

**A “Tolerant” Indonesia? Indonesian Muslims in Comparative Perspective  
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**Abstract:** Are Indonesian Muslims exceptionally tolerant? Drawing on a synthesis of new and existing datasets, this article argues that contrary to common assumptions, Indonesian Muslims are not more tolerant than other Muslims nor does Indonesia face a crisis of intolerance as a result of democratization and decentralization. Instead, Indonesian Muslims are about as tolerant as one would expect for an underdeveloped, newly democratic country with low levels of higher education. Within Indonesia, individuals with greater education and income are more tolerant than those with less. Those Muslims from more religiously heterogeneous ethnic groups tend to be more tolerant than those from more homogenous ethnic groups. Indonesian Muslims tend to be less tolerant than non-Muslim Indonesians. The Indonesian state is different from many Muslim-majority states in that it is relatively less involved in regulating religion. Lastly, Indonesia is distinct in being home to mass Islamic organizations whose leaders are more tolerant than one would expect based on global trends, are highly engaged politically, and who have been active in promoting the rights of religious minorities. Future research should further investigate what tolerance means to members of these organizations and whether their influence is fading.

**Key words:** tolerance, democracy, Islam, Indonesia

At the 2015 meeting of the world's largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesian President Joko Widodo stated, "NU has used religion as a source of tolerance, peace and progressiveness" and said that he hoped NU would continue to promote peace in a time of religious radicalism. Likewise longtime NU observer, academic Martin van Bruinessen, said that Islam in Indonesia was relatively more tolerant toward minorities within Islam, such as the Shi'ites and Ahmadis, than elsewhere in the Muslim world (Junaidi 2015). That same week members of Indonesia's second largest Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah, saw Jokowi make a similar appeal to uphold and promote religious tolerance: "We should also become an example of a nation that can live in peace and harmony" (-Jakarta Post 2015). At a time of sectarian violence in the Middle East and Islamist extremism elsewhere, Indonesian Muslims are widely seen as stronghold of tolerance and moderation, by some accounts "immune" to radicalization (Defense One 2016).

Poorly understood, however, is whether this view is consistent with more systematic measures of tolerance. Are Indonesian Muslims exceptionally tolerant? How do Indonesian Muslims compare to other countries in levels of tolerance toward non-Muslims? How do they compare to populations in other developing countries? Other Muslim-majority countries? Other newly democratic countries? Within Indonesia, what are the best predictors of tolerance and intolerance? Despite the frequent assertion of tolerance, scholars have not thoroughly compared the views of Indonesian Muslims with those of other Muslims on the issue of interfaith tolerance.

Drawing on three datasets on tolerance, as well as indicators from five other related datasets, this paper argues that contrary to the conventional wisdom Indonesian Muslims are neither exceptionally tolerant nor intolerant. Instead, Indonesian Muslims are about as tolerant as one would expect for a developing, newly democratic country with low levels of higher

education. Within Indonesia, individuals with greater education and income are more tolerant than those with less. The Indonesian state is also different from many other Muslim-majority states in that it is relatively less involved in religion, while it remains non-secular. Indonesia is distinct, however, in being home to mass Islamic organizations whose leaders are more tolerant than one would expect, are highly socially and politically engaged, and who have been active in promoting the rights of religious minorities. Future research should investigate what tolerance means to members of these organizations and whether their influence is fading in order to explain the implications for democratic governance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Perhaps the most influential scholar of Indonesian Islam, Clifford Geertz, directly contrasted religious culture in Java with that of the Middle East. “Compared to North Africa, the Middle East, and even to Muslim India, whose brand of faith it most closely resembles, Indonesian Islam has been, at least until recently, remarkable malleable, tentative, syncretistic, and most significantly of all, multivocal” (Geertz 1973: 12). While Moroccan Muslims followed medieval texts, religio-political leaders, and orthodox interpretations of Islam, Javanese Muslims combined Islamic practices with Buddhism and Hinduism, followed ethnic or tribal leaders, and practiced syncretic or mystical interpretations of Islam. Geertz’s belief that Indonesian Muslims were syncretic, culture-oriented rather than religion-oriented, and open to multiple faiths is a major reason why subsequent scholars and the public believe Islam in Indonesia to be more tolerant than in other Muslim societies. This reputation was bolstered by the Islamic renewal (*pembaharuan pemikiran*) movement of the 1970s and 1980s, when prominent Muslim leaders appeared to support liberal, secular, and pluralist ideas. Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the

massive Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama, declared his opposition to an Islamic state and helped found liberal NGOs to promote a strong civil society. Nurcholish Madjid argued against Muslims supporting Islamic political parties. And Syaafi Maarif made strong arguments for supporting religious pluralism and cooperation with Indonesia's non-Muslim population as head of the country's second-largest Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah. These prominent leaders further cemented Indonesia's reputation for tolerance, moderation, and even liberalism in contrast to Middle East Muslims.

The Geertzian view has, however, been repeatedly challenged over the past four decades. Geertz's work has been criticized for overstating the influence of Hinduism on Java and the strength of the abangan (Hodgson 1974; Woodward 1989). Indeed, there is no evidence that the abangan existed before the mid-nineteenth century (Ricklefs: 2006, 2007). Instead, scholars have pointed to the importance of Islamic leaders in Cairo and the hijaz in shaping Indonesian Islam. Michael Laffan's 2003 book *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia*, which maps the writings of Muslims from Southeast Asia who studied in the Hijaz and Cairo during the late nineteenth century, suggests that Islamic reform played a key role in Indonesian nationalism. Chiara Formichi shows how pan-Islamic and then Indonesian Islamic nationalist ideals endured long beyond the late colonial period in the writings of the influential leader of *Darul Islam*, Kartosuwiryo (2012). Kevin Fogg reveals how pious Muslims experienced the 1945 revolution as an explicitly Islamist struggle (2012). Jeremy Menchik suggests that rather than being grounded in either secular or Islamic nationalism, Indonesian nationalism occupies a middle ground where belief in God is mandatory but also plural. "Godly nationalism" is based on a common, orthodox theism and helps to explain the state's demand that Indonesians adhere to a world religion, and renounce support for heterodox, syncretic, or animist views including those

of the abangan (2014). Most recently, Martin van Bruinessen argues that the liberal or progressive turn of Indonesian Islam has been confounded by a “conservative turn” marked by increased intolerance toward minority Muslims like the Ahmadiyah (2013).

Absent from this debate between the Geertzian view of Indonesian Islam as syncretic, plural, and tolerant or the revisionist view of Indonesian Islam as also orthodox and intolerant are more empirical comparisons across Muslim societies. This is surprising given the fact that scholars now have access to cross-national indicators of public opinion in Indonesia, the Middle East, and elsewhere in the Muslim world. By assembling this data from the fifth wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), the fourth wave of the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS), Jeremy Menchik’s and Robin Bush’s surveys of the leaders of the mass Islamic organizations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Saiful Mujani’s survey of Indonesian Muslims, economic development indicators from the World Bank, and political development indicators from Freedom House, this paper seeks to provide a more systemic and comprehensive answer to the question: are Indonesian Muslims exceptionally tolerant?

To do so, it may be helpful to introduce readers to the survey research literature on tolerance. The first major social science survey on tolerance was a 1955 study by Samuel Stouffer on American’s tolerance toward groups that were known to be disliked: communists, socialists, atheists, and accused communists. The Stouffer questions asked whether the disliked groups should be permitted by the state to give a speech, teach in a high school, teach in a college or university, work in a defense plant, and be a radio singer. In 1972, the Stouffer questions were adopted by the General Social Survey and on nearly every national survey since. Stouffer’s impact on the questions developed by Sullivan, Pierson and Marcus (1979, 1982) has shaped the prevailing conceptualization of tolerance in survey research. Sullivan et al. developed

a “content-controlled” strategy where respondents picked their “least-liked” group from a list including Communists, Black Panthers, and other disliked groups. The respondent’s attitudes were then assessed using questions about the least-liked group’s right to teach in the public schools, make a speech in this city and to hold public rallies in our city and become president of the United States. The least-liked strategy was an improvement on Stouffer in that it included a broader range of targets, and respondents who “liked” communists no longer distorted the sample; Stouffer under-estimated the degree to which non-Communists disliked Communists because he included Communist-sympathizers in his sample. The downside of this strategy, however, was its vagueness. Rather than assessing tolerance toward multiple targets, only one target was assessed. And rather than assessing tolerance toward rights in difference contexts, only a single site was assessed. Similarly, the content of the speech, course taught at school, and public rally were left unspecified.

The Sullivan et al. questions proved highly influential for subsequent researchers. Caspi and Seligson (1983) used the questions in Israel and Costa Rica. Shamir and Sullivan (1985) used the questions in Israel (also Shamir 1991). Barnum and Sullivan (1989) used the questions in Britain. Gibson and Duch (1993) used the questions in the Soviet Union. Sullivan, Walsh, Shamir, Barnum and Gibson used the questions in Israel, Britain, and New Zealand (1993). Single country studies outside the US have also adopted the Sullivan et al. questions. Wang and Chang (2006) asked whether Taiwanese supporters and opponents of unification with China should be permitted to hold rallies and express their opinion, teach in schools, and run for government positions. Mujani combined the Stouffer and Sullivan items to ask whether: respondents in Indonesia would tolerate a Christian as a teacher in a public school, if they objected to a church in a predominantly Muslim community, to Christian religious services in a

predominantly Muslim community, and to a Christian becoming president of the country (2003, 174).

In 1990, the WVS picked up the Sullivan et al. “least-liked group” strategy for a question on social tolerance, asking, “On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbors?” This question was used again in 1995, 2000, and 2005. In the 1995 wave the WVS expanded their questions to include political tolerance. After choosing their least-liked group from a list, respondents were asked whether the group should be allowed to hold public office, teach in our schools, or hold public demonstrations. The 1995 wave of the WVS was done in 180 countries, and researchers have since published papers using its data to measure tolerance in 18 countries (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003), Turkey (Tessler and Altinoglu 2004), 16 countries (Weldon 2006), 33 countries (Hutchison 2007), 33 countries (Hutchison and Gibler 2007), 14 countries (Marquart-Pyatt and Paxton 2007), and 35 countries (Anderson and Fetner 2008).

The two most recent waves of the WVS asked respondents who they would not like to have as neighbors, and included nine groups: people of a different race, heavy drinkers, immigrants/foreign workers, people who have AIDS, drug addicts, homosexuals, people of a different religion, unmarried couples living together, and people who speak a different language. These questions make it impossible to know the specific religion or ethnicity of whoever the respondent is thinking about, but they do allow for cross national comparisons of levels of tolerance toward groups that are perceived as different. These are the questions utilized below.

As with any cross-national survey data, more nuanced questions and concepts are forsaken for the benefit of comparison and replicability. This tradeoff is most apparent in the questions on tolerance toward a neighbor of a different religion; other research has demonstrated

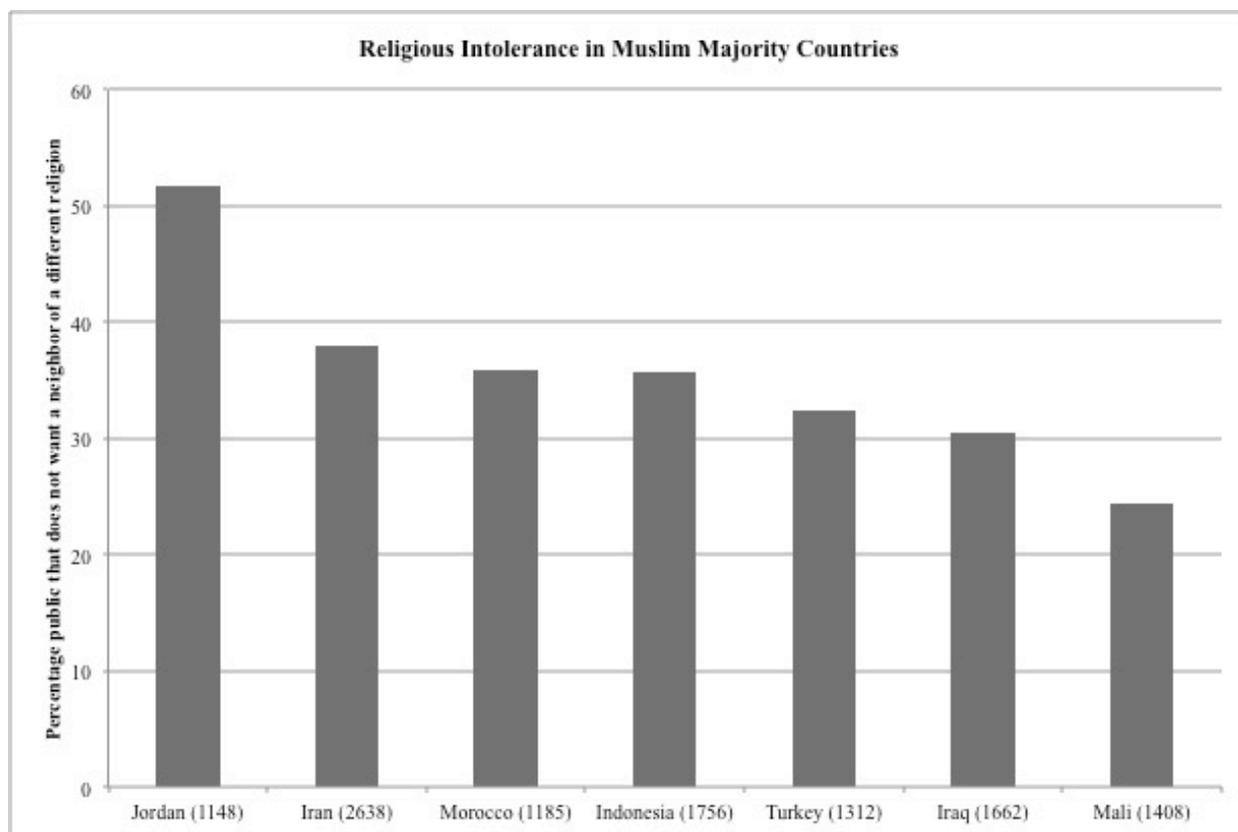
that levels of tolerance are specific to the religion of the neighbor rather than being a general value (Stouffer 1955; Gibson 2006). In the Indonesian context, Muslims are significantly more tolerant of Christians and Hindus than Ahmadi, Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, or Communists (Menchik 2016). Likewise, as we will discuss below, Menchik's research demonstrates that leaders of Indonesia's mass organizations think about tolerance in ways that are ignored by the WVS questions.

Yet this oversight does not mean that cross-national indicators are useless. They help us understand how Indonesian Muslims answer these questions in comparison to their co-religionists abroad. And this is an important concern in Indonesia's democratic age. Tolerance is a cornerstone of stable democracy. In a political system based upon the mutual respect of citizen and government, intolerance can threaten stability, especially when anti-system movements like *Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia* (Indonesian Party of Liberation) and *Front Pembela Islam* (the Islamic Defenders Front) are quick to mobilize against any perceived threat to the majority. By comparing Indonesians to other populations, this paper elucidates the levels of tolerance in Muslim-majority democracies, suggests ways to strengthen pluralism in other developing and Muslim-majority states, and suggests future avenues of research for scholars of Indonesia.

## **INDONESIAN MUSLIMS COMPARED**

The World Value Survey (WVS) is a cross-national, longitudinal survey of trends in people's values and beliefs. Over the last three decades, the WVS has grown to include over 100 countries and provides the most comprehensive cross-national database of public opinion. The most recent wave that includes Indonesia and questions on tolerance was undertaken in 2006,

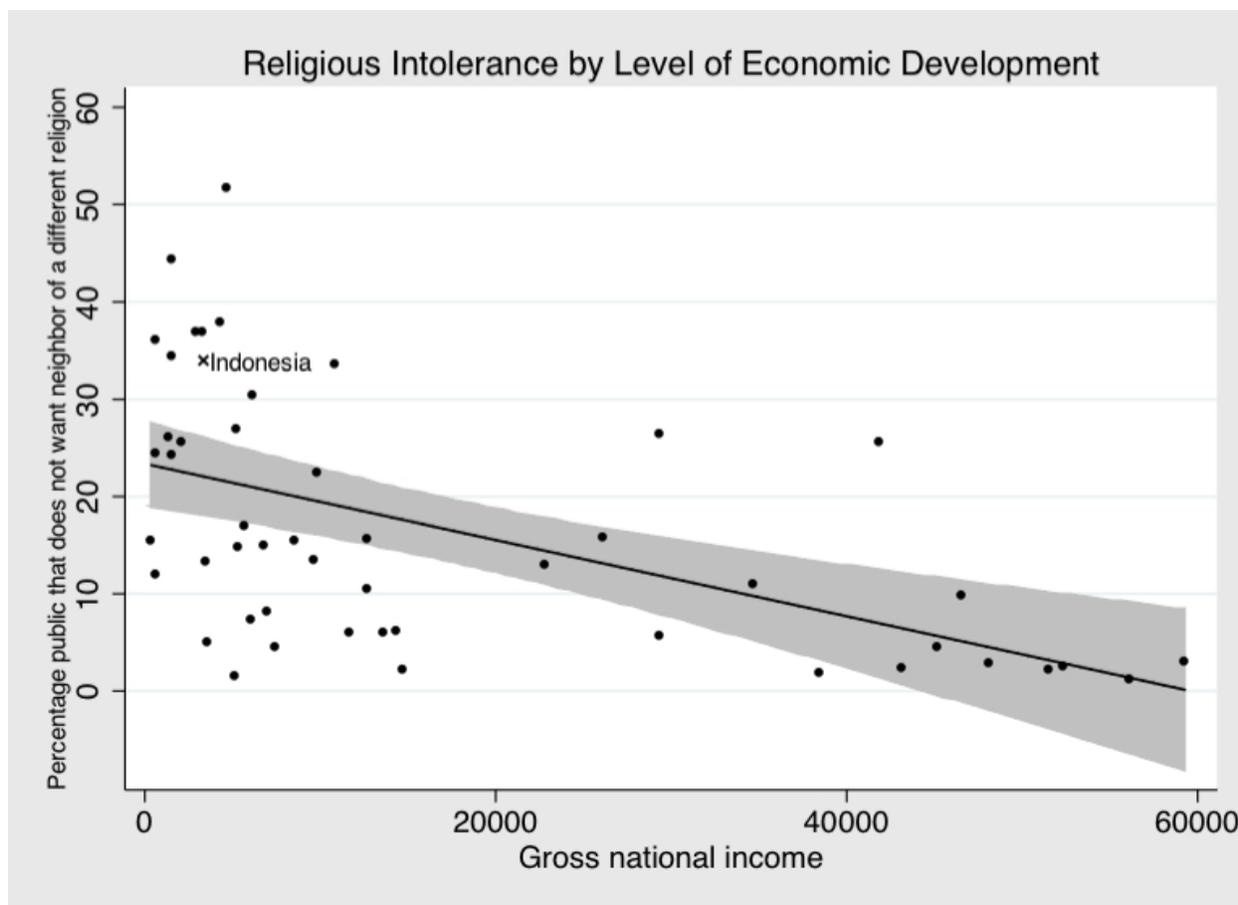
and asks respondents one question relevant to our inquiry: “On this list are various groups of people: Mention any that you would not like to have as neighbors.” People of another race, another religion and that speak another language are possible answers with the answers moving in tandem. For that reason, we choose to focus primarily on the number pertaining to religious intolerance. Figure 1.1 compares levels of intolerance by Indonesian Muslims with Muslims in the other Muslim-majority countries of Jordan, Iran, Morocco, Turkey, Iraq, and Mali. Jordanian Muslims have the highest levels of intolerance, followed by Iranians and Moroccans. Mali’s Muslims have the lowest levels of intolerance towards a neighbor of a different religion. Indonesian Muslims sit in the middle of sampled countries. Figure 1.1 suggests that statements lauding Indonesian Muslims as exceptionally tolerant are not warranted.

**Figure 1.1 Religious intolerance in Muslim majority countries**

Note: Indicator of religious intolerance from 2005-2009 WVS, using only Muslim respondents.

Modernization theory predicts that levels of intolerance should decrease with increases in economic development, since postindustrial societies will emphasize “post-material values” (Norris and Inglehart 2011). By incorporating indicators of economic development from the World Bank with the WVS indicators of intolerance, we can assess whether Indonesians are exceptionally tolerant for a low-income country. Figure 1.2 shows countries with WVS data on religious intolerance compared to their Gross National Income per capita with a 95% confidence interval. Richer countries have lower levels of intolerance than poorer countries, but there is a great deal of variation suggesting that other variables are necessary to explain levels of religious intolerance. More important for this article, Indonesians are not exceptionally tolerant for a poor country.

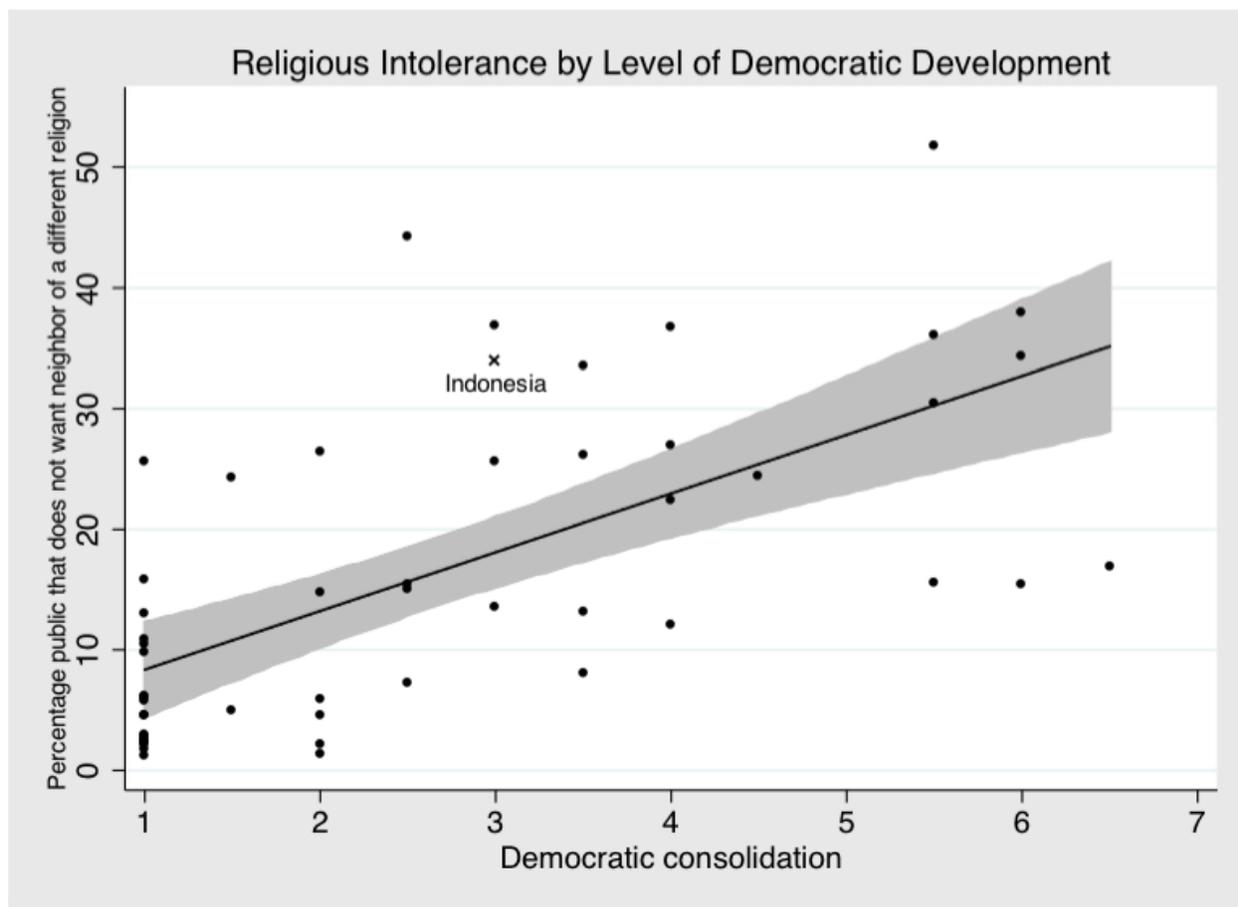
**Figure 1.2 Religious intolerance by level of economic development**



Note: Indicator of religious intolerance from 2005-2009 WVS; GNI per capita from the World Bank's Global Development Indicators for 2012.

Modernization theory further predicts that levels of religious intolerance should decrease as societies undergo political development. By incorporating indicators of democratic freedom from Freedom House with the WVS indicators of religious intolerance, we can assess whether Indonesians are exceptionally tolerant for a newly democratic country. Freedom House uses a simple 1-7 score, with the lower number indicating more political and social rights for citizens. Figure 1.3 shows countries with WVS data on religious intolerance compared to their level of democratic development with a 95% confidence interval. More democratic countries have lower levels of intolerance than more authoritarian countries, but there is a great deal of variation suggesting, again, that other variables are necessary to explain levels of religious intolerance. More important for our purposes, Indonesians are not exceptionally tolerant for a newly democratic country.

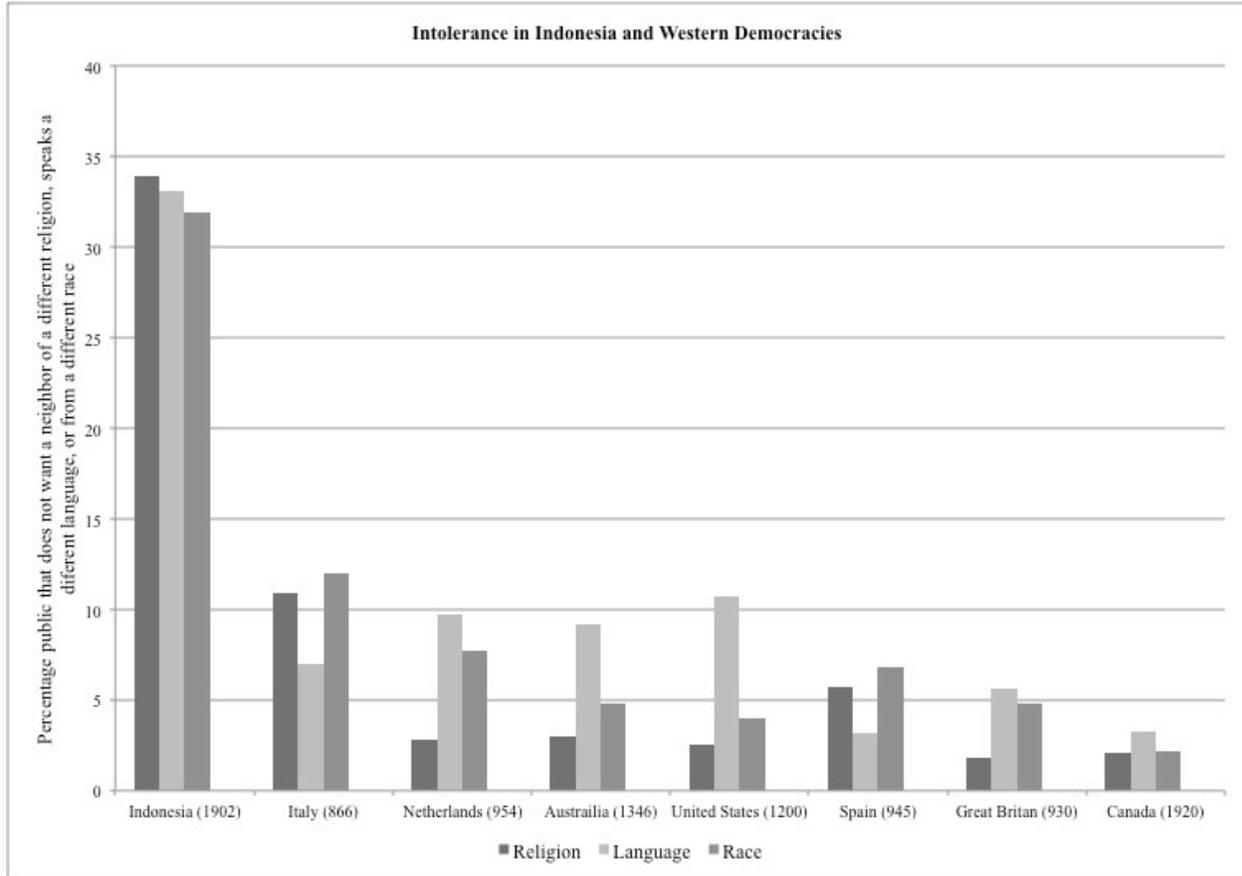
**Figure 1.3 Religious intolerance by level of democratic development**



Note: Indicator of religious intolerance from 2005-2009 WVS; Democracy indicators from Freedom House 2012.

Combining the focus on levels of economic development and democratic consolidation together suggests that Indonesians are likely to be substantially less tolerant than populations in rich Western countries with consolidated democracies. Figure 1.4 uses WVS indicators for intolerance to having a neighbor of a different religion, having a neighbor that speaks a different language, and having a neighbor of a different ethnic group. We find that Indonesians are substantially more intolerant than publics in rich, consolidated democracies on all indicators. While Western respondents never rise over 15% intolerance, Indonesians never falls below 30%.

**Figure 1.4 Intolerance in Indonesia and Western Democracies**



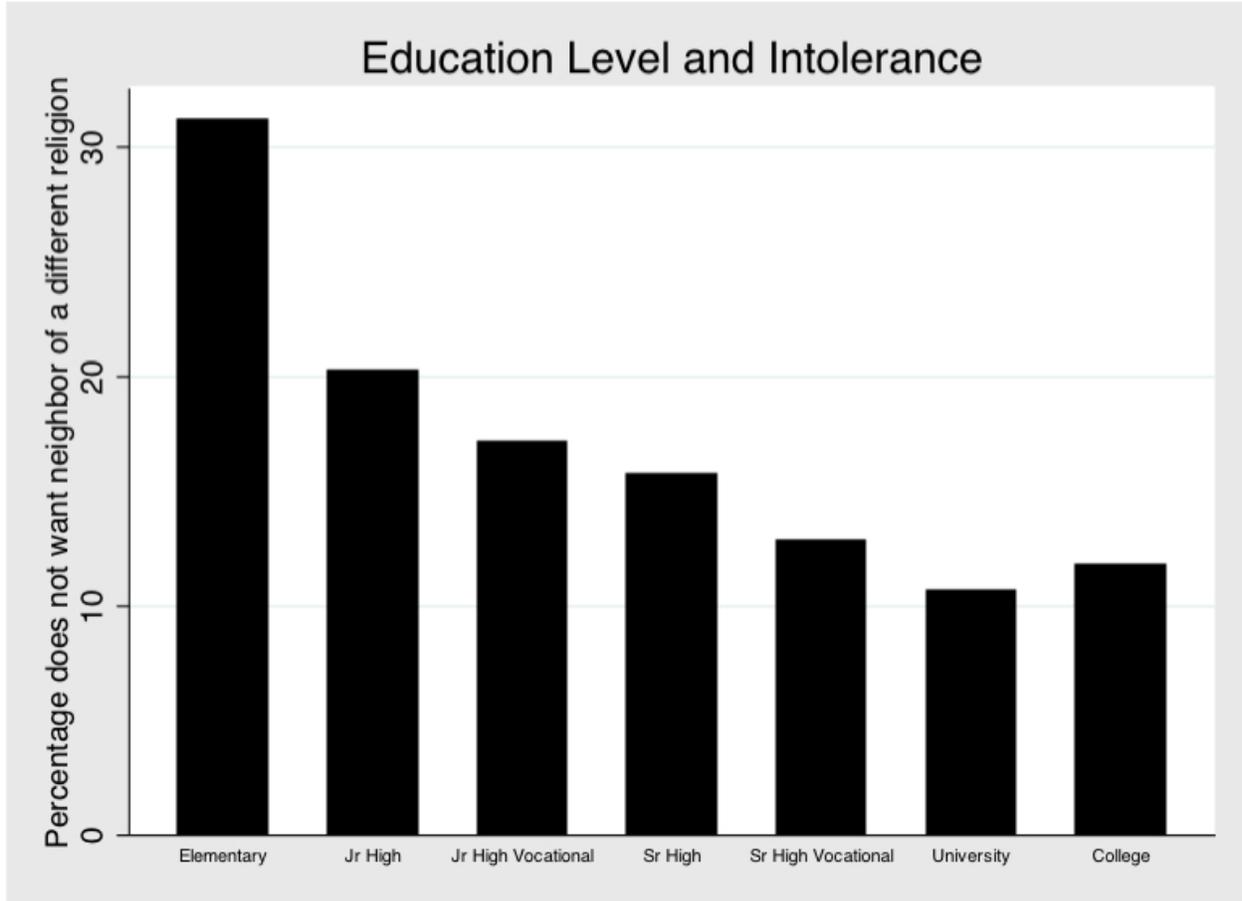
Note: Indicators of religious, language and racial intolerance from 2005-2009 WVS.

Our findings suggest that Indonesia is not exceptionally tolerant for a developing, Muslim-majority country. Now that Indonesia has proven itself to be unexceptional in terms of Muslim-majority democracies, low-middle income countries, and new democracies, it is worth investigating the determinants of tolerance within Indonesia. Geertz divides Javanese society into three groups: *priyayi*, *abangan*, and *santri* (Geertz 1976: 5–6). The *priyayi* are the administrative upper classes who practice a form of “Javanese religion” that combines Islam with mystical and Hindu practices. Their class status differentiates them from the *abangan*. The *abangan* are then contrasted with the *santri*, who are outwardly orthodox Muslims in their dress, living arrangements, and religious rituals. Owing to the *abangan*’s syncretic beliefs, a Geertzian explanation stresses the relative intolerance of the *santri* compared to *abangan* Muslims. The Geertzian view, then, would predict significantly higher levels of intolerance among orthodox, observant Muslims compared to syncretistic, nominal Muslims.

The WVS data do not support this view. The WVS contains two questions that can be used as a proxy for the *santri* and *abangan* distinction. The first asks, “Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?” We coded as “observant Muslims” respondents that attend religious services once per week or more, and coded as “nominal Muslims” those that report attending once per month, only on holy days, once per year, less often, and never. Some 30 percent of *santri* Muslims object to a neighbor of a different race while 33 percent of *abangan* Muslims object. Thirty four percent of *santri* Muslims object to a neighbor of a different religion while 33 percent of *abangan* Muslims object. And 32 percent of *santri* Muslims object to a neighbor that speaks a different language while 35 percent of *abangan* Muslims object. So the WVS finds that the *santri/abangan* Muslim distinction is unhelpful for explaining attitudes of tolerance.

The second question asks, “Do you consider yourself a religious person, not a religious person, atheist, etc.? Here we find evidence against the Geertzian view: self-proclaimed religious people are *more* tolerant of neighbors of a different race (30 percent intolerant to 38 percent intolerant), neighbors of a different religion (33 percent intolerant to 37 percent intolerant), and neighbors that speak a different language (32 percent intolerant to 44 percent intolerant). While neither question is an ideal proxy for the santri-abangan distinction, the WVS data suggest that the distinction between syncretic and orthodox Muslims is a poor predictor of levels of tolerance. The WVS data also upends the Geertzian (and more broadly held) notion that more orthodox, observant Muslims are more intolerant than their syncretistic, nominal Muslim neighbors.

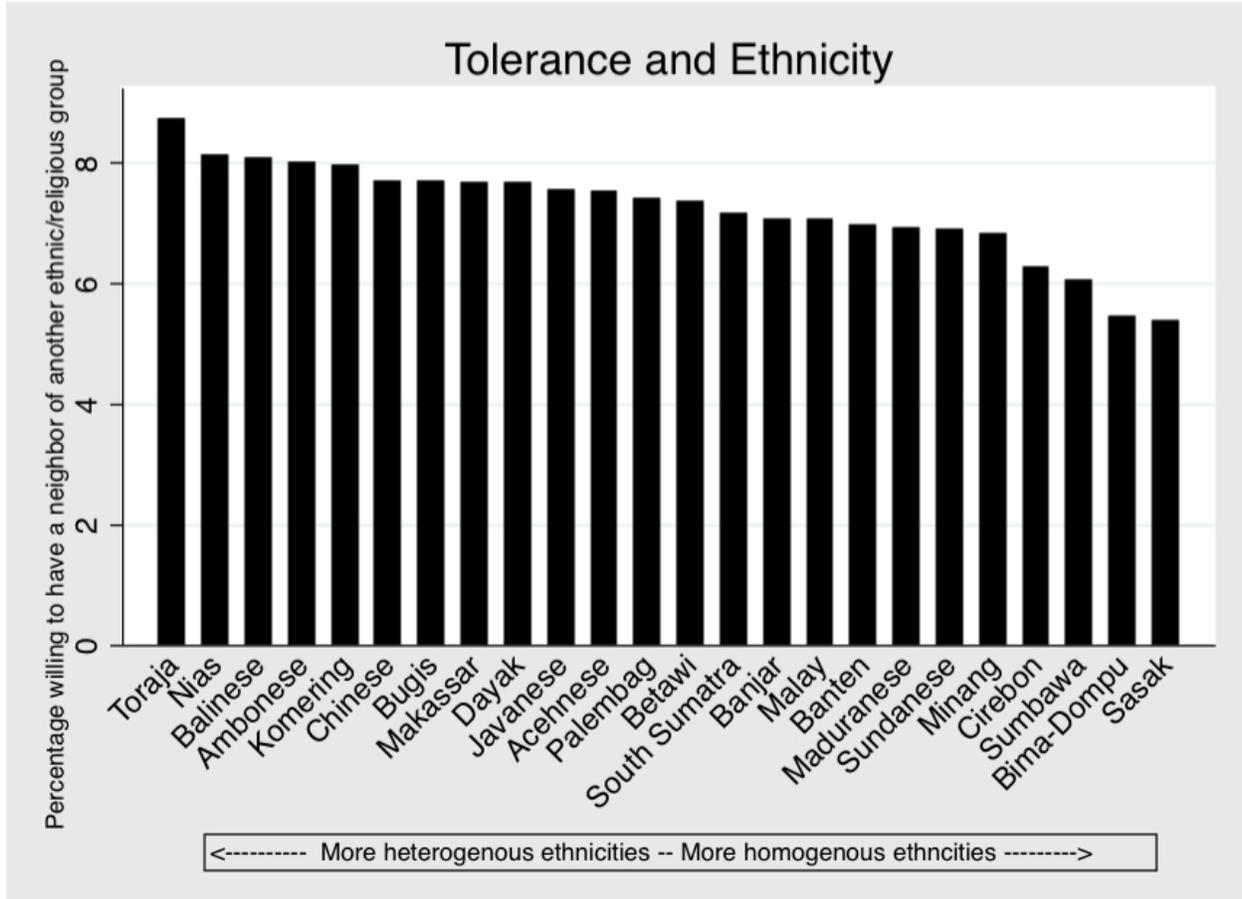
In addition to religious observance, education is another factor that shapes attitudes toward other religious groups. More educated individuals are thought to be better at understanding and embracing religious pluralism. Separating respondents by the highest education level produces some of the more powerful, if unsurprising, results. In general, more education leads to less intolerance so that university and college students have the lowest levels of intolerance. Figure 1.5 presents the average levels of intolerance based on forms of education using the question, “How do you feel if someone with a different religion you lives near your home?” Figure 1.5 demonstrates that education is a powerful explanation for levels of tolerance.

**Figure 1.5 Education level and intolerance**

Note: Indicators of tolerance and education from the fourth wave IFLS

In addition to education, some scholars argue that ethnicity is a good predictor of levels of tolerance. They argue that individuals from ethnic groups that are homogeneously Muslim may have less contact with individuals from other religious backgrounds, less incentive to work with individuals from other religious backgrounds, and be less trusting of individuals from other religious backgrounds. Conversely, when the ethnic composition stretches across multiple religions, tolerance is more likely. Menchik (2016) makes this argument by using Lipset and Rokkan's contention that crosscutting cleavages are important for understanding conflict and coexistence and applies it to the behaviour of religious organizations (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) Figure 1.6 uses the IFLS data to suggest that ethnicity is indeed a good predictor of tolerance. Using the aggregate indicator of tolerance and respondent's self-identified ethnic group, those Muslims from more heterogeneous ethnicities such as the Torajans (12% Muslim), Nias (19% Muslim), Balinese (3.6% Muslim), and Chinese (16.7% Muslim), tend to be more tolerant than those from homogeneous ethnic backgrounds like the Sasak, Banjarese, Bima-Dompu, Achenese, Gorontalo (100% Muslim), and largely homogeneous backgrounds like Sundanese (99.6%), Madurese (99.3%), Minangkabau (99.6%), Makassarese (99.5%), Sumbawans (99%), Malay (99.7%), and Cirebonese (99.8%).

Figure 1.6 Tolerance and ethnicity

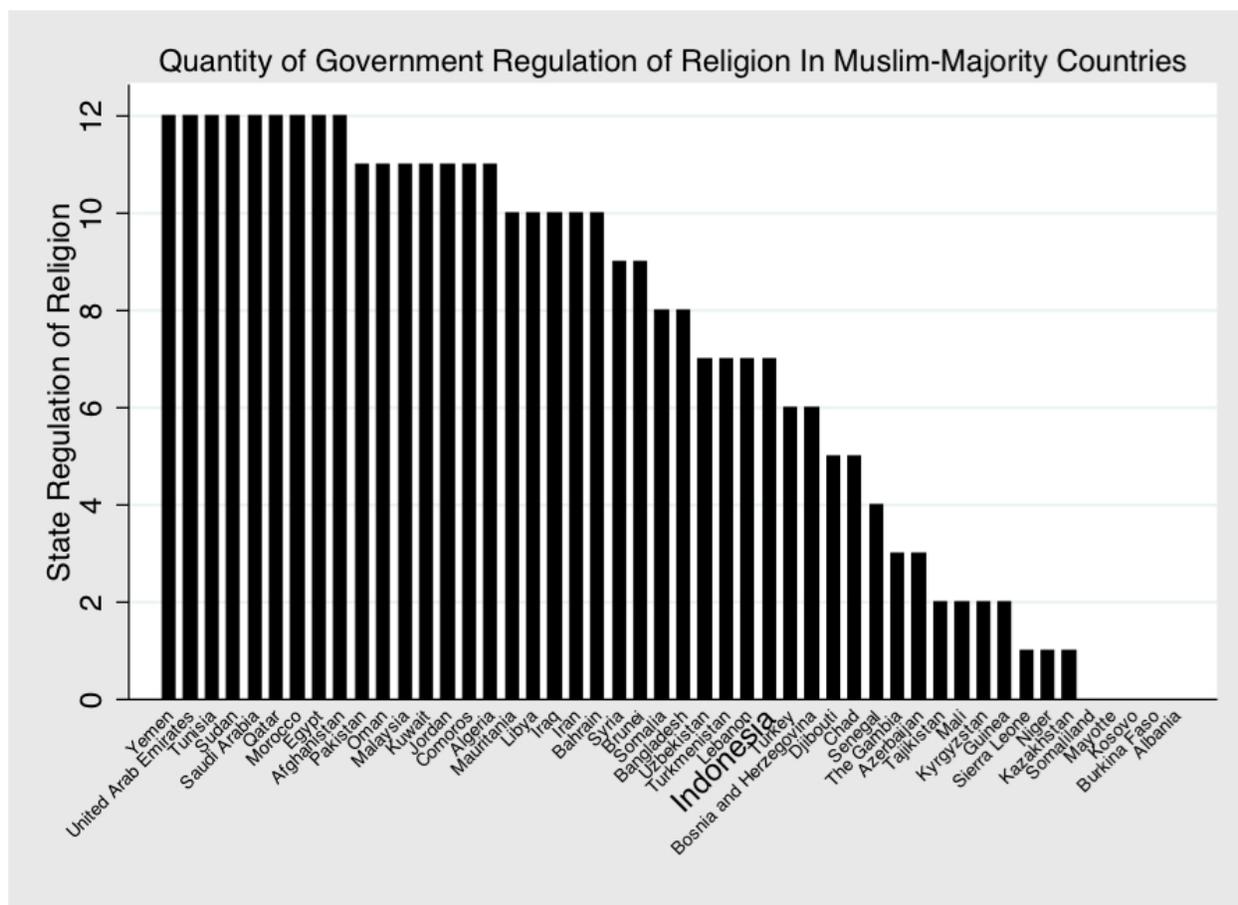


Note: Indicators of tolerance and education from the fourth wave IFLS

Separately but related, whether an Indonesian is a member of the Muslim majority or non-Muslim minority is a good predictor of tolerance. According to the IFLS data, Indonesian Muslims are less tolerant than non-Muslim Indonesians. Some 23.7% of Muslim respondents object to having a neighbor of a different faith. Hindus are the next least tolerant, with 8.32% respondents stating they would object to someone of a different faith. Protestants follow with 4.67% and Catholic respondents have the lowest levels of intolerance, with only 2.67% responding they would object to having a neighbor of a different faith. Gaduh likewise notes that Muslims in Indonesia are slightly more intolerant than their non-Muslim compatriots (2012).

Another way in which Indonesia is not exceptional but noteworthy is in exercising a relatively small amount of regulation of religion for a Muslim-majority country, and especially in not heavily privileging Islam over other recognized religions. Using Jonathan Fox's dataset on state involvement in religion in 2008, we created a figure that aggregate four indicators of government regulation of religion and the privileging of Islam: whether there is a favored religious branch, whether the government funds some things related to religion, proportion of law's based on religious law, and whether conversion is limited or restricted. The aggregate scale ranges from 0 – 12 with higher numbers indicating more regulating and privileging of Islam. While these indicators are theoretically crude and normatively biased toward secularism and Protestant faiths, they provide a useful snapshot of the degree to which these states regulate religion and privilege Islam. As Figure 1.7 indicates, Indonesia is on the lower end of government regulation of religion and privileging of Islam, but is still not a secular state.

Figure 1.7 Quantity of government regulation of religion in Muslim majority countries



Note: Indicators of regulation from the 2008 US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports and downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives

A final determinant of attitudes toward other religions is membership in one of Indonesia's mass Islamic organizations like Muhammadiyah or Nahdlatul Ulama. These organizations are believed to be the backbone of Indonesian civil society and have proved crucial in tamping down intergroup conflict during the country's democratic transition (Hefner 2000; Liddle and Mujani 2005). Do the members and leaders of these organizations share the attitudes of other Indonesians?

The compiled data suggests that membership in Islamic civil society organizations predicts higher levels of tolerance, and lower levels of intolerance, for both the members and the leaders. The 2007 IFLS data reports that 23.7 percent of Indonesian Muslim respondents object to having a neighbor of a different religion, and the 2006 WVS reports that 33.9 percent of Indonesians objects to having someone of a different religion in their neighborhood. Bush's survey of the membership of NU shows slightly less intolerance than the WVS data: Bush finds that 30 percent of member of Muhammadiyah and 29 percent of NU members object to a non-Muslim living in their community (Bush 2014). Menchik, however, finds a bigger difference between the leadership and the members: only 14.2 percent of NU and 18.3 percent of Muhammadiyah leaders object, suggesting lower levels of intolerance than the members and than the broader Muslim population. Additionally, IFLS reports that 83 percent of Muslims object to a group of another religion building a house of worship in their community. Bush and Menchik find slightly lower levels of intolerance: Bush finds that 76 percent of Muhammadiyah's mass members object and 63 percent of NU members object, while Menchik finds that 78 percent of Muhammadiyah leaders and 71 percent of NU leaders do not think a Christian church should be allowed to be built in their community. So on the second question, too, leaders of Islamic civil society organizations are more tolerant than the general public, and

members of Islamic civil society are slightly more tolerant. On both questions, NU members and leaders are considerably more tolerant than the general public.

These differences become even more pronounced if we use more theoretically sophisticated indicators of tolerance and intolerance. Menchik's 2016 book suggests that the leadership of NU and Muhammadiyah think *differently* about the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims and Muslims than classical liberal political theory would suggest. For that reason, it is important to describe some of those differences between showing the implications quantitatively.

The term "brotherhood" (*persaudaraan*) is often used by Muhammadiyah to describe the virtue of fostering warm, supportive relationships between Christians and Muslims (*persaudaraan sesama mahluk*). Abdul Mu'ti, a longtime leader and currently the Secretary General of Muhammadiyah for 2015-2020, published a book titled *KrisMuha* (a shortening of the words for "Christian" and "Muhammadiyah") that laid out the institutional manifestation of this vision (Mu'ti and Riza ul Haq 2009). Muhammadiyah schools operate in Flores, West Kalimantan, and North Sumatra where the students are majority Christian or Buddhists. Teachers of any faith provide instruction in math, history, English, and other secular subjects to students of any religion. Doctrine is taught according to religious identity. These schools and curriculum date back to the 1970s, before the central government required that religious education be given in accordance with the religion of the students and by a teacher of the same religion. Like non-religious education, in regards to other aspects of social relations like health, economic development, neighborhood relations, Muhammadiyah places a high emphasis on inter-religious brotherhood and tolerance.

Similarly, in an influential book written in 1979, *Goals of the Members of Nahdlatul Ulama*, Achmad Siddiq, the head of the Islamic law board (*Syuriah*) of NU from 1983-1989,

explained NU's values as based on moderation (*al-tawāssuṭ*), justice (*al-i'tidāl*), and balance (*al-tawāzun*; Siddiq 2006 [1979]). Highly broad and somewhat vague, NU's principles provide the organization a great degree of fluidity and support for social harmony. In addition to moderation, justice, and balance, a similar NU value is *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining right and forbidding wrong). One manifestation of these values is NU's strong emphasis on respecting the highly heterogeneous practices of Sunni traditionalism in Java, including support for the already diverse Sunni mazhabs, local religious beliefs like the veneration of the nine saints of Java (*wali songo*), and Islamic mystical sects (*tarekat*). Similarly, in applying the principle of moderation to Islamic law, NU recognizes the uncertainty that accompanies the interpretation of Islamic law and urges its members to withhold condemnation of Muslim following different theologies.

At the same time, however, both NU and Muhammadiyah place clear limits on tolerance. While Mu'ti has called for respect and tolerance of Ahmadi Muslims, other leaders and the central board seem to disagree. Former Muhammadiyah Chair Syafi'i Maarif touted Mu'ti's research as an example of Muhammadiyah's tolerance, while also making clear that there would never be a book on *AhMuha* (a shortening of the words for "Ahmadiyah" and "Muhammadiyah" (Syafi'i Maarif 2009, interview with Jeremy Menchik and Alfred Stepan, 30 September). Muhammadiyah, like NU, draws the boundary of tolerance at interactions that corrupt or undermine Muslims' faith. Brotherhood does not extend to matters that might confuse respect for other religious people with admiration for beliefs that are inferior to Islam. Their distinction between permissive interactions in social matters and curtailed interaction in matters of faith stems from their commitment to the primacy of religious belief over other values like political or religious freedom. Any interactions that might lead Muslims to devalue their own faith, confuse

the tenets of their faith with that of another faith, or convert to the other faith should be avoided. In interviews Menchik's informants would frequently joke that different religions should not be combined like "gado-gado," a mixed vegetable salad with peanut sauce. The point is not that Muhammadiyah or NU are opposed to cooperation with non-Muslims. The point is that by privileging faith over brotherhood, these organizations are cautious about sanctioning activity that might corrupt the beliefs of their members.

These views are manifest in survey data. NU and Muhammadiyah leaders are likely to be tolerant of Christians as elected leader in a predominantly Christian area like Manado and somewhat tolerant in the heterogeneous area of Jakarta. But they are less likely to tolerate Christian mayors in a predominantly Muslim area like Banda Aceh. Similarly, the presidency of a country that is almost 90% Muslim, a highly symbolic seat, is likely to be seen as only appropriate for a Muslim. Similarly, NU and Muhammadiyah leaders are unwilling to tolerate political behavior by the minority that interferes in religious affairs. On the question of demonstrating about a topic of broad social interest—gas prices—Islamic elites are highly willing to tolerate demonstrations. Demonstrations in favor of interfaith marriage or against Islamic law in the region of Aceh are not tolerated. They are unwilling to put up with demonstrations by Christians that interfere in matters of Islamic marriage or Islamic community governance.

Finally, Menchik finds that NU and Muhammadiyah do not hold individual freedom as their most important value. Even after decades of political inclusion and moderation they are not liberals, nor are they likely to become liberals. NU and Muhammadiyah leaders are willing to live next door to Christians at high rates of 82%. This is a high level of tolerance similar to wealthy, industrialized, consolidated democracies. Yet, there is a marked decrease in tolerance as

soon as the subject is religious. Islamic leaders are unwilling to allow Christians to teach an unspecified subject in a private Islamic boarding school, nor to build a church in an Islamic neighborhood. These data suggest that NU and Muhammadiyah leaders are tolerant but not in the secular-liberal sense.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has argued that contrary to the conventional wisdom, Indonesian Muslims are not exceptionally tolerant. Instead, they are about as tolerant as we should expect given their relatively low levels of higher education, economic development, and recent introduction of democracy. What does make Indonesian Muslims exceptional, however, is that members of the mass civil society organizations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are more tolerant than their co-religionists within Indonesia and abroad. Insofar as public attitudes have enabled Indonesia's successful democratic transition and relatively low levels of ethnic conflict compared to the Middle East, the country should credit NU and Muhammadiyah for being one important contributor to the country's relative stability and continued resilience against more anti-democratic forces.

These findings raise the question of why scholars and the public mistakenly think that Indonesian Muslims are exceptional. The most obvious answer is Geertz's legacy and Indonesia's association with Hinduism, which in the public imaginary is thought of as more tolerant than Islam in the Middle East. Less obvious, but perhaps more important, are Indonesia's neighbors. In the United States, Jordan and Egypt are frequently invoked as home to moderate Muslim populations in contrast to the extremists in Iran or Saudi Arabia. But on most all measures of women's equality – political leadership, access to education, justification for the

use of reproductive health tools such as abortion in cases of rape, incest, or genetic diseases for the child – the public in Egypt and Jordan is equally or more extreme than in Iran and Saudi Arabia (2005-2009 WVS). Attitudes in Jordan are the most extreme anywhere in the Muslim world about women's right to have abortion in case of incest, rape, or congenital defects. And attitudes about female political leadership are the most extreme in Egypt, with 93% of the public believing that men make better political leaders than women (compare to 74% in Saudi Arabia). The reason that Jordan and Egypt are considered moderate is political: both regimes have foreign policies that are considered moderate in terms of the US alliance with Israel. We say this not to critique U.S. foreign policy, but rather to demonstrate that the category of "moderate Muslim" may reveal more about the speaker than the population to which it is applied.

Regardless of the origins of the misunderstanding, future scholars should go beyond the relatively blunt instruments of the World Values Survey and Indonesian Family Life Survey to better understand the meaning of tolerance to Indonesian Muslims and especially to the members and leaders of Islamic civil society. Understanding determinants of tolerance among this group is likely to hold the most potential for increasing interfaith understanding and cooperation, and minimizing the religious intolerance that too often accompanies political change.

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