



POLICY BRIEF

PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE

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Writer and Editor
William Shea

Research Implementer
PT. Mars Indonesia



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although Indonesia is a diverse nation based on ideals of the Pancasila, recent years have seen significant increases in restrictions on freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), as well as inter-faith conflict and violence. Indonesia, a nation that historically prides itself on harmony and tolerance amongst its diverse religious and ethnic groups, has – in many locations – begun to experience an erosion in freedom of religion and belief, materialized through increasing intolerance – particularly towards the nation’s religious minorities. In 2018, Search for Common Ground implemented a public perception survey across seven major Indonesian cities to measure Indonesian citizens’ perception and opinions on the state of FoRB/tolerance, and how it is applied across the nation.

Results identified that although the theoretical perception and agreement with FoRB/ tolerance remains significantly high among Indonesia’s people, its application in everyday life is contradictory. Approximately 20-30% of citizens who agreed with the idea in theory, were much more hesitant to undertake FoRB/tolerant actions of even the simplest form. The role of the State also reflected this contradiction in the eyes of respondents, while there were also visible links between the influence of religious organizations and media (in particular social media) upon FoRB/tolerance perception. Efforts to overcome this theoretical-practical gap must focus towards inclusive engagement of the ‘vulnerable to intolerance’ sub-group (that make-up the 20-30% mentioned above), alongside continuously challenging the intolerant voice, and engaging religious leaders as the purveyors of ‘real’ news and context to their followers.



BACKGROUND

This project surveyed public perceptions on a range of elements related to freedom of religion and belief, with the aim to further understand the levels of understanding and implementation of tolerance across the country. The perception survey used both quantitative and qualitative methods (through a quantitative questionnaire as well as in-depth interviews with key religious influencers), with a focus on seven specific target cities (Jakarta, Depok, Bekasi, Tangerang – overall known as Greater Jakarta, Bandung, Kupang and Yogyakarta), with the following objectives:

- ✦ To assess the level of public knowledge and understanding on religious freedom;
- ✦ To assess the public perspective on how state actors preserve the religious freedom;
- ✦ To measure public attitude towards religious freedom;
- ✦ To measure public attitude towards other religious groups; and
- ✦ To assess the influence of social media in shaping public attitude towards religious freedom.

Of the 711 respondents surveyed, 65% were of the Islamic faith (the nation's majority religion), with the remaining 35% spread across minority religious backgrounds. The gender breakdown was evenly split, with 75% of respondents classified as within the middle-upper class socio-economic threshold. The general respondent age was between 18 – 54 years old.

711
RESPONDENTS

65%
MAJORITY RELIGION

18-54
GENERAL AGE

35%
MINORITY RELIGION

1:1
GENDER BREAKDOWN

75%
MIDDLE-UPPER CLASS
SOCIO ECONOMICS



RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overall, analysis of the findings evidenced that while theoretical understanding of FoRB and tolerance remains significantly high, the understanding and application of practical FoRB/tolerance is on the decline. There was an average of between 10-40% (20-30% standard) of respondents – depending on location – whose practical implementation of tolerance somewhat contradicts their theoretical perceptions. In general, examples of such practical implementation provided in the survey could be considered as 'minimum standard' tolerance, requiring little sacrifice and with almost no impact on the lives of others. Such a shift in responses between theoretical and practical perceptions forms a worrying sign for the ongoing state of FoRB and tolerance in Indonesia.

A key element of this was lack of engagement with 'others' – those who are 'different'. This lack of engagement leads to lack of understanding, with the potential that information about the 'others' is more likely to come from inside their own circle. When the information source is limited and/or biased, and received through mediums that are exclusive, the potential for misinformation increases significantly. From misinformation results misunderstanding, and misunderstanding (or lack of understanding), no matter the context, is the breeding ground for intolerant beliefs and actions. For Indonesia in its current climate, influenced by a range of clear and hidden factors, it is these 20-30% of respondents who may influence the advancement (or retreat) of FoRB/tolerance in the coming years. Based on similar socio-economic contexts, this groups may be listed as vulnerable to intolerance – or borderline intolerant. While focus is often provided to groups that are clearly intolerant, in reality it is those who are vulnerable to intolerance that could shape the overall future of the nation in relation to religious freedom and the practice of tolerance. It is they who decide the community harmony in the years to come.

Public perception on the role of the State in FoRB/tolerance displayed similar signs to overall FoRB/tolerance theory and application. While high rates of respondents believed that the government's role was integral in handling FoRB/tolerance matters, the application of such a role has been below optimal to this point. Public perception on the State's protection of their rights and activities also varied, with contradictions displayed between religious groups and locations. Awareness of religious organizations was also surveyed, with the largest traditional Islamic institutions heading the figures – particularly in the majority cities. Of interest is the high initial awareness rates of hardline Islamic groups in a number of cities, which is potentially due to the high amount of press received by said groups in the Indonesian media.

Finally, media sources and use were also studied, with almost all respondents citing television as a source of media they turn to. Social media also forms a key information source, with preferred platforms often dependent upon location. Most respondents tend to steer clear of using social media for spreading negative information about other religions, however engagement in such activities was notably higher in Bandung and Jakarta.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Engaging the 'vulnerable to intolerance' demographic

Recommended actions for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), donors, researchers, media and cultural/arts communities.

- ↳ Understanding who the demographic is, what they respond to, and what their fears and attractions are. This may require further in-depth research.
- ↳ Design interventions that speak to this demographic, whose values or driving factors may be different from the tolerant majority.
- ↳ Promote similarities – don't highlight differences. This demographic needs to be further engaged not pushed further away. Similarities such as specific interests, points of agreement, ideologies (such as Pancasila) are all options for consideration.
- ↳ May be undertaken individually, through organizations, using culture and art as mediums for communication. Culture and the arts remain strong across all groups of Indonesian society, and cover both traditional and modern modes of delivery.

2. Challenge Intolerant Voices

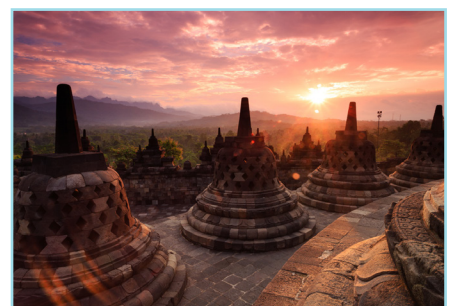
Recommended actions for media, donors, CSOs and cultural/arts communities.

- ↳ Ensuring 'vulnerable to intolerance' demographic is included, not excluded, from anti-intolerance movement, thereby decreasing the spread of intolerant voice.
- ↳ Positive messaging from more conservative (but still pro-tolerance) voices could be effective.
- ↳ Opportunity for public and community campaigns, based on broad or specific issues (flexible to evolving situations), that aim to unite a diverse range of groups, institutions and stakeholders.
- ↳ Inter-religious engagement through formal organizations, student groups, with potential to use 'real' examples on which to base movements/ideas.

3. Religious Leaders as Information Sources

Recommended actions for media, government stakeholders, and religious organizations.

- ↳ Engaging leaders and organizations within news/media cycles, through traditional and digital modes, to be aware and understand potential problematic events.
- ↳ Developing methods for responses to current contexts, that promote harmony and counter false or misleading news.
- ↳ Including leaders at both the top and community levels of organizations, to ensure united and balanced voice.
- ↳ Development of 'monitoring' system for large organizations to ensure a unified message is being portrayed throughout all levels of engagement.
- ↳ Ensure methods are modern and responsive, yet remain accessible and user-friendly to all potential user groups in-line with their individual contexts.





KEY RECOMMENDATIONS *(Cont.)*

4. Promoting Positive Stories

Recommended actions for media, policy makers, donors and cultural/arts communities.

- ↳ Tolerance/FoRB in Kupang (or similar cities/locations) highlighted, but not necessarily from the city's majority religion's perspective. Portray voices from Kupang's Muslim population (for example), youth groups and government leaders.
- ↳ Delivery of stories is key – including relevant stakeholders joining larger movements/events across the country, or presentation through digital media platforms.
- ↳ Film and other arts are important and valuable, particularly with high rates of social media engagement, even more so in cities with higher rates of intolerance.
- ↳ Partnering with large institutions that can reach alternative audiences to portray films and other media, to cast a wider net across target audiences.
- ↳ Television should not be forgotten, as it remained the largest source of relevant information across all surveyed cities. Potential partnerships with national broadcasters should be considered.

5. Comprehension of Majority Status

Recommended actions for media, government, CSOs and cultural/arts communities.

- ↳ Social experiments for awareness raising, although may not directly change mindsets, can highlight ideological inconsistencies for external viewers.
- ↳ Engage majority on deeper understanding of FoRB and human rights, and their role in ensuring these apply for all citizens.
- ↳ While related ideas may be complex, always keep the door open to innovative ideas that push boundaries for social change.



ABOUT SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

Search for Common Ground is an international humanitarian organization, established in 1982 with a focus on peacebuilding, transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions with an emphasis on problem solving. Our mission is to build sustainable peace for future generations by working with all parties from conflict, providing the tools needed to work together and find constructive solutions.

Search works in 36 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America. In Indonesia, Search works with local partners and organizations, supports the process of building a culture of peace through media, dialogue, strengthening community relations and capacity building since 2002.

Address

CoHive Uptown
Jl. Timor No. 16, Menteng.
Jakarta, Indonesia 10350

- Common Ground ID
- commongroundid
- commongroundid
- Common Ground ID