

Between Theocracy and Pluralism: Identity Politics and Local Leadership in Indonesia

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Abstract

The rise of religious-based identity politics in Indonesia has significantly influenced local governance, particularly among regional heads who integrate Islamic values into public administration. Conversely, the principle of pluralism—as a cornerstone of democracy—demands inclusivity and equal treatment for all societal groups. This study aims to examine and compare two leadership models of regional heads in Indonesia: one oriented toward Islamic theocracy and the other toward democratic pluralism, with a focus on their respective implications for the development of modern civil society. Employing a qualitative comparative case study approach, the research analyzes two regions with distinct leadership orientations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. The findings reveal that theocratic leadership emphasizes religious values and moral accountability, often enhancing religious identity but risking exclusion and limited civic space. In contrast, pluralist leadership promotes diversity and participatory governance, yet faces challenges in building a cohesive collective identity. The study concludes that effective local governance in a diverse society requires a balanced integration of moral-religious values and inclusive democratic principles to ensure fairness, legitimacy, and sustainability in civil society development.

Keywords

Islamic Theocracy, Pluralism, Local Government, Regional Head Leadership, Civil Society, Democracy

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of reform and democratization following the fall of the New Order regime, Indonesia has experienced highly complex political dynamics, including in the context of the relationship between religion and the state. At the local level, many regional heads are elected not only based on their political vision but also because of their strong religious identity (Gea et al., 2022). This phenomenon marks the rise of religion-based political power in local government contests, reviving the longstanding discourse between theocratic ideals and the principle of pluralism within a democratic system (Arifin & Nurjaman, 2022). Islamic theocracy in the context of a modern state faces major challenges when confronted with pluralism—the diversity of society in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, and ideology. In Indonesia, which is constitutionally not a religious state but has the world's largest Muslim population, religious pluralism is a social reality that cannot be ignored (Salamuddin & Repantu, 2015).



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Therefore, the application of Islamic values in governance must be managed inclusively and wisely, so as not to conflict with the spirit of diversity and democracy. Proper management of pluralism is key to maintaining social harmony and preventing potential conflict and national disintegration, especially when religion-based policies begin to intersect with the rights of minority groups and the diverse civil society (Khumaidi, 2021).

Islamic theocracy as an ideological approach to governance is rooted in the belief that Islamic values can serve as the primary basis for determining public policy. In practice, some regional heads in Indonesia have adopted this approach by emphasizing religious symbols, such as Sharia-inspired regional regulations (*perda syariah*) or bans on activities deemed contrary to Islamic norms (Satria et al., 2024). The term "Islamic theocracy" in the context of this study refers to the identity held by regional leaders who have a strong Islamic religious background, both in terms of education, organizational affiliation, and public image. This religious identity is then used as a basis or approach in formulating and implementing public policies that contain elements of Islamic values, such as the implementation of sharia regulations, strengthening religious symbols in public spaces, or programs that prioritize homogenization of values based on Islamic teachings. This approach not only reflects the personal religiosity of the leader, but also shows an ideological orientation in governance that tends to emphasize the dominance of Islamic values in the social life of society (Jati, 2013).

Conversely, regional leaders who uphold the principle of pluralism tend to govern with a spirit of openness, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. In this approach, religion is still respected as a source of moral and ethical values but is not used as a tool to direct public policy exclusively (Septriani et al., 2023). Pluralism opens space for participation by all segments of society, regardless of religious, ethnic, or social background. The resulting policies generally focus on social justice, strengthening civil society, and protecting the rights of vulnerable groups (Djuyandi, 2011). The tension between theocratic and pluralistic approaches at the local level is not merely ideological; it has direct implications for the configuration of civil society. Modern civil society in Indonesia—including non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, religious communities, and independent media—plays an important role in safeguarding democracy and citizens' rights (Putra & Sihidi, 2022). When local governments adopt exclusive religion-based policies, the civic space can shrink. On the other hand, pluralism tends to expand participation and guarantee civil rights (Fauzia, 2016).

Previous research has mostly highlighted the relationship between religion and the state at the national level or discussed identity politics more broadly. However, few studies have specifically compared the direct impact of two types of leadership approaches—Islamic theocratic and pluralistic—on the dynamics of local civil society. Joebagio (2016) emphasized the rise of Islamic identity politics after the reform era, including in regional leadership contests. These studies show that some local leaders use Islamic symbols and rhetoric as part of their political legitimacy. However, there are also critiques from researchers such as Solikhin (2016), who highlight that the application of theocratic elements in local policies often neglects the rights of minority groups, including non-Muslims, women, and other vulnerable populations. The study by Shofwan & Maknun (2023) underscores the importance of pluralism in the context of local democracy in Indonesia. These studies reveal that regional heads with a pluralistic approach are more successful in building harmonious relationships among ethnic and religious groups. Lastly, Hikam's research (2000) highlighted religious-based leadership towards democracy and civil society in Indonesia.

Civil society in Indonesia shows complex dynamics in responding to regional leaders' policies. In areas led with a theocratic tone, some civil society organizations face pressure, especially those

advocating for gender and minority issues. In contrast, in more pluralistic regions, civil society is more active, with greater space for participation (Perdana, 2009). The dynamics of modern civil society refer to the changes and developments taking place in organizations and associations that are outside the scope of government and business, but are nonetheless important in shaping the social and political order. It involves the interaction, participation, and influence of various groups in society, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, and advocacy networks, in various aspects of public life, including in the policy-making process (Pramestisari & Kebayantini, 2022). This is where the urgency and novelty of this research lie. A direct comparison between the two leadership models can provide a more concrete understanding of how a regional leader's ideology influences civil society.

The research problem formulation is: How do the differences in leadership approaches—Islamic theocracy versus pluralism—of regional heads affect the dynamics of modern civil society in Indonesia, and what are the implications of each approach on freedom, participation, and diversity? The purpose of this study is to comparatively analyze the leadership practices of regional heads based on Islamic theocracy and pluralism in the context of local governance in Indonesia, and to explore their impact on the strengthening or weakening of civil society. The expected benefit of this research is to contribute theoretically to the study of religion-state relations, while also serving as a practical reference for policymakers and regional leaders in formulating inclusive and responsive governance strategies that reflect the pluralistic nature of Indonesian society.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach using a comparative case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of how two models of regional leadership—those oriented toward Islamic theocracy and pluralism—affect the dynamics of modern civil society in Indonesia. The study selects two regions as research sites that, in terms of leadership characteristics and socio-political contexts, represent the theocratic and pluralist approaches (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). Case selection is conducted purposively, based on indicators such as religion-based public policies, religious narratives in governance, and the involvement of civil society. Indicators such as religion-based public policies, religious narratives, and civil society involvement distinguish two regions as ideal representations of the “theocratic” and “pluralist” approaches because they show real differences in how local leaders run their governments. Theocratic regions tend to issue policies that are laden with religious values, use religious narratives in public communication, and involve dominant religious groups more in the policy process. In contrast, pluralist regions emphasize policies that are neutral towards religion, inclusive narratives, and provide broad participation space for various civil society groups. Despite the differences in approach, the two regions can still be compared fairly because this study considers the local socio-economic and historical contexts as comparative factors, so that the analysis does not only rely on leadership style alone. Through this approach, the research aims to reveal the meaning, patterns, and impacts of these leadership practices in a contextual and comprehensive manner.

Data collection is carried out through in-depth interviews with regional leaders, community figures, civil society activists, and local academics who understand the governance dynamics of each region. In addition, the researcher also conducts direct observation of policy practices and analyzes official documents such as regional regulations, speeches, and local media reports. Data analysis is conducted thematically using a descriptive-analytical approach, which involves identifying key themes emerging from the data and linking them to theories of theocracy, pluralism, and civil society. Data validity is ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and timing to ensure that the resulting

interpretations are objective and accurately represent the phenomena being studied (Yulianah, 2022).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Comparison of Regional Head Leadership Models Based on Islamic Theocracy and Pluralism

3.1.1 Regional Head Leadership Model Based on Islamic Theocracy

In a theocratic system, political power is considered an extension of God's will, so that the divine element becomes the main foundation in the structure and legitimacy of government. The leader in this system not only acts as the head of state administration, but also as the guardian of morals and implementer of religious laws (Azikin, 2007). Therefore, in the context of Islamic theocracy, a leader is required to have strong faith, in-depth knowledge of Islamic teachings, and the ability to interpret sharia to be applied in national life. The legitimacy of leadership is not only assessed from political and managerial abilities, but also from spiritual depth and commitment to Islamic values (Salamudin & Repantu, 2015). Leadership in a theocratic system tends to be sacred and has high religious authority, so that state decisions are often associated with divine truth. In this case, the leader is not only responsible to the people, but also to God, who is believed to be the main source of law and truth. As a result, this system can strengthen control over society in the name of religion, including in terms of social behavior, culture, and public policy making. Although the theocratic system can create moral-based order, the main challenge lies in how to balance the dominance of religious values with the principles of democracy and civil rights in a pluralistic society (Fachrurrozi, 2008).

The leadership model of regional heads based on Islamic theology is a form of leadership that makes Islamic teachings the ethical, moral, and normative basis for running the government at the local level. In this model, leaders are seen not only as administrative officials, but also as trustees who are responsible to the community and to Allah SWT. The main principles in this model include justice (al-'adl), deliberation (shura), trust (integrity), and concern for the welfare of the people (maslahah). These values not only function as a personal guide for leaders, but are also manifested in public policies and daily leadership styles (Olifiansyah et al., 2020).

The main characteristic of this model is the strong drive to Islamize policies, both symbolically and substantively. Symbolic, for example, the use of religious identity in public rhetoric, religious ceremonies, or the use of Islamic clothing and language. Meanwhile, the substantive approach is seen in regional policies with sharia nuances, such as Sharia Regional Regulations, prohibitions on certain activities during the month of Ramadan, or religious-based moral development programs. This model also often places clerics or religious figures as strategic partners in the decision-making process. The leadership of regional heads based on Islamic theology, as reflected in the case of the leadership of a kiai in Sumenep Regency, shows that the religious identity of a leader does not always automatically bring significant changes to the government bureaucratic system. In Halim's research (2020), it was found that public expectations of the kiai figure as an agent of moral change in the bureaucracy were not fully realized. This shows a gap between public perception of the moral capacity of religious figures and the complex reality of governance that requires more than just religious legitimacy.

As a religious figure, a kiai has high charisma and trust from the community. He is seen as being able to bring spiritual values into the public sphere and resolve various socio-political problems with a religious ethical approach. This expectation often leads to the belief that the presence of a kiai in the position of regional head will immediately improve governance, create a clean bureaucracy, and eliminate corrupt practices and injustice. However, in practice, the reality of bureaucracy which is full of systems, administrative procedures, and power dynamics is not easily transformed with a moral

approach without the support of adequate technocratic and managerial capacity. The findings of this study confirm that bureaucracy as a modern organizational system requires leadership that is not only moral, but also has the ability to control, strategic planning, supervision, and administrative knowledge. A regional head is required to be a top manager who understands bureaucratic mechanisms, is able to make data-based decisions, and manages regional human and financial resources effectively. When the kiai's leadership is unable to reach and intervene in a complex bureaucratic system, then his religious symbolic power is not enough to encourage structural change in the bureaucracy.

This condition also illustrates that the success of a regional head cannot rely solely on cultural or religious legitimacy. Leadership in the context of modern governance demands an integration of moral values with technical proficiency and institutional capability. Weaknesses in managerial aspects and a lack of experience in government can lead to stagnation or even regression within the bureaucratic system, even if the leader possesses integrity and good intentions. Therefore, to promote the creation of a moral and efficient bureaucracy, there must be synergy between religious leadership character and strong professional competence.

In the studies by Melia et al. (2023) and Yusra (2018), the leadership of Mahyeldi Ansharullah as the Governor of West Sumatra, and previously as the Mayor of Padang, serves as an interesting example in the study of regional leadership models based on Islamic theology. As a preacher long active in campus and religious outreach activities, Mahyeldi brought a spiritual nuance into the public spheres of government. He is known not only as a public official but also as a moral figure and role model in the religious life of the Minangkabau community. On various occasions, he emphasized the importance of Islamic values such as justice ('adl), trustworthiness (amanah), and social responsibility in fulfilling leadership duties.

The application of Islamic theocracy in Mahyeldi's leadership is evident through various policies that integrate Islamic values into governance and community life in West Sumatra. Although Indonesia is a democratic country and does not formally adopt a theocratic system, Mahyeldi's leadership style reflects the substance of theocratic governance—namely, making Islamic teachings the primary foundation in public policy-making. One example is the "Sumatera Barat Madani" (Civilized West Sumatra) program, which emphasizes the importance of building society based on religious principles, especially in shaping the morality and ethics of its citizens. He also promotes the strengthening of religious education in formal educational institutions, aiming to instill Islamic values from an early age in the younger generation.

Furthermore, Mahyeldi supports local regulations that are normatively religious, such as encouraging the wearing of Muslim attire, organizing religious activities in government institutions, and involving the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in the regional policy-making process. This indicates a strong relationship between religious authority and government. This leadership pattern reflects elements of theocracy in governance practice, where religious laws and values are used as key references in managing socio-political life. Although it does not officially constitute a theocratic system, Mahyeldi's approach illustrates how Islamic values can serve as a strong foundation for regional development planning, and how religion can function as a moral and social instrument in local political leadership.

The impact of the Islamic theocratic leadership model on civil society in Indonesia is highly varied, depending on the socio-political context of the region and the capacity of the leader to balance Islamic values with democratic and pluralistic principles. On one hand, this leadership model can contribute positively to shaping public morality, strengthening bureaucratic ethics, and fostering emotional

closeness between leaders and the community. Values such as honesty, justice, and social responsibility embedded in Islamic teachings can serve as guiding principles that reinforce public trust in local leadership. For instance, Gresik Regent Akhmad Yani, a leader with a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) background, practices Islamic leadership characterized by amanah (trustworthiness) and high integrity in fulfilling his policy promises, which has helped shape strong public morality and bureaucratic ethics among the community.

However, on the other hand, the implementation of theocratic leadership may also pose serious challenges to civil society if not balanced with inclusivity and openness. As seen in the leadership of a kiai (Islamic cleric) in Sumenep Regency, research findings indicate that religious values do not automatically translate into improved bureaucratic quality or public service. While a kiai has moral legitimacy in the eyes of the public, effective governance also requires managerial competence, systemic oversight, and strong administrative understanding to run an effective and fair bureaucracy. Another potential risk is policy exclusivism, where dominant religious values may limit the space for minority or dissenting groups. If a regional leader interprets Islamic values rigidly and normatively without considering the plural social context, it can lead to discriminatory policies or even horizontal social conflict. In Indonesia's highly diverse civil society, a leadership model that is overly theocentric—without room for intergroup dialogue—risks weakening social cohesion and undermining the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), which is the foundation of national life.

Therefore, the impact of the Islamic theocratic leadership model on civil society in Indonesia depends largely on how leaders interpret and apply Islamic values in political practice. When implemented inclusively and moderately, Islamic values can strengthen public ethics and help create clean, welfare-oriented governance. However, if practiced exclusively and without sensitivity to diversity, it has the potential to generate social tensions and restrict democratic space for civil society.

3.1.2 Regional Head Leadership Model Based on Pluralism

The regional head leadership model based on pluralism is a form of leadership that responds to the very diverse socio-cultural reality of Indonesia. In this model, regional heads are not only required to be government administrators, but also as guardians of social harmony. They need to have high sensitivity to the diversity of culture, religion, ethnicity, and social background of their community (Lase, 2009). Pluralistic leadership means being able to bridge differences, avoid discriminatory policies, and promote the principles of social justice. In this context, leaders act as facilitators of dialogue between groups, who actively encourage tolerance and strengthen social solidarity between citizens. Furthermore, pluralist leaders also emphasize active community participation in the process of formulating public policy. This creates spaces for participatory democracy at the local level that allow all groups to feel heard and their aspirations accommodated. Regional heads in this model tend to prioritize an inclusive approach, where the policies taken not only benefit the majority, but also protect the rights and interests of minority groups (Ramadhan, 2023). Thus, pluralism-based leadership is not only oriented towards administrative achievements, but also towards the formation of a civilized, just, and sustainable social order amidst the dynamics of the diversity of modern society.

Pluralist leadership is a form of leadership that explicitly recognizes and celebrates diversity in society as a strength, not an obstacle. In this model, inclusivity is the main principle that must be carried out by a leader. Inclusivity means that all elements of society, regardless of religious background, ethnicity, culture, gender, or socio-economic status, have equal opportunities to participate in the public decision-making process. Pluralist leaders not only open up space for community participation, but also

actively reach out to groups that are often marginalized to ensure that their voices are heard and considered in public policy (Sandang, 2016).

Another aspect of pluralist leadership that is no less important is the creation of an atmosphere of harmony and social cohesion. Regional leaders must be agents of peace who are able to reduce the potential for horizontal conflict in a pluralistic society. One way is to organize programs that promote tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural activities that build mutual understanding and empathy between groups. These programs are not only ceremonial, but must be designed in such a way that they are able to touch the roots of existing social problems and involve active participation from various elements of society (Najib, 2013).

Community involvement in the decision-making process is also an important characteristic of pluralist leadership. Leaders must provide participatory dialogue forums such as citizen meetings, public discussion forums, or community-based policy consultation mechanisms. In this way, leaders not only demonstrate their commitment to the principles of democracy, but also ensure that the policies made truly reflect the real needs of the community. This participation creates a high sense of belonging to public policy and strengthens the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, known as a nationalist and statesman, has become a symbol of strong pluralist leadership in Indonesia. Although he lived in the early days of independence, his leadership values are still very relevant, especially in terms of respect for religious, cultural, and belief diversity in society. As Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, the Sultan not only led administratively, but also became a moral and cultural role model who fought for social harmony. The principles of tolerance and unity that he upheld proved that leadership can run effectively by upholding the values of pluralism. Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X viewed the Special Region of Yogyakarta not only as an administrative entity, but as a miniature of Indonesia that reflects the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity that exists throughout the archipelago. Within this framework, he placed pluralism as an important foundation in regional governance. The principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*—which emphasizes unity in diversity—is not only used as a motto, but is implemented through concrete policies that are inclusive and oriented towards strengthening social cohesion. Sultan HB X actively encouraged dialogue between community groups, guaranteed the protection of minority rights, and created spaces for public participation that allowed all elements of society to play a role in regional development. Yogyakarta's special status was maintained so that it would not become a symbol of exclusivity, but rather a cultural force that protected all identities.

Moreover, Sultan HB X showed serious attention to education as a strategic instrument in forming a pluralistic and tolerant society. He encouraged the integration of local cultural diversity values into the education curriculum in Yogyakarta, so that the younger generation would not only know their own culture, but also appreciate other cultures as part of the nation's identity. Through various cultural and educational programs, Sultan HB X fostered a spirit of mutual respect and appreciation between cultural communities in Indonesia. His commitment to preserving local cultures from various regions in Indonesia is not only a form of respect for ancestral heritage, but also a strategy for building a strong nation through recognition of diverse identities. Thus, Sultan HB X's leadership is a real example of how pluralistic values can be institutionalized in regional government practices in a sustainable manner and have a broad impact on social harmony.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as the Mayor of Solo, has demonstrated a form of pluralist leadership focused on improving the quality of social life through efforts to strengthen the values of tolerance. He openly acknowledged that the city of Solo once had a less-than-favorable image in terms of interfaith

and social group tolerance. However, instead of denying this reality, Gibran used it as motivation to bring about significant change. Under his leadership, Solo rose in rank from 9th to 4th place in the tolerant city index, showing concrete success from various policies and approaches implemented.

This transformation was largely due to the collaboration that Gibran built with various stakeholders, such as religious leaders, community figures, interfaith organizations, and security forces. He understood that creating a tolerant atmosphere could not be done solely by the government, but required active involvement from all elements of society. By engaging these leaders and communities, Gibran was able to foster a climate of dialogue and cooperation among groups that may have previously been polarized by their identities and interests. This kind of leadership reflects the traits of a pluralist leader who can bridge differences and direct focus toward collective interests.

One symbolic approach taken by the Solo City Government under Gibran was the installation of religious ornaments at Solo City Hall during religious holidays. This act was not merely decorative; it served as a tangible expression of the government's respect for religious diversity in Solo. These ornaments signified that all religions have equal space for expression in public spheres, and that the government is present to guarantee and celebrate that diversity. Initiatives like this reinforce the message that diversity is not a threat, but a richness that must be nurtured together. Gibran's leadership style also demonstrates a structured and sustainable narrative of tolerance. He does not merely react to issues, but proactively initiates interfaith programs, cultural dialogues, and intercommunity collaborations. Through this approach, Gibran has shown that leadership based on pluralism can encourage social cohesion and foster a sense of safety for minority groups. His strategic role as a young leader also brings hope for the emergence of a new generation of leaders who are more inclusive, adaptive, and visionary in facing the challenges of diversity in Indonesia.

A model of regional leadership based on pluralism has a significant impact on strengthening civil society in Indonesia, especially within the context of a pluralistic national life. Pluralistic leadership encourages the recognition and appreciation of ethnic, religious, racial, and group diversity as a national asset that must be preserved and protected. In practice, leaders who prioritize pluralism create participatory spaces for all community groups, regardless of their identity backgrounds. This strengthens social cohesion, reduces the potential for horizontal conflict, and fosters the growth of an inclusive and democratic political culture.

A concrete example can be seen in the leadership of Sultan Hamengkubuwono X in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The Sultan firmly rejected calls to ban the Ahmadiyya and Shia communities, a stance that demonstrated his commitment to religious freedom and the protection of minority rights. This position not only diffused potential conflict between religious groups but also strengthened public trust in the regional government as a protector of civil rights. Civil society, in this context, felt secure and free to practice their respective beliefs without fear of state discrimination. A similar impact can be observed in the leadership of Solo Mayor Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who actively promotes the creation of a tolerant city. By installing religious ornaments in public spaces and working with interfaith leaders, Gibran has created visual and cultural symbols that reflect respect for diversity. As a result, Solo's level of tolerance has increased significantly, as evidenced by the city's rise in the tolerance index. Civil society has also become more active in various interfaith forums and joint social activities, reflecting growing public trust in the government as a facilitator of peaceful and equitable coexistence.

Despite the many positive impacts of a regional leadership model based on pluralism—such as increased tolerance, recognition of diversity, and expanded public participation—this model also faces challenges and inherent weaknesses. One major challenge is resistance from conservative or exclusive

groups who reject inclusive approaches and advocate for the dominant application of certain values. In some cases, regional leaders who promote pluralism become targets of criticism, rejection, or even threats from groups who feel that pluralistic policies conflict with their ideological beliefs.

Additionally, pluralism at the policy level often faces obstacles in practical implementation. Many policies designed to accommodate diversity cannot be optimally executed due to a lack of inter-agency coordination, weak bureaucratic capacity, or the absence of strong oversight systems. For instance, programs that support interfaith harmony are sometimes merely ceremonial and fail to address core issues such as discrimination in public services or the exclusion of minority groups from local social structures.

3.2 Implications of Regional Head Leadership Based on Islamic Theocracy and Pluralism for Civil Society

The implications of the two models of regional leadership—Islamic theocracy and pluralism—on civil society in Indonesia demonstrate different dynamics, depending on the approach taken and the socio-political context of the region being led. Below is an explanation of the implications:

3.2.1 Implications of Islamic Theocratic Leadership on Civil Society:

The Islamic theocratic leadership model tends to place Islamic values and norms as the foundation for public policy-making. The positive implications of this model include:

1) Strengthening Public Morality

The Islamic theocratic leadership model, which bases public policy on Islamic values and norms, has a positive implication on society by strengthening public morality. In this system, the leader often serves as a role model in applying Islamic principles such as honesty, justice, and simplicity in daily governance. When regional leaders prioritize Islamic ethics, the community is encouraged to emulate these religious attitudes in their social lives. This can be seen in the increased awareness of religious practices, the avoidance of corruption, and greater social solidarity. Public morality strengthening also promotes a more orderly and cultured society. Policies grounded in Islamic values help form a more ethical social culture, such as fostering an ethos of responsibility and trustworthiness among civil servants, and promoting politeness norms in public service. Consequently, society feels a collective moral bond, which becomes the foundation for building social solidarity. Thus, leadership based on Islamic values not only strengthens the spiritual aspect but also improves the quality of social interaction in the community.

Regent Irsyad Yusuf has succeeded in strengthening public morality in Pasuruan Regency by integrating Islamic values into his government policies. He encouraged programs such as Islamic boarding school-based character education, congregational prayer movements, and strengthening the role of mosques and religious figures in community development. In addition, he also promoted an anti-corruption culture and clean and transparent governance. This approach not only improves public ethics, but also fosters public trust in a government that upholds moral and religious values.

2) Legitimacy of Trust Among the Muslim Community

The Islamic theocratic leadership model also has a positive implication in the form of increased legitimacy and trust from the Muslim community toward the regional government. When public policies are formulated and implemented based on Islamic teachings, Muslim citizens tend to feel closer to the government and trust that it represents the values they adhere to. This legitimacy is crucial for strengthening social and political stability in the region. The community sees the leader not just as an

administrator, but also as a moral and spiritual figure carrying out their duties based on religion. As a result, public support for government programs is generally high, especially if those policies are seen as accommodating the interests of the Muslim community and preserving Islamic values. This creates a conducive environment for the implementation of development programs due to a strong sense of involvement and trust from the public in their leader.

The Regent of Sumenep, who is also a *kiai* (Islamic religious leader), is able to legitimize the trust of the Muslim community due to his strong religious authority and his status as a role model in the community's religious life. With a background in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and a central role in religious activities, he is viewed not only as an administrative leader but also as a moral and spiritual guide. This perception makes his policies—especially those based on Islamic values—more easily accepted and supported by the community. His legitimacy is further strengthened by his close ties with *pesantren* communities, local religious figures, and his leadership approach, which emphasizes principles of justice, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and public service in accordance with Islamic teachings.

3) *Limitation of Civil Liberties*

One negative implication of the Islamic theocratic leadership model is the limitation of civil liberties, particularly for religious minorities and people with different beliefs. When public policy is exclusively designed based on Islamic law without considering societal diversity, the potential for discrimination against non-Muslim groups or other belief systems increases. This can manifest in restricted access to public services, disregard for minority rights, or social and political pressures to conform to the majority's norms. In a plural society like Indonesia, such an exclusive approach can lead to social tensions, reinforce polarization, and even create feelings of alienation for citizens who do not belong to the dominant group. Therefore, leaders with a theocratic orientation need to be cautious and ensure that the application of religious values in public policies aligns with constitutional principles, such as justice, equality, and human rights.

4) *Marginalization of Vulnerable Groups*

Marginalization of vulnerable groups becomes a serious consequence of implementing the Islamic theocratic leadership model if not accompanied by an inclusive approach and awareness of equality principles. In this context, groups such as women, religious minorities, and certain communities risk being unfairly excluded from public policies that are rigidly based on religious doctrine. For example, regulations governing dress codes, gender roles in public spaces, or access to education and employment can indirectly limit the rights of certain groups if not interpreted progressively. This marginalization can widen social gaps and foster feelings of injustice in society. Therefore, it is essential for leaders adopting a theocratic model to maintain a balance between religious values and universal principles such as human rights and non-discrimination, so their leadership does not violate the spirit of unity and social justice in a multicultural society like Indonesia.

5) *Closure of Diverse Public Participation*

The closure of diverse public participation is a consequence of the dominance of a specific religious perspective in Islamic theocratic leadership, especially when public policy is designed and implemented solely based on the majority religion's interpretation without opening inclusive dialogue spaces. In a multicultural and multi-religious society like Indonesia, such a singular approach can ignore or even suppress the aspirations of other groups with different views or needs. For example, forums for

deliberation or policy-making may only involve certain religious figures, marginalizing the voices of minority groups, youth, or other civil society communities. As a result, the policies produced may not represent the diversity of society and could trigger social tensions. Therefore, a leadership model that is inclusive and opens public participation spaces widely for all segments of society is crucial to maintaining democracy and fairness in regional governance.

3.2.2 Implications of Pluralist Leadership on Civil Society:

The pluralism model emphasizes inclusivity, tolerance, and equality, and thus has various progressive implications for civil society:

1) Increased Citizen Participation

The pluralistic leadership model, which emphasizes inclusivity, tolerance, and equality, creates ample space for increasing citizen participation in public life. In this model, all social groups—both from the majority and minority communities—are recognized as equal in rights and existence. They are given equal opportunities to engage in decision-making processes, express their aspirations, and contribute to the formulation and evaluation of public policies. This condition fosters a democratic and responsive governance atmosphere that addresses the real needs of a diverse society. When every voice is valued and heard, public trust increases, and civil society feels a collective responsibility for regional development. Thus, pluralism not only strengthens social cohesion but also broadens the base for healthy political participation in the life of the nation and state.

Mayor Gibran encourages the creation of interfaith dialogue spaces, supports cross-cultural activities, and involves various elements of society, including minority communities, in the planning and implementation of city development programs. He also strengthens partnerships with civil society organizations and local communities to create policies that are responsive to the needs of citizens. By ensuring freedom of expression and expanding citizens' access to decision-making processes, his leadership creates a sense of security and trust, so that the community is more active in participating in social activities, public deliberations, and regional development.

2) Strengthening Social Cohesion

The pluralistic leadership model plays an important role in strengthening social cohesion in society. In this approach, diversity—whether in terms of religion, ethnicity, or culture—is viewed as an asset that enriches society, not as a threat that needs to be avoided or eliminated. Leaders who prioritize pluralism will create a social space that respects and values differences, enabling society to live harmoniously and peacefully. This process facilitates the formation of closer relationships between different groups, reduces the potential for social conflict, and strengthens solidarity among citizens. When society feels that differences are respected and accepted, they are more likely to work together toward common goals, whether in social, economic, or cultural development. Strengthening social cohesion thus becomes an essential foundation for creating a more inclusive, stable, and sustainable society.

3) Protection of Minority Rights

The pluralistic leadership model also has a significant impact on the protection of minority rights, which are often marginalized in governance systems that are not inclusive. In a pluralistic approach, the rights of minority groups—whether in terms of public service, freedom of religion, or political representation—are guaranteed and protected fairly. A government based on pluralism ensures that all

groups, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or cultural background, have equal access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Furthermore, religious freedom is upheld, allowing individuals or groups to practice their beliefs without discrimination or restriction. In terms of political representation, pluralism demands that minority groups are given an adequate voice in decision-making processes, ensuring that their interests are accommodated in public policies. As a result, the protection of minority rights contributes to creating a more just, prosperous, and equitable society. HB X, as the Sultan of Yogyakarta, demonstrated his commitment to protecting minority rights in various ways, including through his policies to maintain harmony between groups, support cultural diversity, and ensure that all levels of society have equal access to basic rights. He understood Yogyakarta as a miniature of Indonesia with various ethnicities, religions, and cultures, so it is important to maintain unity and tolerance.

4. CONCLUSION

The leadership model of regional heads based on Islamic theocracy prioritizes religious values as the basis for decision-making and public policy. Leaders in this system are considered as guardians of morals and implementers of religious law, with legitimacy that comes not only from political ability, but also from spiritual depth. This leadership tends to be sacred, and leaders are responsible not only to the people, but also to God. Although it can strengthen bureaucratic ethics and public morality, the challenge lies in the difficulty of balancing religious principles with the principles of democracy and civil rights in a pluralistic society. On the other hand, the leadership model based on pluralism emphasizes more on respect for cultural, religious, and social diversity. Leaders in this model are expected to be able to maintain social harmony by avoiding discriminatory policies and encouraging active community participation in the decision-making process. Pluralist leadership focuses on inclusivity, where all groups, both majority and minority, have equal opportunities to contribute.

Both models have complex impacts on civil society. The theocratic model tends to strengthen religious identity but has the potential to limit the space for inclusion, while the pluralist model opens up space for participation and diversity but faces challenges in strengthening collective identity and consistency of implementation. Therefore, it is important for regional heads to balance moral values (religion) and the principles of inclusive democracy in order to serve all levels of society fairly and sustainably. Recommendation for regional heads is the importance of balancing moral-religious values with inclusive democratic principles in regional governance. This approach is generally acceptable because it allows leaders to maintain legitimacy among religious communities while also ensuring the protection of minority rights and broad citizen participation in democratic processes. This study contributes uniquely to the literature on governance and religion-state relations by illustrating how religious authority can be constructively exercised within local government, and how a pluralist leadership model can strengthen civil society capacity. For future research, the study opens avenues to further explore the implementation challenges of pluralism, such as maintaining policy consistency across sectors, reinforcing collective identity without undermining diversity, and examining how local bureaucracies can effectively mediate between moral values and democratic principles in diverse socio-political contexts.

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