

Politics and Religious Freedom in Indonesia: The Case of West Sumatra and North Sulawesi¹

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ABSTRAK

Sejak penerapan sistem desentralisasi, daerah-daerah di Indonesia telah mempromosikan kearifan lokal dalam berbagai bentuk pembangunan termasuk politik, ekonomi dan administrasi. Penelitian ini menganalisa wacana politik dalam kebebasan beragama di Sumatera Barat dan Sulawesi Utara yang yang ditafsirkan sesuai dengan filosofi kedua daerah tersebut. Penelitian ini menganalisa kebebasan beragama berdasarkan peraturan perundang-undangan tentang interaksi antar umat beragama di Indonesia. Banyak peraturan perundang-undangan daerah yang berada dibawah konstitusi negara mempertanyakan kebebasan beragama dan memainkan peran penting dalam wacana politik tentang kebebasan beragama di Indonesia. Penelitian ini juga menganalisa bagaimana pemahaman para *stakeholders* di Sumatera Barat dan Sulawesi Utara tentang kebebasan beragama. Data diambil dari pemimpin Muslim dan Kristen serta para pejabat pemerintah. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa filosofi Islam di Sumatera Barat telah mempengaruhi pemahaman kebebasan beragama masyarakat lokal, sedangkan filosofi keberagaman masyarakat di Sulawesi Utara telah membuat istilah kebebasan beragama dipahami sebagai pluralisme agama. Penelitian ini juga menganalisa hubungan Pemerintah Pusat dan Daerah dalam hal agama di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Politik agama, pemerintah pusat dan daerah, hubungan antar umat beragama, dan kebebasan beragama.

ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of decentralization, regions in Indonesia have promoted regional philosophies that guide their development. They apply said philosophies to many forms of development, including politics, economics, and admin-

istration. This paper examines the political discourse of religious freedom in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi, where the term 'religious freedom' has been variously interpreted to suit their regional philosophies. This paper includes examining religious freedom in regulations on religious interactions in Indonesia and shows that regulations below the Indonesian constitution have questioned religious freedom and played an important role in the political discourse of religious freedom in Indonesia and its provinces. This paper also examines how religious freedom in both West Sumatra and North Sulawesi is understood and explained by stakeholders. This picture is drawn from both Muslim and Christian religious leaders as well as governmental officials. The results show that West Sumatra's Islamic philosophy have influenced the local understanding of religious freedom, whereas North Sulawesi's philosophy of plural society has lead the term of religious freedom to be understood as religious pluralism. This paper questions relationship between national and regional governments over religion in Indonesia.

Keywords: Religious politics, national and regional governments, interreligious relations, and religious freedom

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has long been seen as a religiously moderate country. In November 2010, for example, US President Barack Obama visited Jakarta and mentioned the spirit of religious tolerance that is enshrined in Indonesia's constitution, and said that it is one of this country's defining and inspiring characteristics. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in April 2016 that Germany saw Indonesia as playing a very important role in spreading the values of tolerance, considering that Indonesia was a majority Muslim country while at the same time being a democratic country. In addition, the former Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono received an award for religious tolerance from the US-based Appeal of Conscience Foundation in 2013. Meanwhile, the British government awarded Azyumardi Azra, former rector of Jakarta-based Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN), the title of Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2010 for his important contributions to the establishment of inter-faith dialogue and cultivation of good relations between Islamic and non-Islamic peoples in Indonesia.

These honours for the Indonesian leaders and political statements from the US president and German Chancellor took place when sectarian tensions, societal violence and the arrest of individuals considered religiously deviant did not stop. They had ignored the plight of religious minorities for implementation of

religious freedom in decentralized Indonesia. Regional governments do little to intervene as many minority religious communities are being attacked and mobs under the banner of religion reign on the streets in their provincial areas.

This paper, at first, examines regulations on religious interactions in the country and compares them with the Indonesian Constitution. After suggesting that regulations of a lower level than the Constitution have ignored religious freedom, the paper explains how religious freedom has been interpreted differently in two provinces, West Sumatra and North Sulawesi.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sources of problems on the interreligious relations in the Indonesian regulations can be categorized into two basic ideas: religious freedom and religious pluralism. These underlying ideas are undoubtedly interlinked. To state two basic ideas does not amount to structuring a theory, but merely to identify some of the most predominant leading categories.

Religious freedom is generally understood as a positive freedom while religious pluralism requires active engagement within religious diversity and willingness to abide the existence of other religious opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with. These principles and their adequate interpretations will be discussed below.

The primary idea of religious freedom means that all religions are tolerated and free to flourish. It means every citizen has right to worship, right to join in communion of beliefs, and right to evangelize and spread the doctrine of the faith. The religious freedom also recognizes right of citizen not to worship and right to be in absentia from religious institutions ([Marshall, 2000, p 8](#)).

Religious freedom also means that every religious group or religious community has rights to exercise their religious beliefs ([Scolnicov, 2011, p. 2](#)). Therefore, all religions have right to perform their beliefs and show their identities in group and in pub-

lic. In this context, [Jeremy Menchik \(2011\)](#) introduces a new model of understanding of interreligious relations. Rather than the common understanding of religious freedom based on individual right, he demonstrates that interreligious relations are based on communal choice. It means that individual religious person, according to [Jeremy Menchik \(2011\)](#), must adapt to their religious communal groups which have communal rights to exercise their beliefs together.

Religious freedom has been commonly connected with the separation of state and religion ([Eisgruber & Sager 2009, p. 6](#)). This understanding has been applied in the US and France. The parting means that a state cannot set up a religious worship; it cannot pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions or prefer one religion over another. State cannot force or influence a person to go to or to remain away from religious institutions against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. State cannot punish those who entertain or profess religious beliefs or disbeliefs and who attend or not attend religious worships ([Eisgruber & Sager 2009, p. 6](#)). This is not to say the state do not guarantee the right of a religious group to be free to engage in collective expressions of its faith ([Scolnicov, 2011, p. 2](#)).

In accommodated religion by states like Indonesia and India, however, states must engage equally in all established religions ([Menchik, 2011](#)). The state can open up registration for religion, set up registered religious worship; pass laws which aid registered religions, not one religion over another. A person has individual right to or not to practice their beliefs.

The interreligious relations also inundate with the next term, pluralism. It has tended to do with active engagement among different religious communities ([Eck, 2006](#)). Society consists of enumeration of difference and religious persons are encouraged to engage one another. The term pluralism also suggests celebration of the diversity in a good manner as well as engagement of the difference to construct multi religious relationships. In do-

ing so, proponents of the concept furthermore focus on inter-faith-dialog ([Eck, 2006](#)). Additionally, they also recognize engagement of non-believers in the multi-faith dialogue ([Berger, 2014](#)).

Therefore, pluralism seeks to enrich a faith or non-faith community through engagement of each other ([Eck, 2006](#)). It invites religious and non-religious identities to participate in the dialogue to understand differences and similarities among them by sharing their experience. Those participants share their differences and similarities to understand each other. It is a language of give and take, and it is not always the language of agreement or common ground, but also the language of relationship. The strongest the mutuality in the relationship, the better the relationship is ([Eck, 2006](#)).

Furthermore, it also creates a new sense of place in a diverse and changing landscape. It tries to limit fragmentation and fracturing of communities and emergence of ghettos in which certain religious communities live unto themselves. The diverse places are the most important sites for interreligious encounter. The places inhabit common space and many informal ways for diverse communities to be aware of the multiple religious lives live in the neighborhood.

The model of religious pluralism is not premised on relativism or the retreat from commitments, but is the encounter of commitments ([Eck, 2006](#)). Religious speech is included, but expressed in the context of mutual respect for others who may not accept the fundamental premises of someone's truth claims. The more robust norm of religious pluralism is to give room for free expression in a context of mutual respect for real differences.

The religious pluralism promotes ideas such as freedom without uniformity, social responsibility together, opposing use of religion for individual purposes, and guard religion against religious extremism. The religious pluralism is achieved on the basis of respecting diversity and difference in culture and faith. When religious differences are recognized and their legitimacy are respected, different religions can enjoy their respective growth

and develop in Freedom.

The aforementioned categories share a benign view of religious interactions can be managed. It is a matter of persuading citizens both as an individual and a group and governments to understand and comply with the common categories. States and societies are positioned on a spectrum of progress, either inclined toward the achievement of better religious interaction as a social project, or slipping backward into religious hatred or persecution.

RESEARCHMETHOD

This paper seeks to build on religious and political science, in order to provide a more comprehensive and comparative picture of religious freedom in Indonesia by selecting West Sumatra and North Sulawesi.

West Sumatra is a majority Muslim population and North Sulawesi is a majority Christian society. Administratively, West Sumatra consists of 19 sub-units below the provincial government, among them 11 districts (*kabupaten*) and seven cities. Meanwhile, the provincial governance of North Sulawesi has 11 districts too and four cities. West Sumatra has a population around four and half million, the majority of whom are ethnic Minangkabau (BPS 2011) and North Sulawesi has more than two million with predominantly ethnic Minahasa, Bolmong, and Sangihe (BPS, 2011). Minangkabau culture is defined mainly by matrilineality, in which inherited lands and houses are transferred from mothers to daughters. Minangkabau men, on the other hand, are well known for their culture of circular out-migration (*merantau*), a practice which has engendered a culture open to the exchange of ideas and dynamic social relations in West Sumatra. North Sulawesi, on the other hand, is patrilineal, like many other provinces. People of the North Sulawesi are known by their family names, called 'fam' locally.

Geographically, West Sumatra is dominated by the Bukit Barisan mountain range, which defines the boundaries of its

cultural heartland. The highlands of West Sumatra are called *darek* (literally, the land as opposed to the sea or coast), centred historically in the village of Pariangan in the district of Tanah Datar, which is considered the cradle of Minangkabau culture. In the coastal areas, called the *pesisir* or more broadly the *rantau*, meaning the regions outside of the highlands, there is a long history of intermarriage with traders and other sojourners brought to West Sumatra by ancient trading systems that linked the regions to India and the Straits of Malacca, and through which gold and then cultivated coffee were traded between the fourth and the nineteenth century ([Summerfield and Summerfield 1999: 31](#)). This trade played an important part in the introduction of Sufi Islam into the region from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century ([Dobbin 1983](#)), from which time Islam has been an important part of Minangkabau identity.

North Sulawesi is bounded by the Celebes Sea to the north, the Molucca Sea to the east and south, and the province of Gorontalo to the West. It includes the Talaud and Sangihe groups of islands in the Celebes Sea. Most of North Sulawesi is mountainous, with extensive uplifting and faulting and it has many active volcanoes. The coastal lowlands are narrow and the uplands are drained by many fast-flowing streams. The highlands are covered with rainforests of oak, chestnut, and various conifers.

The relationship between Minangkabau culture and various forms of Islam has been marked by both accommodation and tension. When Islam became established in the region in the seventeenth century, mosques became a part of the local political system (*nagari*). Tensions arose with the emergence of the Paderi movement in the early nineteenth century, which, under the influence of Wahhabism, challenged the principles of matrilineality and the heterodoxy of Sufi Islam. When Indonesia's Dutch colonisers lined up on the side of traditional culture (*adat*), they paradoxically increased the importance of Islam as an element of regional identity. From this time, Islam has become an

important element of regional identity and has increased in the post-Suharto period.

In North Sulawesi, Christianity was introduced by the Portuguese and the Dutch during 16th and 17th centuries. Before that, North Sulawesi was part of the Buddhist Sriwijaya empire of Palembang and Hindu Majapahit empire of eastern Java. With the gradual disintegration of Majapahit Empire in 15th century, Islam was introduced in North Sulawesi by the southern Celebes state of Gowa with little impact. Christianity grew stronger with the colonial Dutch rule in 1905. However, the association of Minahasan's people with Christianity and Gorontalo (the region became a separated province in 2000) and Bolmong's with Islam has played an important part of pluralistic element of regional identity in North Sulawesi.

This history makes the two provinces ideal field sites for a study that examines the uses of religious discourse by two different religious majorities on religious freedom in the post-Suharto period. In addition, documentary analysis on religious freedom in both provinces was conducted. Government regulations and internal documents published by regional governments were collected in order to document the myriad understanding of interreligious relations in both provinces. Analysis of the extent and ways in which they were informed by claims about interreligious relations was conducted in 2013, which provided insight both into the public presentation of religious freedom by stakeholders.

These textual sources were analysed in order to reveal the religious, social and political constructions employed when seeking to introduce and validate particular understanding of religious relations, with the aim of understanding the ways in which public figures use the language of interreligious relations to maintain and construct regional identity, and equally the ways in which the regional identity is mobilised in order to justify the use of certain understanding of interreligious relation as an argument for the introduction of new forms of social control on interreli-

gious relations.

The analysis was carried out using techniques associated with critical discourse analysis, which seeks to produce insights into the way discourse reproduces or resists social and political inequality, power abuse and domination. Techniques of over-wording and the identification of experiential, expressive and relational values were used to identify categories, themes, ideas, views and roles. Over-wording refers to 'an unusually high degree of wording, often involving words which are near synonyms', which indicates a focus of ideological struggle ([Fairclough 1989: 115](#)). An experiential value is 'a trace of and cue to the way in which the text producer's experience of the natural or social world is represented'; an expressive value is 'a trace and a cue to the producer's evaluation of the bit of the reality it relates to'; a relational value is 'a trace of and a cue to the social relationships which are enacted via the text in the discourse' ([Fairclough 1989: 112](#)). Experiential and expressive values provide insight into the understanding and opinion of the speaker while relational values can be used to identify reciprocal social relationships. Together, these elements made it possible to piece together the puzzle of how claims pertaining to certain understanding of interreligious relations have been used to justify regional identity, which has been reintroduced in the post Suharto era.

The systematic examination of policy documents and regulations and structured textual analysis of newspaper articles was complemented by insights from observation and semi-structured interviews during fieldwork. The first author's subjectivity was an important element in the fieldwork process. He has lived and worked in Manado since 1999, but, he is of West Sumatran origin and finished his secondary school in the province. This is to say, his cultural roots and on-going connections with the region have clearly influenced the research process. The other two researchers are of North Sulawesi origin and grew up in the area.

Interviews were conducted in Padang, the capital city of the province in September 2013 and in Manado, the capital city of

North Sulawesi from July to August 2013. In both provinces, respondents were drawn from key stakeholder groups, such as state officials, formal and informal Islamic and Christian leaders and ordinary Muslims and Christians. Twenty five people in both regions identified through purposive sampling techniques were interviewed. Interviews with the religious leaders focused on their understanding of interreligious relations. Interviews with members of the community, which focused on the impact of interreligious relations, provided supplementary data for the study.

These interviews were supplemented by our observations during fieldwork of the impact of interreligious relations in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi and our reflections on our experiences as an observer-participant in conferences, seminars, visits to official and religious institutions, and attendance at ceremonies.

Since the demise of the New Order government in 1998, the role of regional ideology in Indonesian politics has been gradually redefined. In place of the New Order ideology of nationalist secular developmentalism (which had replaced the anti-imperialism and radical nationalism of Guided Democracy), the role of regional ideology in Indonesian provinces has greatly increased.

West Sumatran regional governments have actively promoted the regional philosophy ‘Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi

Kitabullah’(ABS-SBK), which asserts an integral relationship between Islam and traditional Minangkabau social and cultural norms. In North Sulawesi, the old Minahasan life philosophy, “SI TOU TIMOU TUMOUMOU”, which in the Minahasa language means: “Man lives to educate others”, and ‘TORANG SAMUA BASUDARA, (We all are brothers and sisters) have been reintroduced in the post-Suharto era.

Decentralisation has given regional governments the authority to align local social and political development within their regional philosophies that has influenced their understanding of interreligious relation in the post-Suharto era.

FINDINGS

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN INDONESIAN REGULATIONS

Indonesia is a pluralistic society. This plurality consists not only of hundreds of tribes and ethnic groups, but also religions. This social fact would lead to conflict if it was not managed proportionally or if the state failed in managing the relationship between religions. To manage the plurality, the Indonesian Constitution acknowledges religious freedom for all citizens. This acknowledgment, however, is not reflected in subsequent regulations on religious affairs in Indonesia. Religious freedom are often formulated based on a concept of *Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama* (inter-religious harmony). For example, Presidential Regulation No 1/1965 began to control religious interactions among society by providing official recognition to six official religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) at the expense of others.² This regulation allowed the six aforementioned religions to be publicly disseminated while others were not. This was considered a way to construct religious freedom; conversely, if religions without official recognition send missionaries into communities, they are considered to be causing religious disharmony. The implicit politics of religious freedom in this regulation began the construction of an association of religious freedom with the prohibition of public religious activities without official recognition.

The next regulation on religious freedom was a joint ministerial decision between the Minister of Internal Affairs and Religious Affairs, numbered 1/BER/MDN-MAG/1969. This regulation managed missionary activities for the six official religions, stipulating that missionaries are not allowed to intimidate, persuade, or force others in any form. According to this regulation, persuading others to convert to another religion is a cause of religious disharmony. This regulation has become problematic since conversion to one's partner's religion became a prerequisite in the Marriage Law No. 1 year of 1974 and thus someone must persuade his or her partner to convert to his or her religion

in order to be able to officially become married.

This prohibition of interreligious exchange of knowledge was clarified with a subsequent regulation, Joint Ministerial Decision of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Religious Affairs No. 1/1979. This decision states that religious missions cannot be targeted at persons of different faiths. In other words, according to this regulation religious freedom involves conveying religious messages only to persons of the same religious affiliations. This regulation further explains that persuading one to convert by providing life utilities considered to be against religious freedom; the acts of distributing written messages (such as books, pamphlets, and magazines) and visiting adherents of other religions to convey religious messages are likewise considered to cause religious disharmony. This regulation has limited Indonesians opportunities to discuss and learn about other religions with friends who adhere to different religions.

The association of religious freedom with the limiting of religious preaching by and to adherents of religions without official government recognition was continued through a regulation establishing a forum for the elites of official religions. Instruction No. 3 of 1981 showed an intention to create the *Wadah Musyawarah Antar Umat Beragama*, a forum for religious leaders from all officially recognized religions that was expected to meet regularly and promptly in response to religious conflict in their own regions. This forum, however, ignored the role of religious leaders in groups and sects without official recognition.

Subsequent regulations on religious affairs have continued to ignore religious freedoms. In 1996, the Minister of Religious Affairs set a guideline for the counteracting of disharmonious religious interactions through Decision of Minister of Religious Affairs No. 84/1996. According to the decision, the damage to religious freedom can arise from the construction of places of worship, religious broadcasting, foreign aid, interfaith marriages, celebrated religious holidays, blasphemy, religious splinter groups, and other social and political factors. This regulation overlooks

religious frictions related to groups without official recognition and their construction of religious places of worship in the country.

In 2006, joint ministerial decisions of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Religious Affairs (Numbers 9 and 8 of 2006, respectively) gave regional governments the authority and responsibility for managing religious freedom in their regions and districts—with majority consent. This regulation has played an important part in making minority groups politically vulnerable in Indonesian districts. To reach majority voters in local elections, candidates must follow majority demands, even where detrimental to minority groups. The regulation also states that construction of religious places of worship requires 90 local users and support from 60 people from the community. This regulation suits Islamic Sunni culture where every follower can practice his or her faith at any mosque nearby because they have no structural institutions. Christians, particularly Protestants, are generally required to go to their own churches, which may not necessarily be near their own residences. Similarly, Members of Muslim tarekat organisations could go to mosques outside their areas where their forms of Islam are being practiced.

These regulations cannot prevent conflict among religious adherents in Indonesia and events detrimental to religious interactions in the country continue to occur. These include church burnings, killings of member of religious sects lacking official recognition, and difficulties in the construction of religious worship places. The uneasy relationships between religious groups in Indonesia have been strained further by the availability of global media networks which provide coverage of international religious disharmony and thus undermine political discourses of religious freedom. Coverage of an American priest's intent to burn the Qur'an, Muslim civilians being killed in Palestine, and terrorist acts show failures in constructing religious freedom worldwide. These have been detrimental to the interactions of religious communities in Indonesia and indicate that religious

freedom in Indonesian society has always been influenced by the local, national and international events.

DISCOURSE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN WEST SUMATRA AND NORTH SULAWESI

West Sumatra and North Sulawesi,³ two of Indonesia's thirty three provinces, have different religious majorities. Demographically, the population of West Sumatra is 97 per cent Muslim, whereas North Sulawesi is 70 per cent Christian (data as of 2012). This paper examines how Muslims and Christians in these two regions perceive religious freedom.

Muslim and Christian narratives about religious freedom in both regions have initially focused on similar terms such as 'mutual respect' (*saling menghormati*), 'mutual recognition' (*saling menghargai*), 'tolerance' (*toleransi*) and 'peace' (*damai*). These responses are not surprising, as national and regional discourses on religious freedom have associated the religious freedom with those terms. However, as the national discourse on religious freedom does not describe further who should respect whom, Muslims and Christian in the two regions differ their understanding of those terms.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR MUSLIMS IN WEST SUMATRA AND NORTH SULAWESI

Muslim respondents in West Sumatra commonly provided examples of religious freedom in terms of behavior and dress, limited places for non-Muslim activities, and government engagement in Islamic activities. For example, Rahman,⁴ chairman of a local Muslim organization (interview, 20 July 2014) said 'if a woman wears shorts, she does not respect Islamic values [as manifested in] the dress code in the region'. He added 'all women—not only Muslim woman—must respect the dress code in order not to disturb the comfort of society (*kenyamanan masyarakat*)'. He refers to religious freedom as the act of following regional dress codes, codes based in Islamic values.⁵

Unlike in West Sumatra, Muslims in North Sulawesi, when asked about the Islamic dress code and its relation to religious freedom, do not require adherents of other religions to follow such a dress code. A *habib* (50s) told me that the issue of dress code is one of attitudes. He urged Muslims to wear Muslim dress in order to differentiate Muslims and Christians in the region (interview, 15 August 2014). For him, unlike Muslims in West Sumatra, religious freedom in North Sulawesi means that Muslims are allowed to wear Islamic dress code in public, as they are allowed to do now; as such, for him Islamic dress code is to distinguish them from other adherents of other religions.

West Sumatran Muslims also understand religious freedom as the closing of restaurants from morning to a few hours before *magrib* prayers during the month of Ramadan. Ahmad (43), a member of Regional Indonesian Ulama Council, suggested to me in our conversation in early August 2014 that non-Muslims must respect (*menghargai*) Muslims who are fasting during Ramadan. Such respect can be shown, he said, by not eating during the day in public places, as Muslims are not allowed to eat and drink. For him, when restaurant owners open their businesses for everyone, the owners break codes of religious tolerance and trigger disharmony between religious groups. This position is echoed by Rahman, who told me that, in the days before Ramadan, religious elites from all religions are asked to gather in the city of Padang to be reminded that Ramadan will come and for those religious elites to tell their followers to do certain actions, including closing restaurants. Again, religious freedom during Ramadan in West Sumatra, according to my Muslim respondents, is understood as limiting certain behaviors for all citizens.

Such politics of religious freedom during Ramadan in West Sumatra do not occur in North Sulawesi. For Muslim respondents in North Sulawesi, closing restaurants during Ramadan is going too far. Mahmud, a head of the regional religious office in Manado, suggests that respecting Muslims during Ramadan

means allowing them to come late to school and work, and to go home earlier than the usual working hours; this is current practice (interview, 12 August 2014). This message is echoed by the *habib*, who even suggests that ‘Muslims must show that they are fine in their normal activities during Ramadan’ (interview, 2 August 2014).

For Muslim respondents in West Sumatra, religious freedom also refers to limited construction of places of worship. Places of worship must be constructed within their own ‘established religious community’, as stated by Rahman (interview, 20 July 2014) when I and him were discussing many forms of religious freedom in West Sumatra. He inferred that construction of places of worship is only permissible in places communities with a long history of certain religious affiliations. This interpretation is interesting because it could be interpreted as meaning that mosques could not be built in historically Buddhist or Christian areas; such an understanding harms relations between religious communities.

These responses are, again, dissimilar to those of Muslim respondents in North Sulawesi. For Mahmud, the construction of places of worship must follow national regulations on the issue (interview, 12 August 2014). For him, so long as the regulations’ requirements—pertaining to congregation size and endorsements from communities and regional governments—are fulfilled, the construction of places of worship must be supported.

Muslim respondents in West Sumatra also discuss the engagement of regional governments in Islamic activities as part of the discourse on religious freedom. For example, Rahman argues that regional government officials, such as governors and mayors, must enforce the closure of restaurants during Ramadan (interview, 20 July 2014). He likewise finds that regional governments must enforce Islamic dress codes in public places. He infers that religious freedom will not occur if the Islamic community enforces these activities by itself.

The association of religious freedom with regional government

engagement in Islamic activities is supported by Muslims respondents in North Sulawesi. The *habib* told me that governments' must provide services to the community—including religious services (Interview, 15 August 2014). As a regional official, Mahmud explained that the regional government has been engaged in supporting religious activities. He said that religious leaders and teachers in the community have been supported financially. However, Mahmud disagrees regarding the enforcement of regulations inspired by Islam, except if said regulations have become regional or national ones regarding religious interactions in Indonesia (interview, 12 August 2014).

The aforementioned responses from Muslims in North Sulawesi show that, for them, religious freedom means freedom for Muslims to follow their own religious beliefs, for governments to facilitate the practice of these religious beliefs, and for Muslims and governments to follow regulations on religious activities. These Muslim respondents in North Sulawesi also refer to religious freedom to practicing religion, standing side by side in religious worship, and exchanging religious wishes—none of which are common for Muslims in West Sumatra. It is common in North Sulawesi for Muslims to pray together during meetings attended by adherents of different religions. Such meetings usually begin with prayers led by a Christian priest and end with prayers led by a Muslim imam. The construction of mosques near churches is also apparent in North Sulawesi. More importantly, Muslims wish “Merry Christmas” to their Christian fellows in the region. Mahmud told me that, for him, wishing someone “Merry Christmas” meant commemorating the birth of the prophet Isa as acknowledged in Islam, and not belief in Jesus as God (Interview, 12 August 2014).

In conclusion, comparison of Muslims in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi indicates that Muslims in North Sulawesi encourage interaction with Christians while Muslims in West Sumatra tend to limit interactions. Additionally, Muslims in West Sumatra strongly demand adherents of other religions to not

disturb Islamic activities,⁶ while Muslims in North Sulawesi expect their Muslim fellows to strongly follow Islamic activities. However, Muslims in both provinces support government engagement in religious activities.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS IN WEST SUMATRA AND NORTH SULAWESI

Christian respondents' narratives on religious freedom in West Sumatra focus on interactions between adherents of different religious and freedom of worship and freedom to construct places of worship. Christian respondents in West Sumatra showed concern with the lack of interaction between Christians and Muslims in West Sumatra. Albert, a Christian priest in Padang, referred to religious freedom as social interactions, rather than formal relationships, between the region's Christians and Muslims. He felt that the Christian community was being isolated from the majority of society (interview, 27 July 2014). Though he is sometimes invited to forums and meetings of religious elites in the region, he expressed belief that such meetings do not discuss or resolve problems of religious interactions (interview, 27 July 2014).

Christian respondents in West Sumatra also showed concern over their freedom to jointly hold religious activities at individual residences. Another Christian priest in Padang, Joshua (50s), complained that the Christian community has found it difficult to hold sermons at congregation members' homes (interview, 27 July 2014). He stated that he often receives complaints from his flock that they cannot hold religious gatherings at homes, shops, or malls (interview, 27 July 2014).

In discussion of religious freedom, Christian respondents in West Sumatra focused on the difficulty of constructing places of worship. Joshua opined that the construction of places of worship is a consequence of the increasing Christian population (interview, 27 July 2014). He argued that religious freedom should mean eased construction of places of worship for adherents of

all religions.

The difficulty of constructing churches and limited social and religious interactions were not the main issues associated with religious freedom among Christian respondents in North Sulawesi. They instead referred to religious freedom as freedom of religion, joint engagement of adherents of different religions in social and religious activities, religious plurality, and power sharing between Muslims and Christians. Deny, a lecturer at a Christian college in the region, told me that religious freedom is accepted by showing the Indonesian Jewish community's only synagogue in North Sulawesi. He also suggests that worship can take place everywhere, be it at places of worship or at congregation members' homes (interview, 20 August 2014).

For Christian respondents in North Sulawesi, religious Freedom also means the engagement of different religious communities in social and religious activities. Muslims and Christians invite each other to participate in religious celebrations such as Eid al-Fitr and Christmas. Likewise, Muslims and Christians provide assurances of security during these prayers during these holidays. Furthermore, Muslims and Christians work together to put up tents for wedding ceremonies or wakes.

This engagement in North Sulawesi is supported by recognition of each religious community's different values. For example, Muslims are provided halal food when they are invited to Christmas celebrations and wedding ceremonies hosted by Christians. Likewise, Muslims sometimes provide low-alcohol drinks to Christian guests at Eid al-Fitr celebrations. Providing the necessities of adherents of other religions has become another practice of religious Freedom in North Sulawesi.

For Christian respondents in North Sulawesi, religious freedom also refers to embracing religious plurality. As mentioned earlier, joint prayers are considered normal during meetings attended by Muslims and Christians. Likewise, mosques and churches can be constructed close to each other. Furthermore, Islamic performances can be shown during Easter celebrations,

as can Christian performances during Islamic New Year celebrations.

Religious freedom for Christian respondents in North Sulawesi also refers to power sharing between Muslims and Christians in public administration. When the author was a secretary of the Regional Elections Watch Team in 2012, the governor, like all members of the team, agreed to select personnel of the regional Indonesian Election Watch proportionally between Muslims and Christians; as proposed, one in three members was Muslim. The power-sharing between Muslims and Christians also occurred in selecting members of North Sulawesi's regional Commission for General Elections in which two of five members are Muslims.

DISCUSSION

This paper surveys the religious freedom in Indonesian regulations and perception of Muslims and Christians on the religious freedom in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi. It begins by laying out a divergent meaning of religious freedom in the Indonesian Constitutions and regulations below. The paper then follows the different meaning of religious freedom by Muslims and Christians in the two provinces in Indonesia. The paper shows the association of religious freedom with an Islamic understanding in West Sumatra and of pluralistic meaning in North Sulawesi. It shows that there is considerable divergence in the concept of religious freedom in the decentralized Indonesia.

This paper argues that the diverging meaning of religious freedom has caused religious intolerance in Indonesia. This paper adds analysis on studies on religious freedom in Indonesia. [Andy Fuller \(2011\)](#) argues that lack of law enforcement on principles of religious freedom has increased religious discriminatory in Indonesia. [Julian Millie \(2012\)](#) suggests that mainstream Islamic organizations play important role in discrimination toward Islamic sect, Ahmadiyah. [Bani Syarif Maula \(2013\)](#) shows that Indonesian government's attitudes toward minority groups are con-

trolled by dominant social groups, rather than the Indonesian Constitution. [Frans-Magnes Suseno \(2013\)](#) also suggests what the previous scholar do. [Zainal Abidin Bagir](#) and his colleagues (2014) shows that two Indonesian Islamic organizations; Nahdatul Ulama and Indonesian Ulama Council, have pushed regional government to limit governmental service toward Islamic minority in Jawa Barat. [Ahmad Najib Burhani \(2013\)](#) also suggests that discriminatory toward Ahmadiyah in Indonesia because of Alliance of government and mainstream Muslims. According to Burhani, government is too easy to accept religious decree enacted by Islamic organizations. [Ahmad Najib Burhani \(2014\)](#) then suggests that discriminatory toward minority takes place because of majority's fear of losing religious dominance. Carool Kersten (2014) shows a long list of causes of religious discriminatory after 1998 in Indonesia ranging from democratisation, political openness, Alliance of religious and political institutions, and emergence of religious militant groups. [Sydney Jones \(2015\)](#) argues that religious violence occurs because of lack of law enforcement and attitudes towards religious discriminatory in public. [Mohammad Iqbal Ahnaf \(2015\)](#) argues that lack of law enforcement, narrow minded religious understanding and dynamic of local politics in democratisation of Indonesia have fuelled religious discriminatory in Indonesia.

This paper is in line with arguments presented by scholars who argue that local politics has played an important role in religious freedom in decentralised Indonesia. Unlike many other scholars, however, this paper also suggests that local politics can contribute to enhancing religious freedom as it is shown in North Sulawesi.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated how Indonesian regulations on religious freedom have diverted its meaning from the Indonesian Constitution. Religious freedom as right of individual citizen to follow religion and beliefs have changed into respecting

majority religion and limiting activities of religious minorities. As has been shown here, regulations on religious freedom have not focused on the implementation of religious freedom, as required by the Constitution, but rather on related issues giving advantages to mainstream religions.

This paper has also shown discourse of religious freedom by Muslims and Christians in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi. It is shown here that Muslims in West Sumatra and their fellows in North Sulawesi have indicated different interpretation of religious freedom. For Muslim in West Sumatra, religious freedom means demanding adherents of other religions to not disturb Islamic activities, while Muslims in North Sulawesi expect their Muslim fellows to strongly follow Islamic activities. However, both Muslims in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi support government engagement in religious activities.

As demonstrated in the paper, Christians in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi have focused on different keywords in relation to religious freedom. In West Sumatra, religious freedom is expected to encourage interaction, freedom of worship and freedom to construct places of worship. In North Sulawesi, however, religious freedom refers to freedom to believe in religion, embracement of religious diversity and power sharing between Muslims and Christians.

All in all, the paper has identified the key terms through which Muslims and Christians focus discussion on religious freedom. It has demonstrated that religious freedom has been interpreted to suit local philosophy in decentralized provinces of West Sumatra and North Sulawesi. In West Sumatra, religious freedom is interpreted by Muslims to suit Islamic perspectives while Christians comment on the effects of said Islamic perspectives. Meanwhile, Muslims and Christians in North Sulawesi define religious freedom in terms of accepting religious plurality.

IMPLICATION

The research might not have solved the divergent meaning of

religious freedom in Indonesia. But, it has helped demonstrating the effect of local politics on religious freedom in Indonesian provinces. The research has established divergent facts regarding local politics and religious freedom in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi. It has brought to fore the regionalism and religion across countries and has given rise to opportunities and challenges for religious freedom in the country. This is providing an added information base for analysis of local politics and religion.

The paper recommends that the National government take authority from regional governments over decisions related to religious issues, including the construction of places of worship, freedom of religion and rights to practice faith in the country. The Indonesian National Commission for Religious Freedom would be necessary to be constructed for arranging, planning and monitoring religious freedom in Indonesia. This paper also recommends that the government is to review existing regulations and to revise them to promote and enforce religious inclusiveness and religious freedoms in the country.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Acknowledgements: The authors thank IAIN Manado for funding this research and Christopher A Woodrich, Frank Dhont, and Prof. Robert Hefner for helpful comments.
- 2 Confucianism was excluded from the list of officially recognized religions in 1967 by the Suharto government before again being acknowledged by the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono government in 2006.
- 3 The first author has worked in North Sulawesi since 1999, but grew up in West Sumatra.
- 4 All respondent's names in this paper are anonymous.
- 5 These are Islamic values as understood by the community. Different interpretations of the Qur'an and hadiths have led to different recommendations of what exactly consists of Islamic dress code.
- 6 Rahman suggests that the limitation of non-Islamic religious activities in the region is like the limitation of Islamic activities in other places, such Bali (Interview, 20 July 2014).

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