Under the Veil of Tolerance: Critics on Tolerant City Index

Muhammad Ikhsan Attaftazani a,1

a Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, UGM, Yogyakarta

1 ikhsanattaftazani@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
Religious tolerance in Indonesia has become phenomenal in the last decades after Setara Institute was established alongside other NGOs such as Wahid Foundation. There is an annual index of tolerant and intolerant cities in Indonesia conducted by the Setara Institute. Other religious indexes are also mentioned, such as the index of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB) by Wahid Foundation and the Religious Harmony index by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This index shows the interreligious relations within society and measures tolerance from the FORB index. To some extent, this index led to the competition of cities in Indonesia to be the most tolerant. This research examines the problem within the index from a philosophical perspective. Furthermore, the effect of the religious tolerance index on local government policies and everyday engagement in society will be addressed. This research uses a qualitative analysis method and collects data through library research. This research shows some problems in the index, such as binary opposition and generalized intolerant action with religious motives. In addition, the tolerance tends to move into pragmatic tolerance instead of mutual tolerance after the index emerges.

ABSTRAK
Toleransi beragama di Indonesia telah menjadi fenomena dalam beberapa dekade terakhir setelah Setara Institute...
Religious tolerance is an important issue raised by scholars and society in Indonesia alongside the moderate religiosity agenda of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This program aims to encounter religious extremism or fundamentalism that emerged and increased after the Reformation era. In this case, the government takes a big role in governing religious activities such as seminars or training. Since 2012, Badan Litbang and Diklat Kemenag RI has conducted an index of religious harmony to measure the achievement of the religious harmony program. On the other hand, some Non-

Government Organizations conduct an index on religiosity, such as Wahid Foundation and Setara Institute.2

The Wahid Foundation and Setara Institute are Indonesia’s leading religious indexed institutions. Both institutions have their own model for indexing religiosity in Indonesia. Wahid Foundation cooperates with Lembaga Survey Indonesia, conducting the Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB) index annually since 2008.3 Wahid Foundation focuses on the action or event-based methodology of discrimination of FORB instead of looking at the particular cities in Indonesia. The more violation of FORB in the place found, the more the place becomes intolerant and vice versa. Therefore, Wahid Foundation comes from universal to particular. Meanwhile, Setara Institute is one of the most active institutions that indexing tolerance on Freedom of Religion and Belief. The research is based on locations taken from all cities in Indonesia annually.4 Setara Institute looks at not only discrimination but also the peace in the city. Thus, the Wahid Foundation seems more credible in measuring FORB discrimination, while Setara has the strength of precise data based on the city. Although there is a difference in the method, their aims are the same to look at the government’s work in FORB.

Subsequently, the index of tolerant cities from Setara Institute has a big impact on the city nominated as tolerant or non-tolerate in the case of social and political. The index is also very well known and influences the media to frame the city, tolerant or not, based on the report by Setara. Thus, the government can make a regulation to make a city more tolerant. To some extent, this index can motivate other cities which are considered less tolerant of regulating the new regulation, which is more inclusive of any religion and beliefs. According to that, Wahid Foundation index—even though it did not

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2 Besides those institutions, there is education institution which annually reported the religious case in Indonesia, the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) UGM Yogyakarta, even though did not focus on FORB. See “Annual Reports – CRCS UGM,” accessed June 15, 2023, https://crcs.ugm.ac.id/downloadcategory/annual-reports/. See also the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta for the report of moderate religiosity through convey Indonesia program “CONVEY Indonesia – Empowering Educational Actors and Institutions to Promote Religious Moderation in Preventing Violent Extremism,” accessed June 15, 2023, https://conveyindonesia.com/.

3 The Wahid Institute and Wahid Foundation are the same institution. I will use Wahid Foundation in the next writing. The last report was 2019 and there is no further information afterwards. See Subhi Azhari and Gamal Ferdhi, “Kemajuan Tanpa Penyelesaian Akar Masalah,” Annual Report, Kemerdekaan Beragama/Berkeyakinan (Jakarta: Wahid Foundation, 2019), 9.

have much influence as Setara Institute, helps the government to measure
the performance of their programs in society.

In contrast, there are some problems in the differences between reality
and data that lead to pragmatism. There is also a gap between reality at the
government level and the data. For example, some minority people in the less
tolerant city did not feel discriminated by religion or beliefs. I will also take
into account the problem with the option of place, time, and action that is
recorded in the index. Therefore, I will address some theories on religious
and secular violence and ethics to see the connection with the index. This
approach probably changes the index drastically, while the definition of
tolerance, violence, and conflict differs from the index institution because
there will be a lot of action that should not be included in discrimination.

There is more research on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Indonesia
based on surveys or indexes\(^5\) and supporting data from Wahid Foundation
and Setara Institution.\(^6\) Somehow, there is less research focus on the index of
religiosity or tolerance. The Paramadina Foundation and the Peace and
Conflict Resolution UGM give some critical points to these institutions. They
address some issues regarding the FORB index, such as unclear
measurement of FORB and including too many criteria such as pluralism,
FORB, democracy, and tolerance in the same tools.\(^7\) However, the previous
research only focuses on something that has been there. To some extent, this
research not only adds some critics from the grassroots but also more
philosophical to see the hidden effect of the index.

This research will examine and revisit the aims of tolerance indexed
based on FORB. Thus, this research will give a new perspective on how to
make the city more tolerant rather than repeating an index annually.
Noteworthy, this study is not limited to Setara Institute and Wahid
Foundation report but also takes a broader comparison with government

\(^5\) Muhammad Lukman Hakim, Indah Dwi Qurbani, and Abdul Wahid, “A Paradox between Religious
Conviction and Recognizing the Freedom of Others on Measuring Religious (in) Tolerance Index in
East Java, Indonesia,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (December 31, 2023),
https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2191443; See also Ayu Mellisa et al., *Mengukur Kebebasan
Beragama Di Jawa Barat 2014: Catatan Dari Index Demokrasi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pusat Studi Agama
dan Demokrasi Paramadina, 2016).

Freedom* 6, no. 1 (2021); See also, Saepul Agna, *The Wahid Institute Dan Gerakan Kebebasan Beragama

\(^7\) Ali-Ihsan Fauzi and Samsu Rizal Panggabean, *Melaporkan Kebebasan Beragama Di Indonesia 2008:
Evaluasi Atas Laporan The Wahid Institute, Setara Institute, Dan CRCS-UGM* (Jaktarta: Yayasan
Paramadina & Magister Perdamaian dan Resolusi Konflik, 2009).
and other NGOs index on FORB. Some international institutions will also contribute to the index, such as the United States Commission on Freedom International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

The Setara Institute and Wahid Foundation index of FORB indirectly lead the government to see tolerance as a pragmatism, not as itself. These institutions also failed to capture religious discrimination, and most of the discrimination was considered as religious.

Method

This research uses qualitative analysis and collects data from primary and secondary sources of library research. The primary sources are the index or annual report of religious tolerance in Indonesia from three major institutions, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Wahid Foundation, and Setara Institute. For the secondary data, I use the news from digital media related to the issue and other related indexes. I use an interactive data analysis model, which contains data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion. In data collection, I look for any data from index institutions and any issues related to FORB. In the data condensation process, I select the data that show the weakness of the index and support the argument. Then, after collecting data, I will change to the narrative explanation. The last, I conclude the data by verifying the validity. Therefore, the material object of this research is religious index institutions, while the formal object is pragmatic tolerance, ethics, and secular violence.

Result and Discussion

*The Emergence of Religious Index in Indonesia and Its Problem*

If we could go back to the last two decades, there is an awareness of FORB in Indonesia. It emerged drastically after the fall of the Suharto era. Religious group massively promoted their idea under reformatory periods, and nationalists did the same. Somehow, the religious group, specifically

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Islamist groups such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and (Front Pembela Islam) FPI, was more vocal in expressing their rights in the public sphere.\(^9\) To some extent, their action allegedly discriminates the rights of other religions and beliefs like converting other religions.\(^10\) That would be dangerous for Islamist groups during the Suharto regime to oppose the government. Eventually, Islamist groups used the momentum to express their voices after being repressed by the New Order regime. To affirm that, the greatest fear from Islamist radicals is the terror that Indonesia has undergone.\(^11\) Therefore, interreligious relations are becoming rare and vulnerable in some places, which leads to conflict or violation.

The awareness of mutual relations between religions increases in the early 21st century with the emergence of interreligious institutions which corroborate civil society.\(^12\) Several years later, some institutions that pay attention to indexing religiosity, such as Setara Institute and Wahid Foundation, followed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Every institution has its own characteristics to carry out a survey or index. For instance, the Ministry of Religious Affairs uses the term “kerukunan" or harmony rather than tolerate or FORB—the first used by Setara Institute and the last used by Wahid Foundation. Somehow, if we looked broadly, the index conducted the same, namely FORB. It is also important to address the international institute from America, the United States for Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which launched the annual report on FORB in Indonesia in 2006.\(^13\) USCIRF probably influenced religious index institutions in Indonesia because the Wahid Foundation started in 2008, Setara Institute in 2015, and Kemenag in 2012.

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\(^12\) Izak Lattu, “Building Trust and Social Solidarity in the Public Sphere in the Perspective of Indonesia,” *Waskita: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Masyarakat* 2, no. 2 (2014): 14.

\(^13\) This organization has many representatives in many countries to measure FORB index. USCIRF has launched annual report on FORB in Indonesia since 2006. See USCIRT, *Annual Reports* 1416:20:56 2023, https://www.uscirf.gov/annual-reports.
During covid-19, some index institutions still produce the index, but Wahid Foundation chooses a different way. In the last three years, the Wahid Foundation published some books and reports. In 2020, Wahid Foundation published “Meredam Kebencian: Satu Dekade Pemantauan Siar Kebencian Keagamaan di Indonesia.”\(^\text{14}\) This book only reports hate speech during the last decade. Then, in 2021 Wahid Foundation also published a guidebook, “Panduan Menyusun Kontra-Narasi dan Narasi Alternatif untuk Toleransi dan Perdamaian”.\(^\text{15}\) This book contains research on the use of storytelling to counter intolerance and extremism. The latest publication, in 2022, published a report (National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism) RAN PE. After covid-19, Wahid Foundation no longer published an index of FORB, but they took another step to publish a book.

Meanwhile, Setara Institute consistently indexes the data for tolerant cities amid covid19. In 2022, Setara Institute launched the tolerant City index as the sixth index since 2015. Unlike any index institution, even Kemenag, many people consider Setara Institute a representative index of tolerance in Indonesia. Annually, the index of tolerant city became national news when it was launched. There are also some influences that emerge from this index, like self-pride because their city is nominated as the most tolerant than the other. To some extent, the nominated tolerant city also can increase the economic income because people from other cities want to feel the vibes of the place. Some minority groups also tend to migrate to the tolerant city for study or work rather than to the intolerant ones. Alongside the benefit of the index, there are also some critics who come from intolerant city people.

Natalius Pigai, on his Twitter account @NataliusPigai2, criticized the index of Setara Institute in 2023, which inputs Depok as the most intolerant city in Indonesia.\(^\text{16}\) Based on his experience of 23 years in Depok, he admitted that he never felt discriminated by the Muslim majority. In addition, there is no prohibition on building worship places. Other Twitter


users who lived in Depok also agree with the statement of Natalius Pigai. This case decreases Setara Institute’s credibility because the result and reality differ. The reason might be that they have different definitions and analysis tools for tolerance.

The term tolerance is debatable because, to some extent, one group is tolerant while the other is not. For instance, if tolerance means Muslims should help Christians while celebrating Natal or visiting other religious worship places, for some groups, this is tolerant, but for fundamentalists, this is. Fundamentalist Muslims have their own way of respecting other religions by not interfering with their worship. Therefore, it is not appropriate to include this in the survey to measure the religious harmony used by Kemenag. Every person has an expression on how to tolerate others. Furthermore, we will address this problem and the effect of the index on government and society.

The Philosophical Perspective and Effects from Religiosity Indeks

The index conducted by Setara Institute to measure the tolerant and intolerant city leads to binary opposition. This index creates two opposite terms, tolerate and intolerant, which are labeled to cities in Indonesia. Cities that have interreligious regulations and less recorded religious violence will get some points. The greatest point they get, they will be nominated as the most tolerant cities, and vice versa. Sometimes, the labeling becomes ambiguous when all cities get a good point in tolerance. Does the lowest point consider to be intolerant? For example, there is a national math competition and the members are among the best students from every province. The result shows that the best student answers the whole question correctly, while the lowest grade gets five wrong numbers out of fifty questions. The lowest grade student would not be considered dumb. Then, if tolerance is determined by more or less conflict or the existence of religious regulation, tolerance becomes simplified because it ignores another aspect, such as the contention of the actor.

There is a problem if someone looks at something in structuralism that produce binary opposition. Derrida criticized this concept because the binary opposition always looks for the opposite of the entity and destroys social life.¹⁷ Structuralism only separates the object into something that opposes each other, such as good and evil, east and west, tolerant and intolerant, and makes one entity higher than the opposite. Something can be
defined if there is a relation with the opposition. The binary opposition also influences the accident attached to the substance. For instance, when there is a conflict, it must be intolerance. This mindset is very clear in the index conducted by Setara and Wahid Foundation.

Measurement of the index using deontological ethics—introduced by Immanuel Kant—is also become a problem. The weakness of using deontological ethics is nullifying the intention of the subject. In the index of FORB and tolerance, the institutions use data from any place to see discrimination and regulation as a good thing, whether the result is good or evil. Using deontological ethics, tolerance is always considered good, while intolerance is always evil. They neglect that, in some cases, people who tolerate others do not mean that they are good people. Perhaps they have bad intentions or pragmatics to get what they want. Furthermore, they should not generalize the conflict affected by religion because many secular things influence the perpetrators to commit violence.

The narrative used in the index of FORB and tolerance should distinguish intolerance or discrimination by religion and secular. In reality, religious violence is a myth because religion is only used as a tool that motivates them to commit violence. There is some seculars reason behind bloodlust by extremist groups, such as politics, ideology, and economics. To affirm that, the disastrous war in history, World War I and World War II, is caused by secular reason. Nowadays, when we see the conflict between religions in one place, it does not mean religious conflict. For instance, the conflict in Poso, central Sulawesi, in 1998-2001 cannot merely be considered a religious conflict because after the transition from an authoritarian regime to decentralization or regional autonomy, society shifts significantly. The local people felt marginalized, while immigrants gained more power to rule the people. Therefore, politics plays an important role in the conflict, and

the religious narrative makes it bigger. Despite some combatants or extremists legitimate their actions by quoting from the Quran or the Bible to gain more supporters, it emerges after the conflict. For this reason, the basic assumption of the conflict is politics instead of religion. This is important to pay attention to not easily determine religion as the cause because of the involvement in the conflict.

Besides generalizing the discrimination as religious, the religious index institution also indirectly generalizes the people within the city by labeling them as intolerant. The label ‘intolerant city’ can mean that people who live there are intolerant or have many intolerant actions in that city. The first neglect that not all people in an intolerant city participate in intolerant action, and perhaps there are some pacifists. The second sound more compatible with the intolerant city label. Somehow, time is one essential thing that should take into account when labeling something. The pattern of intolerant action is unclear if looked at from different periods. The religious group becomes less tolerance and more tolerant in particular times. In this case, the annual index or report did not represent the city and only showed the periodic pattern of intolerant actions.

The religious index institution should focus on how people and government encounter the societal problem instead of looking at the number of conflicts. In most cases, religious groups tend to be less and more violent, affected by their condition, such as oppression by other groups, usually the government. When they feel oppressed, they might take action against each other to keep their position. They will become less violent if their right is fulfilled by the authority to expand their influence. Gradually, after they gain a large supporter, perhaps they will do more violence.22 Then, their supporting idea of violating the other seems to discredit the religious teaching by interpreting the text in their way. Thus, it is naïve to call the city intolerant because, in that year, there was no encounter among religions or beliefs. On the other hand, a tolerant city is not a city where conflict never exists, but it is more compatible if the benchmark is on how they solve the problem and bring society back into peace.

In tolerate city index conducted by Setara Institute, they show the top 10 most tolerant cities in Indonesia. Singkawang, Salatiga, Manado, and Ambon

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have always been listed as the top ten most tolerant cities for several years. There must be a change in the position of the most tolerant city based on the annual index. Mostly, Salatiga and Singkawang compete with each other to be in the first position. Salatiga was nominated as the most tolerant city for three years in a row and was replaced by Singkawang in the first position. In response to this issue, the head of the Regional Representative Council (DPRD), Salatiga, Dance Ishak Palit, wants to establish the local regulatory draft of tolerance. He reflects on Singkawang, which moves to the first position after establishing a regulation draft of tolerance.\(^{23}\) When we look at this case, there will be a positive effect of the index. Somehow, the establishment of regulation is not purely made to gain peace in society but for pragmatic reasons, which is so-called pragmatic tolerance.\(^{24}\) The label “tolerance” for the city is quite useful because the index is on a national scale. The city can use the label to promote tourists coming there and get benefits for their economy. This case shows us that tolerance can shift into pragmatism because the cities compete with each other in order to get the first position rather than being tolerant.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, the index of FORB or any other related issue on religion is quite ambiguous in some points. First, the institutions distinguished the city with binary opposition by separating tolerant and intolerant cities. The more discrimination exists in the city, the more intolerant they are and vice versa. Second, they generalize all discrimination as part of religion when there is contact with different religions. They did not seek further beyond the discrimination, whether religious or secular violence that exists. Third, the annual index or report cannot determine whether the city is tolerant or intolerant because, in different periods, they can be more tolerant or less tolerant. Besides the ambiguities, there is also the impact of this index which leads the cities into pragmatic tolerance.


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NataliusPigai


