

DEALING WITH RADICAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS AND THEIR MILITIAS: THE POLICIES OF PEACEFUL CULTURAL COEXISTENCE IN SURAKARTA DURING 2014–2024

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Abstract

This study aims to depict the policies of peaceful cultural coexistence implemented by the Surakarta city government over the past decade. The research addresses two main questions: (1) What regulations have been formulated by the Surakarta city government to promote cultural coexistence? (2) How has the city government enforced the regulations to ensure cultural coexistence within Surakarta society? Data were collected by examining primary and secondary sources and analyzed using the cultural coexistence theory developed by Fredrik Barth, which identifies three main elements forming peaceful cultural coexistence: adaptability, pluralism, and equity, or the fair fulfillment of basic rights. The findings show that the Surakarta city government has attempted to establish fair

and inclusive regulations. However, a significant shortcoming lies in the enforcement of these regulations, particularly against radical Islamic groups that refuse to adapt and respect pluralism. Consequently, it is essential to encourage government authorities to adopt a more assertive law-enforcement approach, ensuring that all individuals learn together, adhere to regulations, and respect differences among the various groups in society.

Keywords: *Cultural Coexistence, Militia, Pluralism, Purification, Salafi*

A. Introduction

During the colonial era, Surakarta was the capital of an autonomous kingdom known for its social harmony. Various ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, Arab Hadrami, Banjar, and others from across the archipelago, lived peacefully (Kuntowijoyo, 2000). In 1900, the population of Surakarta was 109,459, consisting of 101,924 Javanese, 1,973 Europeans, 5,129 Chinese, 171 Arabs, and 262 other foreigners (Sariyatun, 2005). *Kasunanan* and *Mangkunegaran*, as the political authorities and centers of Javanese culture, worked to ensure that various ethnic groups could maintain their respective cultural identities by encouraging peaceful coexistence among them. Traces of such cultural awareness in the past can still be witnessed in the city of Surakarta today, such as the harmonious relations between the Chinese and Javanese in Balong village (Pelu & Purwanta, 2020), the Banjar and Javanese in Jayengan village (Elanissan et al., 2022), and the Arab Hadrami and Javanese in Pasar Kliwon (Bazher, 2020).

Cultural awareness among various ethnic groups has led to rapid economic development, making Surakarta the leading business city in southern Central Java. Even compared to the Yogyakarta Sultanate, the twin of Kasunanan Surakarta showed more advanced and dynamic modern thinking and

economy. Bruggen and Wassing attributed this difference partly to the Mangkunegaran rulers, who adopted various elements of Western culture (Bruggen & Wassing, 1998). While it is true that Mangkunegaran made a significant contribution to business and education, many other factors helped establish Surakarta Residency's position as a beacon in southern Central Java, such as Laweyan, a center for *batik* crafts since the Pajang Sultanate, and Kauman, a village known for high-quality *batik* innovation and the early development of the stamped *batik* technique (Purwanta & Pelu, 2024).

The image of Surakarta as a city of harmony changed drastically during the early years of Indonesian independence. Radicalism grew rapidly, forcing Surakarta into a social revolution. Only two months after the proclamation of independence, high-ranking Kasunanan officials were murdered. Since the capital of the Republic of Indonesia was moved from Jakarta to Yogyakarta in early January 1946, violence by radical groups had been increasing. The move made the Special Region of Surakarta, especially Klaten Regency and Surakarta City, the center of the radical opposition movement (Sutiyah, 2017). One of the most noticeable consequences of the arrival of national-level political activists was the growing anti-autonomous regional government movement, which was marked by acts of brutality. The movement accused Sunan Paku Buwono of opposing their agenda. He was kidnapped and forced to surrender his hereditary authority to the people. Subsequently, the movement appointed members of their group as residents of Surakarta. When the central government resisted their demands, the radical groups kidnapped Prime Minister Syahrir and launched an attack on Yogyakarta, the

capital of the Republic of Indonesia at the time (Nuraini, 2023). Radicalism, often toned down in historical accounts as “social revolution”, thus marked the end of the Special Region of Surakarta (Prasadana & Gunawan, 2019). Consequently, both Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran lost their political power, and their territories were incorporated into Central Java province.

Radicalism transformed Surakarta from a city of harmony into a “short-tempered” city. In the following years, the killings among different groups became more frequent and reached a peak in the 1965 tragedy. As a result, Surakarta City became one of the centers of massacre, besides Boyolali and Klaten Regency. According to a testimony by Bedjo Untung, in one location alone, the Bacem River bridge, at least 6,200 bodies were dumped (YPKP, 2022).

In the following periods, Surakarta City’s reputation as a short-tempered city from a political perspective expanded to include issues of ethnicity, religion, race, and local customs. During the New Order era, at least three riots rife with brutality against Chinese ethnic groups occurred in 1972, 1980, and 1998 (Mulyadi, 2004; Putro et al., 2017). In terms of religious radicalism, Surakarta, as one of the centers of *abangan* culture, one of the socio-religious variants (or sub-cultures) in Javanese society according to Geertz (1960), was also where the Islamic purification movements emerged and became the embryo of various Islamic movements in Indonesia. Setianto identified at least three Islamic purification movements in Surakarta that emerged at the beginning of the New Order era: Al-Quran Interpretation Council (MTA, *Majelis Tafsir Al-Quran*), founded by Abdullah Thufail; Jamaah Al-Islamiyah movement, founded by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar

Ba'asyir; and Council of Islamic Study (MPI, *Majelis Pengajian Islam*), founded by Abdullah Marzuki (Setianto, 2022). The Islamic purification movements gave birth to various radical, fanatical, and vigilante Islamic militias. Using religion to justify their actions, they often expressed their protests in violent ways, disturbing the residents of Surakarta (Baidhawry, 2018). One example was the 2020 attack on the house of Habib Segaf Al-Jufri, who was holding *midodareni*, a collective evening prayer as preparation for marriage (Selestinus, 2020).

As such, Surakarta became a hostile environment for religious and ethnic diversity. This prompted various groups to seek to restore its former glory as a city of harmony. In education, examples include the Wahid Institute (now Wahid Foundation), which initiated the Sekolah Damai (Peaceful School) program, and Solo Bersimfoni, which initiated the Adipangastuti Hasthalaku (Eight Virtues) program. The Sekolah Damai program, implemented at State Senior High School 4 Surakarta, aims to create harmonious, inclusive, and peaceful learning environments (Istianah et al., 2023). On the other hand, the Adipangastuti Hasthalaku program seeks to fix eight virtues of centuries-old Javanese culture in Surakarta into the foundation of high school students' lives. The eight virtues are: (1) *tepa slira* (tolerance); (2) *lembah manah* (humility); (3) *andhap asor* (respect); (4) *grapyak semanak* (friendliness); (5) *gotong royong* (cooperation); (6) *guyub rukun* (harmony); (7) *ewuh pakewuh* (consideration); and (8) *pangerten* (mutual understanding) (Alsuci & Hermawan, 2021).

In the socio-cultural aspect, various communities seek to promote deradicalization through Islamic teachings, as people have become increasingly aware that seeds of radicalism are

often planted under the guise of the Islamic religion, which gives rise to acts of terrorism in the name of *jihad* (Badi'ati, 2020; Ulya, 2016). Raden Mas Said State Islamic University of Surakarta initiated a religious moderation program targeting students in the former Surakarta Residency (Hasyim & Junaidi, 2023). Organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah also initiated similar programs for adults (Warsito et al., 2024).

The fact that these developments have basically all been community efforts when the government should have been the one with the authority to establish the laws and enforce them to ensure everyone in Surakarta can live side by side peacefully, begs the question: What role has the government played in rebuilding Surakarta as a city of harmony? To understand this, this study explores two main research questions: What regulations has the Surakarta city government formulated to promote cultural coexistence? How has the city government enforced the regulations to ensure cultural coexistence within Surakarta society? Due to the complexity of the problems and the diversity of the Surakarta city community, this study limits its analysis to government policies and actions on two historically sensitive issues that have repeatedly triggered public violence: ethnicity and religion.

B. Methods

This study uses the historical method (Wasino & Hartatik, 2018) and focuses on two aspects of the Surakarta city government's efforts to foster peaceful cultural coexistence through regulations and enforcement. From a regulatory perspective, the study examines various regional

regulations affecting both the city government's employees and Surakarta's residents. The city government has been promoting peaceful cultural coexistence through revisions and updates to its regulations, as well as various cultural coexistence initiatives included in its Regional Medium-Term Plan (RJMD, *Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah*) documents. This study analyzed the 2010, 2016, and 2021 RJMDs, along with various regional regulations in effect between 2014 and 2024, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of regulations in Surakarta.

This study also examines the measures taken by the Surakarta city government to encourage peaceful socio-cultural coexistence and to prevent and resolve tensions that undermine harmony. To promote peaceful socio-cultural coexistence, the city government can implement awareness-raising programs and establish specialized support agencies. To prevent friction, it can promote moderation of Islamic thoughts and teachings in groups showing a tendency to lean towards radicalism. To address current incidents, the city government's immediate response is critical.

Data were collected through a documentary study of legal products issued by the city government. Data on actual measures taken by the city government were obtained by analyzing information from government agencies available in the papers and on official websites. Quantitative data, particularly the score for each research variable, were obtained from institutions with national recognition for studies of freedom of worship and religion, including the SETARA Institute, the Wahid Institute (now Wahid Foundation), and the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS UGM).

The analysis was conducted based on Fredrik Barth's theory of cultural coexistence (Barth, 1998), which explains how a group's identity is shaped by interactions with its environment, including other groups sharing the same space and resources. From this perspective, a group identity, whether similar or different from others', is not the result of isolated internal interactions but rather of interactions with other groups (Eriksen & Jakoubek, 2018). The distinction between "us" and "them" defines the boundaries of social, cognitive, and physical identities among groups (Jakoubek, 2022). As such, a group's identity can only be maintained and developed through its interactions with other groups.

Three essential elements in maintaining and developing group identity are adaptability, pluralism, and equity, or the fair fulfillment of basic rights. Adaptability must be a characteristic of every group in a diverse society, as cultural interactions across space and time result in continuous change (Todorov, 2011). Adaptability enables groups to maintain and develop their existence and identity despite threats from other groups, often marked by violence.

In pluralism, diversity among individuals and groups must be recognized and respected. From the perspective of cultural coexistence, diversity reveals identity boundaries, such as ethnicity and religion (Azra, 2019). Socio-cultural interactions give rise to various changes and awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony between groups (Rachmad, 2024). The third element is cultural equity, namely, the fulfillment of basic rights for all groups living in the same area. Conceptually, cultural equity is the recognition and appreciation of the uniqueness of various communities'

cultures, and the support for their presence through physical space, public policy, investment, and expressions in civil and spiritual life (Aumer-Ryan et al., 2007). A public policy grounded in cultural equity fosters appreciation for the uniqueness of each cultural identity and its representation. It helps maintain cultural diversity while reducing or even eliminating structural discrimination (Belfiore et al., 2023).

C. Findings

The current residents of Surakarta City show the characteristics of a plural society. Like other urban cities in Indonesia, Surakarta is home to various ethnic groups. The Javanese, as the native ethnic group, are in the majority and dominate various public spaces, including the political, social, tourism, and arts sectors. The Chinese and Arab Hadrami, who have existed since the beginning of the Kasunanan era, play a significant role in the economic sector despite being minorities. Their arts also decorate public spaces, especially during Chinese New Year celebrations.

In terms of religion, the majority of Surakarta's population is Muslim. According to Clifford Geertz's classifications of *santri* and *abangan* (Geertz, 1976), Muslims in Surakarta are predominantly *abangan*. This is due to the powerful influence of the Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran cultures, although a new wave of Islamization has emerged since the beginning of the 21st century (Azra, 2019). The Surakarta *abangan* community has undergone an evolution marked by greater adherence to religious law, including the five daily prayers, the Friday prayer, and the hajj pilgrimage. They join mainstream religious organizations, such as

Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which are known to be communities of moderate Muslims. In Indonesia, contemporary *abangan* in Surakarta accept Pancasila, as they deem it capable of protecting diversity. This view is reflected in their choice of political parties. Nationalist (secular) parties always win the competition in both general elections (PEMILU) and regional head elections (PILKADA).

Meanwhile, notable groups also exist among the Surakarta *santri* community, such as the Al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School in Ngruki, Sukoharjo Regency, led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir (Fuaduddin, 2017). This Islamic purification movement later became the embryo for various similar movements. In the early 21st century, the group gave rise to various militias in Surakarta, including the Surakarta Islamic Youth Front (FPIS, *Front Pembela Islam Surakarta*), Jundullah Militia (Laskar Jundullah Surakarta), Surakarta Islamic Militia (LUIS, *Laskar Umat Islam Surakarta*), Hisbah Team, Hizbullah Sunan Bonang Militia, Hawariyyun, Hizbullah Brigade, Bismillah Army, and Al Ishlah. Alongside these, there are also local branches of Jakarta-based movements, such as Ka'bah Youth Movement (GPK, *Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah*) and Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, *Front Pembela Islam*) (Wildan, 2014). While coming from different organizations, these groups have the same views on current issues, hence their many collaborative acts as Islamic militias. Collectively, these groups are known as hardliner Islam, fundamentalist, Salafi, or Wahabi. They aspire to build the country based on an Islamic system, both as an Islamic state and a caliphate (Wahid, 2009).

An interesting phenomenon amid the growth of Islamic purification movements among the youth is the recruitment

of their members. Surakarta is home to “Gangs of Wild Kids” (GALI, *Gabungan Anak Liar*), a notorious youth group commonly associated with misguided vigilante actions, drinking, home rebellion, extortion of merchants and drivers in markets and public transport hubs, theft, robbery, and general acts of violence and even murder (Ibrahim, 2024). As a result, the people of Surakarta mostly fear and avoid them.

The FPIS groups and the GALI have very different ideologies but are similarly eager to act as vigilantes. As a result, competitions and conflicts between the two cannot be avoided. One notable clash occurred in the Kusumodilagan, Pasar Kliwon, on March 17, 2008, in which Heru Yulianto, also known as Kipli, a GALI leader in Pasar Kliwon, died horribly, and six members of the Muslimin Mosque Kusumodilagan community became murder suspects (Fandi, 2011). The killing of Kipli earned the Islamic militias respect from the people of Surakarta. Another clash occurred in 2012 in which Islamic militias raided a GALI base run by Koes Setiawan Danang Mawardi, also known as Iwan Walet, in Gandekan Village, Jebres, Surakarta (Wismabrata, 2012). The Mayor of Surakarta at the time, Joko Widodo, intervened before the clash spread further (Bramantyo, 2012). The case was brought to court, and both parties, proven to have committed violations, were given prison sentences.

The Gandekan raid was an important phase because Islamic militias became the most respected group among Surakarta residents, a position previously held for decades by the GALI. The victory in the raid on Gandekan village resulted in GALI's subsequent *laskarisasi* (Islamic militarization) (Setianto et al., 2022). The Islamic militias extended three

options to the GALI. First, they repent, stop their sinful behavior, and join the Islamic militias. Second, they repent, stop their sinful behavior, and leave the thug life. Third, they remain members of GALI but must move out of Solo Raya; most GALI members chose the first option (Setianto et al., 2022).

Besides Islam, Surakarta has communities of Protestant Christians, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox Christians. Although very small in number (around 100 people) and relatively new, the presence of an Orthodox Christian community shows that Surakarta is one of the safest cities in Indonesia, and its people can accept differences. Meanwhile, Protestant Christians and Roman Catholic communities have been part of Surakarta for longer and have been a significant element of its daily life, especially in education (Pradewi et al., 2019).

From a regulatory perspective, the Indonesian constitution directs the Surakarta city government to adopt Pancasila and uphold the ideology above that of any religious group. Government policies must be free from religious norms and, at the same time, not interfere with them. Accordingly, the Surakarta city government would not adopt sharia law as regional regulations, a trend in Indonesia during the first decade and early in the second decade of the 21st century (Mufidah et al., 2021). The Surakarta city government chose to exercise its authority over the groups and to formulate regulations based on human rights, for example, protecting vulnerable groups such as women and children.

An analysis of Surakarta City regulations from 2014 to 2024 found no regulations addressing discrimination against

or favoritism toward any particular ethnicity. There are no regulations addressing the discrimination against ethnic Chinese, who, in previous periods, were often victims of racial riots. On the other hand, the regional regulations also do not indicate any special treatment for indigenous residents or ethnic Javanese. The Surakarta city government clearly emphasizes that its employees should serve the community fairly and without discrimination (Dinas Pendidikan, 2024a; Dinas Sosial, 2024). From this perspective, the Surakarta city government tries to accommodate all ethnicities and be present for all societal groups.

The same pattern applies to religion. The Surakarta City Education Office held the 2024 Surakarta City-Level Catholic Elementary School Subject and Arts Competition (Dinas Pendidikan, 2024c). The Surakarta City Education Office provides equal treatment to students who are Protestant Christians (Dinas Pendidikan, 2024d) and Muslims (Dinas Pendidikan, 2024b). Equal treatment of students who adhere to Roman Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, and Islam is a sign that the Surakarta Education Office is trying to act fairly and non-discriminatively. To promote peaceful cultural coexistence in society, the Surakarta city government has established the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB, *Forum Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama*) at the sub-district level and the Inter-Religious Leaders (FORSITA, *Forum Silaturahmi Tokoh Agama*) at the village level (Kelurahan Bumi, 2024). The forums are expected to foster communication and fellowship among Surakarta city residents and reduce the risk of misunderstandings among different religious groups. This way, awareness of diversity in religious and ethnic identities

arises among community members, while a shared identity as citizens of Surakarta is simultaneously strengthened.

The Surakarta city government has taken various steps to foster peaceful cultural coexistence by formulating fair regulations, with positive results. In its report on the aspect of government regulations, SETARA Institute noted that the city of Surakarta was among the twelve cities with the best regulations in 2015, along with Pematang Siantar, Salatiga, Singkawang, Manado, Tual, Binjai, Tebing Tinggi, Kotamobagu, Palu, Kediri, and Padangsidempuan (SETARA Institute, 2016), and ranked 3rd in 2018 (SETARA Institute, 2019) and 2020 (Azhari & Hasan, 2021). It dropped to 4th in 2022 (Yosarie & Hasan, 2023). and again to 6th in 2023 (Yosarie et al., 2024). The drop was not caused by a decline in the quality of its regulations, but rather by the increasing number of cities in Indonesia that began paying more attention to fostering peaceful cultural coexistence through regulations. In 2023, two cities in Central Java, Magelang and Semarang, overtook Surakarta on the scoreboard. This shows that regulatory innovation to foster peaceful cultural coexistence must continue to keep pace with the changing times.

In addition to the attitudes reflected in the regulations, another very important factor in fostering peaceful cultural coexistence is the government's presence in the socio-cultural dynamics of urban community life. Presence in this context can manifest in two forms. The first is a guarantee of safety and comfort for all community groups in expressing their identities, provided they do not interfere with other community groups' rights, violate human rights, or violate the law (Lin, 2020). Guarantees in this context must be clearly

stated to protect groups engaged in ethnic and religious activities. In addition to protection, the government also needs to firmly state its stance by condemning and prohibiting parties who engage in unlawful vigilante acts and disrupt the activities of other groups.

The second form is the city government's action against violations that disrupt cultural coexistence, both through statements and law enforcement (Budiman et al., 2022). Government actions are evaluated by the speed and accuracy with which violations are handled. Speed in this context is the time between the occurrence of an incident and the arrival of the government's agents, particularly the police, at the scene, and the investigation and inquiry into the parties involved. The accuracy of the government's actions is judged from the transparency and fairness of the proceedings and trials against the parties involved. In terms of safety and comfort for ethnic and religious activities, the Surakarta city government has shown fluctuating performance. A good example to illustrate this is the attitude and actions of the Surakarta city government toward members of *Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid* (JAT) and LUIS who attacked a music event held by Slinkers Club Solo (SCS) at the Car Free Day (CFD) arena, accusing them of having a drinking party and forcing them to end the event (Ricky & Hartono, 2014). Responding to the incident, the Head of Intelligence at the Solo Police, Commissioner M. Fahrudin, stated that the incident should not have happened. Even if alcoholic drinks were indeed present in the music event, it was the police who had the authority to act, as it was their duty to supervise the distribution of alcoholic beverages (Ricky, 2014). The statement reflected the government's lack

of firmness in responding to the militia's actions, thereby damaging Surakarta's peaceful cultural coexistence. Similarly, as a resolution, the police mediated between the two groups at the Baitussalam Grand Mosque in Serengan, Solo, Central Java, which ended only with a peace agreement. The resolution was insufficient, and the Surakarta city government even sided with the perpetrators. The SCS held the music event with a permit from the Surakarta Transportation, Communication, and Information Office. Thus, using violence to end the event forcefully was a criminal act.

The lack of firmness in the police's attitude and actions towards the vigilante actions of the Islamic militia reflects the general attitude and actions of the Surakarta city government. However, this does not mean that every government agency in Surakarta supports groups that undermine peaceful cultural coexistence. Many government agencies are trying to strengthen harmony among Surakarta city residents. One example is the Surakarta City Education Office, which held the Interfaith Harmony Jamboree at the Military Resort Command Headquarters, Slamet Riyadi Street, Surakarta, on October 21–23, 2015. A total of 100 Muslim students, 40 Christian students, 20 Catholic students, 19 Hindu students, 11 Buddhist students, and 10 Confucian students participated in the activity (Ferdhi et al., 2015). This shows the complexity of the government's attitude and actions, as they are a collection of the attitudes and actions of every government agency in Surakarta city toward fostering peaceful cultural coexistence and preventing its disruption.

It is undeniable that a lack of firmness in the attitude and actions of the police and other government agencies

in Surakarta city will lead to self-serving behavior that undermines harmony and cultural coexistence among groups in society. Moreover, the current national political developments are more beneficial to anti-cultural coexistence groups. According to the statement of the Presidential Chief of Staff, Jaleswari Pramodhawardani, intolerant attitudes and hardline Islamic ideology have infiltrated Indonesian society, including the bureaucracy (Lestari, 2016). Even the National Human Rights Commission identified district or city governments as the perpetrators of alleged violations of the right to freedom of religion and belief, a subject of frequent complaints (Wirawan, 2016). This shows how the declining performance of the Surakarta city government in dealing with the Islamic militias' actions has become a concern. However, it also deserves appreciation because the decline is less severe than in other cities.

In a discussion titled "Intolerance and Radicalism Trends in Solo Raya 2017," Wahid Institute explained that intolerance in Surakarta has increased to 49.8% (Wahid Foundation, 2019). The data shows that intolerant groups' control of public space is increasing and almost equal to the strength of groups working toward cultural coexistence. SETARA Institute also found that intolerant acts in Surakarta spiked in 2017, putting the city on par with cities known to be intolerant, such as Banda Aceh, Depok, and Cilegon (SETARA Institute, 2018). Amid the oppression by intolerant groups, Commissioner Ribut Hari Wibowo was inaugurated as the Surakarta City Police Chief on March 14, 2017 (Utama, 2017). The presence of new police officers and the Surakarta city bureaucracy, who resisted the infiltration of hardline Islamic

ideology, has a positive influence on law enforcement and the imposition of stricter sanctions on vigilante groups. According to SETARA Institute's records, the Surakarta city government's performance in 2017 was considered very good and ranked among the top four nationally (SETARA Institute, 2018). In the 2018 Tolerant City Index (IKT) report, SETARA Institute ranked Surakarta 36th out of 94 cities in Indonesia (SETARA Institute, 2019). This is a significant drop from 2017, when the city ranked 10th. One cause is the performance of the Surakarta city government, especially in responding to and taking action against intolerant behavior, and the bureaucracy's lackluster attempt to initiate practical steps to foster peaceful cultural coexistence. This situation was immediately addressed by F.X. Hadi Rudyatmo, the Mayor of Surakarta at the time, and the community once again felt the government's presence. The Surakarta city government bounced back, putting the city in the top ten in performance in 2020 (Azhari & Hasan, 2021). This rank indicates that the government can take a firm stance against violations of community harmony.

An example of this firm stance is the city government's response to the attack by Solo Islamic militias on the *midodareni* ceremony held by the family of the late Habib Segaf Al-Jufri in Metrodanan, Pasar Kliwon, Surakarta on August 8, 2020 (Selestinus, 2026). The attacker accused the family of following Shia teachings in the ceremony, which they considered heretical, even though the state officially recognizes it as one of the sects of Islam. They shouted, "*Allahuakbar*, Disperse, Infidels," some even said, "Shia is not Islam, Shia is the enemy of Islam, their blood is *halal*, kill them!" (Selestinus, 2020). The police, as representatives of

the Surakarta city government, moved quickly to evacuate the guests and detain several people involved in the attack, who beat the guests and destroyed vehicles (Marwoto, 2020).

In the 2022 Tolerant City Index (IKT) report, the SETARA Institute ranked the Surakarta government's attitudes and actions at 11th place, alongside those of Semarang and Manado. This drop was mainly due to new cities, Tegal and Magelang, entering the top ten. Despite the government's declining attitude and actions, Surakarta rose to fourth place overall. This position is its highest achievement since 2014 and shows that a peaceful cultural coexistence is growing stronger in the lives of the people of Surakarta. In a report released on January 30, 2024, SETARA Institute ranked the Surakarta city government's attitudes and actions 16th. This also reduced Surakarta city's score on the overall tolerant city index by 0.083, dropping its position to 10th (Yosarie et al., 2024).

D. Discussion

The contestation between cultural groups in a plural society, where they compete for the title of most influential, is a phenomenon that naturally occurs across all ecologies. If left unchecked, competition might develop into coercion with violence and even lead to war. This is why the government plays an essential role in creating order and peaceful coexistence between regional groups (Diop, 2007).

Creating peaceful cultural coexistence among different groups is a challenging goal when one group insists on imposing its views and attacks others. In the case of the city of Surakarta, the group is the radical Islamic group and its

various militias, who are followers of the Wahabi and Salafi sects, wanting to establish their ideology as the law. Unlike Afghanistan and several kingdoms in Malaysia that prohibit Wahabi or Salafi teachings (Abdullah, 2022), Indonesia, as a Pancasila state, does not interfere with religious teachings and beliefs that develop in society. In 2017, Indonesia banned Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), not because of its teachings but because its goals were contradictory to the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, as regulated in Law No. 17, 2013 concerning Community Organizations (Marfiando, 2020).

Surakarta City is also unlikely to prohibit religious teachings, as is the case in Indonesia. Therefore, the most likely way to achieve peaceful cultural coexistence is to strengthen the government and foster cooperation and shared identity among the Surakarta community. Efforts to strengthen the government by establishing regulations that uphold equality and protect the basic rights of each community group have been progressing very well (Abidi, 2016). The fluctuation of Surakarta's position in the national tolerance ranking is closely related to the enforcement of regulations. One of the officials responsible for the lives of the city's people is the mayor. According to Satterthwaite's views (Satterthwaite, 2009), the mayor is a political officer who ensures the implementation of economic policies that support the city's prosperity, social policies that foster harmony and peace in society, and environmental policies that promote the preservation of nature and the health of the population, especially vulnerable groups. His vast authority makes the mayor a central figure in ensuring peaceful cultural coexistence among groups in an urban society.

In 2022, Surakarta ranked fourth among the most tolerant cities in Indonesia, the highest ranking ever. This achievement is closely related to the commitment and actions of Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who served as Mayor of Surakarta in early 2021 and is currently the Vice President of Indonesia. One of his breakthroughs was encouraging the public to celebrate the major holidays of each religion and ethnicity by using public spaces at city hall, especially along General Sudirman Street (Wicaksono, 2023). This breakthrough made the people of Surakarta see tangible evidence that the government provides the same facilities to all religious and ethnic groups. The second breakthrough was to show that the Surakarta city government opposes all forms of intolerance and imposes strict sanctions on anyone who undermines cultural coexistence. Firm actions are visible in the arrest of Islamic militia members for thuggery (Prabowo, 2021), the legal proceeding brought against youths from the Al Quran School (Kuttab) for the destruction of Christian graves (Satriawan, 2021), and the prosecution of Surakarta City Sharia Council (DSKS, *Dewan Syariah Kota Surakarta*) for attacking the Indonesian Chinatown Culinary Festival because several dishes served that were forbidden by Islamic teachings (Ryanthie, 2024). The message the Mayor of Surakarta wanted to convey was that no group in society should impose its views upon others or engage in anarchic actions against other groups.

The Surakarta city government has the authority to investigate, determine, and take action against any violations. Both breakthroughs are closely related to Gibran Rakabuming Raka, a prominent figure in fostering peaceful cultural

coexistence in Surakarta. Gibran, the son of the 7th president of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, was committed to making Surakarta an inclusive city (Ahmalia et al., 2024). Hard-line Islamic groups were thus discouraged from fighting back head-on, even though they consider the government's policies inconsistent with Salafi teachings. Given this progress, Surakarta's status as the fourth most tolerant city nationally can be sustained and even improved if the city government institutionalizes the policies of Gibran Rakabuming Raka (the city mayor at the time). On the other hand, these achievements will decline if the Surakarta city government bureaucracy is not firm enough in enforcing laws against vigilante groups. Only with fair opportunities for all groups to express their cultural identities and the firm action of the government in maintaining public order will society learn to obey the law and respect other cultures.

E. Conclusion

The struggle to build peaceful cultural coexistence in the city of Surakarta faces serious challenges from the growing pluralism in society and the existence of hard-line Islamic groups that act as vigilantes and impose their beliefs and ideology upon others. Constitutionally, the city government is an agent of the central government, mandated to govern all groups. Therefore, over the last decade, the Surakarta city government has sought to foster peaceful cultural coexistence in two ways. The first is the establishment of fair and inclusive regulations for all groups in society, regardless of religion and ethnicity. The second is the enforcement of regulations.

The most difficult challenge faced by the Surakarta city government is enforcing regulations. The city's lack of firmness has left groups of vigilante victims feeling ignored and unprotected. On the other hand, perpetrators of violence feel victorious and respected, so they tend to repeat the violence. An analysis of the city government in the last three years found that firmness is necessary to enforce regulations. Firm attitudes and actions have put Surakarta fourth in rank among the most tolerant cities in Indonesia. Peaceful cultural coexistence is a fundamental prerequisite for societal development because, by living side by side, various groups can optimally utilize the resources in their environment to improve welfare. At the next level, interactions between groups that take place peacefully and in a civilized manner will give birth to a shared identity, a positive city image that every socio-cultural group can call its pride.

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