

Religious Social Capital in Creating Peace Values in Multicultural Societies

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Abstract:

Indonesia's cultural and ethnic diversity holds great potential for social integration, but is also prone to conflict. In this context, religion plays a dual role: it can be both a trigger for tension and a bridge for peace. This study examines the role of religion as social capital in fostering harmony in a pluralistic society. The approach used was a qualitative literature study, analyzed thematically. The results indicate that religious social capital plays a crucial role in fostering peace in multicultural societies through three main elements: religious networks, social trust, and the integration of religious values with local culture, which fosters harmony. Concrete findings are demonstrated through studies of various communities such as peaceful Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the Forum for Interfaith Harmony (FKUB), and the Gusdurian network, which implement inclusive education, open religious practices, and interfaith advocacy. These three elements form the foundation of social reconciliation based on spirituality and local wisdom, and demonstrate that religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah can become agents of peace if they prioritize an inclusive and contextual approach. This study enriches social capital theory by integrating religious and local values, and offers a new direction in the development of inclusive Islamic education and interfaith dialogue relevant to societal realities.

Keywords: interfaith dialogue; local wisdom; multiculturalism; religious social capital; tolerance.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is blessed with extraordinary cultural and religious diversity. Behind the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," society lives in a dynamic multicultural reality yet is vulnerable to identity conflicts (Mubarak & Rahman, 2021). The differences that constitute the nation's wealth also require serious efforts to maintain social harmony, as history records that many conflicts are rooted in religious and cultural issues (Effendy, 1998). Religion plays a dual role in a pluralistic society. It can be a unifying force and a source of morality, but it can also be misused to justify violence and discrimination. Religion, as a tool for peace, can become a tool for conflict when twisted within a narrow narrative. Peace in multicultural societies does not emerge naturally, but rather results from complex social processes. Understanding the role of religion in creating social harmony requires a sociological, not just a theological, approach. (Putnam, 2000) defines social capital as the networks, norms, and beliefs that support cooperation. When religious values are integrated,

religious social capital is formed—a social force based on spirituality, integrity, and inclusiveness (Wibisono et al., 2024). Religious social capital consists of community networks, social trust, and cultural values that support interfaith harmony and dialogue. Its effectiveness depends heavily on how religious practices are practiced, whether they are exclusive or inclusive. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the extent to which organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and interfaith communities contribute as agents of peace (Rahman & Setia, 2022).

This study addresses three main questions: the role of religion as social capital in a pluralistic society, the concrete forms of religious social capital in peacebuilding, and the influence of religious organizations' attitudes on public responses and the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue. This research aims to examine the role of religion as social capital in peacebuilding in a multicultural society. Its primary focus includes concrete forms of religious social capital, such as religious networks, interfaith trust, and the application of inclusive and pluralist approaches in the practices of religious organizations.

This research contributes to broadening understanding of the relationship between religion, social capital, and peace. Its findings are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers, religious leaders, and educational institutions in designing inclusive, religious-value-based social programs. This way, religion becomes not only a symbol of identity but also a social force that shapes peaceful societies and values diversity.

Several studies have examined the relationship between religion, social capital, and peace. Putnam (2000) argues that religious communities tend to have high levels of social trust, which strengthens solidarity (Coleman, 1988) highlights the role of social capital in maintaining stability, but has not specifically examined its relationship to religion. Effendy's (2011) study focuses more on the dynamics of Islamic politics within religious organizations, rather than on their contribution to social peace. Interfaith dialogue can reduce the potential for conflict, although it does not yet discuss the structure of social networks and the role of local culture in detail (Santiawan & Warta, 2021). Ethnic and religious diversity are factors influencing social cohesion, but the concept of social capital has not yet been fully formulated. Tolerance in Islamic boarding school education can reduce the potential for radicalism, although its scope is still limited to formal education (Malau, 2024). (Mujani & Liddle, 2009) emphasized that religious involvement does not always equate to political tolerance. Meanwhile, Ropi (2017) revealed that religious organizations' attitudes toward pluralism can fluctuate depending on social and political dynamics. Interfaith dialogue and the use of digital media are crucial in building trust between religious groups (Asmikhazali, 2021).

This study attempts to offer a new perspective by combining classic theories on social capital from figures such as Putnam, Bourdieu, and Coleman, then reading them within the context of Indonesia's highly religious and culturally diverse society. The researchers not only examine the concept theoretically but also explore its concrete manifestations in the field, such as social networks, levels of trust, and how society responds to religious organizations. Furthermore, religious attitudes (inclusive, exclusive, or pluralist) are analyzed using Alwi Shihab's approach. This research goes beyond description, but also evaluates: to what extent do religious organizations truly promote peace? And is interfaith dialogue sufficient, or does it need to be supported by inclusive education and respect for local cultures?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Social Capital

Social capital reflects the ability of individuals and groups to build cooperation through social networks, norms, and trust. (Putnam, 2000) emphasizes the importance of social networks and norms of reciprocity as the basis for societal coordination, while (Hallinan, 2006) views social capital as a resource acquired through participation in structured institutional networks. (Coleman, 1988) emphasizes that social capital is formed not only from the structure of relationships but also from the quality of interactions that foster trust and social responsibility. In multicultural societies, this capital serves as an important bridge between groups and a means of overcoming potential identity divisions.

Religious social capital is a form of social capital derived from religious values, teachings, and networks. It is reflected in internal solidarity, interfaith relations, and the role of religious institutions in maintaining social cohesion. When religious values are embodied in social networks, religion becomes a force for social transformation. Religious social capital does not emerge instantly, but rather is formed through three essential, complementary elements. First, religious networks provide a space for social

interaction between individuals and groups from various religious backgrounds. These networks can be formal, such as large religious organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), or informal, such as interfaith communities. Second, people's religious understanding and practices are strongly influenced by local culture and prevailing values, resulting in differing religious expressions in each region. Third, the existence of social trust, both within fellow religious communities and within religious institutions, is key to building interfaith cooperation. A high level of trust determines the creation of a healthy and collaborative dialogue.

Multiculturalism and Cultural Acculturation

Multiculturalism is an approach that emphasizes the importance of respecting and accepting cultural diversity within society. As explained by (Banks, 1997), multiculturalism goes beyond simply recognizing differences, but also encourages harmonious coexistence among groups with diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

In everyday practice, the principles of multiculturalism are reflected through an inclusive, tolerant, and respectful attitude toward local cultures. Local culture itself is a crucial element in shaping a collective identity that strengthens solidarity within a pluralistic society. Therefore, multiculturalism is not merely a theoretical discourse but also a concrete guideline for creating a just, peaceful, and respectful social life.

Cultural acculturation, the process of mutual influence between local culture and religious values, plays a crucial role in creating a peaceful social life. Religious institutions that are open to local culture tend to be more successful in grounding religious teachings, making them relevant and easily accepted by society (Geertz, 1976).

However, a multicultural spirit struggles to thrive in a homogeneous society that tends to be closed to differences. This is where religious institutions play a crucial role as agents of pluralistic thought formation, using an inclusive approach appropriate to the social context. When religion and local culture coexist, a peaceful and respectful shared space is created.

Religious Attitudes: Exclusive, Inclusive, and Pluralistic

Religious attitudes, both individual and institutional, fall into three main categories: exclusive, inclusive, and pluralist. Exclusive attitudes arise when a person only recognizes the truth within their own group or religion, while isolating themselves from other teachings. This view tends to be rigid and makes it difficult to open up dialogue. Conversely, inclusive attitudes demonstrate some flexibility: a person may acknowledge that other groups also have truthful values, but still feel that their own religion is the most correct. At a more open level, there is a pluralist attitude, a view that holds that truth does not belong to just one group. This attitude allows space for all religions to engage in equal dialogue, listening to one another, and valuing differences as a shared wealth, not a threat.

The religious attitudes of individuals and groups play a significant role in shaping patterns of social interaction, including their openness to interfaith dialogue. In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society, religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama play a strategic role in facilitating interfaith communication. Both are often used as references in building inclusive dialogue spaces (Purnawan, 2013).

However, the level of openness to interfaith dialogue among these organizations is not always uniform. The degree of inclusiveness demonstrated depends heavily on local dynamics, ranging from cultural aspects and social conditions to influential religious figures in a particular region. This demonstrates that religious approaches cannot be separated from the social context in which they develop and interact (Hosnan, 2022; Mujani & Liddle, 2009).

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach using a literature review method. This means that all data and information were obtained from various sources, such as books, journals, and other relevant documents. This method was chosen because the primary focus of the research is to understand the ideas, concepts, and values related to religious social capital and efforts to build peace in diverse societies. Therefore, this research does not involve direct field observations, but rather relies on the rich literature as a basis for analysis.

The data in this study were obtained from various written sources, such as national and international scientific journals, academic books, research reports from religious institutions, and publications from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and interfaith communities. Government policy documents and relevant digital sources were also used as references, particularly those discussing social theory and issues of interfaith harmony.

Data were obtained through a selective literature search, taking into account topic relevance, novelty (last 5–10 years), and source diversity. The analysis was conducted using two approaches. First, a descriptive-analytical approach to describe the content of the literature and understand the role of religion in social structures and patterns of religious interaction. Second, a thematic approach to identify important themes, such as religious networks, types of religious attitudes, the role of institutions in interfaith dialogue, and the relationship between religion and local culture.

This research draws on the social capital theories of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, as well as Alwi Shihab's ideas on religious attitudes. All of these theories are combined to construct a framework relevant to the issues under study. Through this approach, it is hoped that the resulting analysis will be in-depth and applicable, particularly in strengthening the role of religion as a social force promoting peace in diverse societies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religion in Social Capital and Cultural Capital of Multicultural Societies

In a diverse society, harmony does not emerge spontaneously but is formed through social values embedded in social capital and cultural capital. Both play a crucial role in maintaining balance and building peace amidst differences. Social capital is a network of relationships, mutual trust, and social norms that enable cooperation within a society (Putnam, 2000). It strengthens solidarity, participation, and bonds among community members. Coleman (1988) adds that social structures that support trust and collaboration are also part of social capital. Cultural capital is a collection of values, traditions, and cultural expressions inherent in an individual or group's identity and can be a source of social recognition (Bourdieu, 2019). It encompasses knowledge, lifestyles, and perspectives that influence interactions within a society. In a pluralistic society, cultural capital is crucial for fostering understanding and appreciation of differences. Meanwhile, social capital plays a more bridging role between groups. While cultural capital shapes identity, social capital builds bonds. According to (Banks, 1997), social capital creates bridges and social ties, while cultural capital fosters empathy through shared cultural awareness.

Religion plays a key role in multicultural societies, as it sits at the center of both social and cultural capital. As social capital, religion helps build networks between individuals, creates moral norms, and strengthens interfaith trust. Places of worship and interfaith forums serve as spaces for strengthening social ties. As cultural capital, religion also plays a role in shaping a community's cultural identity. Religious values shape ways of life and customs that are passed down from generation to generation, such as religious practices linked to local culture, such as slametan (celebration) or grave pilgrimages (Geertz, 1976).

Religion can be a unifying force when practiced openly and non-exclusively. It builds social networks across groups. However, if it is merely a symbol of a closed culture, religion can divide society (Ropi, 2017). Peace is born not only from social relationships but also from mutual respect for cultural identities. This is where religion plays a role as a bridge between the two. Religion is not only a matter of personal faith but also plays a vital role in shaping social order. When practiced with a spirit of openness and love, religion can strengthen intergroup relations and build inclusive social norms. Religion, as a "double-edged sword," can be divisive if misused, but it can also be a force for peace when grounded in values of justice, empathy, and solidarity.

According to (Putnam, 2000), religious communities have two important strengths: strengthening relationships within the group and bridging relationships with other groups. Mosques, churches, temples, and interfaith forums are not only places of worship, but also spaces for dialogue and social cooperation. Religious teachings will have a significant impact if they are implemented in concrete actions, not just preached. That is where religion can unite those who are divided. Coleman (1988) mentions the values of trust and responsibility in religion. These two values function like oil in a machine, helping relationships between people run smoothly without friction that can cause damage. When people trust each other, life becomes more peaceful. There is no excessive suspicion or fear of betrayal, and if people feel responsible

for others, they will care for, help, and realize that life cannot be lived alone. When these two values are present in a society of trust and responsibility, the atmosphere becomes peaceful. People can live side by side with mutual respect, despite differences in beliefs, backgrounds, or cultures.

In the Indonesian context, several real examples show that religious teachings can help reduce social tensions.

- a. Ambon after the 1999–2002 conflict. Following the bloody conflict between Muslim and Christian communities in Ambon, religious leaders from both sides initiated the establishment of the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) and held various interfaith activities. These activities not only symbolized reconciliation but also opened up new social spaces, especially for the younger generation, to engage in collaborative activities such as arts, sports, and community service. In this context, religious values such as compassion and forgiveness were actualized through unifying collective action.
- b. Peaceful Islamic Boarding School in Central Java. Several Islamic boarding schools in Central Java, such as Al Muayyad in Surakarta and Al Falah in Salatiga, have developed educational systems that integrate the values of tolerance and diversity. Students not only learn Islamic teachings but are also trained to engage in dialogue with followers of other faiths and participate in interfaith activities. This approach has proven effective in reducing the potential for radicalism and strengthening the spirit of peace rooted in Islamic teachings.
- c. Gusdurian Community. This community exists as a social space that embodies the values of a friendly, open Islam. They actively advocate for the rights of minority groups, provide education that upholds diversity, and create interfaith forums that build bridges between communities. For Gusdurian, religion is not just about worship, but also a unifying social force. Interfaith dialogue is no longer the preserve of the elite but has become a part of community life through contextual religious practices. Religion, in this case, not only shapes personal morals but also creates a peaceful space of openness, mutual trust, and continuous growth (Malau, 2024).

Elements of Religious Social Capital

1. *Religious Network*

Religious networks such as mosques, churches, or interfaith forums are not only places of worship but also spaces for social encounters. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, these networks play a crucial role in fostering peace due to their moral influence, closeness to the community, and broad mass support (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). They act as bridges between groups, prevent alienation, and provide spaces for dialogue when conflict arises. Religious networks that actively engage in dialogue and social activities have proven more effective in fostering harmony than top-down state approaches.

In diverse societies, the way individuals or religious groups understand their own beliefs and interact with others. Three main patterns are evident:

- a. Exclusive groups believe only their own teachings are true. They tend to be closed off and reluctant to engage in dialogue or cooperation with followers of other religions. This attitude can easily lead to tension and even conflict, as it creates little room for mutual understanding.
- b. Inclusive groups are beginning to open up. While they remain convinced that their religion is paramount, they do not reject others. They can collaborate on certain matters, as long as they don't touch on core beliefs. An example is traditional Islamic boarding schools, which maintain their identity while remaining welcoming to differences.
- c. Pluralist groups view differences as richness. They believe that every religion has value and potential for salvation. Their approach is open, dialogue-driven, and actively fosters interfaith cooperation. Such groups can be seen in the Gusdurian community or the Interfaith Forum, which frequently engage in interfaith activities.

The higher the level of pluralistic openness within a religious network, the greater its potential to act as an effective agent of peace. Pluralism here is not simply a passive acceptance of differences, but rather demonstrates an active commitment to understanding, learning from, and collaborating with groups of differing beliefs.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, as the two most influential Islamic organizations in Indonesia, exemplify how religious networks function in social life. NU is widely known for its cultural

approach that emphasizes the values of tolerance (*tasamuh*). Through its network of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and autonomous institutions such as GP Ansor and Lakpesdam, NU is actively involved in strengthening multicultural education and facilitating interfaith dialogue (Ngabalin et al., 2024). Meanwhile, while Muhammadiyah emphasizes the purification of Islamic teachings, its social practices demonstrate an open and inclusive attitude. Its involvement is evident in peace education activities, interfaith healthcare services, and humanitarian action through the Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC). In addition, several interfaith organizations, such as Interfidei, PGI, and the Gusdurian Network, also strengthen diversity networks with diverse approaches, ranging from education and the arts to social action that reaches grassroots communities.

This comparison demonstrates that religious networks are diverse and cannot be equated. Their methods of operation and influence are heavily influenced by their religious understanding, the history that shaped them, and the leaders who guide them. Public trust in religious organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah stems from their moral stance, consistent values, and closeness to social life. The 2020 LSI survey showed that both are highly trusted by the public, second only to the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the President. This indicates that the public views them not simply as religious institutions but also as guardians of social harmony. However, this trust can fade if the organization is too exclusive or too close to power. An open attitude and a commitment to justice are key to maintaining that trust (Mujani & Liddle, 2009).

2. *Public Trust and Social Exemplarity*

Religion plays a crucial role in building social trust because it teaches values such as honesty, trustworthiness, tolerance, and solidarity. This trust does not emerge instantly, but grows out of social interactions based on norms and values that are continuously maintained (Coleman, 1988). In Islam, concepts such as *as-yesthat's right*, *Justice (adālah)*, and *ukhuwwah insāniyyah* (human brotherhood) serve as ethical foundations that strengthen interpersonal relationships. Religious organizations that demonstrate moral integrity and are inclusive tend to be more trusted by the public as conflict reducers and peacemakers (Putnam, 2000; Ropi, 2017).

Interfaith dialogue is a concrete way to build trust amidst differences. Through dialogue, prejudice and stereotypes gradually fade, and empathy grows. An interfaith community in Yogyakarta regularly engages in dialogue. The result is not only a more peaceful social climate but also concrete cooperation in education, health, and the environment. This demonstrates that despite differing beliefs, human values can still be a common ground.

Interfaith dialogue is insufficient if it remains merely an elite discourse without addressing the lives of the people. Without concrete action, dialogue risks losing meaning and failing to prevent social conflict, especially if issues of justice, education, and local culture are not addressed. The success of Islamic boarding schools in building tolerance is not solely due to their curriculum, but also to their daily practices that respect differences. This demonstrates that interfaith dialogue requires ongoing concrete action; the values discussed must be translated into shared life.

In some places, interfaith dialogue has not stopped at discussion but has evolved into concrete collaboration, particularly in education and social advocacy. For example, in Manado and Ambon, there are multicultural schools founded by interfaith leaders. There, children from diverse backgrounds study together using a curriculum that instills values of tolerance and peace. Another example comes from the Al Falah Islamic Boarding School in Salatiga. This Islamic boarding school welcomes visits from Christian and Catholic students through an interfaith visit program. This provides students with a space to experience tolerance firsthand, not just through theory. Meanwhile, the Wahid Foundation runs the "Madrasah Damai" program in collaboration with Islamic schools. This program instills values of tolerance, gender equality, and social justice from an early age. All of these examples demonstrate that inclusive education can be a powerful way to build social trust because values of togetherness are not only discussed but also lived out in daily life.

The Realization of Social Capital as an Instrument of Peace

The tangible impact of religious social capital is evident through inclusive education and the preservation of local culture. Both serve as essential foundations for creating a peaceful life amidst diversity. Inclusive education not only conveys the concept of tolerance but also fosters fairness and openness in

daily interactions within the school environment. Banks (Banks, 1997) states that this type of education can produce individuals who are empathetic and respectful of differences.

One example in Indonesia is the Wahid Foundation's Madrasah Damai program, which collaborates with Islamic schools to foster a culture of peace and reject violence through a humanistic religious approach. Several Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia are increasingly adopting a more open and welcoming approach to Islamic education. For example, Al Falah Islamic Boarding School in Salatiga and Al Muayyad Islamic Boarding School in Solo have created spaces for interfaith dialogue and incorporated pluralistic values into their teaching and learning processes. Students are not only encouraged to understand their own religious teachings but are also given opportunities to engage in dialogue and visit communities of other faiths. From these experiences, they learn firsthand about tolerance and coexistence in diversity.

It reminds us that inclusive education like this is not enough to simply shape individuals who "know tolerance." Furthermore, it encourages the birth of a generation that is actively involved in maintaining peace, not merely remaining silent, but taking action to create social harmony. In this colorful society, local culture often serves as a bridge that unites diverse differences. When religion respects and blends with local traditions, strong social capital forms, felt in everyday life. For example, Geertz (1976) observed that Javanese Islamic traditions such as slametan, tahlilan, and pilgrimages are a harmonious blend of Islamic teachings and local culture that help strengthen bonds of brotherhood within the community.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is also known as a religious organization that does not reject these traditions, but rather makes them part of its culturally friendly and peaceful preaching (Ropi, 2017). As revealed, the strength of social capital comes not only from the social network itself, but also from how deeply rooted and alive these cultural values are within society.

Several religious institutions in Indonesia demonstrate how they not only focus on worship and religious teachings but also genuinely embrace the local cultures around them. For example, Nahdlatul Ulama, with its Nusantara Islam concept, maintains local traditions as long as they do not conflict with Islamic law. They also foster interfaith dialogue that combines art and customs in places like Pati and Banyuwangi.

The Gusdurian community uses traditional arts such as wayang, regional music, and local languages to spread messages of tolerance and social justice, building bridges between communities. Meanwhile, the Walisongo Islamic Boarding School in Ponorogo combines religious studies with local cultural practices such as gamelan and Islamic theater, so that students not only learn about religion but also appreciate their cultural roots. This approach transforms religious institutions into more than just places of worship, but also social centers that foster peace and unity amidst the community's cultural diversity.

Challenges and Obstacles

Social capital, which means trust and cooperation between residents, does not always grow easily in all environments. In communities whose members are similar, whether by religion, culture, or ethnicity, interaction with people from different backgrounds is often very limited. However, meeting and interacting with other diverse groups is crucial for fostering greater openness and mutual respect. According to (Putnam, 2000), homogeneous communities typically have strong bonds among members of their own group, known as bonding social capital. However, they tend to lack connections with other diverse groups, a form of bridging social capital. This situation is prone to triggering exclusive attitudes and feelings of superiority due to a lack of experience with diversity. Therefore, without opportunities to meet and interact across groups, inclusive attitudes and tolerance are difficult to develop (Putnam, 2000). In rural areas, social life typically operates in closed circles, with limited population mobility and a hierarchical social structure. If religious teachings are not presented openly and in a friendly manner, this can make communities more exclusive, even suspicious of those who differ from them. (Geertz, 1976) also observed that traditional Islamic boarding school students in rural areas hold onto conservative values. Therefore, when introducing ideas about diversity and pluralism, a gentle, understanding approach is essential to their acceptance. Strategies for overcoming these obstacles include the following:

- a. The Role of Religious Leaders in Leading Change. Cultivating religious social capital in closed or conservative communities requires appropriate and sustainable strategies. One key factor is local religious leaders, such as kiai (Islamic scholars), ustaz (Islamic teachers), or pastors, who possess

- moral authority and are trusted by the community. When they voice messages of inclusivity and peace, communities are often more receptive and open. For example, in conflict areas like Poso and Ambon, local religious leaders serve as crucial bridges in the reconciliation process, as their voices are more credible than those of central officials. Therefore, local religious leaders play a strategic role as agents of change, helping create peace and foster mutual understanding within the community.
- b. Intercultural and Interreligious Teaching in the Education System. Introducing children to diversity from an early age is crucial for fostering a mindset that values differences. For example, the Wahid Foundation's Madrasah Damai program invites children from various religious and cultural backgrounds to learn together. This approach has been proven effective in reducing prejudice and fostering social empathy among children (Purba et al., 2026). Furthermore, the use of a curriculum that emphasizes multicultural values and local wisdom helps children remain open to others without losing their own identity and cultural heritage (Banks, 1997). Thus, with this approach, we can foster a generation that is more sensitive, caring, and able to coexist in diversity.
 - c. Narrative Shift in Religion: From Exclusive Limitations to Inclusive Openness. A common problem in less diverse societies is a closed and rigid perspective on religion, focusing only on one side. Therefore, it is crucial to change the way we understand religious teachings to be more open and in line with the existing context of diversity. (Ropi, 2017) emphasizes the need to reread religious texts using the *maqāsid al sharī'ah*, namely, placing peace, justice, and the common good at the core of religious goals. In this way, religion can become a bridge that unites rather than divides.

This research demonstrates how religion can be a powerful force for uniting people in diverse societies (Gumilar et al., 2025). Beyond enhancing theoretical understanding, the findings can also provide practical inspiration for building peace and tolerance in everyday life.

This research broadens insights into social capital by incorporating the role of religion and local culture as forces that unite diverse groups within society (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). This inclusive and pluralistic approach helps to openly examine relationships between religious communities, while local culture is considered an active force in building reconciliation (Truna, 2024). Furthermore, this research categorizes religious organizations based on their community response and effectiveness in peacebuilding. Thus, this research paves the way for interdisciplinary studies linking religion, culture, and society.

The findings of this research bring great opportunities for real application, especially in the field of Islamic education and socio-religious activities, including:

- a. Islamic Education curriculum development: Schools and Islamic boarding schools can design curricula that instill the values of multiculturalism, respect for local culture, and interfaith dialogue skills.
- b. Strengthening Cross-Community Interaction: Madrasas need to provide space for direct interaction between students from various backgrounds so that they learn to truly appreciate differences.
- c. Training of Religious Figures as Agents of Peace: Providing training to religious figures to enable them to convey peaceful religious narratives rooted in local culture, particularly in homogeneous or conflict-prone areas (Ropi, 2017).
- d. Field research extension: Conducting further research in communities, especially in rural areas, to test the effectiveness of applying these findings in real-world contexts.

CONCLUSION

Essentially, religion serves not only as a spiritual connection or ritual, but also as a crucial social capital in building peace in diverse societies. When religion is understood inclusively and practiced with openness and mutual respect, it can serve as a bridge that unites diverse groups, rather than a source of division. This religious social capital operates through three main elements: inter-community networks that open up spaces for dialogue, trust and social integrity that grow from moral teachings and cooperation, and respect for local culture that strengthens unity while avoiding the dominance of any particular culture. Of course, all of this needs to be supported by a conducive social environment and a progressive religious narrative for peace to truly be realized.

For religion to truly act as a unifying force in a diverse society, several concrete steps are essential. First, interfaith dialogue should not be merely discourse; it must be realized through concrete cooperation in education, the environment, and social activities that bring mutual benefit. Second, education needs to be designed so that children from diverse backgrounds can grow together, get to know each other, and develop empathy from an early age. Third, local cultural values must be integrated into religious practices and social activities so that the message of peace can be felt directly and sustainably. In this way, religion becomes not just a voice from the pulpit but also the pulse that drives peaceful and respectful social relations among citizens.

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