kedu/pr-217157949/pemkot-magelang-belajar-toleransi-ke-pemkot-singkawang.

tolerance through its legislative and constitutional framework.[50] Specially, Article 29 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to embrace their faith and worship according to their religious belief. This constitutional mandate prohibits discrimination among religious groups and expresses the state's intent to foster peaceful, inclusive coexistence across communities, exemplified by Singkawang City.

Walzer explained that there are several indicators contained in tolerance, namely accepting differences, there is no group uniformity, but there is diversity or multiculturalism, recognizing the rights of others, being able to respect and appreciate one's existence, and acknowledging the existence of cultural diversity is the creation of God Almighty.[51] Singkawang's model of harmony and diversity serves as a national benchmark for interfaith and interethnic coexistence. Consequently, branding Singkwang as the City of Tolerance is highly fitting, positioning it as a reference center for fostering unity across West Kalimantan and Indonesia as a whole. Beyond its social impact, this city branding stimulates the local economy, thereby supporting national poverty alleviation efforts, particulary within Singkawang City.

Conclusion

Although West Kalimantan has a history marked by ethnic and religious intolerance such as past conflict in Sambas regency, Singkawang city has transformed into a national benchmark for harmony, earning recognition as the most tolerant city in Indonesia. Consequently, positioning itself as the 'city of tolerance' serves as an ideal city branding strategy for Singkawang, reflecting a community where social cohesion and diversity flourish naturally. This harmony is evident in multi-ethnic and interfaith celebrations, as well as structural

[50] Sahri, 'The Role of Tharîqat in Strengthening Nationalism in Indonesia', *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2347010.

[51] Anang and Kalimatul Zuhroh, 'Nilai-Nilai Toleransi Antar Sesama Dan Antar Umat Beragama (Studi Pandangan KH. Sholeh Bahruddin)', *Multicultural Islamic Education* 3, no. 1 (2019): 41–55, https://doi.org/10.35891/ims.v3i1.1730.; Deniz Neriman Duru, Laurie Hanquinet, and Nazlı Sıla Cesur, 'Perceptions of Diversity and Attitudes of Tolerance in the "Fragmented" U.K.', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 4 (2017): 674–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1249053.; E. R. Hogemann, 'The Measure of the Contribution of Multiculturalism in Constructing the Current Brazilian Constitutional Text', *Law and Safety* 86, no. 3 (2022): 60–69, https://doi.org/-10.32631/pb.2022.3.05.

policies like Singkawang Mayor Regulation No. 129 of 2021 on the implementation of Community Tolerance, which regulates and encourages peaceful coexistence. As the city of tolerance, the local government regulate social interaction in building harmony and diversity, and its people are encouraged to uphold the values of tolerance. Beyond serving as a role model for intergroup harmony across Indonesia, Singkawang's inclusive practices yield significant economic benefits. Major cultural events such as *Cap Go Meh* festival attract visitors from outside West Kalimantan, driving local revenue, stimulating economic activity, and supporting broader government poverty reduction efforts in the region. []

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