



The Beyond indigenous religions in Indonesia: Struggling for their rights

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Abstract

Indigenous religions in Indonesia include several registered organizations that struggle for their community rights. However, their struggle seems endless because the majority has insufficient knowledge and perspective of indigenous religions' belief system. This study examines the process of their struggle historically to unveil their efforts to obtain their rights as citizens. Employing a qualitative method is suitable for this study because it utilizes literature reviews to understand the historical story of indigenous religions' journey during their struggle. This study shows that the communities of indigenous religions should be paid attention by the government because the supreme council court of Indonesia has claimed legally their existence but the sub-institutions in each region cannot fully imply the legal standing of the decision.

Keywords: indigenous religions, struggling the rights, political religiosity of Indonesia

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Introduction

Indigenous religions become controversial for certain communities because their belief system is considered by the majority as a deviant religion. This condition is influenced by the concept of world religion (Masuzawa, 2005) which articulates religions from the point of view of the West. Most understanding of religion in the world should include God, the prophet(s), and holy book(s), while most indigenous religions do not provide those requirements. In this regard, recognized religions around the world include Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Confucianism.

Therefore, indigenous religions in some countries cannot be sustained longer because the adherents are receiving inequality and disrespect from others. For instance, some indigenous religions in Indonesia face the struggle to sustain their belief system because the majority, including Islam and Christianity, do not fully accept their concept of religion. Moreover, some indigenous religious adherents received discrimination in either policy or social life. Some studies explained that discrimination to the adherents of indigenous religions happened in public services, such as healthcare and education (Thea, 2020; Mediana, 2020; Andriansyah, 2022).

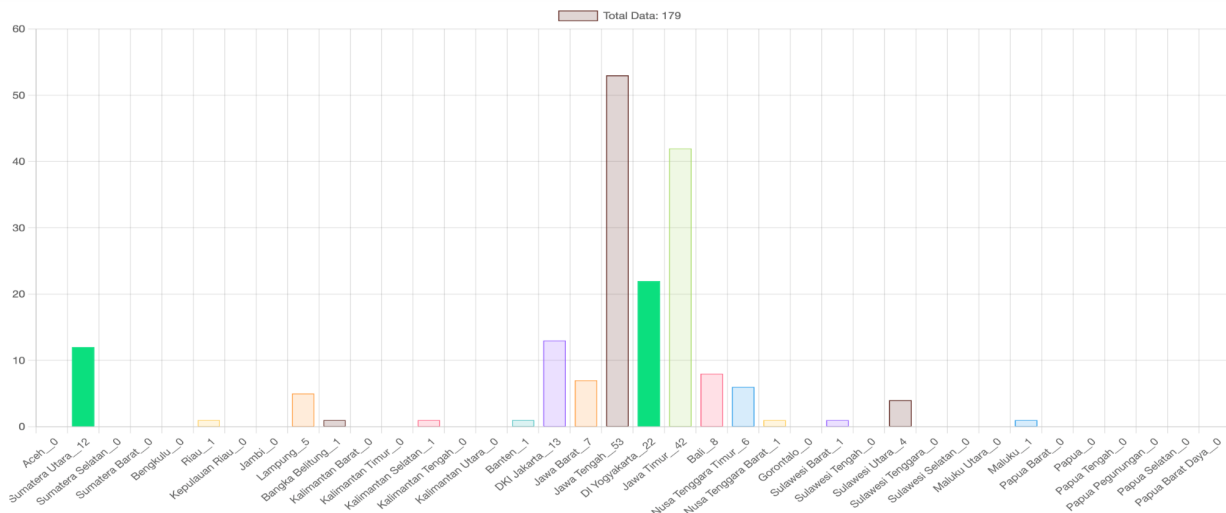
The more problematic issue of indigenous religions in Indonesia is about policy and law. Indonesian court institution (Mahkamah Konstitusi) decided that the government recognizes the existence of indigenous religious adherents as their belief system in 2016. However, the practice of policy and law does not fully imply, so the adherents of indigenous religions in certain regions of Indonesia remain receiving inequality treatment in public services. The indication of this disintegration of Indonesia's policy is caused by most Indonesian citizens consider religion includes three aspects (the only God, the prophet(s), and the holy book(s)) as well as the first principle of Pancasila (Indonesia's values) (Picard & Madiner, 2011).

In 2021, the discrimination towards adherents of indigenous religions in Indonesia emerged in Magelang, where one of the adherents' daughter was forced to take catholic subjects in school because the school does not have a specific teacher for indigenous religion subjects (Kompas et al., 2021). In other case, the adherents of indigenous religions is recognized as communism, then, they do not access their right in public services in Magelang, Central Java (Boni et al., 2023). In Toba, the adherents of *Ugama Malim* received a negative sentiment when they pray (Mubarrak & Kumala, 2020), in Aceh, a negative stigma towards religious minority appeared issues of inequality services in public, and the intolerance treatment of the *Budi Daya* belief system in education (Wamad, 2022). Shortly, the dilemma among indigenous religious adherents to maintain their belief system is getting bigger because of those conditions. Although Indonesian court institutions decided to recognize those belief systems as a part of Indonesian diversity, those indigenous religions still receive discrimination from people (Mediana, 2020).

In considering those phenomena, this study examines the gap in understanding of the majority, including Abrahamic religions (Islam and Christianity), Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, towards indigenous religions in Indonesia. To unveil those phenomena, this study employs a qualitative method that is a suitable procedure in searching for the study's purposes (Flick, 2009).

An overview of indigenous religions in Indonesia

There are legalized organizations of indigenous religions in Indonesia by 179 communities (Kemendikbud, 2024). The number of indigenous religions in Indonesia is dominated by the region of Central Java that is 53 organizations followed by 42 organizations in East Java, 22 organizations in Yogyakarta, 13 organizations in Jakarta, 12 Organizations in North Sumatra, and others.



Source: Kemendikbud (2024)

Among 179 legalized organizations of indigenous religions in Indonesia that can be seen in the graphic, the unregistered indigenous religions in Indonesia remain many. Most scholars assume that unregistered organizations of indigenous religions in Indonesia are affected by the fearness of being exposed. The main reason for the statement is because most Indonesian cannot fully accept their existence for some reasons, such as afraid of getting bullied, discrimination, and public service access.

However, the community of indigenous religions have been created to allow their community having an accompaniment, namely the Supreme Council of Belief in Almighty God (Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, MLKI). The community established MLKI in the National Congress of Belief in Almighty God in November 2012, but the declaration happened in October 13, 2014 when they held a national seminar in Yogyakarta (MLKI, 2017).

The main purpose of MLKI itself is to fight for their rights as citizens of Indonesia that is proven in the statutory laws about 1945 Constitution, Chapter XA Human Rights, Article 28 Article 28 E paragraph (2), Article 28 C, paragraph (1), Article 28I, paragraph (3), and Chapter (I) and paragraph (2); 1945 Constitution, Chapter XI Religion Article 29, paragraph (1) and paragraph (2) regulates religion and belief; Law Number 23 OF 2006 concerning Population Administration; Law Number 24 of 2013 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2006 concerning Population Administration; Constitutional Court Decision Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016 concerning Review of Law Number 23 of 2006 concerning Population Administration as amended by Law Number 24 of 2013; Joint Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Culture and Tourism Number 43/41 of 2009 concerning Service Guidelines for Believers in the One and Only God; Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 44 of 2009 concerning Guidelines for Cooperation between the

Department of Home Affairs and Regional Governments with Community Organizations and Other Non-Profit Institutions in the Field of National Unity and Domestic Politics; Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 33 of 2012 concerning Guidelines for Registration of Community Organizations within the Ministry of Home Affairs and Regional Government; Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 77 of 2013 concerning Guidelines for the Development of Institutions of Belief in One Almighty God and Traditional Institutions; and Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 27 of 2016 concerning Education Services for Belief in God Almighty in Education Units.

Those regulations indicate that the government of Indonesia is taking care of the communities of indigenous religions in Indonesia and become the basic reference for the communities to fight for their rights as the citizens. However, those regulations are not spread out massively to notify either regional institutions or publics, so sometimes some regional institutions or publics do not treat the community members of indigenous religions in Indonesia in a good way because they consider them as divergence.

History of indigenous religions journey to unveil the belief system in political perspective of Indonesia

Political religiosity in Indonesia became complex after Indonesia's independence in 1945. Historically, religiosity in Indonesia is considered as animism and dynamism because most Indonesians are not aware of local belief in Indonesia that has diversity. Tylor (2016) elaborated animism is a process of spiritual movement from one thing to another thing, in detailing the process of soul moves out from the body, likely the abrahamic religious concept considers it as a process of moving forward to heaven or hell. Similarly, the ancient community considers that the soul moves from their body to another thing, such as a tree, cave, or river.

In addition, Koentjaraningrat (1984) elaborated that Indonesian, especially Java, considered mysticism in a part of the community's life, and other scholars added that mysticism belief is upholding to live harmony among human beings, ancestors, and cosmos although it is regarded as irrational for the paradigm of world religion (Suwandi, 2000; Johnson & Kraft, 2017). However, most Indonesians see those concepts as heathen because their judgements are influenced by the current religious belief system.

The phenomena indicate that the government plays the main role in shaping citizens' perspective. Moreover, a tragedy of 1965, when the New Order regime in Soeharto presidency, became a terrible situation for the communities of indigenous religions (Ricklefs, 2012) because the indigenous religion members were affiliated to communism when the government commanded the army to demolish the Indonesian communist party. The government also forced all members of indigenous religions to choose one of the legalized religions including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Picard, 2011).

However, the communities of indigenous religions want to follow Hinduism that was considered a registered religion in Indonesia around the 1960s after redefining their religious concept in their internal conversion (Geertz, 1977). In fact, the assessment in registering indigenous religions is declined by certain political parties because they consider indigenous religions to be a heathen belief system. It is the reason why the members of indigenous religions remain struggling in searching for their rights.

Conclusion

Historical story of a journey of indigenous religions reminds us that political religiosity in Indonesia needs to be examined to reach an equality among people. As we see that indigenous religions become the original religion of Indonesia, and the registered religions in Indonesia currently are the imported religion. However, the founding fathers of Indonesia decided that Indonesia must uphold five principles into Pancasila (*believe in the only God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, justice guided by wisdom and prudence in representative terms, social justice for all the people of Indonesia*).

In other words, we do not need to blame who are the suspects of hindering religious sentiment, but we need to examine more clearly about the understanding of indigenous religions' belief system. By doing so, we can appreciate and respect their belief systems and accept them as a part of religious communities in Indonesia.

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