

# Conflict-Related Behavior among Sundanese Muslim Students: The Role of Ideology and Perceived Injustice

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## Conflict-Related Behavior among Sundanese Muslim Students: The Role of Ideology and Perceived Injustice

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**Objective.** *Exploration of the psychological factors of conflict-related action among Sundanese Muslim students in Indonesia.*

**Background.** *Religious-based conflicts have been widely examined in various disciplines, attracting responses and factors in every cultural context.*

**Study design.** *Study 1 used an indigenous-based survey and was analyzed by thematic analysis. Study 2 examined the role of political ideology and perceived injustice in conflict-related behavior using hierarchical regression analysis.*

**Participants.** *Study 1: 224 people (35,7% of men, 64,3% of women) from 18 to 49 years old ( $M = 20,98$ ;  $SD = 3,72$ ). Study 2: 494 people (35,6% of men, 64,4% of women) from 17 to 49 years old ( $M = 20,00$ ;  $SD = 1,52$ ).*

**Measurements.** *Indonesian-language versions of the scales of religious fundamentalism ideology by Muluk and colleagues, violent extremist attitude by Nivette and colleagues, nonviolent direct action by Brown and colleagues, and sensitivity to injustice by Schmitt and colleagues.*

**Results.** *Study 1 showed specific patterns of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. There are differences in the respondents' responses to conflicts between and within religions. These differences are caused by ideology orientation towards religion and perception of injustice towards their groups. Study 2 confirmed Study 1 that religious fundamentalism predicts both violent and nonviolent behavior. Also, perceived injustice of victims moderates the effect of religious fundamentalism to violent behavior. Meanwhile, perceived injustice of perpetrators predicts only nonviolent behavior.*

**Conclusions.** *There is a significant effect of religious-based ideology and perceived injustice on conflict-related behavior in the Sundanese Muslim context.*

**Keywords:** *ideology; religious fundamentalism; perceived injustice; conflict-related behavior; violent behavior; nonviolent behavior.*

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## Конфликтное поведение сунданских студентов-мусульман: роль идеологии и предполагаемой несправедливости

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**Цель.** Исследование психологических факторов конфликтных действий среди сунданских студентов-мусульман в Индонезии.

**Контекст и актуальность.** Конфликты на религиозной почве широко изучаются в различных дисциплинах, вызывая отклики и обсуждения в каждом культурном контексте.

**Дизайн исследования.** Исследование 1 проводилось на основе опроса коренного населения с помощью онлайн-анкетирования. Исследование 2 было направлено на изучение роли политической идеологии и предполагаемой несправедливости в конфликтном поведении методом иерархического регрессионного анализа.

**Участники.** Исследование 1: 224 человека (35,7% мужчин, 64,3% женщины) в возрасте от 18 до 49 лет ( $M = 20,98$ ;  $SD = 3,72$ ). Исследование 2: 494 человека (35,6% мужчин, 64,4% женщины) в возрасте от 17 до 49 лет ( $M = 20,00$ ;  $SD = 1,52$ ).

**Методы (инструменты).** Использовались индонезийские версии шкал идеологии религиозно-фундаментализма Мулука и коллег, отношения к насильственному экстремизму Ниветта и коллег, ненасильственного прямого действия Брауна и коллег, а также шкалы чувствительности к несправедливости Шмитта и коллег.

**Результаты.** В ходе исследования 1 были выявлены специфические закономерности когнитивного, эмоционального и поведенческого реагирования. Обнаружены различия в реакции респондентов на межрелигиозные и внутрирелигиозные конфликты. Эти различия обусловлены идеологической ориентацией на религию и восприятием несправедливости по отношению к своей группе. Исследование 2 подтвердило результаты исследования 1, согласно которым религиозный фундаментализм предопределяет как насильственное, так и ненасильственное поведение. Кроме того, предполагаемая несправедливость по отношению к жертвам сглаживает влияние религиозного фундаментализма на насильственное поведение. В то же время предполагаемая несправедливость по отношению к правонарушителям предопределяет только ненасильственное поведение.

**Выводы.** Выявлено значимое влияние религиозной идеологии и предполагаемой несправедливости на уровень конфликтного поведения в среде сунданских мусульман.

**Ключевые слова:** идеология; религиозный фундаментализм; предполагаемая несправедливость; конфликтное поведение; насильственное поведение; ненасильственное поведение.

**Финансирование.** Исследование проводилось при финансовой поддержке Государственного исламского университета имени Сунана Гунунг Джати (г. Бандунг).

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## Introduction

Conflict usually happens [3] in interpersonal relationships or between groups. The development of social media encourages conflicts to develop and escalate in an uncontrollable direction. Social media increases information dissemination and facilitates communication and the emergence of new information that could strengthen conflict [58].

Religious-based conflicts have recently attracted much attention. In addition to the easily exposed and escalated information through social media, conflicts often involve ideology, beliefs, and emotions with a strong influence on behavior [10]. Religion is a central belief system that regulates permissible and impermissible actions and is capable of evoking and controlling sacred emotions [7]. An incomprehensive religious understanding might lead to erroneous beliefs and generate negative emotions, prejudice, discrimination, and violence that contradict religious values. Furthermore, religious-based conflicts involve many people from various parts of the world. Since conflicts generally occur through social media, they involve technology-literate young people who may lack personal maturity [39]. Monahan, Steinberg, Cauffman, & Mulvey stated that the immaturity of psychological function among students is associated with antisocial behavior, especially amid conflicts [26].

The emergence of radicalism among Muslim students has attracted Indonesians' attention. Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace study entitled "Religious Discourse and Movements Among Students:

Mapping Threats to the Pancasila State in State University" lists ten universities whose students were exposed to radicalism [36]. In line with this, even the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (2017) insisted that "Radicalism Among Students is Worrying" [23]. This condition is worrisome because its offline and online development is uncontrollable [57] since it is often associated with violent behavior.

The claim about the emergence of radicalism regarding religion-based conflict among Sundanese Muslim students is interesting to explore for three reasons. First, conflict-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by cultural factors [50]. Ecological factors also affect the formation of individual characteristics [50]. Therefore, Sundanese Muslim students' thoughts, feelings, and behavior are influenced by their cultural values.

The Sundanese are the second largest ethnicity in Indonesia, after the Javanese. The Central Bureau of Statistics showed that nearly 36,6 million or 15,5% of Sundanese live in West Java Province. In-group and out-group Sundanese are polite, courteous, friendly, gentle, loving, religious, creative, diligent, and tolerant and enjoy socializing and working together [31]. They have a life philosophy of 'sumuhun dawuh' (accepting), "sadaya daya" (surrendering), and "heurin ku letah" (not being blunt). This philosophy may make them less assertive and less likely to demand their rights [34]. Subsequently, Sundanese Muslim students are anti-violent and intolerant of radicalism.

Second, religion is sometimes associated with violence because religious people are

more vulnerable to violence than secular people [21; 55]. However, empirical studies on the relationship between religion and violence show inconsistent results. Baier found that religiosity is not associated with violence against Muslim or Christian youth [1]. It is influenced by friendship, self-control, alcohol consumption, and masculine norms [1]. Furthermore, Wright found that religious claims related to violence were not empirically proven [54]. Religion protects students from antisocial behaviors [56] and increases helping behavior [12].

Islam, the religion embraced by Muslim students in this study, is often associated with violence. However, the holy book teaches Muslims to tolerate differences [40] and respect human values [47]. They are also taught to uphold justice [44; 45], promote prosocial behavior [41; 42; 43] and respect differences [48]. Proper internalization of anti-violence values minimizes the potential for violence due to other influencing factors.

Third, conflicts are associated with both violent and nonviolent behavior. Violent behavior can be physical, psychological, emotional, moral, economic, political, philosophical, or metaphysical. This behavior includes hate speech, hoaxes, character assassination, and cyberbullying on social media.

Nonviolent behavior in conflict situations does not solely imply doing nothing [8] or being a substitute for violent behavior because it is powerless. According to Eyo and Ibanga, the behavior also IMPLIES taking the initiative and striving to resolve conflicts without violence [8]. Nonviolent behavior could involve demonstrating, protesting, submitting petitions, or being uncooperative.

The factors influencing behavior in conflict situations include the widely examined concept of ideology, which requires further analysis. Ideology is an individual orienta-

tion about how a country should be regulated in social, economic, and religious matters [27]. It guides thinking and behaving when faced with problems [9]. Ideological differences influence the variations in motivation, cognition, and social interaction [14]. Additionally, extreme ideology promotes the emergence of violent thoughts, motivations, and behaviors in conflict situations [2; 38; 52].

Ideology is structurally complex, comprising knowledge structures about inter-related beliefs, opinions, and values. Cognitive factors also play a role in forming conflict-related actions. Individuals fight for justice when they feel that their groups are treated unfairly by other parties, a phenomenon known as perceived injustice. Previous studies have found that perceived injustice accompanied by angry emotions, group identification, social identity, and dark personality traits promotes violence or extremism [29]. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze the role of psychology and culture in shaping religion-based conflict that involves violent and nonviolent behavior.

## **Methods**

**Study 1.** The first study aimed to explore Sundanese Muslim students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to religious-based conflicts and the influencing factors. Religion-based conflicts include inter- and intrareligious conflicts. The study used a survey with an indigenous approach to obtain responses from respondents regarding their experiences of conflicts. Therefore, the survey set consisted of 8 open-ended questions and was distributed online to 224 students from several universities in Indonesia. The participants comprised 80 male and 144 female students. Based on ethnicity, 146 participants were Sundanese, while 78 were non-Sundanese. The collected data were analyzed themati-

cally using NVivo, followed by coding, categorization, and interpretation.

**Study 2.** The second study aimed to examine the role of ideological factors and perceived injustice using quantitative method. The participants consisted of 494 Muslim students from various universities in Indonesia. They come from various ethnic groups and have social organization affiliations. Some students have backgrounds in Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Islamic Association (Persis), PMII, Indonesian Muslim Association (HMI), KAMMI, and Muhammadiyah Student Association (IMM).

The analysis was conducted on violent behavior, nonviolent behavior, perceived injustice, and religious fundamentalism ideology. Data were collected online using a political ideology-religious fundamentalism scale of 8 items [27], a violent extremist attitude scale of 4 items [24], a nonviolent action scale of 6 items [4], and a sensitivity to injustice scale of 30 items [35]. Descriptive analysis was performed on the variables whose relationship was determined using correlational analysis through SPSS. Moreover, hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine the effect of predictor and moderator variables.

## Results

**Study 1.** The results showed specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns and psychological factors that influenced the conflict.

**Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses.** There are differences in cognitive responses to intra- and interreligious conflicts (table 1). The most common cognitive response is "questioning the reasons for the conflict". The second most common interreligious cognitive response was "thinking about how the conflict was resolved". Additionally, the second most common

cognitive response to intrareligious conflict was "not thinking about".

In the interreligious conflict, there was no demographic difference in the response. However, there were differences in responses between males and females regarding intrareligious conflicts. The male participants' response was dominated by being normal or not thinking about it, while the female participants responded by asking about the trigger for the conflict. One participant stated that:

*"What I thought at the time, how can people who understand religion well enough but do things that trigger conflict, what do they think and what is their purpose in doing something like this? That's what still surprises me."*

In the context of ethnicity, most Sundanese participants questioned why conflicts arose and considered resolving them. Non-Sundanese participants did not think about or identify the causes of the conflicts. Participants considered resolving conflicts by respecting each other and avoiding violence. One participant responded as follows:

*"How can I make fellow Muslims respect each other in terms of furu'iyah. Moreover, it also keeps Muslims loyal to others, not harsh to others. There are even those who are harsh on fellow Muslims, but soft on non-Muslims."*

Some participants indicated that the impact had a more emotional aspect and was related to their religious identity, stating:

*"I don't think about it; I just do not like it when my religion is vilified."*

The participants' emotions when watching intra- and interreligious conflicts were generally negative (table 2). The results showed that 36 of the participants' emotional responses to interreligious conflicts were sad, 29 were afraid, and 33 were annoyed. In contrast, 44 of the participants' emotional responses to intrareligious conflicts were mediocre, 33 were sad, and 35 were upset. In intrareligious conflicts, there was no difference in emotional reactions between

Table 1

**Cognitive Responses**

Response	Intrareligious					Interreligious				
	Male	Female	Sundanese	Non-Sundanese	Total	Male	Female	Sundanese	Non-Sundanese	Total
Questioning	5	45	46	14	60	19	36	36	19	55
Conflict resolution	7	18	17	8	25	17	30	31	16	47
Cause of conflict	5	13	8	10	18	4	21	19	6	25
Impact of conflict	4	5	5	4	9	2	5	4	3	7
Not thinking	25	5	10	20	30	4	3	3	4	7
Others	24	58	60	12	82	34	49	53	20	83
Total participants	80	144	146	68	224	80	144	146	68	224

Sundanese and non-Sundanese or male and female respondents. However, there were differences in the emotional responses to interreligious conflicts. The response of “do not feel anything” was given by 9 male participants and 10 non-Sundanese.

Meanwhile, the most common behavioral response to inter- and intrareligious-based conflicts (table 3) was staying silent and observing the ongoing conflict. One participant was more focused on the government’s role in dealing with the conflict:

*“I only listen to the steps or actions of the government and related institutions to overcome this problem.”*

Some participants resigned to Allah SWT:

*“When there is a heated debate regarding differences in religious understanding, I just keep quiet and listen while taking refuge in Allah from the narrowness of thinking.”*

The second most common answer was to intervene, as demonstrated in the following example:

Table 2

**Emotional Responses**

Response	Intrareligious					Interreligious				
	Male	Female	Sundanese	Non-Sundanese	Total	Male	Female	Sundanese	Non-Sundanese	Total
Sad	21	12	22	11	33	10	26	24	11	36
Afraid	2	20	16	6	22	9	20	10	10	29
Upset	9	26	23	12	35	10	23	23	10	33
Uncomfortable	11	26	26	11	37	2	5	4	3	7
Mediocre	13	31	35	9	44	9	4	3	10	13
Others	24	29	24	29	53	40	57	85	13	106
Total participants	80	144	146	78	224	80	144	146	68	224

*"I have witnessed interreligious conflicts. If the topic is still within my reach, I will participate in mediating the dispute. However, if the topic of conflict is difficult enough, I don't think it's in my realm to interfere and I'm afraid I'll say the wrong thing if I don't understand what's being said, hence in this situation, I prefer to just listen and let someone with higher understanding take over."*

Other participants sought information:

*"I consulted with experts and looked for valid sources. If there is a difference of opinion, but the source is clear, it doesn't matter (following their respective schools of thought). But for matters of faith that are not appropriate, they should be straightened out."*

Another response was to take lessons and avoid conflict. There are no differences in behavioral responses to intrareligious conflicts based on gender or ethnicity. However, 18 males preferred resolving or avoiding interreligious conflicts, compared to only 12 females.

**Religious-based ideology and injustice perception as influential factors.** The analysis showed that the psychological factor with the most influence on religion-based con-

flict was misperception, with 111 responses. A participant stated that the cause was:

*"a lack of understanding about other religions besides the one they profess, not understanding each other, being provoked by various parties and misinformation."*

Other participants also highlighted the importance of obeying the Islamic law:

*"I just conveyed my understanding of the religion and listen to the opinions of other people who have different understandings and respect what he understands as long as it does not deviate from the Shari'a and limitation."*

*"Disputes in religious understanding may be caused by differences in school or sources of understanding. Therefore, as long as it is still sourced from the Qur'an, hadith, scholars, it is still said to be reasonable."*

Responses of the participants indicate that their belief to implement religion in their daily lives (religious fundamentalism ideology) dan perception of their religious group should be treated fairly (perceived injustice) may become the roots of their psychological responses related to the conflict.

**Study 2.** Correlational analysis showed that fundamentalist students positively

Table 3

**Behavioral Responses**

Response	Intrareligious					Interreligious				
	Male	Female	Sunda-nese	Non-Sun-danese	Total	Male	Female	Sunda-nese	Non-Sun-danese	Total
Observe	26	56	55	27	82	37	69	63	42	106
Discuss	11	27	27	11	38	7	9	8	8	16
Reconcile	13	20	20	13	33	18	12	17	14	30
Review	5	15	15	5	20	5	15	12	8	20
Avoid	2	2	2	2	4	7	4	5	6	11
Other	23	24	27	20	47	6	35	41	0	41
	80	144	146	78	224	80	144	146	78	224



related to violent behavior ( $r = 0,110$ ,  $p = 0,018$ ) and nonviolent behavior ( $r = 0,107$ ,  $p = 0,021$ ). Student violent behavior is also related to perceived injustice ( $r = 0,197$ ,  $p \leq 0,001$ ). The relationship between perceived injustice and violent behavior varies for victims and observers. The analysis showed that the perceived injustice as a victim ( $r = 0,237$ ,  $p \leq 0,001$ ) has a greater relationship than as an observer ( $r = 0,167$ ,  $p \leq 0,001$ ). Similarly, nonviolent behavior was associated with perceived injustice ( $r = 0,172$ ,  $p \leq 0,001$ ). It was more positively related to perceived injustice as victims ( $r = 0,274$ ,  $p \leq 0,001$ ) rather than as an observer ( $r = 0,146$ ,  $p \leq 0,001$ ).

Hierarchical regression analysis showed that participants with the ideology of religious fundamentalism exhibit more violent behavior when they also have perceived injustice as victims and observers (table 4).

The influence of religious fundamentalism on violent behavior increased upon adding the perceived injustice ( $\beta = 0,095$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ). Therefore, perceived injustice increases the relationship between religious fundamentalism and violent behavior.

Hierarchical regression analysis also showed that religious fundamentalism predicts nonviolent behavior (table 5). Furthermore, perceived injustice as victims positively predicts nonviolent behavior ( $\beta = 0,289$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ) while perceived injustice as perpetrators shows negative effect ( $\beta = -0,114$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ). Meanwhile, there is no moderating effect of perceived injustice on the relationship between religious fundamentalism and nonviolent actions.

### Discussion

The results of the analysis in the first study show that there are patterns of cog-

Table 4  
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results of Violent Action Predictors (Study 2)

Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4
Age	-0,163**	-0,161**	-0,165**	-0,156**
Gender	-0,112**	-0,113*	-0,104*	-0,118**
Religious Fundamentalism		0,094*	0,093*	0,095*
Perceived Injustice (Victims)			0,203**	0,209**
Perceived Injustice (Observers)			0,027	0,014
Perceived Injustice (Perpetrators)			0,007	0,002
Religious Fundamentalism x Perceived Injustice (Victims)				0,186**
Religious Fundamentalism x Perceived Injustice (Observers)				0,202**
Religious Fundamentalism x Perceived Injustice (Perpetrators)				-0,058
R <sup>2</sup>	0,035	0,044	0,093	0,117
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0,009*	0,049**	0,024*

Notes: \* –  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\* –  $p < 0,01$ .

Table 5

**Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results of Nonviolent Action Predictors (Study 2)**

Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4
Age	-0,164**	-0,162**	-0,154**	-0,153**
Gender	-0,127**	-0,129**	-0,120**	-0,121**
Religious Fundamentalism		0,091*	0,097*	0,097*
Perceived Injustice (Victims)			0,289**	0,288**
Perceived Injustice (Observers)			0,012	0,010
Perceived Injustice (Perpetrators)			-0,114*	-0,115*
Religious Fundamentalism x Perceived Injustice (Victims)				-0,042
Religious Fundamentalism x Perceived Injustice (Observers)				0,023
Religious Fundamentalism x Perceived Injustice (Perpetrators)				-0,011
R <sup>2</sup>	0,038	0,046	0,129	0,130
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0,008*	0,082**	0,001

Notes: \* –  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\* –  $p < 0,01$ .

nitive, emotional and behavioral responses, including psychological and social factors. First, the main responses about psychological factors include a lack of understanding of religions other than one's own or misperceptions. Misperceptions of interreligious people can trigger conflicts, followed by egoism-fanaticism, intolerant attitudes and ways of thinking, beliefs, negative emotions, and the ability to regulate emotions.

Reid-Quiñones et al. examined differences in adolescent cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to violence between witnesses and victims of conflicts [32]. However, they found no differences between gender groups. This study showed differences in cognitive responses across genders. Males prefer not to think about conflicts, while females question the causes.

The results of the analysis in the second study show that social factors, including

group differences and ethnocentrism, are the largest contributors to the response to religious-based conflicts, followed by the influence of provocation. Social norms and intolerant cultures are quite influential contributors, followed by traditions or habits as the least contributing factor. Social norms and culture, including race, gender, and social classes related to religion, can trigger religious-based conflict in this modern cultural situation [51]. Internalizing identity as part of an ingroup is one of the pathways that leads to a negative psychological evaluation of the outgroup. In addition, ideology plays an important role in escalating or reducing conflict due to its influence on motivation, cognition, and society [14; 15]. The behavioral outcome caused by using ideology to guide the thinking process can be classified as violent and nonviolent behavior.

In Study 2, religious fundamentalism predicts both violent and nonviolent behavior of Sundanese Muslim participants. This supports previous studies on the relationship between Muslim identity and religious fundamentalism [23]. This finding is different from previous study suggesting that fundamentalists tend to act hostilely [21; 22; 55].

Another finding shows that religious fundamentalism is equally related to violent and nonviolent behavior. This is in line with Kashyap and Lewis, who stated that Muslim and Christian religiosity have the same effect on moral and social attitudes [20]. Conversely, Baier stated that religion is not correlated with violence [1]. Perceived injustice was used to explain the role of religious fundamentalism in conflict-related behavior. Religious fundamentalism has a greater chance of inciting violence when individuals have high perceived injustice. This supports Pauwels and Heylen, who found that perceived injustice only played a role in religious fundamentalism toward violence [30].

Despite its contributions, this study was focused only on Indonesian Sundanese population. Thus, the generalization can fur-

ther be developed by studying other populations such as other ethnicities or religions. Future research can also explore other personal and social factors influencing conflict-related behaviors.

### Conclusions

The study of the religious ideology of fundamentalism and conflict behavior, which is divided into violent and nonviolent behavior, as well as the important role of perceived injustice in the moderation model is tested through qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative data described emotional responses, cognition, and behavioral responses to religious-based conflict from an indigenous perspective and highlighted the role of religious-based ideology and perceived injustice influencing these behaviors. Quantitative data confirmed that perceived injustice has a significant role in conflict behavior with the religious ideology of fundamentalism as a predictor. The results of these two studies provide a new perspective on previous research that has not been consistent. Further research may explore possible prevention and intervention in response to violent behavioral responses.

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