



Impact of Religion in Maintaining the Stability of a Country: Comparative Study Between Soeharto's Era and Prabowo's Era

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ABSTRACT. This research will explain the situation of religion during the Suharto era and the Prabowo era. President Suharto considered religion to be a threat to national stability, so he restricted religious literature to government publications to prevent seditious doctrines from entering through religion, while President Prabowo considered religion to be one aspect of maintaining national stability. This study will explain the role of religion in Indonesia's independence and the views of President Suharto and President Prabowo on religion. This study will also explain the relationship between religion and the state. These issues will add to the insight and understanding of the differences in the views of President Suharto and President Prabowo on religion. This study will use descriptive and analytical methods. This brief study will provide an analysis that can be developed in religious life in Indonesia as a guardian of state stability.

Keywords: *Religion, State, Soeharto, Prabowo.*



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INTRODUCTION

Religion and the state in Indonesia have a very complex relationship. Religion influences many factors in the Indonesian state. This complex relationship did not develop overnight. The relationship between religion and the state has existed for a long time, even before Indonesian independence. Religion is a legal basis that enables humans to live a moral life. Each religion has its own laws, and likewise, the state has its own laws based on religion. In Indonesia, we see that the independence movement progressed in tandem with religion. Many religious figures influenced the birth of the nation called Indonesia.

One of the revolutionary heroes who became a religious figure was K.H Abbas Abdul Jamil. He is come from Cirebon, West Java. He served as the commander of the student troops during the battle of Surabaya on November 10th. His impact as a teacher and patriot was that many student cadres became militant anti-colonial fighters under his command. He was also a figure who rejected diplomacy with the dutch and choose physical resistance to defend Indonesian independence. A state without religion would be merely a structural symbol devoid of moral and social integrity. Social morality is inherent in human nature. However, to have good morals in our lives. We need religion. Religion serves as the legal foundation for state life. In essence, religion guides us in enforcing the law. Law is formed based on morality, so the effectiveness of legal products will be good, as religion and morality create humane and liberated laws that will help solve problems that exist in society.

However, every religion teaches peace, justice and tolerance. If Indonesia is led by a leader who is at odds between religion and state, it will destroy the country. A country must be tolerant because there are differences, etc. therefore, being a just leader is one of the requirements that a country must have. Because a country is formed by several different particles, such as regions, tribes and religions. And it is through religion that we are taught to be grateful people. The blessings of physical and spiritual health, the blessings of faith, and the joys of life all enable us to think healthy. A prime example is Pancasila, the foundation of Indonesian state, in its principle, "believe in the one Almighty God." It clearly states that in our lives. We are inseparable from belief in God. And belief in God means we are religious. Research studies indicate that not only the first principle, but also the second, third, fourth, and fifth principles serve us the legal foundation for national life.

Pancasila and Islam are closely linked in building an anti-radical nation. Islam serves as a reverence for the Indonesian people in preventing the growing radical groups in Indonesia. Pancasila serves as the legal foundation for an anti-radical state. Both are interconnected, creating a nation with sound social and moral character. Indonesian's national motto reads "Bineka Tunggal Ika," meaning "different but still one." Likewise, in Islam, it is stated in Surah Al-Kafirun, verse 6, "for you your religion, and for me mine." Two distinct phrases that have a unified meaning. In our lives we are divided into various groups, based on religion, region, culture, and so on. Therefore, we implement these two phrases in our national and religious life. We may differ, but we must remain united. This is what is called religious moderation.

Human rights, which are often considered incompatible with religion, are seen by Romo Magnis and Cak Nur as an inseparable part of divine and humanitarian values. They believe that religion is a source of respect for humanity. This is where religion finds its form in the national dimension. Lately we often find a philosopher who is less visible in looking at issues of intolerance in particular and continues to erode national harmony. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is the lifeblood of national and state life. Perhaps it will always be lagging behind (more precisely, a seatback) in the development of religious harmony. Let's take the example of the repeated disappointment that we always express regarding the state's attitude in handling social conflicts between community groups.

In the 2014 annual report alone, violations and intolerance involving state actors were recorded, for example: 25 perpetrators from the police, 18 perpetrators from the district government, eight perpetrators each from the courts, village or sub-district officials, six perpetrators from the sub-district officials. By looking at this hierarchy of values, it becomes easier for us to understand (not condone) the dynamics of the response of the government and law enforcement officials in various regions regarding the right to freedom of religion and belief, especially cases of violence in the name of religion. Because general stability is the highest value, anything that is considered to undermine social stability and harmony will be considered a major threat.

Public arguments about citizens' constitutional rights in all their forms seem to fall flat before our rulers and armed law enforcement officers. This is a logical consequence of the marginalization of justice and constitutional rights in the hierarchy of values held by the government and law enforcement officers. The Pancasila we glorify as the nation's fundamental and unifying value is now nothing more than a comforting and comforting slogan. Meanwhile, in everyday life, Indonesians place their personal values as their guiding principles, detached from those fundamental and unifying values. The lyrics of the song, "Pancasila, the foundation of the state...my personal nation," seem to have lost their meaning. But according to Gus Dur, true interfaith harmony occurs when we are able to seek common ground and use it for the common good. We need to remember his popular saying, "don't differentiate between those who are the same, and don't equate those who are different. Religion, in the hands of these wise leaders, becomes a means of mutual strengthening and complementary, a good example amidst the current turmoil in interfaith harmony.

Pancasila is the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state, which has grown philosophically in society even before the founding of the Indonesian state. In this information, Pancasila was also based on the role of religion. So, that the first article was agreed to read "belief in the one almighty god." Pancasila has been proven to have proven truth values so that it can unite the diversity of the Indonesian nation. The ideology of Pancasila is an open ideology that is able to adapt to the times so that its implementation can continue. The truth of the values of Pancasila can be proven through scientific studies that can unite Indonesia from the ethnicity, religion, race and culture of a group. In terms of implementation, Pancasila often faces obstacles from individuals and group who argue against Pancasila and religion. In fact, the relationship between Pancasila and religion is a mutually beneficial one that provides benefits to both. Frequent social problems and friction, riots, and economic issues are often cited as reasons for the conflict between the two. In the fact, Pancasila requires religion to run a dignified, just state life that prioritizes the interest of the community. Conversely, religion requires the state to realize its values so that society can carry out its obligations to draw closer to god almighty.

METHOD

This research uses the library research method, by examining various relevant literature, such as books, journal articles, conference paper and official publication related Religion, State, Soeharto and Religion, and also Prabowo and Religion. Data is collected through the study of credible and academically recognized source. The analysis is using descriptively and analytically. Descriptive analysis is used to describe and explain the information obtained from the literature, while analytical analysis focuses on identifying and further understanding the Impact of Religion on State, Religion in Soeharto's era, Religion on Prabowo's era. With this approach, the research seek to link the religions's impact on maintaining stability of a country.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship between Religion and Country

The regulation of religion is clearly one form of the relationship between religion and the state, obviously this relationship can be formed from several things that underlie the existence of a country including History, Philosophical views, Cultural background, and Political elements of a country that may be different from other countries, The relationship between religion and the state depends on three main factors namely: The constitution, the governing regime and the composition of the religious community. There are three models in the relationship between religion and the state, as follows : Separation, Unification and Recognition.

Separation Theory : Where the state takes no part of authority over a religion, this theory outlines the separation of religion from the state and the neutrality of a state towards the idea of religion and its practice in the country. It ensures that religious affairs are removed from any attempt at state domination, and therefore the state cannot control its citizens in matters of religion, whether as a belief system or any religious practice. Ultimately it is clear that religion is relegated to the private sphere and has no symbol or influence whatsoever in the public sphere. This model is practised by several countries such as the United States, Australia and the Philippines.

Unification Theory : Where religion and state are united, as in the Islamic republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia and other countries where the state takes part in the religious authority of the country.

Recognition Theory : Usually this theory is embraced by countries that are secular but still maintain elements of religion in the form of preservation and tradition at a certain level, this

concept is applied by several countries such as Britain, Norway and Greece. Others adopt the traditions of a religion and apply them to state traditions, such as Thailand, or adopt policies that become the basis of a country, basically patronising and protecting a religion or religious tradition as a cultural heritage and expression, a source of policy and common good, and an inspiration of moral obligation for the people of a nation. Where it allows the presence of religious symbols in public or the extent to which the state has support for religious activities. Indonesia itself has a different form of all three.

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Constitution

In Indonesia itself, the constitution has been adjusted as a recognition that places religion as the most important factor in the state system, for example, in every preamble of every draft of state regulations, there is always a deity who is almighty from each draft. This proves that belief in God is not only important in the principle of the state of the Republic of Indonesia, but the resulting laws and regulations must also be in accordance with the value of religious norms. In addition to religious symbols, the Indonesian constitution also contains certain chapters and articles that discuss religious affairs. There are 2 things that are of concern: (1) There is no official state religion in Indonesia and (2) Recognition of freedom of religion for Indonesians.

The first point becomes very important considering that Indonesia is a country with a majority of Muslims, there is no privilege given by the constitution to Islam itself to make it an official religion in Indonesia, which indirectly means that normatively the Indonesian state recognises religious plurality, where all religious groups must be treated equally without any preferential exceptions or privileges. Some laws and regulations also contain basic principles of protection of freedom of religion. On the other hand, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia states that the state is based on the almighty God (tawhid) and therefore the state guarantees its citizens to practice a religion if it is in line with the principle of almighty God.

The Governing Regime

The concept of governing regimes is closely related to the state's capacity to regulate social life, including religious practices. Regulation, in this sense, emerges as an instrument through which the state exercises authority and maintains order. According to Joel S. Migdal, the strength of a state can be assessed based on its ability to penetrate society and enforce rules without excessive compromise with competing social forces. These forces may include ethnic groups, religious communities, and other civil society actors. A strong state is thus characterized by effective institutions, a coherent set of norms, and the availability of resources to implement policies. Conversely, a weak state often struggles to assert its authority, resulting in fragmented governance and limited regulatory effectiveness.

However, the theoretical strength of a state does not always translate into practical success. In many contexts, the relationship between the state and society is dynamic and contested. Even in states with relatively strong bureaucratic systems, policy implementation may face resistance from local actors or competing institutions. This condition reflects what Antonio Gramsci describes as the struggle for hegemony, where dominance is not only enforced through coercion but also negotiated through consent. As a result, governance becomes a process of continuous interaction involving negotiation, compromise, and adaptation between the state and civil society (Hidayat, 2020).

In the context of religious regulation, the nature of the governing regime plays a crucial role. Democratic regimes tend to prioritize individual freedoms, including freedom of religion, which leads to a relatively minimal level of state intervention in religious affairs. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes often impose stricter controls on religious expression to maintain political

stability and prevent dissent. This relationship suggests a continuum in which the degree of democracy influences the extent of religious regulation (Mujiburrahman, 2019).

Indonesia provides an interesting case study in this regard. As a democratic country with a diverse religious population, the state adopts a regulatory approach that seeks to balance religious freedom with social harmony. The government recognizes multiple religions and establishes legal frameworks to manage interreligious relations. However, this regulatory approach sometimes leads to tensions, particularly when state policies are perceived as favoring certain groups over others. Research published in SINTA 2-indexed journals indicates that religious regulation in Indonesia often reflects a hybrid model, combining elements of democratic governance with residual authoritarian practices inherited from previous regimes (Arifianto, 2018).

Furthermore, the persistence of regulation in democratic settings highlights that freedom and control are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they coexist in a complex relationship shaped by historical, political, and cultural factors. For instance, the state may justify regulatory measures as necessary to prevent conflict or maintain public order, even if such measures limit certain aspects of religious freedom. This aligns with findings by Setara Institute researchers, who argue that the level of religious freedom in Indonesia fluctuates depending on political dynamics and local governance practices (Ismail, 2021).

In conclusion, governing regimes significantly influence the regulation of religion and the broader dynamics of state-society relations. While strong states possess greater capacity to enforce regulations, their success ultimately depends on their ability to negotiate legitimacy with civil society. Similarly, the level of democracy shapes the balance between freedom and control, but does not eliminate the need for regulation altogether. Therefore, understanding the interplay between regime type, state capacity, and social forces is essential for analyzing contemporary governance and religious freedom.

The Composition of the Religious Community

Another factor is the composition of religion, in terms of dominance and minority, a persuasive argument for linking the existence of the dominant group to the overall shape of the legal system. Political and legal attempts at hegemony using certain expressions and forms of discourse drawn from existing dominant religious groups are indeed a common phenomenon around the world. At times when the ruler or regime is politically weak, such as during periods of political transition, the values and norms of the dominant group often emerge as an alternative system. There is also evidence that in times of turmoil dominant groups, mostly religious, may dominate public decisions and even function as quasi-governmental institutions, as was the case in some Eastern European and Asian countries, such as Indonesia after 1998. Religious composition is thus an important element in the state practice of regulating religion. In fact, regulations or policies are often part of the political bargaining that takes place between the government and dominant religious groups. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that the incumbents of the regimes themselves largely belong to or are attached to those dominant groups that are more likely to seek favours than other groups, or at least to play an important role in legal and political decision-making processes.

In the Indonesian context, the majority of society adheres to Islam, and Muslim actors have historically played a significant role in shaping the state system. This demographic dominance often correlates with the reinforcement of religious hegemony, whereby Islamic teachings are positioned as the “legitimate” model of religiosity. Consequently, other religious expressions may experience marginalisation or restriction when they diverge from dominant interpretations. Scholars have noted that this tendency is closely linked to the socio-political construction of religious authority in Indonesia, where majority beliefs influence both public discourse and state policy (Hefner, 2011; Arifianto, 2019). One important illustration is the interpretation of the principle of “Belief in One God” (Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa) in Pancasila and the Constitution.

Muslim activists, particularly during the 1950s, advocated for an understanding rooted in Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*). This interpretation contributed to the embedding of Islamic theological concepts into Indonesia's political vocabulary, reinforcing Islam's central position within the state framework. As a result, elements of Islamic values have occasionally been reflected in legal instruments and public policies, not necessarily as formal Islamic law, but as normative references influencing legislation (Asshiddiqie, 2010; Hosen, 2016).

The second factor relates to political legitimacy. Rulers often seek support from dominant religious groups to secure authority and maintain stability. This dynamic aligns with the patron-client model in Indonesian politics, where religious elites and mass organisations provide symbolic and electoral backing in exchange for recognition and policy accommodation. Such patterns have been widely discussed in national SINTA 2-indexed studies, which highlight how political actors strategically engage religious sentiments to strengthen their legitimacy (Mujani & Liddle, 2010; Syarif, 2020). Consequently, competition over legal and political authority frequently reflects the interests of dominant groups. Some regulations may therefore be shaped more by particular religious values than by universal principles. While this dynamic can contribute to social cohesion among the majority, it also raises critical concerns regarding pluralism, equality, and the protection of minority rights within Indonesia's democratic framework.

This may explain why dominant groups favour high levels of regulation of religious life while minorities prefer lower levels. For dominant groups, while any regulation has the potential to impact their private sphere, it may be in line with long-term power projections, either explicitly or implicitly. In many cases, regulations are also used as a tool of legal control and restriction, enhancing hegemony and monopolising the "truth." In practice, while rhetorically supporting religious freedom activities, it is worth noting that they support certain policies regarding minority groups, such as restrictions on proselytising or the spread of religious messages of their ideas in the wider society. When it comes to special circumstances such as protecting hegemonic views in the "free market" of religiosity, the situation seems even worse. Dominant groups demand that the authorities strictly prohibit the spread of ideas and practices by minority groups, alleging that they are "deviant" and "alien" from the mainstream way of understanding religion.

Governmental Rules of Indonesia About Religion

Indonesia is a country with a Muslim majority population. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia is often criticised for directing state policy on religion solely in the interests of Muslims, rather than other religious communities. As a result, the Ministry of Religious Affairs fails to represent other religions and is moving further away from its original purpose.

Indonesia is a country with a Muslim majority population. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia is often criticised for directing state policy on religion solely in the interests of Muslims, rather than other religious communities. As a result, the Ministry of Religious Affairs fails to represent other religions and is moving further away from its original purpose. The Ministry of Religious Affairs was first established on 3 January 1946, with H. Rasyidi, B.A. becoming its first minister. Rasyidi explained that the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established within the government of the Republic of Indonesia to fulfil the government's obligation under Chapter XI, Article 29 of the Constitution, which states that 'The state is based on belief in one God and guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their respective religions and beliefs.' This article means that the state is obliged to make laws and regulations and formulate policies that are in accordance with and in line with the belief in one supreme God and prohibit abuse of religious teachings. The purpose of this article is to foster a social environment that fosters mutual respect and tolerance among Indonesia's religious communities. In principle, the state only regulates social life and cannot interfere with beliefs, thoughts and understandings concerning a particular religion. However, if such beliefs or understandings clearly deviate from the core teachings of the religion itself with

definite parameters and are taught or disseminated to others, thereby causing unrest in society and disrupting the peace of religious life, then the state, in order to protect the public interest, may act in accordance with applicable law.

Even when Indonesia was still under Dutch colonial rule, religious affairs were also a concern for the Dutch government. Islamic religious matters such as zakat, hajj, the appointment of religious leaders and marriage were regulated by the Department of Justice (Organisation and Work of the High Islamic Court). And by the Kantoor voor Inlandsche Zaken, which acted as an advisor to the Dutch East Indies government on religious matters. In Christianity, matters concerning the Church and clergy were handled by the 'Eeradienst' section of the 'department van Onderwijs en Eeradienst'.

According to Michel Foucault, after World War II, an increasingly complex model of government emerged, with regimes establishing the logic of government power and citizens submitting to policies that regulated their behaviour in detail. These regulations sought to realise specific goals, desires and objectives to build a productive, regulated, controlled and adaptable society. This development occurred under the New Order regime in the mid-1970s. During the era of President Suharto, he exercised real political power in the country and dominated the political process, successfully limiting most forms of dissent and opposition. However, he encountered political threats emanating from ethnic, racial, and religious groups.

Seeing this, the Soeharto regime became increasingly obsessive in regulating and controlling the behaviour of its citizens in both the private and public spheres, covering all aspects of social interaction, including religion. This excessive regulation was aimed at maintaining political and social stability for the realisation of its development programme. Soeharto used instruments of power such as the police and military to realise this. This regime displayed a typology in its policies. The first was to encourage interfaith tolerance through dialogue and discussion, as well as prohibiting members of society from discussing or expressing unacceptable views on topics related to ethnicity, religion, race and intergroup relations (SARA) in public. According to the regime, SARA was a source of conflict and thus had the potential to cause socio-political instability. The second principle is to support religious piety by supporting religious ceremonies or providing technical assistance and guidance in the implementation of other religious activities. The third principle is to monitor heterodox groups. The fourth principle is to require all citizens to embrace one of the religions recognised by the state.

This regime does not control and develop religion based solely on the increase in places of worship, the religiosity of followers or efficiency in managing the hajj. Instead, it does so through efforts to standardise religious groups and attitudes towards religion. They support the celebration of religious holidays in public spaces but also strictly control funding for religious missions from abroad and severely restrict missionaries from preaching in Indonesia. They support the publication and distribution of holy books from all denominations but also monitor the entry of holy books from abroad. They guarantee and promote the principle of religious freedom for the entire community but also prohibit or restrict the activities of certain religious groups in public spaces and merge minority religious groups with other larger, more developed religious groups. They support the publication and distribution of holy books from all denominations but also monitor the entry of holy books from abroad. They guarantee and promote the principle of religious freedom for the entire community but also prohibit or restrict the activities of certain religious groups in public spaces and merge minority religious groups with other larger, more developed religious groups. Thereby, after new order consolidation, Indonesia become one of country that most regulated and strictest in the world in matters of religion, according to the book that published by Ministry of religious Affair repeals the decree of regime control in religious affair around 1965-1995 more than 110 regulations on religion were issued.

This regulation was only valid until 1998 when president Suharto resigned from office, the era after Suharto is called the era of reformasi. since the era of reformasi until now, the government has only issued regulations regarding religion only as a social matter to maintain inter-religious unity, without entering into the concept of religion itself.

President Prabowo himself considers religion to be one of the tools for maintaining the stability of the country. This was evident from the gathering with interfaith leaders, political party leaders, labour union leaders and interfaith youth organisations at the State Palace, Jakarta, on Monday, 1 September 2025. This gathering was part of the government's response to the large demonstrations initiated by students and civilians from 25 to 31 August 2025, which caused significant divisions in Indonesian society. The gathering served as an open dialogue forum that reaffirmed the president's commitment to maintaining national unity and listening to the aspirations of all elements of society.

President Prabowo also gave religious leaders the opportunity to express their views and aspirations on national and global issues. The meeting ended with prayers from each religious leader according to their respective beliefs. This gathering of leaders from different backgrounds shows that President Prabowo's leadership is open to dialogue and participation based on the value of unity, and considers religion to be one aspect of maintaining the stability of the country.

These demonstrations were based on public distrust of the government and the House of Representatives. Social media has become a new tool for the public to assess the performance of the Indonesian government. The openness of information seems to have exposed the government's ills. The high level of corruption highlights the lack of integrity among government officials who have earned the public's trust. In addition to corruption, the government's performance has also been sharply criticised by the public, causing widespread distrust of the government.

This demonstration gave rise to the 17+8 movement. The 17 short-term issues considered urgent include the abolition of luxury facilities and allowances for members of the House of Representatives, overseas visits at a time when Indonesia's economy is weakening, and transparency in government budgeting. And 8 long-term demands related to the revision of the TNI law, the law on asset confiscation for corruption suspects, and improvements to economic policy.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between religion and the state is mutually beneficial. Religion needs the state to realise its values so that society draws closer to God Almighty, and the state needs religion to serve as a boundary in order to run a dignified and just state that prioritises the interests of society. All religions teach love, and a country is its implementation. In Indonesia, religion plays an important role in maintaining the stability of the country. Religion plays a very crucial role through the movement of thoughts and energy. The relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia is based on the constitution, the governing regime and the composition of the religious community, where a leader has a crucial role in maintaining the relationship between religion and the state. Two Indonesian presidents, Soeharto and Prabowo, had different views on responding to the presence of religion. President Soeharto considered religion to be a threat to the stability of his government, so he closed many religious spaces, such as the publication of religious books and religious funding from abroad, as a preventive measure. Meanwhile, President Prabowo sees religion as a factor in maintaining the stability of the country through inter-religious discussions to resolve issues in Indonesia.

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