RELIGIOUS PLURALISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENERATION Z IN INDONESIA

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Abstract*: This study aims to explore the perspectives of Generation Z (Gen Z) in Indonesia on religious pluralism, considering the diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts. Using a qualitative approach, the study found that Gen Z exhibits a more inclusive, tolerant, and open-minded attitude compared to previous generations. The core values upheld by Gen Z include tolerance, cooperation, and respect for differences. Factors influencing these attitudes include education, cross-cultural social experiences, exposure to social media, as well as the roles of family and community. However, challenges such as intolerance, digital radicalization, and limited in-depth understanding of other religions remain significant barriers to achieving ideal religious pluralism. Therefore, while Gen Z shows promising potential for creating an inclusive society, a comprehensive strategy is needed to internalize the values of tolerance in everyday life. The implications of this study include the importance of an inclusive educational curriculum, digital literacy to address negative content on social media, and strengthening the roles of family and community in fostering pluralistic awareness. Recommendations include reinforcing pluralism education in schools, facilitating more intensive interfaith dialogues, and supporting government policies that promote tolerance in education. This research highlights the role of Gen Z as agents of change who can strengthen religious pluralism in Indonesia and build a more tolerant and harmonious society in the future.*

Keywords*: Generation Z, religious pluralism, tolerance, social media, education, Indonesia*

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Introduction

Indonesia is a pluralistic nation in terms of religion with a large population. According to the 2019 Population Census, the most recent census, Indonesia's population reached 266,334,836 people (100%). Of this number, Islam is the most widely adhered religion, with 231.2 million people (86.69%). This is followed by Christianity with 20,246,267 people (7.60%), Catholicism with 8,325,339 people (3.12%), Hinduism with 4,646,357 people (1.74%), Buddhism with 2,062,150 people (0.77%), Confucianism with 100,835 people (0.03%), and other religions with 112,792 people (0.04%) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). This diversity, combined with the large population, presents a significant potential for conflict related to religious issues. As frequently reported by the media and research institutions, interfaith relations in Indonesia often experience violent conflicts in various regions. These communal conflicts not only disturb national stability but also threaten national integration.

Given the conflicts that have occurred, religious sentiment becomes an important factor behind the emergence of conflicts. Although ideally no religion teaches hostility, historically and factually, intolerance, primordialism, and religious radicalism have been sources of conflict. Therefore, it is necessary for religious communities to practice their beliefs in a mature, tolerant, and pluralistic manner. As Khaled Abou el-Fadl emphasized, the spirit of tolerance and pluralism among religious followers will determine how sacred texts are understood in a tolerant way (Huda et al, 2024). Religious pluralism refers to the view that accepts and respects religious diversity. In this context, pluralism is not just about recognizing diversity but also an attitude to live together with respect for those differences. In an increasingly global world, religious pluralism provides space for each individual to practice their beliefs, while still acknowledging that other religions also hold important values (Ward, 2020).

These conflicts arise due to political, social, and economic factors. However, some are also triggered by differences in religious text interpretation. Religious conflicts, which are rooted in religion, are usually harder to resolve compared to social-political conflicts, as they involve deep religious sentiments. (Kurtz, 2015) in his book Gods in the Global Village, stated that religious conflicts can become extraordinarily bitter and destructive because the parties involved feel they are fighting for an absolute truth. The attitude that arises is that anyone considered "not part of the group" must be excluded. Due to their sensitive nature, religious conflicts can easily provoke the masses and be emotionally exploited.

With advancements in technology and increased access to information, religious diversity in Indonesia is not only a social reality but also a topic frequently discussed by the younger generation, particularly Generation Z (Gen Z). Gen Z, who grew up in the digital era with quick access to information, has a different perspective from previous generations. They tend to be more open to diversity, more accepting of religious differences, and more inclusive of adherents of other religions.

However, despite Gen Z's greater openness to religious pluralism, they also face a major challenge in the form of radicalization and religious extremism that can easily spread through social media (BNPT, 2021). This shift in perspective creates a need to examine how Gen Z understands religious pluralism and how they implement it in their daily lives. Several Islamic figures such as Budhy Munawar Rahman, Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Nurcholish Madjid, Alwi Shihab, and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) have offered views on religious pluralism that align with the spirit of tolerance, mutual respect, and appreciation for differences. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is one of the figures who proposed religious pluralism based on tolerance and

respect for differences. Gus Dur viewed pluralism as a reality that is part of God's will and cannot be avoided. According to him, religion should be a unifying force, not a source of division (Wahid Foundation, 2019). This view is very relevant for Gen Z, who live in the midst of rapid social-political changes and respond to it with greater openness.

However, religious pluralism is not easily accepted by all groups. Some view pluralism as a threat to their religious identity or contrary to the teachings of the religion they follow. Therefore, although the younger generation like Gen Z tends to be more inclusive, they still need guidance to understand and practice the values of pluralism in a broader social and religious context.

Overall, the study of religious pluralism from the perspective of Gen Z aims to understand how Indonesia's younger generation views religious pluralism, how they articulate attitudes of tolerance and inclusivity, and how they can become agents of change in building interfaith harmony in Indonesia. By studying religious pluralism from the Gen Z perspective, it is hoped that a broader understanding will emerge and contribute to strengthening social harmony amidst Indonesia's diversity.

Experts' Opinions on Religious Pluralism

Several scholars have provided diverse views on religious pluralism, as follows:

1. Ernst Troeltsch
    Troeltsch, a German theologian, argued that religious pluralism is the recognition that no religion can claim absolute truth. According to him, each religion has its own path to the truth, and this diversity should be respected as part of social reality. "In the face of internal and interreligious conflicts, a pluralist attitude is necessary, acknowledging that no religion has the right to claim to be the most true" (Troeltsch, 1931, p. 62).

2. John Hick
    As one of the most influential figures in religious pluralism thought, John Hick emphasized that each religion is a valid path to reach the truth. According to him, although religious teachings differ, they all lead to the same divine reality. "All religions are valid paths to the same truth, and none can claim exclusive access to it" (Hick, 1989, p. 124).
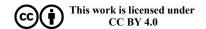
3. Nurcholish Madjid
    In Nurcholish Madjid's view, religious pluralism is understood as the recognition that all religions have a part of God's truth, and none can claim to be the most true. His thinking focuses on the importance of tolerance and social harmony. "Pluralism is a reflection of the plurality of truth; no one can monopolize the truth of God" (Madjid, 2005, p. 88).

4. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)
    Gus Dur, the former President of Indonesia and a moderate Islamic thinker, argued that pluralism is an unavoidable reality and part of God's will. For Gus Dur, religion should be a unifying force, not a source of division. "Pluralism is part of God's will, a reality that cannot be avoided. Religion should be a unifying force, not a source of division" (Wahid, 2006, p. 42).

Problem Identification

The background section describes the religious life in Indonesia, which is pluralistic and diverse. On one hand, this diversity presents an opportunity for integration, but on the other

hand, it also holds the potential for conflicts. The dynamics of religious life are often associated with violent conflicts.

In addition to political and economic interests, conflicts often arise from religious misunderstandings rooted in exclusive views toward diversity, which recognize only one truth and one path to salvation. This perspective poses a risk of generating friction between religious groups. Based on this reasoning, an inclusive outlook and way of life are needed, making the idea of religious pluralism highly relevant. However, introducing the idea of religious pluralism in Indonesia is not easy. The discourse surrounding religious pluralism remains controversial, as some groups consider it a Western concept that they believe does not align with the teachings of Islam.

In this context, Generation Z (Gen Z) plays a significant role. Gen Z, who grew up in the digital era with unlimited access to information, tends to have a more open and inclusive perspective. They are more accepting of religious diversity and often prioritize a tolerant attitude. Nevertheless, challenges still remain in implementing the principles of religious pluralism among them, especially in facing radicalization spread through social media.

One prominent Islamic thinker who has widely supported the idea of religious pluralism is Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Gus Dur stated that pluralism is part of God's will, a reality that cannot be avoided. Unfortunately, Gus Dur's ideas about religious pluralism and its application in society are not always easy to grasp, as they are scattered across various media articles. Therefore, a more comprehensive and in-depth study of Gus Dur's views on religious pluralism is necessary, particularly regarding how the younger generation, especially Gen Z, can accept and apply these ideas in their daily lives.

From the explanation above, several issues can be identified, including:
1. The dynamics of religious life in Indonesia involving violent conflicts related to religious pluralism.
2. The view that an inclusive attitude is required in developing the idea of religious pluralism, particularly among Gen Z.
3. Various opinions and interpretations of religious pluralism and related issues, from both religious teachings and socio-political perspectives.
4. Differences in views regarding whether there are Quranic verses or Islamic teachings that include the concept of religious pluralism, and how this is understood by today's youth.
5. The pro and con arguments used by religious figures, including Gus Dur, to support or reject the idea of religious pluralism.
6. Gus Dur's views and attitudes toward religious pluralism, which are considered a new concept in religious pluralism discourse, differing from other Islamic figures, and how these views are accepted by Gen Z.

Limitations and Problem Formulation
As explained in the introduction and problem identification, this research on religious pluralism is motivated by concerns over violent conflicts related to religious differences. Therefore, it is crucial to introduce a more inclusive idea of religious pluralism, particularly among the younger generation, including Gen Z.

However, there are various interpretations of the concept of religious pluralism. Therefore, this study is limited and focused on how Abdurrahman Wahid's views on religious pluralism are relevant to Gen Z's perspective on religious pluralism. The problem formulation for this research is as follows:

1. How can Gus Dur's concept of religious pluralism be accepted by Gen Z, and how does this concept differ from those of other religious figures?
2. What are the arguments underlying Gus Dur's concept of religious pluralism, and how does this concept contribute to shaping Gen Z's inclusive attitude toward religious diversity?

Literature Review

Understanding Religious Pluralism

In philosophical discourse, pluralism is a system of thought that contrasts with monism. Pluralism holds that the nature of reality is multiple (many), whereas monism believes that reality is singular. Between these two stands dualism, which views reality as comprising two aspects. In Western societies, the term pluralism is used to describe the autonomy enjoyed by various entities, such as churches, trade associations, and professional organizations. Pluralism is also understood as the doctrine that all social groups worldwide possess their own truths. With this understanding, pluralism has evolved into an important ideology for both modern Western and Eastern nations (George, 2020).
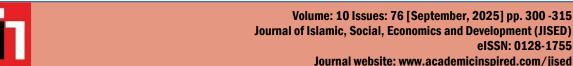
Religious pluralism arises from the acknowledgment of religious diversity in society. Religious pluralism is defined as a view and attitude that recognizes the reality that religions around the world are not singular but diverse. This aligns with the epistemological meaning of pluralism itself. For Gen Z, religious pluralism is not just a philosophical concept but also a social reality that demands the younger generation to appreciate religious and belief diversity (George, 2020). Growing up in the digital era, Gen Z tends to have a more open view of differences. Global interaction through social media has made them more capable of understanding and accepting religious pluralism (Yusrof & Anuar, 2022).

The term "plural," meaning "many," acknowledges differences without forcing religious uniformity. If religious uniformity occurs, religious pluralism loses its meaning. From Gen Z's perspective, religious pluralism emphasizes accepting religious differences rather than uniting all religions into one.

Religious diversity in Indonesia is an unavoidable reality. With more than 266 million people practicing various religions and beliefs, Indonesia possesses rich and complex diversity. For Gen Z, this diversity presents both challenges and opportunities to create peace through mutual respect.

Religious pluralism should be a constructive-transformative strength, not a destructive one. This constructive potential can develop if each religious community upholds the value of tolerance, as tolerance fundamentally aims to restrain potential conflicts. Conversely, destructive potential will emerge if religious communities fail to uphold tolerance and instead believe that only their religion is the true one (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Several thinkers have provided relevant definitions of religious pluralism. Ernst Troeltsch, a German Christian theologian, emphasized that no religion has the right to claim itself as the

most truthful (Troeltsch, 1931). In line with this, John Hick (1989) stated that all religions are legitimate paths to the same truth, meaning no religion should claim exclusive access to the truth.

A more contextual view comes from the Islamic world. Ahmad Amin, an Egyptian scholar, asserted that all religions are paths to God, despite differences in rituals (Amin, 1969). Meanwhile, Mukti Ali, an Indonesian Muslim intellectual, viewed religious pluralism as not just the recognition of the existence of other religions but also a foundation for building mutual respect and harmony among religious communities (Ali, 1971).

Furthermore, Nurcholish Madjid (Cak Nur) emphasized that pluralism reflects the diversity of truths, and no one has the right to monopolize the truth of God. He stressed that religious pluralism is not just a form of social recognition but also part of the bond of civilization (Madjid, 1992).

For Gen Z, religious pluralism is understood as an effort to create social harmony amidst diversity. Not only recognizing differences but celebrating them. This view aligns with Gus Dur's thinking, which sees religious pluralism as something inevitable that must be embraced in a harmonious social life.

Debate on Religious Pluralism in the Perspective of Generation Z

Studies on religious pluralism in the context of Indonesian society are increasingly relevant, especially with the emergence of divergent views among Generation Z (Gen Z). Some groups support the idea of religious pluralism, while others reject it. According to Thoha (2005), religious pluralism remains a sensitive issue in Islam because it has strong ideological and theological roots. He argues that the idea of religious pluralism in the Muslim world has been heavily influenced by Western modern thought after World War II, which then spread through the works of Western mystics such as Frithjof Schuon and René Guénon. In the West, scholars such as Hick (1989), Eliot (1948), Panikkar (1999), and Küng (1991) also contributed significantly to advancing the discourse on religious pluralism.

Nevertheless, criticism of pluralism has also emerged. Thoha (2005) contends that religious pluralism not only tends to relativize truth claims but also risks dominating and monopolizing such claims. In other words, pluralism can devolve into a new form of exclusivism that, paradoxically, rejects alternative perspectives. Within the debate on religious pluralism, two major streams can be identified. The first is religious pluralism, which asserts that all religions are legitimate paths to truth. The second is spiritual-mystical pluralism, which maintains that all religions ultimately lead to the same goal (Hick, 1989).

Much of the opposition to pluralism comes from groups that distinguish between religious pluralism as a social reality and religious pluralism as a theological doctrine (Knitter, 2002). As a social reality, religious pluralism means that religions can coexist peacefully within one society. As a doctrine, however, religious pluralism claims that all religions ultimately lead to the same truth a view that has been more prominently developed in the West (Panikkar, 1999). In terms of interfaith interaction, two dominant perspectives emerge. The first is the concept of global theology, which aims to unite religions into a universal unity (the transcendent unity of religions). This perspective has been supported by modernization sociologists who believe globalization will eventually unify world religions (Küng, 1991). The second is the philosophical-theological traditionalist approach, which rejects religious unification and

emphasizes that each religion possesses its own unique characteristics and spiritual heritage that must be preserved. An important concept in this tradition is Sophia Perennis (al-hikmah al-khalidah), which asserts that the essence of truth in all religions is the same, even though their theological manifestations and rituals may differ (Schuon, 1984).

In Indonesia, this debate has also emerged among Gen Z, who generally fall into three major spectrums. First, the exclusivist view, which holds that only one religion is true and salvific, while others are deemed false. Second, the inclusivist view, which acknowledges the truth of other religions as valid paths to God, though still affirming one's own religion as the most authentic. In Islam, this inclusivist stance is often supported by Quranic verses such as Surah al-Baqarah (2:62) and Surah al-Maidah (5:69), which state that followers of other religions who believe in God and perform good deeds will also attain salvation (Madjid, 1992). Third, the parallel pluralist view, which recognizes that each religion has its own distinct path to salvation without any claim of superiority. This perspective aligns with Panikkar's (1999) notion of religious pluralism.

Several Muslim thinkers have also contributed to this debate. Figures such as Muhammad Abduh, Rasyid Ridha, and Fazlur Rahman developed inclusive theologies that acknowledged elements of truth in other religions. Conversely, pluralist scholars such as Schuon (1984) and Nasr (1987) emphasized that although religions differ outwardly, they ultimately converge on the same Divine reality. In Indonesia, Nurcholish Madjid strongly advocated religious pluralism, emphasizing the importance of interfaith dialogue. He argued that religious diversity itself is evidence of pluralism that must be respected within social life (Madjid, 1992).

With Gen Z's openness and critical attitude, the idea of religious pluralism is increasingly accepted with a broader spirit of tolerance. This generation tends to support the notion that religions should be respected and regarded as legitimate paths to God, even though their practices and teachings differ. Thus, the debate on religious pluralism continues to evolve (Hassan, 2014), especially among Gen Z, who are more critical, open to diversity, and better prepared to embrace inclusive religious discourse in a pluralistic society.

The History of Religious Pluralism in the Perspective of Gen Z

The history of religious pluralism originated in the West as a philosophical concept that has developed since antiquity. Initially, pluralism emerged in ontological contexts to address the question of "what exists" (reality). From this arose four main schools of thought:

1. Monism – the belief that "what exists" is singular, whether spiritual or ideal.
2. Dualism – the belief that "what exists" consists of two primary elements: matter and spirit.
3. Pluralism – the belief that "what exists" comprises many elements.
4. Agnosticism – uncertainty or skepticism regarding the true nature of reality.

In Western thought, pluralism subsequently developed as the idea that truth is not derived from a single source but from multiple sources that may compete yet ultimately converge toward broader understanding (Smith & Snell, 2021).

Religious pluralism began to take stronger shape during the European Enlightenment of the 18th century, when humans began to reason rationally and liberate thought from religious domination. During this period, liberalism emerged as a socio-political doctrine emphasizing

freedom, tolerance, equality, and diversity. This liberal spirit fueled the discourse of religious pluralism by acknowledging that each religion possesses its own truth (Fukuyama, 2022).

In Indonesia, religious pluralism has become an important issue within its highly diverse society. Religious diversity is not only a social reality but also a significant challenge in building interfaith harmony. For Gen Z, who live in a digital era and are exposed to global information flows, religious pluralism is easier to embrace. They tend to view diversity not as an obstacle but as a strength for fostering mutual respect and learning from differences (George, 2020).

The peak of religious pluralism's development occurred in the 20th century. A key milestone was the Second Vatican Council (1960s), which declared the doctrine of salvation for all people, including non-Christians. In the Muslim world, the concept of religious pluralism also attracted attention from thinkers who believed that all religions ultimately lead to the same God.

According to Anis Malik Thoha, there are four major trends in the development of religious pluralism, which also shape Gen Z's perspectives:
1. Secular Humanism – placing humanity at the center of social life.
2. Global Theology – introduced by thinkers such as John Hick, who believed that all religions ultimately lead to the same truth.
3. Syncretism – the integration of elements from various religions to build a more holistic understanding.
4. Perennial Philosophy (Al-Hikmah al-Khalidah) – an ancient philosophy revived in modern contexts, emphasizing that all religions share the same core of truth in relation to God.

In Indonesia, religious pluralism has been strongly supported by Muslim intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid and Mukti Ali, who affirmed that all religions are legitimate paths to God. This line of thought resonates with Gen Z's more open and inclusive perspective, which views diversity as an essential part of harmonious social life (Bandura, 1986).

Philosophically, religious pluralism is not only an acknowledgment of diversity but also an attitude of acceptance and respect for those differences. In the context of religion, this means that although each faith follows a different path, they all lead to the same ultimate goal: the One True God (George, 2020).

For Gen Z, who have grown up in a world that is increasingly open and interconnected, religious pluralism is part of their global identity. They see pluralism as a strength that promotes tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and social harmony. Thus, religious pluralism is not merely a theory but also a lived practice in their everyday lives.

Religious Pluralism in the Perspective of Generation Z

Theological Challenges in the Modern Era

In the modern era, the greatest theological challenge in religious life is how individuals define themselves in the midst of religious diversity. An increasingly interconnected world makes religious diversity inevitable (George, 2020). For Gen Z, who live in a digital world exposed to various global information, religious pluralism becomes an increasingly relevant topic to discuss. The fundamental question is how to approach theology and religion in a context of such vast religious diversity.

Islamic Teachings: Exclusivist and Pluralistic

Like other religions, Islam has both exclusivist and pluralistic teachings. Islam emphasizes the exclusive truth for its followers, but it also recognizes the existence of truth in other religions, as long as they do not oppose Islamic teachings. This inclusive-pluralistic view is reflected in the actions of Prophet Muhammad SAW when he led the community of Medina, granting the same rights and protection to non-Muslims, as long as they were not hostile toward Islam. This concept is recorded in the Medina Charter, which serves as the foundation for harmonious interfaith relations (Yusrof & Anuar, 2022).

The Social Life of Gen Z

In the highly open social life of Gen Z, a deeper understanding of how religion can coexist with mutual respect is essential. Religious pluralism is not only an acknowledgment of differences but also an attitude of acceptance, respect, and reverence for those differences.

The Qur'an itself emphasizes the value of tolerance:

1. QS. Ibrahim (14:4) and QS. An-Nahl (16:36): every nation is given guidance according to its own way.
2. QS. Fatir (35:24): every community has a messenger who brings glad tidings and warnings.
3. QS. Al-Baqarah (2:148): people are encouraged to compete in doing good deeds.
4. QS. Al-Maidah (5:48): although religions are different, every community is urged to do good.

These verses show that even with religious differences, all paths lead to goodness and salvation.

Sufi Perspectives and Modern Muslim Thinkers:

1. Ibn Arabi introduced the concept of wahdatul adyan (unity of religions), asserting that all religions ultimately lead to the same God.
2. Jalaluddin Rumi emphasized that although there are many paths, the ultimate goal is the same.
3. Nurcholish Madjid explained that religious pluralism in Islam encourages an open attitude toward differences. For him, while Islam is believed to be the true religion, other religions still possess part of the truth.
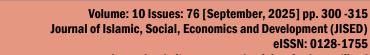
Gen Z and Pluralism

As a generation raised in the digital world, Gen Z is more open to religious differences and tends to view diversity as a natural occurrence. With vast access to information, they are more likely to view religious pluralism as a way to build harmonious interfaith relationships without considering their own religion as the only true path (Yusrof & Anuar, 2022).

For Gen Z, religious pluralism is not just a theological concept, but a daily practice. They are more frequently interacting with various cultures and religions, especially through social media, making the values of inclusivity, tolerance, and mutual respect stronger.

From the perspective of Islam's pluralistic teachings and the open attitudes of Gen Z, religious pluralism is understood not merely as a theory, but as an essential part of social life. Gen Z believes that religious differences should be viewed as a wealth that can strengthen social harmony, not as a source of conflict.

Relevant Previous Research

Analyzing religious pluralism in the context of Generation Z (Gen Z) presents unique challenges, as this group is known to be more open to differences and quicker to embrace the

idea of pluralism compared to previous generations. To understand Gen Z's perspective, it is important to refer to relevant previous studies, even though the theme of religious pluralism has been extensively discussed by various thinkers.

Here are several works that can serve as a foundation for mapping out the thoughts on religious pluralism, particularly relevant to Gen Z:

1. Jamal al-Banna – al-Ta'addudiyah fi Mujtama' Islami (Religious Pluralism in Islamic Society) explains the basic principles of religious pluralism by referring to Qur'anic verses and Hadith. His contribution is important because it connects pluralism with sacred texts.
2. Jalaluddin Rakhmat – Islam and Pluralism: Qur'anic Morality in Dealing with Differences contains papers and articles. The discussion of pluralism is divided into two main themes: interaction with other religions and understanding the meaning of religion. While not exhaustive, this work emphasizes support for pluralism (Jalaludin, 2006).
3. Muhammad Amin Suma – Religious Pluralism According to the Qur'an: A Study of Aqidah and Sharia argues that Islam is the only true and perfect religion, thus rejecting religious pluralism as contrary to Islamic doctrine Suma (1952).
4. Anis Malik Thoha – Trends in Religious Pluralism offers a comprehensive analysis of religious pluralism, covering its history, intellectual development, and Islamic perspective. This work provides sociological, theological, and historical insights (Thoha, 2005).
5. Abdur Rahman Marasabessy – Dissertation: Religious Pluralism in the Perspective of the Qur'an focuses on Qur'anic verses related to religious pluralism, but it primarily highlights verses that support peaceful interfaith relations.
6. Abdul Moqsith Ghazali – The Argument for Religious Pluralism, Building Tolerance Based on the Qur'an offers a deeper argument on religious pluralism. Ghazali interprets Qur'anic verses contextually and emphasizes the importance of building tolerance through historical and cultural approaches.
7. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) – Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita (My Islam, Your Islam, Our Islam) introduces a concept of religious pluralism that is not only theoretical but also practical in everyday life. He introduced the terms Islamku (the Islam I practice personally), Islam Anda (Islam according to others), and Islam Kita (Islam that builds harmony together). This thought reflects openness and acceptance of differences and is highly relevant to the spirit of Gen Z (Wahid, 2006).

Relevant for Gen Z

For Gen Z, religious pluralism is not just a theological or philosophical discourse, but a social reality they face every day. They have grown up in an interconnected world, where interfaith and intercultural interactions occur through social media, education, and social activities (Yusrof & Anuar, 2022).

The thoughts of Gus Dur, which emphasize respect for differences, cooperation, and unity, are highly relevant to Gen Z's inclusive, open, and human-centered character, more focused on humanity than on religious differences.

Overall, the studies of the thinkers mentioned above, along with Gus Dur's perspective, provide a solid foundation for understanding how religious pluralism can be practiced in the modern era, especially by younger generations.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to explore Gen Z's understanding of religious pluralism in the digital era. The phenomenological lens enables the research to capture lived experiences, interpretations, and meanings assigned by Gen Z in both online and offline contexts.

In line with (Creswell, 2014), qualitative research emphasizes exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. The techniques applied in this study follow the qualitative tradition, including the collection of textual and contextual data, inductive analysis to identify emerging patterns, and interpretative description to highlight participants' perspectives. This methodological design ensures that the voices of Gen Z are captured authentically, with careful attention to the contexts in which their understandings of pluralism are formed.

Data were collected from multiple sources including Gus Dur's works on pluralism (books, articles, and essays), academic literature on youth and pluralism, as well as empirical data from Gen Z informants. The latter were selected purposely, representing diverse religious backgrounds and active engagement in digital platforms. To obtain insights, three complementary techniques were applied:

1. Document study of Gus Dur's writings and relevant scholarly works, which provided the theoretical grounding of pluralism and its discourse in Indonesian society.
2. In-depth semi-structured interviews with Gen Z individuals, aimed at uncovering their personal views, experiences, and interpretations of religious diversity.
3. Passive observation of Gen Z's interactions on social media and online forums, which revealed how pluralism is discussed, contested, or enacted in digital spaces.

Triangulation was used to ensure credibility by comparing findings across methods (documents, interviews, observations) and across sources (scholars, youth, digital media) (Miles, 2014). When discrepancies emerged, critical discourse analysis (CDA), following Teun A. van Dijk, was applied to examine the socio-political context, power relations, and underlying ideologies shaping discourses of pluralism.

Data analysis proceeded inductively through reduction, coding, and thematic categorization. Key themes such as tolerance, diversity, and the influence of digital media were identified and connected to theoretical perspectives on pluralism. Emerging patterns from Gen Z's narratives were then compared with Gus Dur's pluralism framework to construct an interpretive understanding.

Verification and validation were achieved through triangulation, cross-checking interpretations with informants (member checking), and ensuring consistency with primary sources (Paton, 2002) especially Gus Dur's writings.

Through this methodology, the study systematically links Gen Z's lived experiences and online practices with established discourses on pluralism, producing findings that reflect both theoretical depth and empirical realities in a digitally connected world.

Discussion

This study aims to explore the understanding and attitudes of Generation Z (Gen Z) towards religious pluralism within their social lives, both in real-life interactions and through digital media. Based on data collected from in-depth interviews, digital observations, and document studies, the findings of this research provide deeper insights into how Indonesian youth perceive and practice religious pluralism and the challenges they face in the digital age. This discussion elaborates on the main findings and examines them in relation to pluralism theory and relevant literature.

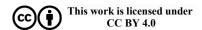### *Religious Pluralism in the Perspective of Gen Z*

One of the key findings in this research is that Gen Z in Indonesia tends to have an inclusive understanding of religious pluralism. The majority of the informants viewed pluralism as a recognition of religious diversity, where each religion is respected and acknowledged as part of society that must be accepted and honored. Most Gen Z informants tend to view pluralism as a way of coexisting peacefully without demanding theological equality. This understanding aligns with the pluralism theory of John Hick (1989), who emphasizes that although world religions have different teachings and practices, they all represent legitimate paths toward the same transcendent reality. This finding reflects how Gen Z, living in an era of globalization and digitalization, is more inclined to adopt inclusive and tolerant views towards religious diversity. However, the study also reveals variations in the understanding of pluralism among Gen Z. Some informants held a more pluralistic view, asserting that all religions contain legitimate and truthful teachings. This view emphasizes that, despite differences in doctrines and practices, all religions ultimately lead to the same higher spiritual goal. This perspective strongly resonates with John Hick's pluralistic theory, which argues that all religions are valid responses to the same transcendent reality. On the other hand, other informants adopted a more inclusive perspective, believing that while religions are different, they all teach good moral values and should be respected by everyone. This shows that while there is commonality in understanding pluralism, Gen Z interprets it in ways that are influenced by their cultural, religious, and personal experiences.

The Role of Gus Dur Thought in Gen Z Perspective

The study also reveals that Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid) thoughts play a significant role in shaping Gen Z's understanding of religious pluralism. Most informants recognized Gus Dur as a key figure in advocating for pluralism and religious diversity in Indonesia. Gus Dur's emphasis on religion as a social glue rather than a divisive force resonates strongly with the inclusive values Gen Z holds. Gus Dur taught that pluralism is God's will, and as religious individuals, people must accept religious diversity with an open heart (Wahid, 2006).

Most informants in this study viewed Gus Dur's ideas as highly relevant to the current social and religious situation in Indonesia. This suggests that Gus Dur's thoughts are more easily accepted by Gen Z compared to other figures who emphasize religious exclusivism. For instance, a Christian informant (Male, 23 years) expressed admiration for Gus Dur, viewing him as someone who promoted inclusivity and humanistic values. Gus Dur's view that religion should unite rather than divide society is highly relevant in today's diverse and interconnected world, especially in a country like Indonesia, where religion plays an important role in social dynamics.

However, despite the widespread acceptance of Gus Dur's ideas, there are other Muslim scholars who emphasize religious exclusivism, such as Muhammad Amin Suma and Anis Malik

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Thoha, who believe that Islam is the only true path to salvation Suma (1952). Their views, which focus on the absolute truth of their own religion, consider pluralism as a threat to religious truth. This stark contrast in perspectives highlights the significant difference in how pluralism is understood within the Muslim intellectual tradition compared to the more open and inclusive views held by Gen Z.

Social Media: The Primary Platform for Promoting Pluralism and the Challenge of Intolerance

One of the key contributions of this research is the recognition of the crucial role social media plays in shaping Gen Z's understanding of religious pluralism. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter/X serve as the primary spaces where Gen Z engages with discussions on religion and diversity. Many informants reported being exposed to positive content promoting interfaith tolerance, such as tolerance campaigns and stories of collaboration between young people from different religious backgrounds. This shows that social media holds great potential in promoting pluralism among young people, especially in a digital age where physical interactions are limited (UNESCO, 2021).

However, the study also reveals the darker side of social media. In addition to content promoting pluralism, there is also content that spreads hate speech, religious provocation, and calls for radicalization. Informants reported encountering videos and comments that spread hatred toward other religions, which could exacerbate exclusivist attitudes and intolerance (BNPT, 2021). This phenomenon reflects the ambivalence of social media in shaping Gen Z's views on pluralism. While social media can be a tool for promoting pluralism, it also has the potential to serve as a platform for spreading intolerance and radicalization (Putra & Sukamto, 2020). This aligns with the concept of digital religion proposed by Campbell & Tsuria (2021), who observe how religious practices and views on pluralism are influenced by social media algorithms, which are not always objective or moderate.

Challenges of Pluralism in the Digital Age

One of the major challenges Gen Z faces in practicing pluralism is the spread of intolerance and radicalization through social media. Content that contains hate speech toward other religions often spreads rapidly via social media algorithms. This phenomenon illustrates that while social media can be an open space for dialogue, it also carries the risk of exacerbating religious and social polarization (Li & Chen, 2021). Some informants expressed concern over the presence of provocative content that promotes exclusivist views and divides religious communities.

Furthermore, Gen Z faces the challenge of having a shallow understanding of other religions, often based on inaccurate or distorted information they encounter on social media. This highlights the need for more inclusive and comprehensive religious education that not only teaches one's own religion but also provides a better understanding of other religions. This aligns with the importance of educational curricula that promote interfaith interactions and reduce stereotypes and misconceptions between religious groups.

Pancasila as the Foundation for Fostering Pluralism

This study also shows that Gen Z continues to view Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational ideology, as an essential basis for understanding pluralism. Gen Z perceives the first principle of Pancasila, Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa (Belief in the One and Only God), as a guarantee of religious freedom and respect for religious diversity. The third principle, Persatuan Indonesia (Unity of Indonesia), is viewed as a moral foundation for strengthening diversity as a national strength (Kaelan 2017). Therefore, despite the challenges of pluralism, Pancasila remains a

guiding principle that can reinforce pluralism and maintain harmony between religions in Indonesia. This finding shows that, even in the face of challenges, Pancasila continues to serve as a moral framework that strengthens pluralism and social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study aims to understand religious pluralism from the perspective of Generation Z (Gen Z) in Indonesia, a nation that is diverse in terms of religion, culture, and ethnicity. The findings indicate that Gen Z tends to have a more inclusive, tolerant, and open attitude compared to previous generations. The core values they uphold include tolerance, cooperation, and respect for differences.

Factors influencing these views include education, cross-cultural social experiences, exposure to social media, and the roles of family and community. Despite this, challenges remain, particularly in the forms of intolerance, digital radicalization, and limited understanding of other religions. Therefore, religious pluralism from Gen Z's perspective shows a positive direction towards a more inclusive society, but requires a comprehensive strategy to truly internalize the values of tolerance in everyday life.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for education, social media, family and community life, and public policy. In the field of education, religious learning should not only focus on doctrinal aspects but also emphasize universal values across religions to foster mutual respect and understanding. An inclusive curriculum will contribute to the development of pluralistic awareness from an early age. Social media also presents both opportunities and challenges: while it can serve as a platform for promoting pluralism and interfaith understanding, it can equally become a space for hate speech and intolerance. This highlights the urgent need for digital literacy among Gen Z, enabling them to critically evaluate and filter the information they encounter. At the same time, the family remains the first environment where tolerance is learned, while communities provide practical spaces for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Strengthening the synergy between family and community life is therefore crucial in nurturing pluralistic values. Moreover, public policy plays a strategic role in institutionalizing pluralism through pluralistic education, teacher training in tolerance-based pedagogy, and the facilitation of interfaith programs that engage young people.

Recommendations

In light of these implications, several recommendations are proposed. Educational institutions are encouraged to strengthen curricula that incorporate pluralism, tolerance, and the history of world religions, while also involving students in interfaith dialogues and collaborative social activities. Governments should formulate and implement policies that promote pluralistic education, develop digital programs aimed at enhancing tolerance literacy, and work together with religious organizations to foster an inclusive society. Social media platforms are urged to tighten supervision over hate speech, encourage the spread of constructive and educational content, and promote digital literacy programs that guide Gen Z in using online platforms more wisely. Families and communities are advised to model tolerance through practical examples, provide safe spaces for diverse identities, and organize interfaith activities at the local level to strengthen bonds of fraternity. Finally, academics and researchers should continue to explore the dynamics of religious pluralism among Gen Z across different contexts, disseminate findings through scholarly publications, and facilitate seminars and workshops that directly involve young people in the dialogue on pluralism.

Closing

Overall, this study affirms that Generation Z holds significant potential as agents of change in strengthening religious pluralism in Indonesia. With the support of moderate education, families that set examples, inclusive communities, healthy social media, and public policies that uphold tolerance, Gen Z can turn religious diversity into a source of strength and social capital for national unity in the future.

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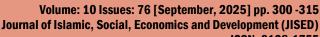
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