

## The Dynamics of Minority Groups in Access to Worship (A Case Study of Christian Groups in Worship Services in Serang City in 2024)

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**Abstract** – This study aims to analyze several aspects of the life of Catholics in Serang, Banten, particularly concerning access to worship facilities, the formation of student activity units based on religion, and the freedom to practice religious activities within the community. This research employs a qualitative approach with a literature study method, where data is obtained through a review of relevant literature, including previous studies on religious freedom, social interaction, and the challenges of practicing religion in a predominantly non-Catholic area. Some of the issues identified in this research include the limited transportation facilities provided by the church for Sunday worship, regulations regarding permits to hold worship services at congregants' homes, and university policies in Serang that make it difficult for Catholic students to form religious-based Student Activity Units (UKM). In addition, there is a rule prohibiting choir practice in congregants' homes, allowing such activities only within the church. The research findings indicate that, despite efforts by the church to facilitate the congregation by providing transportation for those living far from the church, there are still obstacles to the exercise of religious freedom, particularly concerning local community permits and university policies. The policy prohibiting Catholic students from forming religious-based UKM shows a restriction on religious expression in higher education settings. On the other hand, the restriction of choir practice to the church reflects limitations on the congregation's space for conducting religious activities outside the church institution. This study recommends more intensive dialogue between the church, the local community, and educational institutions to create a more inclusive environment that supports religious freedom. Furthermore, a deeper review of policies related to religious activities in universities can help improve understanding and tolerance toward minority religious groups. This study contributes to the literature on religious freedom in Indonesia, especially in the context of multi-religious societies that face different challenges related to religious expression in public and institutional spaces.

**Keywords:** *Minority group, Worship, Serang City*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, freedom of religion is recognised as a basic right of every citizen, as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution. However, the implementation of religious freedom is often faced with challenges in areas with a religious majority, which can affect the lives of minority groups in carrying out their worship. Serang, Banten, which is one of the cities with a majority Muslim population, is an example of a place where Catholic minority groups face obstacles in accessing worship facilities and carrying out religious activities. In this context, this research is important to see how local policies, social attitudes, and community regulations can affect the religious freedom of minority groups, especially in terms of access to religious facilities. (Mirsal, 2022).

The problem of access to worship facilities is increasingly relevant to the existence of several policies that regulate the implementation of worship outside the official place of worship. (Azhari, 2021). In addition, in the realm of higher education, Catholic students face additional challenges when trying to establish faith-based Student Activity Units (UKM) at universities. Policies that hinder the formation of faith-based SMEs on campus indicate restrictions on religious expression in educational spaces. In addition, policies that limit choir practice in congregations' homes also reflect the limited space for people to carry out religious activities outside the church institution.

This research seeks to delve deeper into this phenomenon by analyzing the problems faced by Catholics in Serang in carrying out their worship. By highlighting these challenges, it is hoped that this research can provide recommendations for creating a more inclusive and respectful environment for religious freedom, as well as contributing insights to the study of religious freedom in Indonesia.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the context of this research, dynamics theory can be linked to social dynamics and group dynamics, which explain the changes, interactions and adaptations that occur in community groups, especially related to minority groups who face challenges in exercising religious freedom.

### **a. Social Dynamics Theory**

Social dynamics theory examines how social change occurs in groups and communities, especially when there is interaction between majority and minority groups. Social dynamics are concerned with how societies adapt to diversity, including how majority societies accept or reject the practices and presence of minority groups. In this context, social dynamics can explain the phenomenon faced by Catholics in Serang, where interactions with the Islamic majority community affect their freedom to access worship facilities and carry out religious activities. Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, for example, discussed how social structures affect intergroup relations, and how the norms and values of the majority group can form boundaries for other groups.

### **b. Theory of Group Dynamics**

Group dynamics is a theory that studies the processes of interaction, cohesion and conflict that occur within groups or between different groups. The theory, developed by figures such as Kurt Lewin, addresses how internal factors (such as values and identity) and external factors (such as policies and social pressures) affect cohesion or friction within a group. In the case of Catholics in Serang, group dynamics arise when there are restrictions from the environment or regulations that affect how they can interact internally and with the wider community. This group dynamic is complicated by policies that limit the space for religious expression, which in turn affects the identity and cohesiveness of the community.

### **c. Dynamics of Adaptation in Minorities**

In the face of limitations or obstacles, minority groups often experience a process of adaptation. Social adaptation theory in group dynamics describes how minority groups try to adjust their practices or find alternatives to continue practicing their beliefs. This adaptation is seen in the case of Catholics who try to find solutions to the limitations of worship transportation, for example, or their efforts in building dialogue with the local community to get permission to hold activities outside the church.

### **d. Social Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory, as discussed by Karl Marx and Ralf Dahrendorf, highlights that different interests and resources often trigger conflict between majority and minority groups. In the context of religious freedom, this conflict theory explains that the restrictions experienced by Catholics may arise from a conflict of interests, where the majority group feels the need to maintain their social or cultural dominance. This conflict creates pressure for minority groups to comply with majority norms or accept restrictions on their religious practices.

### **e. Symbolic Interaction Theory**

George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer developed symbolic interaction theory which explains how symbols and meanings attached by society affect intergroup relations. In the case of this study, negative perceptions or stereotypes towards the Catholic minority could arise due to incorrect or biased symbolic interpretations. Restrictions on activities such as choir practice outside the church can be understood through this perspective, where religious symbols or practices of the minority group are perceived as a "nuisance" by the majority group.

This literature study will cover various literatures on religious freedom, minority rights, and social interaction in a predominantly religious society. The Theory of Religious Freedom in the social context explains that every individual has the right to practice their beliefs without intervention from other parties. Based on this theory, religious freedom includes the freedom to worship in public or private places as well as the freedom to establish religious-based organizations.

Previous research on religious freedom in Indonesia shows that conflicts between religious majorities and minorities often occur due to a lack of understanding between groups. Studies conducted in various regions in Indonesia show that minority groups often find it difficult to establish places of

worship and carry out religious activities due to discriminatory local regulations or social pressure from the majority community.

Education Policy Study is also relevant in the context of restrictions on the formation of religion-based SMEs in universities. This research shows that some universities in certain majority areas do not allow the formation of religious groups that are considered to trigger conflicts between students. However, this policy actually inhibits students' expression of religious identity and is not in line with the principle of inclusiveness in higher education.

The case study on access to worship and religious freedom in Serang also shows a similar pattern. Previous research on religious minorities in Indonesia identified similar challenges, such as local regulations requiring permission to hold worship services in congregants' homes. This study seeks to deepen the analysis of these conditions in the hope of providing solutions for the development of more equitable and inclusive policies.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method, which allows researchers to explore key themes based on literature review. This qualitative research design was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives that want to explore in- depth understanding related to religious freedom issues in minority neighborhoods.

Data collection was conducted through reviewing relevant literature, such as academic articles, books, local regulations, and previous research reports. The data collected included information on policies related to religious freedom, university regulations regarding the establishment of faith-based SMEs, as well as specific cases involving restrictions on Catholic groups in Serang. In addition, several online media were also used as secondary data sources to complement information on public perceptions of religious freedom issues.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, where key themes were identified and interpreted to find patterns relevant to the research objectives. This technique enabled the researcher to identify key barriers to access to worship and the formation of religious groups in educational settings.

### **4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study reveal a number of significant obstacles faced by Catholics in Serang, Banten, in exercising religious freedom. These barriers mainly relate to limited access to transportation to places of worship, restrictions on the establishment of faith-based Student Activity Units (UKM) at universities, and a ban on choir practice outside churches. Each of these barriers reflects not only logistical and policy challenges, but also social pressures that affect the dynamics of interaction between majority and minority groups.

#### **a. Limited Transportation Facilities for Sunday Worship**

One of the main obstacles found is the limited transportation facilities provided by the church to accommodate Catholics who live far from the church location. The church in Serang tries to overcome this obstacle by providing transportation services for its congregation who live in areas quite far from the city center. However, the limited capacity of transportation is often a problem, where only a small percentage of parishioners can be accommodated. In addition, permission from the local community is also sometimes an additional obstacle, especially if the worship transportation must pass through a majority non-Catholic neighborhood.

This lack of access to transportation not only limits the ability of people to worship regularly, but also points to disparities in access to religious freedom in majority areas. Transportation for worship is more than just a logistical service, it also serves as a means of connecting individuals to their religious communities. When this access is restricted, there are emotional and psychological repercussions for devotees who feel isolated or struggle to fulfill their spiritual needs. This issue points to the need for local governments to support religious freedom in a more inclusive way, including in terms of providing support facilities that do not discriminate based on religion.

#### **b. Restrictions on the Establishment of Faith-Based SMEs in Universities**

The second obstacle highlighted by this research is the policy in some universities in Serang that prohibits the formation of religion-based Student Activity Units (UKM). In a higher education

environment, students usually have the freedom to express their identity and beliefs, including through religious organizations. However, policies that prohibit the formation of faith-based SMEs, especially for minority groups such as Catholic students, indicate a restriction on religious freedom in the academic space. This is contrary to the principles of inclusivity and freedom of expression that educational institutions should embrace.

This prohibition is often based on concerns about tensions between student groups of different faiths. However, this policy limits students' rights to express their religious identity and develop communities that can support their spiritual needs. This research found that the policy creates frustration among Catholic students who feel their religious rights are not respected in an institution that is supposed to support individual freedom. In the long run, these restrictions may hinder students' character development and create greater polarization between religious groups on campus.

#### **c. Prohibition of Choir Practice in Congregation Houses**

In addition to transportation issues and restrictions at the university, this research also found a ban on choir practice in the homes of the congregation. Choir practice activities are only allowed in churches, with the reason being to maintain order and comfort in a predominantly non-Catholic community. This restriction indicates the existence of social pressure that directs Catholics to conduct their religious activities only in official places of worship and not in public or semi-public spaces such as private homes.

This prohibition reflects the attitude of the majority society that tends to limit the religious expression of minority groups to a closed environment. It also indicates that society may regard religious activities outside the church as disruptive or even threatening to social unity. This attitude creates isolation for minority groups and limits them from developing their religious identity more freely. From a social dynamics perspective, this policy exposes structural barriers that prevent full integration between majority and minority groups, thus creating subtle segregation in religious practice.

#### **d. Comparison with Other Regions in Indonesia**

These three obstacles are not unique to Serang. Many religious minorities in other parts of Indonesia face similar challenges, both in terms of access to worship facilities and freedom of organization and expression. For example, in some other regions, permits to establish places of worship are often difficult to obtain for minority groups, forcing them to worship in inappropriate places or in private homes. In addition, universities in religious-majority areas often have strict regulations on the formation of faith-based organizations for minority groups, citing social stability. However, the case in Serang stands out because of the coordinated structural barriers, whether in terms of society, local policies, or institutional rules. This suggests that the problems faced by Catholics in Serang require a more comprehensive approach, including intensive dialogue between religious communities, government, and educational institutions to reach an agreement that respects religious rights.

#### **e. Policy Implications and Importance of Inter-Community Dialogue**

The results of this study emphasize the important role of dialogue between religious communities, local people and local governments to create a more inclusive social environment. This dialog not only aims to overcome physical or regulatory barriers, but also to increase understanding and tolerance between majority and minority groups. With dialogue, it is hoped that policies will be created that are more supportive of religious freedom and reduce tensions caused by different beliefs. Local governments and educational institutions can take the role of mediators in this dialogue, so that the resulting policies can meet the principles of justice and inclusiveness for all religious groups. In addition, intensive dialog can also open opportunities for the community to better understand the importance of religious freedom and appreciate diversity. This research shows that without communication efforts and deep understanding, barriers to religious freedom such as those faced by Catholics in Serang will continue and may even increase.

This research highlights the main obstacle experienced by Catholics in Serang, namely limited transportation facilities to attend Sunday services. Local churches try to provide transportation services for congregations who live far from the city center. However, limited transportation capacity

is a challenge in itself, resulting in only a small portion of the congregation being able to be accommodated. In addition, permission from local communities for the use of transport routes that traverse predominantly non-Catholic areas often poses an additional barrier.

This limited access reflects the inequality in religious freedom in majority areas. Transportation for worship is more than just a logistics service; it is a vital link for individuals to interact with their religious communities. When this access is limited, the emotional and psychological impact can be felt by congregants who feel isolated or have difficulty meeting their spiritual needs. In this context, local governments have a big responsibility to support religious freedom with a more inclusive approach, including providing supporting facilities that do not consider religious differences. The second obstacle is the prohibition on the formation of religion-based UKM at several universities in Serang. In academic settings, students usually have the freedom to express their identities and beliefs, including through religious organizations. However, policies that prohibit the formation of religion-based UKM, especially for minority groups such as Catholic students, indicate restrictions on religious freedom in the academic space.

The general reason underlying this ban is concern about potential tensions between student groups with different beliefs. However, this policy hampers students' rights to express their religious identity and build a community that supports their spiritual needs. The frustration felt by Catholic students as a result of this policy can reduce respect for educational institutions as places that should support individual freedom. In the long term, this ban has the potential to exacerbate polarization between religious groups on campus, which is contrary to the principles of inclusivity and tolerance. Another obstacle is the prohibition on choir practice at the congregation's home. This activity is only permitted in churches for the reason of maintaining order and comfort in a non-Catholic majority environment. This ban reflects social pressures that lead Catholics to limit their religious activities to official places of worship, not to public or semi-public spaces such as private homes.

The attitude of the majority which limits the religious expression of minority groups shows the existence of structural barriers that strengthen subtle segregation in religious practice. This kind of restriction creates isolation for minority groups, limiting them from being more free to develop their religious identity. From a social dynamics perspective, this kind of policy shows a lack of full integration between majority and minority groups, thus hindering the creation of social harmony.

The obstacles experienced by Catholics in Serang are not a unique phenomenon. In various other regions in Indonesia, religious minority groups often face similar challenges. For example, permits to establish places of worship for minority groups are often difficult to obtain, forcing them to worship in inadequate locations or even in private homes. Universities in certain religious majority areas also tend to have strict regulations against the formation of religion-based organizations for minority groups, under the pretext of maintaining social stability. However, the case in Serang stands out because of the existence of coordinated structural obstacles, both in terms of society, local policies and institutional regulations. This shows that the solution to the problems in Serang requires a more comprehensive approach, including intensive dialogue between religious communities, government and educational institutions to reach an agreement that respects religious rights.

The results of this research emphasize the importance of dialogue between religious communities, local communities and local governments to create a more inclusive social environment. This dialogue aims not only to overcome physical or regulatory barriers, but also to increase understanding and tolerance between majority and minority groups. Regional governments and educational institutions can act as mediators in this dialogue, so that the resulting policies are able to fulfill the principles of justice and inclusiveness for all religious groups. Apart from that, intensive dialogue also opens up opportunities for society to understand the importance of religious freedom and respect diversity. Without in-depth communication and understanding efforts, obstacles to religious freedom such as those experienced by Catholics in Serang will continue and have the potential to increase.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Catholics in Serang face various obstacles in exercising religious freedom, especially in terms of access to worship facilities, restrictions on the formation of SMEs, and the prohibition of choir practice outside the church. The findings show that there are significant challenges in practicing religious life in an area with a majority of different religions.

This study recommends that churches, communities and educational institutions conduct intensive dialogue to overcome these barriers. Local governments are also expected to consider policies that are more inclusive and supportive of religious freedom in order to create an environment of harmony and respect for differences. Further research could examine similar issues in other regions to get a more comprehensive picture of religious freedom in Indonesia.

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