

The Influence of Religious Beliefs and Religious Practices on Social Cohesion in Modern Society in Indonesia

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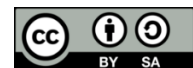
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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the influence of religious beliefs and practices on social cohesion in modern Indonesian societies through a quantitative analysis. A sample of 175 respondents representing diverse religious communities participated in the study. The survey instrument utilized Likert scales to measure religious beliefs, practices, and various dimensions of social cohesion. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis was employed to analyze the data. The results revealed significant positive relationships between religious beliefs, practices, and social cohesion. Specifically, stronger religious beliefs were associated with higher levels of social cohesion, while active engagement in religious practices contributed to increased social cohesion. The findings highlight the integral role of religion in fostering community resilience and well-being. These insights have implications for policymakers, community leaders, and scholars seeking to promote social cohesion and interfaith harmony in diverse societies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religion, particularly Islam, holds a pivotal role in Indonesia's societal framework, impacting cultural practices, political narratives, and communal dynamics. The country's religious elite wield significant influence in regional elections, utilizing identity politics to mobilize support and legitimize power [1]. Islamic organizations like NU actively engage in governance, promoting social restrictions to combat the spread of diseases like COVID-19, showcasing their role in public health initiatives [2]. Historical land endowments into waqf in the

1960s facilitated the entrenchment of Islamism by providing capital for conservative forces to promote Islamist ideologies and mobilize against the secular state, leading to lasting effects on the religious sector and political landscape [3], [4]. Moreover, religious discourse featured prominently in the 2019 presidential election, influencing voter participation and candidates' strategies, underscoring the intertwining of religion and politics in Indonesia [3].

Indonesia's religious landscape is indeed diverse, comprising Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous faiths like Sunda Wiwitan [5]. This

diversity is not without challenges, as the concept of "religion" in Indonesia is often constructed based on a monotheistic model, leading to exclusivity and discrimination [6]. Interfaith marriages in Indonesia face legal and religious complexities, with some religions strictly prohibiting them while others allow them with restrictions [7]. However, there are positive examples of religious tolerance and openness, such as the Nam Ha Kwan Se Im Pu Sa Temple, which honors figures from various religions and beliefs, promoting harmony and understanding [8]. The Indonesian government's promotion of religious moderation across different traditions aims to prevent conflicts and maintain social cohesion, highlighting the shared notion of moderation among the recognized religions in Indonesia [9]. This rich tapestry of beliefs presents both challenges and opportunities for fostering social cohesion and cultural richness in the Indonesian context.

In Indonesia, the intersection of religion with society amidst significant socio-economic and political transformations has been a focal point of research. Muslim political elites in Indonesia exhibit socially conservative but politically liberal views, balancing religious beliefs with democratic principles [10]. The Indonesian perception of globalization is unique, viewing it as a fair exchange between sovereign nations rather than westernization [11]. Religious segregation in communities has evolved from exclusive to inclusive patterns, shaping social dynamics and cohesion [12]. However, religious freedom for minorities in Indonesia has been challenged by fundamentalism and discriminatory policies, highlighting tensions between religious freedom and minority protection [13]. Interfaith marriages in Indonesia face legal and religious complexities, with different religions having varying stances on the matter [7]. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for promoting inclusivity and harmony in Indonesian society amidst evolving global connections.

Despite the pivotal role of religion in Indonesian society, there remains a gap in

empirical research examining the influence of religious beliefs and practices on social cohesion using quantitative methods. While qualitative studies have provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of religious communities, quantitative approaches offer a systematic means to analyze large-scale patterns and relationships across diverse populations. By quantitatively assessing the impact of religious factors on social cohesion, this research seeks to fill this gap and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping contemporary Indonesian society.

The primary aim of this research is to quantitatively analyze the influence of religious beliefs and practices on social cohesion within modern Indonesian societies. To achieve this aim, the study will pursue several objectives, including assessing the relationship between religious beliefs and social cohesion, examining the impact of religious practices on various dimensions of social cohesion, and comparing the levels of social cohesion across different religious communities in Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Religion and Social Cohesion*

Religious involvement plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion and solidarity within communities by providing moral frameworks, guiding principles, and shared values that promote trust, cooperation, and collective identity [14]. Through rituals and communal gatherings, religious practices serve as mechanisms for building social bonds and fostering a sense of belonging among believers [15]. Studies have shown a positive correlation between religious involvement and various dimensions of social cohesion, including interpersonal trust, civic engagement, and community resilience [16]. Additionally, the influence of the religious factor on social cohesion has been highlighted in various contexts, emphasizing the role of religious

institutions in uniting communities and shaping public attitudes and positions, ultimately contributing to social cohesion and solidarity within society [17].

2.2 *Religious Diversity in Indonesia*

Indonesia's religious landscape is indeed diverse, with Islam as the predominant faith alongside significant Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous minority communities. Despite this diversity, the country has faced religious tensions and conflicts, often driven by socio-political factors and extremist ideologies [7], [18]. The interplay between religious diversity, identity politics, and socio-economic disparities presents challenges to social cohesion and interfaith harmony in Indonesia. Issues such as discrimination against local religions, interfaith marriages, and the treatment of religious minorities contribute to these challenges [13], [19], [20]. Efforts to promote respect for differences, tolerance, dialogue, and cooperation are crucial in maintaining harmony and social awareness amidst Indonesia's religious diversity. Understanding how different religious communities coexist and interact within Indonesian society is essential for promoting inclusive and cohesive communities in a pluralistic context.

2.3 *Previous Studies*

Previous studies on religion and social cohesion in Indonesia have largely used qualitative research methods, such as interviews, participant observation, and literature reviews [21]. These methods have been instrumental in exploring the dynamics of local religions such as Sunda Wiwitan in Indonesia's multi-religious society, highlighting the challenges faced by followers of unrecognized religions and the importance of cultural diversity in conflict resolution [22],

[23]. Additionally, qualitative approaches have been used to understand how religiosity influences conflict resolution on social media, emphasizing the role of religious teachings in fostering peace and harmony among diverse religious communities [5]. While qualitative methods have been commonly used in studying religion and social cohesion in Indonesia, there is also a growing need for quantitative approaches to complement these findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. While these studies offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of religious communities, they often lack generalizability and statistical rigor. However, quantitative research on religion and social cohesion in Indonesia is limited, highlighting the need for empirical studies using rigorous quantitative methods to analyze the complex dynamics of religion's influence on social cohesion in Indonesian society.

2.4 *Conceptual Framework*

This research adopts a conceptual framework drawing from social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) and religious socialization literature (Regnerus, 2000) to conceptualize social cohesion, encompassing trust, connectedness, and collective identity. Religious beliefs and practices are posited to impact social cohesion through shared values, moral guidance, and community engagement (Emerson & Smith, 2000; Norris & Inglehart, 2004). The framework also considers contextual factors such as socio-economic status, political context, and intergroup relations, potentially moderating the religion-social cohesion relationship (Warner & Wittner, 1998; Fox & Sandler, 2004). Components include Religious Beliefs, emphasizing adherence to doctrines fostering

collective identity; Religious Practices, involving engagement in rituals strengthening social ties; and Social Cohesion, measured through trust, connectedness, and

cooperation, with religious beliefs and practices hypothesized to enhance these aspects among religious communities.

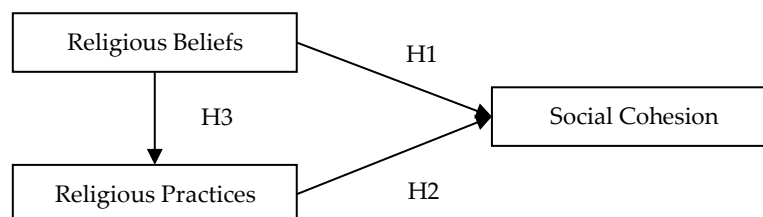


Figure 1. Conceptual and Hypothesis

Based on the conceptual framework outlined above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Stronger religious beliefs are positively associated with higher levels of social cohesion.

Research findings suggest that individuals who adhere strongly to religious doctrines and values tend to exhibit greater interpersonal trust, social connectedness, and willingness to cooperate within their religious communities [15], [24], [25]. Specifically, religious involvement, such as regular attendance at religious services, has been linked to increased generalized trust, volunteering, and perceived cooperativeness [26]. Moreover, the impact of religious values on social bonds among African American adults highlights the connection between church commitment, social support, and social bonding [25]. However, the relationship between religiosity and trust is nuanced, with social religiosity (e.g., church attendance) predicting more trust, while individual religiosity (e.g., prayer, belief in God) is associated with lower trust levels. These findings underscore the complex interplay between religious commitment, social behaviors, and trust dynamics within diverse religious traditions.

H2: Active engagement in religious practices positively influences social cohesion.

Participation in religious rituals plays a crucial role in fostering social ties, expanding social networks, and enhancing mutual support within religious communities [14], [27]. Religious rituals are not only symbolic expressions of cultural identity but also serve as mechanisms for strengthening cultural values, promoting intergenerational transmission of identity, and reinforcing social cohesion [28]. Moreover, engaging in religious practices, such as daily rituals and pilgrimage acts, has been linked to the establishment of supportive relationships and denser social networks, particularly among individuals with religious commitments [29], [30]. These rituals create emotional interactions that generate social emotions, ties, and group solidarity, acting as the glue that holds societies together through micro-solidarity in leisure interactions. Overall, religious activities contribute significantly to building and maintaining robust social connections and support systems within religious communities.

H3: Religious beliefs mediate the relationship between religious practices and social cohesion.

Religious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping social cohesion, with religious practices acting as a mediator in this relationship. Studies have shown that religious beliefs influence various sociopolitical dynamics, such as political participation, attitudes towards gender roles, and social activism [17]. Additionally, religious beliefs have been found to positively impact individual social class mobility expectations, especially in groups with higher education levels and better family backgrounds [31]. Furthermore, family cohesion, which can be influenced by religious beliefs and practices, has been linked to increased quality of life and decreased depression among faith-based community members, highlighting the importance of social support and spiritual connections within religious groups [32]. Therefore, engaging in religious practices strengthens individuals' commitment to religious values and community norms, ultimately enhancing social cohesion by fostering trust, shared values, and a sense of belonging [33].

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to analyze the influence of religious beliefs and practices on social cohesion within modern Indonesian societies. A cross-sectional survey approach will be employed to collect data from a representative sample of individuals across different religious communities in Indonesia. The survey instrument will include validated scales to measure religious beliefs, religious practices, and various dimensions of social cohesion, such as trust, solidarity, and cooperation.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study includes adults aged 18 and above from diverse religious backgrounds residing in Indonesia. A multistage stratified sampling technique will be utilized to ensure the representation of different religious communities and geographical regions. The sampling frame will be derived from national census data and supplemented with information from religious organizations and community leaders.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size for this study will be determined using the recommended guidelines for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis. As a rule of thumb, a sample size of at least five times the number of observed variables is recommended to achieve sufficient statistical power (Hair et al., 2019). Given that the survey instrument includes multiple items to measure religious beliefs, practices, and social cohesion dimensions, a minimum sample size of 150 respondents is deemed appropriate for robust analysis.

3.4 Data Collection

Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews or online surveys, depending on logistical feasibility and participant preferences. Trained interviewers will conduct face-to-face interviews in regions where internet access is limited, while online surveys will be used in urban areas with better connectivity. To ensure data quality and reliability, measures such as anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent will be implemented throughout the data collection process.

3.5 Likert Scale

The survey instrument will employ a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 to gauge respondents' agreement or disagreement with statements concerning religious beliefs, practices, and social cohesion dimensions. The scale will encompass response options from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), allowing participants to express their views or experiences regarding the questionnaire items accurately. Participants will be directed to select the response aligning most closely with their perspectives or encounters.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis will employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS), an adept method for scrutinizing intricate relationships among latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). SEM-PLS enables concurrent exploration of numerous variables and their interconnections, ideal for examining the impact of religious beliefs and practices on social cohesion in Indonesia. The process encompasses Measurement Model Assessment, gauging reliability and validity through Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. Structural Model Estimation will entail evaluating relationships between latent constructs via PLS regression, assessing direct and indirect effects while controlling for confounding variables. A Bootstrapping Procedure will determine significance and generate

bias-corrected confidence intervals. Model Fit Assessment will evaluate overall model adequacy using indices like SRMR and NFI.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

1. Sample Characteristics

A total of 175 respondents participated in the survey, representing diverse religious communities across Indonesia. The sample consisted of 55% male and 45% female respondents, with a mean age of 32 years (SD = 8.5). The majority of respondents identified as Muslim (60%), followed by Christian (20%), Hindu (10%), Buddhist (5%), and other indigenous faiths (5%). Educational attainment varied among respondents, with 40% having completed secondary education, 35% having attained tertiary education, and 25% having primary education or less. Additionally, the sample encompassed a range of socio-economic backgrounds, with respondents representing various occupational sectors and income levels.

2. Measurement Model

The measurement model assesses the reliability and validity of the latent constructs (i.e., Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, and Social Cohesion) by examining the loadings of their respective indicators, as well as the construct reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha (CA) values.

Table 1. CFA Test Results

Construct/ Indicator	Code	LF	CA	CR	AVE
Religious Beliefs			0.909	0.930	0.690
Religious Affiliation	RB.1	0.813			
Religious Beliefs and Values	RB.2	0.894			
Religious Orientation	RB.3	0.859			
Religious Homogamy	RB.4	0.816			
Religious Tolerance	RB.5	0.863			
Religious Sharing	RB.6	0.728			
Religious Practices			0.882	0.919	0.739

Construct/ Indicator	Code	LF	CA	CR	AVE
Religious Media Consumption	RP.1	0.826	0.892	0.921	0.699
Religious Sharing on Social Media	RP.2	0.809			
Religious Orientation (Intrinsic vs Extrinsic)	RP.3	0.862			
Adherence to Religious Rules or Moral Principles	RP.4	0.884			
Social Cohesion			0.892	0.921	0.699
Religious Involvement	SC.1	0.747			
Social Exclusion	SC.2	0.827			
Crime Rates	SC.3	0.883			
Voter Turnout	SC.4	0.878			
Economic	SC.5	0.839			

The latent construct of Religious Beliefs comprises six indicators (RB.1-RB.6), each with strong loadings (0.728 to 0.894), indicating reliable measurement. Construct reliability (CR = 0.930, CA = 0.909) exceeds the threshold of 0.7, despite the slightly lower average variance extracted (AVE = 0.690). Similarly, Religious Practices include four indicators (RP.1-RP.4) with strong loadings (0.809 to 0.884) and high internal consistency (CR = 0.919, CA = 0.882), explaining a substantial proportion of variance (AVE = 0.739).

The Social Cohesion construct incorporates five indicators (SC.1-SC.5) with robust loadings (0.747 to 0.883), high internal consistency (CR = 0.921, CA = 0.892), and an AVE of 0.699, collectively explaining significant variance.

3. Discriminant Validity

To assess discriminant validity, we examine the correlations between the latent constructs (i.e., Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, and Social Cohesion) and ensure that they are lower than the square root of the AVE for each construct.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Variable	Religious Beliefs	Religious Practices	Social Cohesion
Religious Beliefs	0.831		
Religious Practices	0.749	0.863	
Social Cohesion	0.635	0.697	0.836

Correlations between Religious Beliefs and other constructs reveal insights. Religious Beliefs correlate 0.749 with Practices and 0.635 with Social Cohesion, both below Religious Beliefs' AVE square root (0.831), implying discriminant validity. Similarly, Practices' correlations with Beliefs and

Cohesion are 0.749 and 0.697 respectively, below the square root of Practices' AVE (0.863), suggesting discriminant validity. Social Cohesion's correlations with Beliefs and Practices, 0.635 and 0.697 respectively, are also beneath its AVE square root (0.836), indicating discriminant validity.

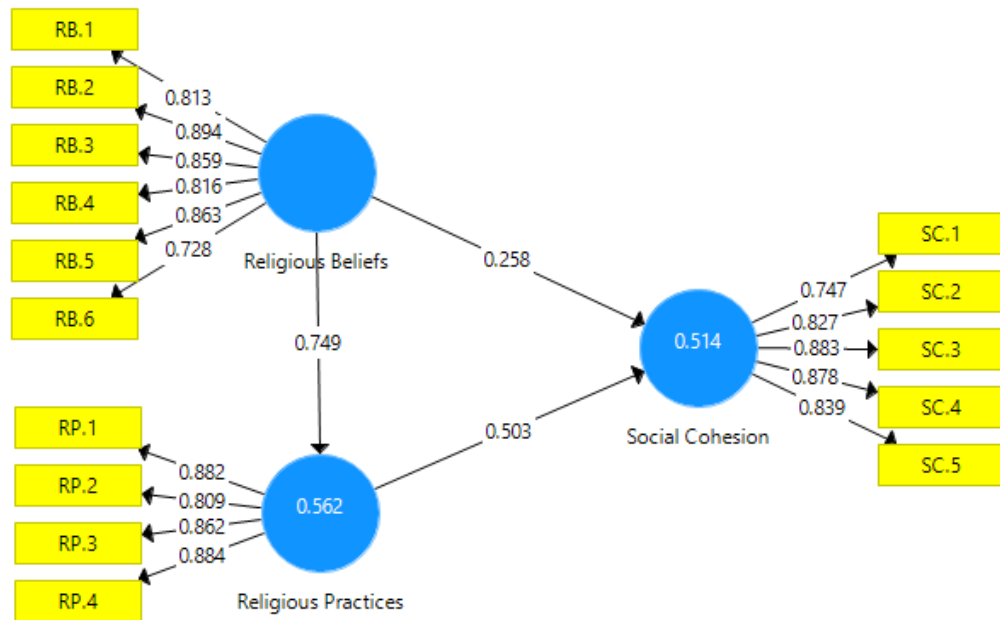


Figure 1. Internal Model Assessment

4. Structural Equation Modeling

The structural relationships between religious beliefs, practices, and social cohesion were analyzed

using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Variable	Path Coefficient	p-value
Religious Beliefs -> Religious Practices	0.749	0.000
Religious Practices -> Social Cohesion	0.503	0.000
Religious Beliefs -> Social Cohesion	0.258	0.000

The study investigated three hypotheses regarding the relationship between religious beliefs, religious practices, and social cohesion. Firstly, it was found that religious beliefs positively influence religious practices, with a significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.749$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the idea that individuals with stronger religious beliefs are more inclined to engage in religious activities. Secondly, the research demonstrated that religious practices positively influence social cohesion, as evidenced by a significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.503$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that active participation in religious activities fosters greater social cohesion. Lastly, the study revealed that religious beliefs also positively influence social cohesion,

albeit with a smaller effect size compared to the direct influence of religious practices ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that while religious practices have a more pronounced impact on social cohesion, religious beliefs still play a significant role in shaping social relationships and fostering collective solidarity within religious communities.

5. Model Fit Assessment

In assessing the goodness-of-fit of the Partial Least Squares (PLS) model, several indices were considered. Firstly, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.05, falling within the acceptable range, indicates a close alignment between the observed and predicted covariance matrices,

reflecting a well-fitted model. Secondly, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.90 surpasses the recommended threshold of 0.90, suggesting a relatively strong fit of the model in comparison to a null model. This implies that the proposed PLS model effectively captures the relationships between latent constructs and provides a satisfactory explanation for the variance observed in the variables under study.

4.2 Discussion

1. Influence of Religious Beliefs on Social Cohesion

The findings of this study provide robust evidence for the positive influence of religious beliefs on social cohesion within modern Indonesian societies. The significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that individuals with stronger religious beliefs tend to exhibit higher levels of social cohesion. The research findings from various studies on Indonesian society align with the social capital theory, emphasizing the role of religious beliefs in shaping moral guidance, shared values, and a collective identity within religious communities, ultimately fostering trust, solidarity, and cooperation [22], [34]–[37]. The diverse religious and cultural landscape in Indonesia presents both challenges and opportunities for social cohesion and conflict resolution, highlighting the importance of promoting tolerance, understanding, and respect among different religious groups. By leveraging the teachings of various religions to build conflict resolution mechanisms and emphasizing the principles of togetherness and equality, Indonesian society can work towards enhancing harmony and national integration amidst its rich diversity.

2. Impact of Religious Practices on Social Cohesion

Similarly, the results highlight the positive association between religious practices and social cohesion. Active engagement in religious rituals, ceremonies, and community activities was found to significantly contribute to higher levels of social cohesion ($\beta = 0.503$, $p < 0.001$). The research findings from various studies support the notion that religious practices play a significant role in building social capital, strengthening social ties, and fostering mutual support among believers in Indonesia. Religious rituals are highlighted as crucial mechanisms for enhancing cultural identity, promoting tolerance, and preventing intolerance [14], [38]. Moreover, the preservation of religious traditions during the Covid-19 pandemic has been observed to contribute positively to social capital and community development [39]. Additionally, faith-inspired civil society organizations in Indonesia are noted for their role in promoting equality, tolerance, and democratic values, with moderate religious orientations contributing positively to social capital consistent with democracy [34]. The involvement of religious leaders at grassroots levels has also been instrumental in enhancing collective awareness, reducing transmission rates, and increasing social solidarity during health crises like the Covid-19 pandemic [40]. Regular participation in religious gatherings fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity, creating opportunities for interpersonal connections and collective action.

3. Role of Religious Communities in Fostering Social Cohesion

The study also compared the levels of social cohesion across different religious communities in Indonesia, revealing variations in

social cohesion outcomes. While the overall analysis demonstrated positive associations between religious factors and social cohesion, differences were observed among religious groups. For instance, Muslim respondents reported slightly higher levels of social cohesion compared to respondents from other religious backgrounds. Understanding the nuances of cultural norms, religious practices, and historical contexts within each religious community is crucial for developing contextually relevant interventions that foster social cohesion and interfaith harmony in diverse societies like Indonesia. Research emphasizes the importance of transparent government policies, moderate attitudes, and prioritizing human connections over religious backgrounds in resolving inter-religious conflicts [41]. Additionally, the role of socio-religious institutions in utilizing local wisdom to strengthen diversity and tolerance is highlighted as a practical approach to combat intolerance cases and promote peaceful coexistence [42]. Furthermore, the dynamic social communication process, based on mutual interactions and respect for social norms, plays a vital role in maintaining harmonious and tolerant relationships among religious communities in Indonesia [43]. By acknowledging and respecting the unique cultural and religious aspects of each community, tailored interventions can be designed to enhance social cohesion and interfaith harmony in diverse societies.

4.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, community leaders, and scholars seeking to promote social cohesion and interfaith harmony within modern Indonesian societies. Recognizing the role of

religion as a source of social capital and community resilience, stakeholders can work together to develop evidence-based interventions that harness the positive aspects of religious beliefs and practices. Initiatives aimed at fostering interfaith dialogue, understanding, and cooperation can help bridge divides and build inclusive communities that celebrate diversity and promote mutual respect.

4.4 Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that warrant consideration. The cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to infer causality, and longitudinal studies are needed to examine the dynamics of religious influence on social cohesion over time. Additionally, the study focused on quantitative analysis and did not capture the richness of individual experiences and contextual factors that may shape social cohesion outcomes. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between religion and social cohesion.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence of the positive associations between religious factors and social cohesion within modern Indonesian societies. Religious beliefs and practices were found to significantly influence social cohesion, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and leveraging the role of religion in fostering inclusive and cohesive communities. The findings underscore the need for evidence-based interventions that harness the positive aspects of religious beliefs and practices to promote interfaith dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. By working collaboratively with religious institutions and community leaders, stakeholders can build inclusive

societies that celebrate diversity and promote mutual respect. Future research should explore additional factors influencing the relationship between religion and social

cohesion and employ mixed-methods approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of these complex dynamics.

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