



ISLAM AND POLITICAL INCLUSION: CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN A MULTICULTURAL DEMOCRACY — A CASE STUDY OF MATARAM CITY, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Multicultural democracy faces challenges in managing differences in religious and ethnic identities and political interests that have the potential to trigger social conflict. The city of Mataram is a sociopolitical space characterized by the diversity of religious, ethnic, and social groups within a single local democratic arena. This study aims to analyze the contribution of Islamic political values to strengthening political inclusion and conflict resolution in the multicultural society of Mataram City. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis related to political participation, representation, intergroup relations, and the management of diversity in Mataram City. The analysis draws on the perspectives of Islamic political thought, political inclusion theory, and conflict resolution. The findings indicate that the principles of 'adl (justice), shura (consultation), musawah (equality), tasamuh (tolerance), and maslahah (public interest) are relevant to fostering inclusive political practices and the peaceful management of differences. However, the implementation of these values is highly dependent on the capacity of political and governmental institutions to guarantee equal rights, representation, access to decision-making, and meaningful participation for various social groups. This study confirms that political inclusion can serve as a bridge between Islamic values and multicultural democracy by transforming diversity from a potential source of conflict into social capital for strengthening social cohesion. This study contributes to the field of Islamic politics and local governance through an integrative approach that combines Islamic values, political inclusion, and conflict resolution.

Keywords *Islam, Political Inclusion, Conflict Resolution*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy in a multicultural society is fundamentally not only about holding general elections or forming a government based on the will of the majority, but also about the political system's ability to accommodate the diversity of identities, interests, and values that exist within society. Multicultural democracy requires recognition of differences in religion, ethnicity, culture, and social identity while ensuring equality among citizens in accessing the political process. In this context, political inclusion becomes a key principle because it relates to the extent to which individuals and groups including those that are socially or politically underrepresented have the opportunity to participate, articulate their interests, and engage in public decision-making processes. Thus, political inclusion not only signifies the existence of formal participation but also encompasses meaningful representation, equal access, recognition of diverse interests, and the capacity of political institutions to prevent the marginalization of certain groups.

This openness to diversity is closely linked to democracy's ability to manage conflict. In a pluralistic society, differences in interests and identities are an inescapable reality; thus, the primary challenge of democracy is not to eliminate these differences, but to provide

mechanisms that allow them to be managed peacefully. Within this framework, conflict resolution can be understood as the process of managing and resolving disputes through mechanisms such as dialogue, negotiation, mediation, participation, and decision-making that enable the parties involved to find common ground. The effectiveness of conflict resolution is greatly influenced by the level of engagement of the parties and the distribution of power within the process. Therefore, political inclusion can be viewed not merely as a democratic principle, but also as a mechanism that creates space for diverse groups to articulate their interests, build communication, and resolve differences through democratic procedures. In multicultural societies, this approach becomes increasingly important because conflicts rooted in religious, cultural, or social group identities can escalate into polarization if inclusive institutions and spaces for dialogue are not available (Saputro & Sukmana, 2025).

Islam plays a significant role in democratic political dynamics, particularly in countries with large Muslim populations, as Islamic values and socio-religious institutions interact directly with political life, civil society, and governance. Islamic values such as justice, transparency, welfare, and moral responsibility have the potential to strengthen political ethics and promote a more just approach to governance. At the same time, the involvement of Islam-based political parties and civil society organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah demonstrates that Islamic actors can contribute to expanding public participation and the representation of various social groups in democratic life. Furthermore, Islamic politics also has the potential to foster interfaith dialogue and contribute to the resolution of social conflicts within pluralistic societies. However, the relationship between Islam and democracy is not always free of tension. Differences in interpretation regarding the relationship between religion and the state, as well as incompatibilities between certain religious principles and specific democratic norms, can become a source of polarization if not managed through a contextual and dialogical approach. Widia et al. (2025) demonstrate that Islamic values can strengthen political ethics and public participation, but at the same time, their integration with democracy requires careful management of these potential tensions. The debate over the relationship between Islam and democracy cannot, therefore, be separated from its historical context, the needs of contemporary society, and the efforts of Muslim thinkers to find common ground between Islamic tradition and democratic principles (Amir et al., 2025; Alrefai et al., 2023).

These tensions become even more complex when religious identity interacts with the demands of pluralism and political inclusion in a diverse society like Indonesia. Religious identity can serve as a source of moral guidance, solidarity, and accountability in politics, but its use as a basis for political mobilization can also lead to the exclusion of groups with different identities. In the Indonesian context, religion-based identity politics therefore has two opposing possibilities: on the one hand, it can strengthen political ethics and the social justice agenda, while on the other hand, it can deepen polarization if the identities of the majority and minority are placed in unequal political relations. This situation indicates that pluralism cannot be understood merely as the coexistence of various groups within a single society; rather, it must be realized through social and political relationships that enable

every group to gain recognition and equal opportunities for participation. Findings regarding symbolic segregation and unequal participation suggest that the development of a pluralistic society still faces obstacles in creating truly inclusive interactions (Suadnyana, 2025). At the same time, Muslim students' ability to adapt through dialogue and interaction in a multicultural environment demonstrates that religious identity is dynamic and can evolve through experiences of interaction with different groups (Dani et al., 2025). Thus, the main challenge lies not in the existence of religious identity itself, but in how that identity is negotiated within a political space that guarantees pluralism, equality, and inclusion. A balance between moral-religious values and democratic principles is essential so that religious identity can serve as a source of social cohesion, rather than as an instrument of political exclusion (Sulistiyo & Sulistiyo, 2025).

Under these conditions, political inclusion can be viewed as one of the strategic mechanisms for conflict resolution because it provides space for various actors to participate in the decision-making process and the resolution of differences. Inclusion ensures that conflicts are not resolved solely through the dominance of the group with greater power, but rather through negotiation, dialogue, and the search for agreements that take into account the interests of all parties. In the public policy process, negotiations conducted amid divergent community interests highlight the importance of participatory and inclusive decision-making, particularly when there are power imbalances and barriers to communication between parties (Nahrudin, 2022). On a broader level, the multilateral mechanisms developed by international and regional organizations demonstrate that the sociopolitical context of every conflict requires a resolution approach capable of accommodating the interests and characteristics of the parties involved; regional frameworks such as ASEAN, for example, provide a more contextual approach to regional dynamics (Bernardianto & Bernardianto, 2025). However, political inclusion does not automatically lead to effective conflict resolution. Experience with political dialogue in Kenya shows that the dialogue process can become merely a performative exercise when dominated by the elite and failing to provide substantive space for civil society, thereby perpetuating political marginalization (Koech & Koech, 2025). These findings underscore that the quality of inclusion—not merely the existence of participatory forums—is a critical factor in determining whether political dialogue can produce legitimate and sustainable conflict resolution.

Although a number of studies have highlighted the importance of Islamic values in political ethics and public participation, the dynamics of religious identity in pluralistic societies, and the role of inclusion and dialogue in conflict resolution, the findings of these studies still tend to address these dimensions separately. Based on the research cited in this study, there remains room to integrate the relationship between Islam, political inclusion, and conflict resolution into a single analytical framework specifically situated within the context of multicultural democracy. This gap is significant because Islam's role in democracy must be viewed not only through the lens of normative compatibility between religious values and democratic principles but also in terms of how Islamic actors and values can contribute to the creation of an inclusive political space and the management of conflict amid diverse identities. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to link these

three dimensions by positioning political inclusion as a mechanism that bridges Islamic values and identity with the process of conflict resolution in a multicultural democracy. Thus, this study aims to analyze how Islam and political inclusion can contribute to conflict resolution in a multicultural democratic society, as well as to identify the conditions and mechanisms that enable Islam-based political engagement to strengthen an inclusive and peaceful democracy.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to analyze practices of political inclusion and conflict resolution mechanisms within a multicultural community in Mataram City, Indonesia. The research focuses on practices of political inclusion, the role of Islamic values and actors in fostering dialogue and participation, and government and community mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts related to religious and social group diversity. The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews and observations, with informants selected purposively based on their knowledge of and involvement with the research issues, including the Mataram City government, religious and community leaders, representatives of minority groups, Islamic civil society organizations such as Muhammadiyah, and academics. Secondary data were obtained through a documentary review of regulations, government policy documents, organizational documents, institutional reports, official publications, and relevant media coverage. The data were analyzed interactively through data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions, while data validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques.

The research focuses on three main aspects: (1) the forms and practices of political inclusion in multicultural societies; (2) the role of Islamic values, organizations, and actors in fostering dialogue, participation, and the management of differences; and (3) government and societal mechanisms for preventing and resolving potential conflicts related to religious and social group diversity. This focus is used to examine the extent to which the principle of political inclusion is not only realized through formal recognition of diversity but is also translated into practices of governance, civic participation, access to decision-making processes, protection of minority rights, and conflict resolution mechanisms.

RESULTS

Political Inclusion, Governance, and the Rights of Religious Minorities

From the perspective of the rule of law and religious pluralism, the protection of the rights of religious minorities is an integral part of upholding the principles of equality, nondiscrimination, and freedom of religion. The Indonesian context reveals a relatively strong normative foundation through the 1945 Constitution, particularly Articles 28E and 29, as well as Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. However, the existence of these legal instruments has not yet fully translated into effective protection at the implementation level. Research by Anshar and Ifing indicates that intolerance, violence, and injustice

toward minority groups remain issues in practice; thus, the primary problem lies not merely in the absence of legal norms, but also in the effectiveness of law enforcement, public policy, education on tolerance, and the harmonization of legal norms with the social conditions of society. Thus, the protection of minorities in a pluralistic state requires more than just formal recognition of religious freedom; the state is also required to establish institutional mechanisms capable of ensuring that these rights are enjoyed equally by all citizens (Anshar & Ifing, 2025). In the case of Mataram City, the city government is fully committed to fostering diversity, as reflected in several statements by government officials particularly the mayor of Mataram such as the following:

“Religious moderation, as we understand it, means remaining steadfast in one’s beliefs while being wise in one’s interactions with others. It means being firm in one’s principles yet respectful of differences. That is how religious life in Mataram can proceed smoothly, harmoniously, and safely.”

Based on the author’s analysis, the deputy mayor’s statement above demonstrates that the Mataram City Government is fully aware of the city’s diversity; this has led the government to take tangible action through policies and formal recognition of religious freedom. Overall, the low level of interfaith conflict in Mataram City demonstrates the government’s ability to translate these norms into policies, public services, law enforcement, participatory mechanisms, and nondiscriminatory protections. This is further reinforced by the opinion of academic Zakaria Anshori, who states:

“We see that the values of religious moderation are not merely a discourse but have become an integral part of development policy. We deeply appreciate that the vision for Mataram City is built on the paradigm of religious moderation. This is a major strength in managing diversity and maintaining social harmony.”

This means that a key factor supporting the continued harmony amid diversity in Mataram City is the Mataram City Government’s commitment to incorporating the principles of religious moderation into various regional development planning documents, such as the RPJMD, RKPD, and programs implemented by each OPD.

This institutional dimension becomes increasingly evident in studies on administrative law and the protection of minorities. Al-Raggad (2025), through a systematic review of 283 articles in the Web of Science database, demonstrates that the effectiveness of protections for ethnic and religious groups is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, including the legislative framework, judicial review, international standards, the sociopolitical environment, and policy reforms. These findings indicate that administrative law is not merely a technical instrument of governance but also a crucial mechanism for ensuring that public policies are implemented in a transparent, accountable, nondiscriminatory, and responsive manner toward underrepresented groups. Valenzi’s (2025) comparative analysis, based on the Atlas of Religious or Belief Minority Rights in the European Union, reinforces this argument by showing that recognition of the legal status of minority groups influences their access to certain rights, including spiritual assistance in institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and the armed forces. Meanwhile, a comparison of Canada and France shows that the design of secularism and state policies toward religious expression can result in different levels of inclusion: models that allow

greater space for the expression of religious identity in public spaces tend to be more supportive of integration and the recognition of minority rights than approaches that strictly limit the visibility of religion (Al-Raggad, 2025; Valenzi, 2025; VanHelder, 2025).

In the realm of Islamic politics in Mataram City, Islamic mass organizations such as Muhammadiyah—particularly the NTB Regional Chapter of Muhammadiyah—are fully committed to fostering harmony amid diversity. This is achieved through concrete actions such as collaborating with election organizers, conducting social initiatives, and so on. This is reflected in the statement made by Dr. H. Falahuddin of the NTB Regional Chapter of Muhammadiyah, who stated:

“Since its inception, Muhammadiyah has been committed to being an independent civil society organization with no affiliation to any political party. We will continue to uphold this commitment by adhering to laws and regulations and prioritizing the interests of the nation and the people. Therefore, we welcome Bawaslu’s intention to build a partnership to strengthen democratic oversight.”

From the author’s perspective, in the city of Mataram, political inclusion is produced not only by the state but also by civil society.

Based on this synthesis, “Political Inclusion, Governance, and the Rights of Religious Minorities” can be understood as an issue situated at the intersection of legal recognition, governmental capacity, and substantive political participation. Research findings indicate that political inclusion cannot be adequately measured solely by the existence of constitutional guarantees or formal recognition of religious freedom, but must be assessed based on the capacity of government institutions to translate these norms into policies, public services, law enforcement, participatory mechanisms, and nondiscriminatory protections. Within this framework, governance serves as the connecting variable between “rights on paper” and “rights in practice”: the more responsive, accountable, and inclusive the system of governance, the greater the likelihood that the rights of minority groups will be effectively realized. Conversely, when state institutions fail to align the law with socio-political realities, the divide between the majority and the minority can continue to be perpetuated even when a normative framework is in place. Thus, the findings of previous research point to the proposition that the protection of religious minority rights serves as a substantive indicator of the quality of political inclusion and democratic governance, since the measure of democracy lies not only in the majority’s ability to determine political decisions but also in the capacity of state institutions to ensure that minority groups continue to receive recognition, protection, opportunities for participation, and equality in public life.

Conflict, Identity, and the Social Construction of Religious Difference

Religious conflict in multicultural societies cannot be understood solely as a direct consequence of differences in religious doctrine, because religious identity is formed and negotiated through social, political, and cultural contexts, as well as public representations. In the context of Muslim diaspora communities, identity construction can occur through processes of social categorization and labeling that influence how individuals and groups understand their position within the majority society. Representations that stereotypically

portray Muslims as a problematic group, prone to violence, or outside the national identity can reinforce symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them,” thereby potentially hindering social integration and widening the gap between groups. Thus, religious identity is not static but rather the result of the interaction between individual experiences, social narratives, power relations, and discursive constructions that evolve in the public sphere. On the other hand, research on Pitu Ulunna Salu (PUS) in Mamasa points to the possibility of constructive identity formation. The reconstruction of PUS’s collective identity, rooted in the history of alliances among traditional institutions, can reshape perceptions of post-conflict brotherhood and harmony, while traditional authority, collective memory, and youth participation serve as key elements in the process of cultural identity-based peacebuilding. These findings suggest that the same identity, which in certain situations can serve as a dividing line between groups, can also be reconstructed as a source of solidarity, reconciliation, and peacebuilding (Mahyuddin et al., 2025).

Religion thus occupies an ambivalent position in the dynamics of conflict: it can serve as a source of legitimacy for exclusion and polarization, yet at the same time provide values, norms, moral authority, and social networks that can be mobilized for peace. From an Islamic perspective, religion can provide normative principles and methodologies for conflict prevention, reconciliation, and peacebuilding, including through the involvement of religious leaders as social actors with the capacity to shape attitudes and intergroup relations. This is also in line with the Hindu perspective, as expressed by Nyoman Widhiarsana, ST., CH., CI, Executive Board Member of the PHDI NTB, who stated the following:

“When religious harmony is well maintained, the lives of religious communities whether Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Catholic, or Confucian will proceed harmoniously. From there, the quality of life in society can continue to improve.”

In addition, Nyoman Widhiarsana, ST., CH., CI, also stated:

“When differences in interpretation arise due to customs or traditions, believers need a clear point of reference to avoid confusion in fulfilling their religious obligations and responsibilities as citizens.”

From the above discussion, in the author’s view, conflict does not lie solely in “religious differences,” but in how those differences are defined, represented, politicized, and institutionalized in social life. A review of the literature also indicates that approaches that view religion solely as a source of conflict have analytical limitations, as they overlook the capacity of religion and collective identity to serve as sources of reconciliation.

In line with this, Firdaus et al. (2023) assert that religion serves a dual function in conflict: it can contribute to the emergence of conflict while also serving as an instrument for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, the relationship between religion and conflict must be viewed critically. Lindgren and Sonnenschein (2021) point out that the claim that conflicts categorized as religious conflicts are inherently more violent, more intense, longer-lasting, and more difficult to negotiate than secular conflicts cannot be accepted at face value, as the conceptual boundary between “religious” and “non-religious” conflicts is often unclear. This critique is important because it highlights that religion should not be treated as a single variable that automatically causes conflict; political

factors, group interests, competition over resources, power relations, and processes of identity framing also determine how religious differences evolve into conflict or, conversely, become a basis for cooperation and peace (Firdaus et al., 2023; Lindgren & Sonnenschein, 2021).

Based on this synthesis, Conflict, Identity, and the Social Construction of Religious Difference can be interpreted as a dynamic process in which religious differences acquire political and social meaning through the construction of identities, narratives, power relations, and intergroup interactions. Research findings show that conflict does not lie solely in “religious differences,” but in how those differences are defined, represented, politicized, and institutionalized in social life. A review of the literature also indicates that approaches that view religion solely as a source of conflict have analytical limitations, as they overlook the capacity of religion and collective identity to serve as sources of reconciliation. In this context, the reconstruction of identity becomes a crucial mechanism: exclusive identities can lead to othering, discrimination, and polarization, whereas inclusive identities can foster solidarity across groups. Therefore, conflict resolution in multicultural societies must move beyond mere management of differences toward a transformation of the social construction of those differences. The theoretical implication is that political inclusion and governance do not merely serve to provide formal rules for managing conflict, but must also be capable of creating a socio-political space for different religious groups to define their identities on an equal footing, participate in decision-making processes, and build a shared narrative of citizenship. Thus, sustainable peace does not require the elimination of religious identity, but rather the transformation of religious identity from a basis of exclusion into a source of recognition, solidarity, and shared life within a multicultural democracy.

Education, Social Engagement, and Peacebuilding for Multicultural Harmony

Multicultural education plays a strategic role in building individuals’ capacity to understand, accept, and appreciate social, cultural, and religious diversity. Fauzi’s (2025) study of secondary schools in Yogyakarta shows that the integration of multicultural values into instruction, culture-based extracurricular activities, and capacity-building for teachers are associated with increased mutual respect among students. These findings are reinforced by Lindayati et al. (2025), who position Islamic education in a pluralistic society as a strategic space for strengthening the values of tolerance, justice, and compassion through the development of a curriculum sensitive to the multicultural context and teacher training grounded in a pluralist perspective.

In the context of Mataram’s multicultural democracy, education and social engagement can serve as mechanisms for peacebuilding by transforming religious differences from a source of social distance into opportunities for interaction, mutual recognition, and democratic participation. Muhammadiyah’s involvement in political education, inclusive education, and collaboration with civil society demonstrates that Islamic social organizations can contribute to conflict prevention not only through religious tolerance but also through the creation of inclusive social and democratic spaces.

This was conveyed by Yudhi Lestanta, a young leader of Muhammadiyah in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB).

“In the context of Mataram City’s multicultural democracy, the education and social engagement of Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah are not merely instruments for fostering tolerance, but rather mechanisms for peacebuilding that transform religious differences from a potential source of conflict into a space for inclusion, dialogue, participation, and social cohesion. Furthermore, in its educational institutions—from the elementary level through higher education—Muhammadiyah incorporates a curriculum focused on multiculturalism and religious moderation as part of its ongoing effort to foster harmony amid diversity.”

Thus, education serves not only as an instrument for the transmission of knowledge but also as an arena for the formation of social character and the reproduction of civic values that enable students to interact constructively with diverse groups. From this perspective, the success of multicultural education depends heavily on the ability of educational institutions to integrate diversity into daily learning practices, rather than merely treating it as supplementary material in the curriculum. Outside the classroom, social engagement and collaborative experiences provide a more practical dimension to peace education.

Khoiri and Rohmah (2025) show that cross-national educational collaboration, cultural exchange, collaborative online learning, and cross-border projects have the potential to enhance global competencies while fostering tolerance, empathy, and solidarity; however, their effectiveness faces obstacles such as the digital divide, curriculum differences, and limited policy support. At the community level, Leiwakabessy et al. (2025), through a participatory empowerment program in Negeri Laha, Maluku, demonstrate that workshops and interactive dialogues on the sources, dynamics, and resolution of conflicts can be used to strengthen community capacity in conflict management and peacebuilding. Meanwhile, Lalramnghaka et al. (2025) demonstrate that ethnomathematics pedagogy can integrate local cultural knowledge into the educational process, thereby creating space for the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, increased cross-cultural awareness, collaboration, empathy, and the ability to navigate differences. These findings collectively indicate that effective education for multicultural communities must go beyond a mere focus on knowledge transfer; it must also provide experiences of interaction, collaboration, dialogue, and recognition of diverse cultural identities.

Based on this synthesis, “Education, Social Engagement, and Peacebuilding for Multicultural Harmony” can be interpreted as a mechanism of social transformation that links the formation of knowledge and attitudes at the individual level to changes in intergroup relations at the societal level. Multicultural education provides a cognitive and normative foundation through tolerance, respect, justice, and openness to differences; social engagement then translates these values into experiences of interaction and cooperation; while peacebuilding provides a transformative orientation for sustainably addressing prejudice, tension, and conflict. An evaluation of previous research also shows that education does not work automatically: changing attitudes requires a relevant curriculum, competent teachers, spaces for dialogue, institutional support, and real

opportunities for students and the community to interact across identities. Therefore, multicultural harmony should not be understood as the absence of conflict, but rather as the social and institutional capacity to manage differences in an inclusive, dialogic, and nonviolent manner. In relation to political inclusion and governance, education and social engagement can be viewed as social infrastructure that strengthens citizens' ability to participate in public life, build trust across groups, and transform diversity from a potential source of polarization into a foundation for cooperation and peace.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this synthesis indicate that conflict resolution in a multicultural democracy cannot be achieved solely through legal recognition or formal conflict-resolution mechanisms, but requires simultaneous institutional and social transformation. Political inclusion serves as a crucial foundation because it ensures that religious groups, including minority groups, receive recognition, protection, representation, and opportunities for substantive participation. However, the effectiveness of such inclusion depends heavily on the quality of governance—specifically, the ability to translate normative rights into policies, public services, law enforcement, and nondiscriminatory governance practices. At the social level, religious conflicts must also be understood as the result of the construction of identities, narratives, and power relations; thus, conflict resolution requires a shift from exclusive identities toward identities that foster cross-group solidarity. In this process, multicultural education, social engagement, dialogue, and peacebuilding serve as the social infrastructure that fosters tolerance, trust, and the community's ability to manage differences peacefully. Thus, inclusive democratic governance, the protection of minority rights, identity transformation, and the strengthening of social capacity are complementary elements in building sustainable peace in a multicultural society.

Future research should empirically examine how political inclusion and the quality of governance interact with religious identity in determining the success of conflict resolution, particularly by comparing majority-minority societies in several multicultural democracies. It is also urgent to direct research toward identifying concrete mechanisms—through education, interfaith dialogue, political participation, and peacebuilding—that are most effective in transforming religious identity from a source of exclusion into social capital for reconciliation and democratic cohesion.

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