

Tracing the history of shia in indonesia: History, perceptions, and contemporary challenges

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ABSTRACT

The existence of Shia as part of the treasury of Indonesian Islam is often marginalized in the mainstream narrative of history and religion, even though it has strong historical roots since the 7th to 9th centuries AD through trade and preaching routes, especially in the coastal areas of Sumatera and Aceh. In its development, the Shia community has experienced various dynamics, ranging from cultural acceptance to theological and social marginalization, especially after the reformation which was marked by increasing conservatism and identity politics. This study aims to explore the historical traces of Shia in Indonesia, examine public perceptions of it, and identify contemporary challenges faced. The research method used is qualitative based on literature studies with a descriptive-analytical approach to historical literature, relevant journals, official documents, and media reports. The results of the study show that negative perceptions of Shia are shaped by sectarian narratives, narrow religious education, and unbalanced media, which have an impact on social discrimination. Meanwhile, contemporary challenges include socio-political pressure, hate speech, and restrictions on religious freedom. Although various advocacy efforts and inter-school dialogue have been carried out, acceptance of Shia is still limited. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct more inclusive perceptions and policies to support a just and pluralistic religious life in Indonesia.

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Introduction

Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world is known to have diversity in religious understanding and practices. Behind the Sunni dominance, there are other Islamic groups that have colored the history and dynamics of religiosity in the archipelago, one of which is Shia, which has a historical trace since the 13th century through trade routes and preaching by scholars from Persia and Arabia (Hasim, 2012). Many religious practices in the Indonesian Islamic tradition show the influence of Shia teachings. Shia traditions and rites have a fairly strong trace not only among Shia adherents, but also in the Sunni community. One example is the commemoration of 10 Muharram, which is commemorated by Shia as the day of the death of Husain ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who died in the tragic event in Karbala on 10 Muharram in the year 61 Hijriah. (Dewi, 2016).

History records that the Shia community has long been present in Indonesia, especially in the regions of Sumatra and Java. Several historical relics, such as the Tabut

tradition in Bengkulu and Kerinci, show the influence of Shia that has merged with local culture. During the Dutch colonial period, the existence of the Shia community did not cause tension and relatively lived side by side with other Islamic communities. However, after independence, especially after the 1998 Reformation, negative sentiments towards Shia began to strengthen along with the increasing conservatism and religious radicalism in the public sphere.

The conflict that occurred in Sampang, Madura in 2012 is a real example of tension triggered by differences in religious beliefs between the Sunni and Shia communities. Differences in religious understanding and practice between the two groups have long been a source of tension that eventually culminated in violence (Humaedi, 2014). Since the Shia sect began to spread in the Sampang Regency area, anxiety has arisen from various parties, especially among the ulama, government, and the majority Sunni community. This tension is exacerbated by the growing view that Shia do not recognize the authenticity of the Qur'an as believed by Sunni Muslims. Some people even believe that the Shia community believes that the original Qur'an was brought by Imam Mahdi, not revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

This view was legitimized through the Fatwa of the MUI of East Java Province No. Kep-01/SKF-MUI/JTM/I/2012 on January 21, 2012, which stated that the teachings of Shia Imamiyah Itsna Asyariyah were deviant and misleading (Concerning the Deviant Teachings of Shia, 2012). This fatwa indirectly strengthened polarization and exacerbated existing socio-religious tensions. Differences in belief in holy books became a critical point that caused a strained relationship between the anti-Shia majority group and the Shia community in Nangkernang Hamlet, Omben District, Sampang.

This situation reflects how religious identity, especially Shia, still faces serious challenges in the midst of a diverse Indonesian society. On the one hand, the existence of Shia has strong historical roots and cultural contributions to the treasury of Islam Nusantara. However, on the other hand, this group has become the object of discrimination, delegitimization, and even violence based on differences in belief. Unfortunately, academic studies on the historical journey of Shia, the construction of public perception, and the contemporary socio-political dynamics faced by this community in Indonesia are still very limited. Therefore, this study aims to retrace the historical traces of Shia, understand the social construction of this group, and identify the contemporary challenges they face, as an effort to encourage an inclusive religious life and respect for differences in Indonesia.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach based on library research. to trace the history, public perception, and challenges of the Shia community in Indonesia. Literature study was chosen because it is based on the analysis of various written sources that provide an in-depth understanding of the historical and social dynamics of Shia. Data were collected through history books, scientific journals, document archives, and highly relevant contemporary media reports. History books were used to trace the early traces of Shia in the archipelago, while articles in scientific journals were used to provides a deeper academic perspective. Archives of official documents and media reports are analyzed to understand how discourse on Shia developed in various socio-political contexts. Data analysis is carried out using a descriptive analysis approach, namely describing the historical journey of Shia and examining how public perceptions were formed and the challenges faced by the Shia community.

The data is categorized based on three main themes: history, perception, and contemporary challenges. Furthermore, the data is compared and criticized to find patterns and relationships between various factors that influence the position of Shia in Indonesia. The analysis also considers global factors, including the influence of Middle Eastern politics on the dynamics of sectarianism in the archipelago. With this method, the study can present a more comprehensive and objective academic mapping in understanding the existence of Shia in Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

The Purpose of Aswaja-oriented Counter-Radicalism in TPQ Education

History of the entry and dynamics of Shia in Indonesia

Early traces of Shia in Indonesia

In tracing the historical traces of Shia in Indonesia, it is important to first understand the roots of its emergence in the history of Islam globally. The emergence of Shia is not merely the result of theological conflict, but also a reflection of the socio-political dynamics that emerged after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. When some companions immediately swore allegiance to Abu Bakr as caliph in Saqifah, there was also a group who believed that Ali bin Abi Thalib had stronger legitimacy to lead the people. Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari stated, "This group is called Shia because they are followers of Ali, by giving him higher rights than other companions." A similar view was also expressed by historian Ibn Khaldun and orientalists such as Ignaz Goldziher, who emphasized that the seeds of Shia had grown since the earliest days of Islam (Arkanudin, 2021). This understanding is an important foundation for reading the dynamics of the spread of Shia in various regions, including in the archipelago.

The Alawiyah Shiites are estimated to have arrived in the Nusantara region in the late 7th century to the early 9th century AD, after facing severe pressure from the Umayyad Dynasty since 674 AD (Musa, 2020). According to Dicky Sofjan, the background to the entry of Shiites into the Nusantara is closely related to the expansion of trade and the spread of Islam which had a strong influence in the Indian Ocean region. One of the important starting points for the spread of Shiites in the Nusantara was the Aceh region, especially the port of Peureulak, which is estimated to have received the arrival of the Shiite community since 173 AH or around 800 AD. According to Ali Hasjmy (1981) in Abidin Nurdin (Nurdin et al., 2016), this sect was brought by around a hundred Muslim traders from Arabia, Persia, and India who came via trading ships from Teluk Kambey, Gujarat, under the leadership of the Caliph. These traders were Shiite followers who experienced oppression in their home country, and their arrival had a major influence on the local community.

In less than 40 years, the Islamic Kingdom of Peureulak was established on 1 Muharram 225 H (840 AD), led by Sultan Saiyid Maulana Abdul Aziz Syah, a descendant of the Arab Quraysh who followed the Shia sect. This influence then spread to the Samudra-Pasai Kingdom, which was originally founded by the Ahlus Sunnah figure, Meurah Giri, in 433 H or 1042 AD. Although there was dynamics between the Sunni and Shia groups, in the end the Shia teachings were culturally accepted in Samudra-Pasai (Nurdin et al., 2016). During this period, many scholars and merchants from Persia and Iraq carried out the mission of preaching along with their economic activities (Sofjan, 2013).

The influence of Shia in the archipelago, especially in Aceh, is not only limited to religious aspects, but also touches on the political, cultural, and social dimensions of society. According to (Nasution & Miswari, 2017) the Peureulak Sultanate which was founded in 840 AD had quite sharp internal dynamics between the Shia and Sunni groups. When Sultan Alaidin Syed Maulana Abbas Shah (888–913 AD) died, conflict broke out between the two schools of thought which eventually led to civil war. The above is also in line with research conducted by (Muchsin, 2018) which stated that the tragedy above peaked in 956 AD which resulted in the kingdom being split into two: First, the Perlak part of Baroh (North) which was under the rule of Sayyid Maulana with its capital in Bandar Khalifah. Second, the Perlak part of Tunong (South) which was under the leadership of Makhdum Meurah 'Abdul Kadir Syah and the center of government was in Bandar Tualang.

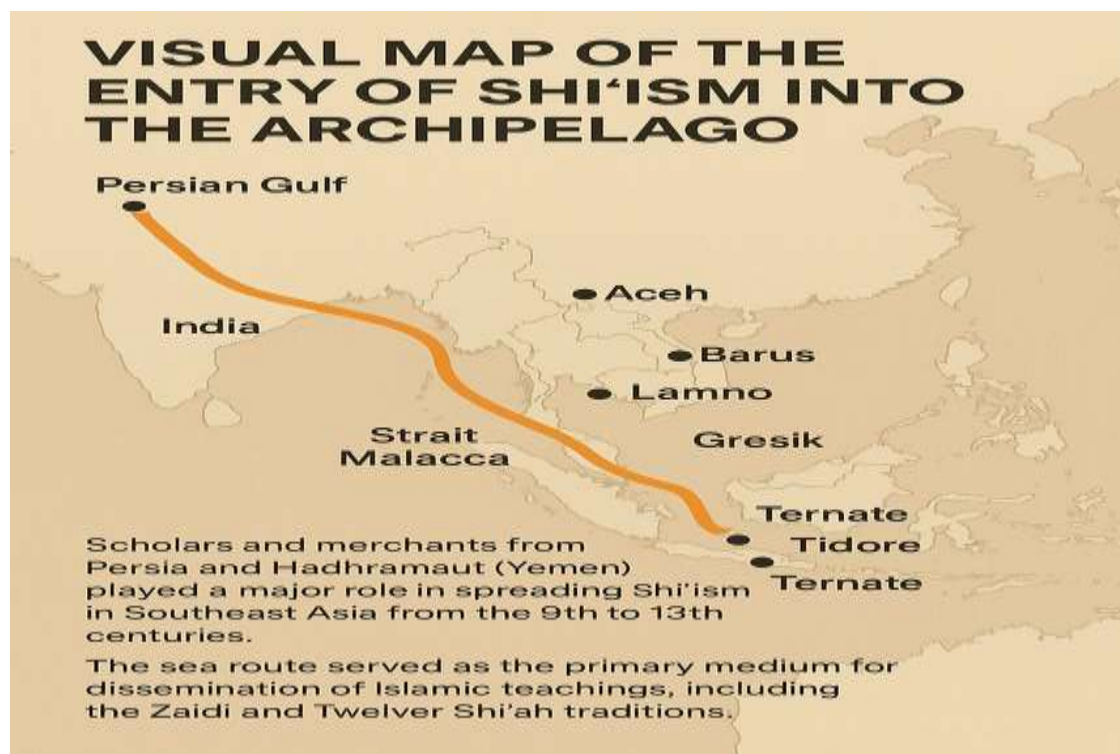
Political strategies were also used to reduce the tension between the sects. One of them was through the marriage of the daughter of the last Sultan of Peureulak, Sultan Makhdum Alaidin Malik Muhammad Amin Shah II Johan Berdaulat (1230–1267 AD), with the first King of Samudra Pasai, Al Malik al-Saleh. This alliance was not just a dynastic strategy, but also a symbol of the unification of the two forms of Islam that developed in the archipelago. This also shows that the acculturation between Shia and Sunni elements in

Indonesia did not always take place in tension, but often manifested in political and social harmony (Nasution & Miswari, 2017).

In terms of geopolitical role, the Peureulak region has a strategic position on international trade routes, making it an important port that is visited by Muslim traders from Arabia, Persia, and India. This trade interaction not only brought commodities, but also various Islamic values, including Shia elements. The Shia preaching brought by traders was often packaged in a form that was accommodating and in harmony with local culture, such as in respect for Ahlul Bait, the implementation of the Ashura commemoration, and religious traditions rooted in the principle of imamah (Nurbaiti, 2016)

By looking at these historical facts, the existence of Shia in Indonesia is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, it has been part of the long history of Islamization in Indonesia, helping to shape the landscape of Islamic diversity in the archipelago for centuries. As a complement to the previous description, the following map is presented to show the regions in the archipelago to Indonesia that have historically received the influence of Shia teachings.

Figure 1: The entry of Shia



This mapping helps provide a geographical picture of the initial concentration and spread of Shia teachings in various regions, both through trade routes and the migration of scholars.

Changes and Shifts in the Position of Shia in Indonesia

After the entry of Shia into the archipelago in the 9th century AD, the position of this school of thought experienced gradual changes along with the social, political, and religious transformations in Indonesia. Initially, the influence of Shia was quite strong, especially in the coastal areas of West Sumatra and the northern part of Java which were international trade routes (Azra, 2024). However, starting in the 17th century, the position of Shia began to be marginalized by the dominance of the Sunni school of thought, especially the Shafi'i, due to the influence of the Haramain scholars and Sunni tarekat networks such as the Qadiriyyah and Naqsyabandiyah (Dewi, 2016). In the 19th century, the Shia community began to experience social and theological marginalization, especially due to the strengthening of Sunni religious

authority in Islamic educational institutions. One of the main reasons for this change in position was the consolidation of Dutch colonial power which supported the majority school of thought for the sake of stability (Ricklefs, 2008) . In addition, the political ties of the Shia Dynasty abroad such as Persia did not have a strong influence in the archipelago because there were no intensive direct diplomatic relations. Thus, Shia in Indonesia is more developed in cultural and tarekat forms, not as a political institution. This shift shows how flexible Shia expression is amid the Sunni majority.

The position of Shia in the early modern era in Indonesia became increasingly hidden and sometimes misunderstood because there was no official institution that openly represented this sect. Many Shia adherents chose to express their beliefs through syncretic forms of culture and orders. Since the early 20th century, the position of Shia has been more associated with a hidden minority, sometimes equated with local religious sects such as Aboge or Kejawen, even though they have different doctrinal roots (Zulkifli, 2013) . This closedness also occurred because of social pressure and the growing stigma, especially after the emergence of the modernist Islamic reform movement that prioritized the purification of faith. The MUI report in the 1980s also began to examine the Shia school of thought as one of the schools of thought in the Islamic world that has fundamental differences with the Sunni school of thought (Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamm'ah) which is adhered to by Indonesian Muslims (MUI, 1984) . This weakened the position of Shia in the national Islamic forum. However, Shia influence persists in the form of traditions such as Ashura, pilgrimages, and religious literature in certain communities. The position of Shia continues to experience dynamics depending on the political context and relations between schools of thought.

Dutch colonialism had a major impact on the Shia community, especially in terms of restricting religious expression that differed from the majority sect. Since the implementation of the Ethical Policy system in the early 20th century, the Dutch began to establish modern schools and supervise religious activities, which resulted in the shrinking of space for esoteric Shia teachings. Zulkifli explains that "Shia teachings did not have a place in the official religious structure formed by the colonial government" (Zulkifli, 2013, p. 34) . The colonial government facilitated moderate Islamic groups or orthodox Sunnis as part of a social control strategy. There are no official records showing recognition or protection for the Shia community in the administrative structure of the Dutch East Indies, forcing them to assimilate or hide their identity. In his research, Zulkifli notes that "many Shia adherents chose not to express their beliefs openly in order to avoid pressure from society or the authorities" (Zulkifli, 2013, p. 45) . In addition, in the process of codification of Islamic law carried out by the Dutch, Shia doctrine was not taken into consideration, showing systematic exclusion. Zulkifli added that "schools of thought in Shia were never used as references in the compilation of colonial versions of Islamic law, either in the form of Compilations or local regulations." (Zulkifli, 2013, p. 51) .

Cultural discrimination against the Shia community was exacerbated by a campaign by several modernist Islamic groups that accused Shia of being a 'deviant teaching' in the context of the Islamic reform movement. This attitude was then institutionally strengthened through the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which since 1984 has issued recommendations regarding vigilance against Shia teachings. Although it does not explicitly state it as a deviant sect, the MUI identified a number of deviations that conflicted with the principles of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah. This guideline was then strengthened by the release of an official MUI book entitled *Mengenal dan Mewaspadaai Penyimpangan Shia di Indonesia* in 2013. Furthermore, in 2006 in the *Ijtimai' Ulama* forum, and in 2007 through the MUI Rakernas, this institution determined ten criteria for deviant sects and emphasized the MUI's theological position based on the Ahlus Sunnah manhaj, which implicitly excluded Shia from the MUI's version of Islamic orthodoxy (Amin et al., 2007) . This gave rise to resistance and defensive attitudes among Shia adherents. The impact of colonialism on Shia was not only in the form of structural repression but also formed a negative perception among Indonesian Muslim society. Zulkifli stated that "the colonial legacy helped shape the face of Indonesian Islam

which tends to be Sunni-centric and exclusive towards minority groups such as Shia" (Zulkifli, 2013, p. 78).

Entering the 1998 Reformation era, the position of the Shia community in Indonesia experienced new dynamics. Freedom of expression and organization guaranteed by the democratic system opened space for Shia to appear more openly in the public sphere. One important indicator was the establishment of the Association of Ahlul Bait Jamaah Indonesia (IJABI) on July 1, 2000, at the Asia Afrika Building, Bandung. This organization was led by Prof. Dr. KH. Jalaluddin Rakhmat, M.Sc as Chairman of the Shura Council and Dr. Ir. Dimitri Mahayana, M.Eng as General Chairman of Tanfidziyah (Ijabi, 2000). IJABI seeks to present an inclusive, nationalist, and moderate Shia face to build dialogue with other Islamic groups and the wider community. As stated by Ustadz Jalal, the nickname for the Chairman of the IJABI Shura Council, IJABI's commitment is to participate in the renaissance of Islam and enlightenment of the people's thoughts as well as defending the fate of the oppressed (mustadh'afin).

Enlightenment of thought, namely building an inclusive understanding of religion, not symbolic but substantive, and supporting freedom of thought and tolerance. IJABI's position then became stronger after the organization received formal legal recognition from the Indonesian Government on August 11, 2000. Thus, the post-Reformation marked a new phase in the shift in the position of Shiites in Indonesia from a hidden community under colonial repression and Sunni domination, to a minority community seeking to actualize itself amidst the challenges of modern intolerance. This transformation reflects the tension between freedom and exclusion in contemporary Indonesian religious life.

However, despite political relaxation, the social position of the Shia community remains vulnerable and problematic. The increasing religious conservatism and strengthening of identity politics in the post-Reformation era have actually encouraged a wave of intolerance towards minority groups, including the Shia. One of the most striking events was the Sampang tragedy in Madura (2011–2012), where the Shia community was expelled and persecuted by the majority group (Qodir, 2013). This event illustrates how democratization does not automatically give birth to pluralism but rather opens new space for religious majoritarianism. The Setara Institute in its 2017 report noted an increase in violations of freedom of religion and belief, including against the Shia community, which shows that intolerance towards minority groups is still a serious challenge in Indonesia (Setara, 2017).

Amidst these pressures, the Shia community developed various social and cultural adaptation strategies. They were more active in philanthropic activities, education, and intellectual discussions that emphasized universal Islamic values such as justice, love for the Ahlul Bait, and peace. Many Shia communities also chose to express their religious identity symbolically, for example through the commemoration of Ashura, pilgrimages to the tombs of Shia figures, and limited study of classic Shia texts.

Thus, post-Reformasi marks a new phase in the shift of the Shia position in Indonesia from a hidden community under colonial repression and Sunni domination, to a minority community seeking to actualize itself amidst the challenges of modern intolerance. This transformation reflects the tension between freedom and exclusion in contemporary Indonesian religious life.

Public Perception on Shia in Indonesia

Factors Influencing Public Perception

Many people view Shia as a heretical or deviant teaching from the majority of Islam (Sunni), even though this understanding is not always based on scientific data. This assumption is exacerbated by the often unfair narrative in various media and public lectures (Raharjo Jati & Halimatusa'diah, 2024). This negative sentiment is further rooted due to the many viral news stories showing sectarian conflicts abroad, such as in Syria and Iraq. This condition causes the stigma to spread without verification, even though the social and political context in Indonesia is different from those countries. As a result, the Shia community in Indonesia is vulnerable to social discrimination and even violence (Wahid et

al., 2021) . Several factors that influence public perception of Shia include political, social, religious, and information factors. Politically, for example, the Indonesian Ulema Council is one of the institutions that has the authority to carry out religious politics issued a fatwa that Shia in Indonesia is included in the religious understanding that must and needs to be watched out for based on the 1984 MUI fatwa, considered to deviate from the Standard teachings of Sunni Muslims in general in Indonesia (Abu Bakar, 2000, p. 195) . Sectarian narrative information is often used as a soft target for scapegoating, so as to gain public sympathy or as part of politics. The spread of biased or inaccurate information through social media also exacerbates negative perceptions (Aqil, 2024) . These factors form an information ecosystem that makes it difficult to distinguish between facts and propaganda.

Media narratives and public discourse are factors that reinforce the stigma against Shia in the modern Islamic landscape of Indonesia. Many media tend to present Shia in the framework of conflict, terrorism, and radicalism, rather than through a more balanced academic or sociological approach (Supriansyah, 2020) . In news reports such as the 2012 Sampang tragedy, the media described the conflict as a "clash of beliefs", even though the root of the problem was more of a social and economic conflict, such as research conducted by Humaedi, that the conflict in Sampang was not only caused by religious issues, but was closely related to social, economic, and political factors (Humaedi, 2014) . The public narrative on social media is even worse, where anonymous accounts often spread misleading anti-Shia content. Big data analysis by Drone Emprit shows that discussions about Shia on Twitter are mostly negative (Drone Emprit, 2020). This shows how the media is an effective tool in shaping public opinion in both positive and negative directions. This narrative is often packaged with religious and nationalistic rhetoric that makes it difficult to reject. As a result, public perception of Shia is shaped more by opinion than fact. The media's bias towards the majority group has marginalized minorities such as Shia.

In the context of religious education in schools and Islamic boarding schools, Shia is almost never discussed objectively. The national Islamic education curriculum emphasizes Sunni understanding and tends to ignore the existence of other schools of thought. As a result, students grow up with a narrow understanding of diversity in Islam (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020 , pp. 9-10) . Islamic religious textbooks do not include Shia as part of Islamic history, except in the context of conflict. This makes Shia portrayed in a partial and biased manner, reinforcing previously formed negative perceptions. In many traditional Islamic boarding schools, studies on Shia are delivered within the framework of "tahdzir" (rejection) or warnings against deviations. This narrative causes students to not have objective and fair information. As a result, exclusive and intolerant attitudes develop from formal religious education spaces.

Public education through counseling, seminars, and the media has also not touched much on the issue of plurality of schools of thought in an inclusive manner. Counseling programs run by the government and community organizations focus more on deradicalization than on cross-school religious education (BNPT , 2021) . In fact, cross-school education is important in building tolerance and reducing prejudice. Several NGOs such as the Wahid Foundation have started this initiative, but its scope is still very limited. The lack of state support in creating a tolerance education curriculum slows down the process of changing public perception (Kurnia et al., 2024) . Meanwhile, institutions such as the Ministry of Religion issue more normative statements without real action in the field (Ministry of Religion, 2012) . Without a systematic education strategy, public perception of Shia will be difficult to change. Cross-sector collaboration is needed to develop a comprehensive roadmap for school education.

Inclusive community-based education is key to reducing prejudice against Shia. Several interfaith communities in Yogyakarta and Jakarta have initiated open dialogues between Sunnis and Shia, with positive results in easing tensions (Maarif Institute, 2018) . This kind of dialogue allows the community to see Shia as part of the richness of Islamic heritage, not as a threat. Local governments such as in Central Java have also initiated interfaith forums to promote harmony (Bakesbangpol Central Java, 2023) . However, these

efforts are still sporadic and have not become national policy. A policy is needed from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion to integrate interfaith education into the national education system. If managed properly, community-based education can be a strong bridge in creating an inclusive and tolerant society. Changing perceptions of Shia will not happen instantly, but through continuous education and based on credible data, the future of inclusive Indonesian Islam can be realized.

Social, Political and Religious Perceptions

Social perceptions of the Shia community in Indonesia tend to be divided between acceptance and rejection, depending on the social and political context in each region. In some areas, such as Sampang, Madura, (Wahyudi & Wahid, 2015) . The Shia community experiences marginalization and violence, while in big cities such as Central Java, Sumatra, they are more accepted as part of the diversity of schools of thought in Islam (Aksa, 2018) . The stigma against Shia is often exacerbated by ignorance and the influence of negative media narratives. In addition, local political influences also worsen the situation, with some groups using religion to worsen the image of Shia (Akmaliah, 2017) . Polarized political attitudes affect the relationship between the Sunni majority and the Shia minority, creating tensions that can lead to violence. Communities exposed to extreme views of Shia tend to have more negative perceptions of them (Zattullah, 2021) .

The public response to the Shia community in Indonesia is greatly influenced by the level of understanding and knowledge about the Shia sect itself. In areas where the majority are Sunni, such as East Java, the response tends to be more skeptical and fuller of negative stereotypes about Shia. For example, the incident of eviction and violence against the Shia community in Sampang in 2012 is a clear example of how the public response can turn into physical violence (Widyadara, 2015) . Meanwhile, in more open and progressive areas, such as West Java, the public response tends to be more inclusive and accepting of the existence of Shia, although there are some obstacles. At the community level, much of this tension is caused by ignorance about the differences in sects and the influence of groups that exploit these differences for political purposes. In this context, inclusive and comprehensive religious education can help create a better understanding of the diversity of sects (Farida, 2014) .

The Indonesian government's attitude towards the diversity of Islamic sects, including Shia, reflects policies that support religious harmony and diversity. Although Indonesia adheres to a system that supports religious freedom based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, its implementation in public policy still often causes tension. The government is often in a dilemma when it has to deal with tensions between majority and minority groups, especially in terms of religion (Arisandi, 2022) . On the one hand, the government tries to maintain diversity and tolerance between religious communities through institutions such as Komnas HAM (Latuharhary, 2021) . On the other hand, the government's attitude towards Shia is often hampered by pressure from majority groups who demand that Shia be considered a deviant and heretical sect. Sometimes, more conservative government policies at the regional level worsen this condition, such as the proposal for a Shia Violation Regional Regulation in East Java by issuing regulations that limit Shia religious activities, even though the Governor of East Java at that time refused to declare Shia "deviant" and heretical, only that his authority was limited (KOMINFO East Java, 2012) .

Although the government prioritizes religious freedom in the principles of Pancasila, its implementation is often hampered by social conflicts that occur in society. The government is trying to overcome intolerance with a multicultural approach through education and anti-discrimination campaigns. However, tensions between the Shia and Sunni communities in several regions show that existing policies are not yet effective enough. In addition, despite government efforts to reduce violence against minorities, inconsistent policies often exacerbate distrust between groups. This is also seen in regional regulations that prohibit Shia religious activities in several places. This regulation seems to be an obstacle for the Shia community to freely practice their religious teachings (Widyadara, 2015) . Therefore, a firmer and more consistent policy reform is needed in prioritizing justice without regard to political and religious elements, so as not to harm one party.

The social impact of political policies on the Shia community in Indonesia is enormous. The Shia community often faces social stigma that leads to exclusion and discrimination. According to the Social Exclusion by (Levitas, 2005) , social exclusion occurs when a group is systematically excluded from social, economic, and political rights. In the context of the Shia community in Indonesia, this is very visible from the restrictions on the construction of houses of worship, education, rejection by the surrounding community, and discrimination in public services. In addition, the Social Stigma Theory from (Goffman, 2022) explains how minority religious identities can become "negative labels" that affect daily social interactions, both in work, education, and other social relationships. The social isolation experienced by the Shia community worsens their conditions, creates a sense of insecurity, and reduces their opportunities to contribute to social and economic life. In addition, the lack of inclusive religious education regarding the diversity of schools of thought and sects in Indonesia. The Islamic religious education curriculum in public schools tends to focus on the Sunni perspective without providing adequate understanding of other schools of thought or sects, including Shia (Navvab, 2018) . This has led to the growth of intolerance among students and the wider community, so that inadequate knowledge about the diversity of schools of thought in Indonesia has worsened this problem. Therefore, it is important to strengthen multicultural education policies that can reduce social tensions and increase tolerance.

Contemporary Challenges of The Shiite Community in Indonesia

In the challenges of the Shia community in Indonesia, politicians and political parties play an important role in the dynamics of identity politics that affect the existence of Shia. In many cases, politicians use religious issues, including relations with the Shia sect, to gain support from conservative groups. Certain political parties, for example, deliberately emphasize anti-Shia attitudes to attract voters who tend to be more conservative. This is clearly seen in several political campaigns, where Shia are positioned as a minority group that is considered "heretic" or "dangerous." This not only worsens the image of Shia, but also exacerbates tensions between sects at the local level. According to the Indonesian Political System and Religious Diversity (Hendra, 2016) , the use of this kind of identity politics often exacerbates social polarization in Indonesia.

The anti-Shia narrative in Indonesia has strengthened along with global Sunni-Shia tensions and is influenced by the conflict in the Middle East, especially between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has been exploited by jihadist groups and conservative mass organizations to frame the conflict as a religious war. In his research, Ali Makhsum stated that ISIS openly spread hatred against Shia which was then adopted by Islamic groups in Indonesia through slogans and campaigns, including the National Anti-Shia Alliance (ANNAS) (Makhsum, 2019) . This narrative is reinforced by fatwas from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) which declared Shia as a deviant sect (Fazeri, 2015) , then disseminated by the media and social platforms without adequate verification where social media also plays a major role as a means of spreading hatred. This campaign even spread to schools and mosques. As a result, violence against Shia has increased, as happened in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, where anti-Shia movements attacked groups considered deviant, even though the Shia community in the area was very small or undetected.

The impact of identity politics on public perception of Shia is enormous. When religious identity becomes a political instrument, society is often taught to see Shia groups as "different" and often "dangerous." In many cases, this narrative is reinforced by ignorance and stereotypes about Shia teachings. This creates a tendency to isolate the Shia community and worsen their marginalization. Even in everyday life, members of the Shia community often feel marginalized and discriminated against, both in the workplace, at school, and in social interactions. According to research conducted by (Wahid et al., 2021) , this discrimination has a major impact on the social and economic life of the Shia community in several regions of Indonesia.

To reduce the negative impact of identity politics on the Shia community, various efforts have been made by pro-tolerance groups and human rights organizations in

Indonesia. One of them is through multicultural education and inter-sect dialogue to increase understanding of religious diversity. Institutions such as the Wahid Foundation actively organize seminars, training, and media campaigns to spread moderate religious views and encourage tolerance between religious communities (Irawan, 2020). They also launched the Counter-Narrative Guide Module and Alternative Narratives of Tolerance and Peace as a guide for the community in recognizing and countering narratives of intolerance and violent extremism (Ds Junaedi, 2021). The Setara Institute also plays an important role in promoting interfaith tolerance and fighting discrimination. They developed the Tolerant City Index (IKT) which measures the performance of cities in Indonesia in managing diversity and social inclusion. Through the IKT, the Setara Institute encourages city governments and community elements to develop promotive policies, allocate budgets for the promotion of tolerance, and prevent incidents of intolerance (Setara, 2024). While these efforts show progress, a major challenge remains in convincing a public that has become accustomed to anti-Shia narratives. Report by Wahid Foundation emphasized that education and collective awareness are essential to minimize sectarian tensions in Indonesia.

Legal efforts to overcome discrimination against the Shia community in Indonesia have been carried out through several channels, although the results are still limited. Komnas HAM, as an institution responsible for protecting human rights, often issues recommendations to address cases of discrimination (Republikmerdeka, 2013). However, the implementation of these recommendations is often hampered by the lack of political commitment from the authorities. On the other hand, the Shia community has also sued discriminatory policies through legal channels, but they often face obstacles in the judicial process (Maududi, 2014). Several activists and legal institutions such as LBH Jakarta have provided legal assistance to the Shia community to seek justice.

Advocacy for the rights of the Shia community in Indonesia involves a number of non-governmental organizations and activists who fight for religious freedom and the protection of human rights. Human Rights Institute Watcht has highlighted discrimination against Shia as a serious problem in Indonesia (Human Rights Watch, 2013). In addition, there are several local organizations that support the Shia community, such as the Association of Ahlulbait Jamaah Indonesia (IJABI) which acts as a forum for Shia adherents, not only that, the Shia group also received support from Rusyan Fikr which is an important arena for the development of religious thought including the Shia sect (Syauqii, 2024). These advocates work to ensure that the Shia community can live their religious life without fear or discrimination. However, the main challenge is the lack of awareness and support from the wider community.

Despite legal and advocacy efforts, law enforcement against discrimination against the Shia community in Indonesia still faces many challenges. One of the biggest obstacles is the lack of awareness and knowledge about religious rights as stipulated in the Indonesian constitution. In addition, most law enforcement officers do not understand the importance of protecting the rights of minority religions, which often leads to ignoring cases of discrimination (Haidarrani et al., 2024). When cases of discrimination are reported, victims often do not receive adequate protection, and some are even forced to withdraw due to fear of intimidation. Therefore, it is important for the government to improve training for law enforcement officers and strengthen the legal system to provide better protection for minorities.

Conclusion

This study shows that the Shia community has been part of the history of Islam in Indonesia since the 7th to 9th centuries AD, especially through trade and preaching routes in the Aceh and Sumatra regions. The influence of Shia was once strong politically and culturally, even experiencing acculturation with the Sunni school of thought. Although its role has experienced ups and downs, its teachings remain alive in the form of local religious traditions. Public perception of Shia is generally negative and influenced by religious fatwas, media narratives, and a less inclusive education system. Shia is often positioned as a deviant

teaching, giving rise to stigma and discrimination that is not based on a complete and objective understanding. In the contemporary context, the Shia community faces serious challenges, such as identity politics, the spread of hate speech, and social pressure that causes restrictions on religious space. Efforts at inter-school dialogue, legal advocacy, and tolerance education have been carried out, but still need to be strengthened so that Shia can live equally in the diversity of Muslims in Indonesia. Thus, this study confirms that the existence of Shia in Indonesia is not a foreign or new phenomenon, but rather part of the long history and plurality of Islam Nusantara. However, to realize an inclusive religious life, it requires a reconstruction of perceptions based on education and fair policies as well as collective awareness of the importance of tolerance between schools of thought in Indonesia.

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