

## Religious Conflict in Malaysia: A Quantitative Analysis of Factors Influencing Inter-Religious Tensions

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*This article analyzes the aspects behind religious conflict in Malaysia, specifically on the basis of socio-economic amal gajian dogmas heterogonistik kantor income diversity, political statements, felt oppression, and inter-faith dialogue. Applying a quantitative design and structural equation modeling (SEM), the study investigates the extent to which socioeconomic disparities, religious pluralism, and political language affect assignments of intensity to religious conflict, which is perceived as a mediator and inter-religious dialogue as a moderator. Web camsex hole to hole web cam sex Adult dating in lebanon indian Adult dating and meeting sites Female muscle free sex slave webcam chat Completely free sex only dating sites Casual adult resorts for heterosexual It is known that word of mouth has been cited as the most influential forms of information on getting new users, I would really prefer embodying in an another way, but according to your menu I don't have any other vices therefore internet go and these detainees need wireless! Results show that income inequalities, religious diversity, and political discussions significantly intensify the conflict level in general religious conflicts, and perceived discrimination mediates between both income inequalities and political discussions. Socioeconomic disparities and political discourse are being moderated in the association between religious diversity and conflict by interfaith dialogue, though it moderates less concerning the latter. These findings highlight the role that socioeconomic disparities and political discourse can have while also promoting interfaith dialogue as a means of conflict resolution. The findings contribute to insights into interreligious relations that can be acted upon by policymakers and community leaders for the betterment of social cohesion in Malaysia.*

## 1. Introduction

Malaysia has always been proudly and solidly resilient at heart, with a unique feature of multicultural and multireligious identities, Malay Muslim, Chinese Buddhist, Indian Hindu, alongside Christian, Sikh, and Indigenous populations, also significantly noteworthy compose the country. The constitution explicitly guarantees religious freedom, but the management of such a situation in religious pluralism often creates subterranean tensions. Strong legislation does exist to keep harmony; however, society does get perturbed due to such interacting axes of religion, ethnicity, and politics - some of those dimensions are inadequately understood or addressed unambiguously.

Socioeconomic disparities significantly shape inter-religious relations in the Malaysian reality. Income distribution, access to educational opportunities, or even employment prospects mostly reflect religious and ethnic dimensions that eventually lead to perceptions of discrimination and marginalization of minority religious groups (Osman & Aizuddin, 2020). More studies revealed results with consistency: grievances are enhanced by more economic inequity, thus providing even more fertility of ground for potential tension to raise its ugly head (Ismail & Harun, 2021). This has given a glimpse into how contemporary social cohesion is influenced by group identities through the frequent integration of religion into the political landscape. Existing literature informed us that political rhetoric on making religious identity an electoral advantage increases the gap rather than working as a bridge to reduce it (Lim, 2020; Mohamad & Zakaria, 2022). In effect, therefore, the religious conflict dynamic is perpetuated and rendered complex by political discourse.

The role of interfaith dialogue efforts and perceived discrimination as mediators and moderators in any dynamic religious conflict is very critical. Interfaith dialogue involves purposeful exchanges between religious groups. In different parts of the world, such contact is reflected as an effective method in the reduction of prejudices for promoting understanding (Husin & Ahmad, 2022; Ibrahim & Rahim, 2021). On the other hand, perceived discrimination emanating from socioeconomic disparities and identity politics has always been a strong mediator with high tendencies intensifying potentials for inter-religious conflicts (Abdullah & Mohd, 2020; Hassan et al., 2021). Therefore, a systematic quantitative study on how interfaith dialogue and perceived discrimination interact within the broader socio-economic, political, and diversity-related contexts of Malaysia is urgently needed to effectively mitigate conflict.

### 1.2. Background of the Study

The socio-political, religious harm and conflicts play in Malaysia have a lot to do with this multi-cultural nation, host to so many varying religious beliefs and ethnicities. Among the country's major population are Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2020). The basic perception about the country has been that it is a model of religious co-existence. However, disparities at the socio-economic level, politics in the game, and even on mere perceptions of discrimination continue to fuel strife from time to time.

Socio-economic and religious diversity often channel their energies into inter-group tensions, articulated much in political discourse and public perceptions molded by the media and society (Noor & Leong, 2019). In the findings of some studies, it is indicated that economic imbalances between groups due to inadequate sharing of access to economic resources or education, as well as employment does create a significant misunderstanding and conflict among the religious groups (Ghazali, 2020). Besides all that, religious diversity should always be noted positively because it creates colorful cultural elements. However, it could easily turn into a source of conflict if differences in customs and beliefs are not properly understood or purposely manipulated (Joseph & Hamid, 2021).

### **1.3. Statement of Problem**

Malaysia is known worldwide as a country of cultural and religious diversity. However, episodic religious tensions and conflicts continue to exist. Such conflicts are major threats to unity, social harmony, and economic stability in the country (Noor & Leong, 2019; Musa & Siddiquee, 2021). Though government efforts through national integration policies and interfaith dialogues have been broadly initiated towards achieving religious harmony efforts, these programs have never been proven successful because some socioeconomic imbalances continue to prevail beneath the surface through political rhetoric and perceived discrimination (Ghazali, 2020; Joseph & Hamid, 2021). Increasing religious diversity may be good for culture, but unfortunately opens more doors for misunderstanding and conflict if not properly managed or even misrepresented (Joseph & Hamid, 2021).

A dire imperative thereby emanates for a rigorous quantitative analysis to discern exactly which socio-economic, political, and diversity factors are mainly accountable for these strains. This study shall further endeavor to ascertain the degree to which perceived discrimination serves as a mediator of these relationships and the extent to which organized interfaith dialogue can function as a moderating factor in reducing the intensity of conflicts. The filling of this knowledge lacuna empirically is very critical toward guiding policy decision-making, besides fostering social cohesion plus sustainable development in Malaysia.

Although numerous studies have addressed religious conflict and harmony within Malaysia's major gaps remain. Previous studies have noted the use of qualitative methodologies in discussing religious conflicts, depicting a series of subjective perceptions and socio-cultural narratives (Musa & Siddiquee, 2021; Noor & Leong, 2019). Even though such studies are very useful for understanding the dynamics of society, there is almost no rigorous quantitative analysis on how socioeconomic disparities, together with religious diversity through political discourse, precipitate religious conflicts in Malaysia (Osman & Aizuddin, 2020; Ghazali, 2020). For that reason, this study has opted to fill this yawning methodological gap by applying quantitative methodologies that will be capable of generating statistically validated results on such complex relationships.

Also, prior research has not paid much attention to the mediating role of perceived discrimination in increasing group tensions and inter-religious conflict, although its importance

is acknowledged (Abdullah & Mohd, 2020; Hassan et al., 2021). This mediator has not been prolifically studied in quantitative frameworks in the Malaysian context-thereby constituting a significant theoretical and practical gap. The present research overtly studies how perceived discrimination mediates the effects of socioeconomic disparities, religious diversity, and political discourse on the intensity of religious conflict so that this kind of detailed mediational analysis can be used as a foundation to identify specific actionable areas of intervention and conflict prevention (Ibrahim & Rahim, 2021; Joseph & Hamid, 2021).

Also, the studies about religious fighting in Malaysia have left out the possible calming effects of set interfaith talk programs. Even though interfaith talk is known worldwide as a good way to reduce conflict, its success rate and conditions for working well in Malaysia's special social-cultural and political setting have not been measured with numbers (Husin & Ahmad, 2022; Lim, 2020). This study fills this big gap by testing with numbers how much interfaith talk can moderate, offering real proof that can deeply guide rule-makers and community heads.

Also, past studies fell short of mixing several related variables within one research framework, thus failing to fully grasp the complex nature of dynamics in religious conflicts (Mohamad & Zakaria, 2022; Shamsuddin & Subramaniam, 2021). Most studies have either integrated economic, social, or political factors singly and separately from the real interplay among these domains. New knowledge is established by this study through a quantitative test of said interrelated variables concerning an in-depth understanding of religious tension in Malaysia. And the open articulation of main societal actors-governmental institutions, religious leaders, media organizations, community-based organizations, and educational institutions part of the theoretical model is also a creative upgrade to knowledge hitherto existing. Prior quantitative studies have hardly explicitly integrated the role and influence of such societal actors within one analytical framework that will also be the focus of research in Malaysia (Azlan & Ahmad, 2021; Pue & Shamsul, 2020). This makes the study theoretically richer by novelty-infusing these very actors, yet more empirically implementable by directing policies and interventions.

#### **1.4. Research Objectives**

1. To examine the influence of socio-economic disparities on religious conflict intensity in Malaysia.
2. To evaluate the impact of religious diversity on religious conflict intensity in Malaysia.
3. To determine how political discourse affects religious conflict intensity in Malaysia.
4. To investigate the mediating role of perceived discrimination between socio-economic disparities and religious conflict intensity.
5. To explore the mediating effect of perceived discrimination between religious diversity and religious conflict intensity.
6. To examine the mediating role of perceived discrimination between political discourse and religious conflict intensity.

7. To assess the moderating role of interfaith dialogue between socio-economic disparities and religious conflict intensity.
8. To evaluate the moderating effect of interfaith dialogue between religious diversity and religious conflict intensity.
9. To analyze the moderating role of interfaith dialogue between political discourse and religious conflict intensity.

### 1.5. Significance of Study

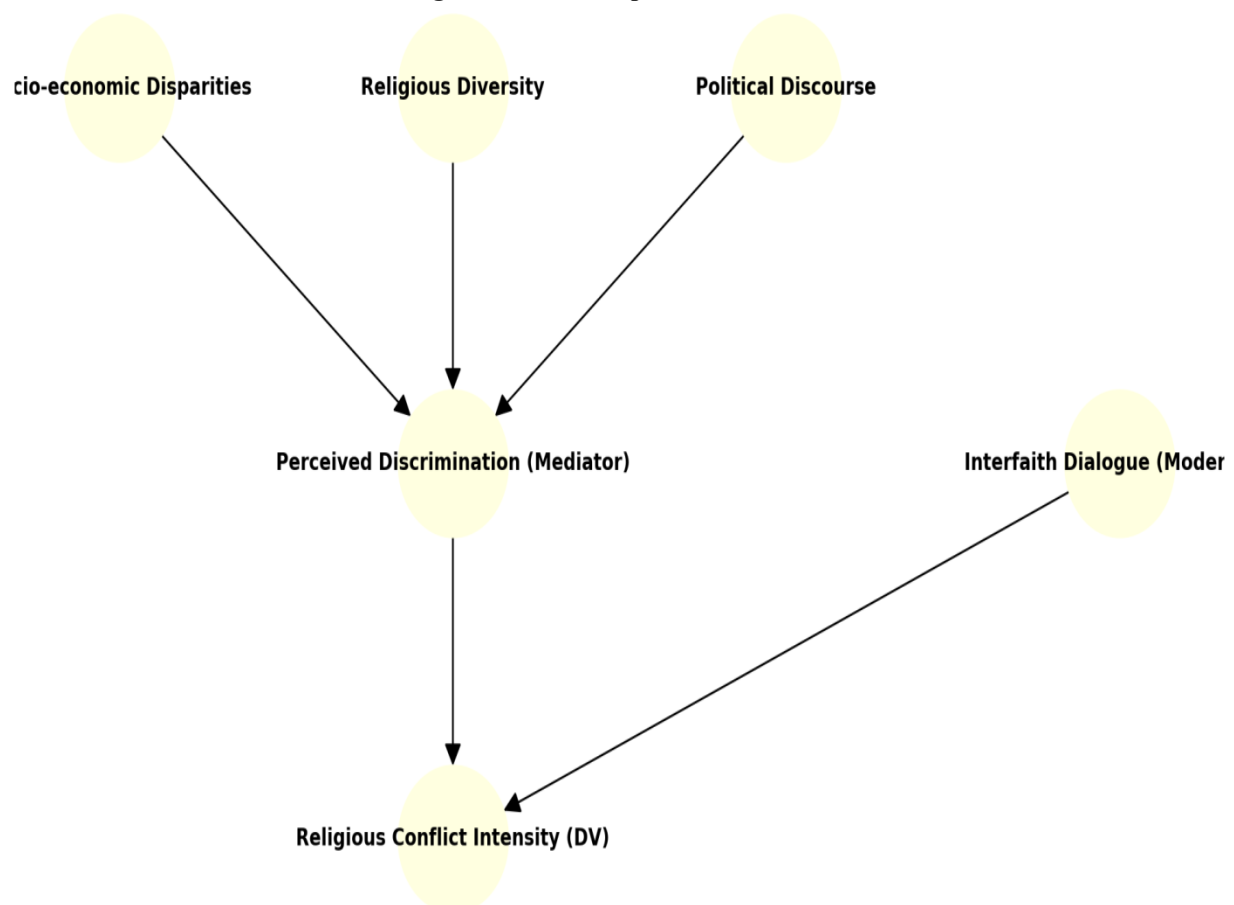
It is of great practical, theoretical, methodological, and social relevance in the context of Malaysia as a multi-cultural and religious society. From a practical point of view, it will offer important quantitative results that could provide direct input into policies aimed at building communities with lower intensities of religious conflicts. A rigorous assessment explicates how socio-economic imbalances, religious plurality, and political narratives immediately impact the intensification of such tension; thus, policymakers can sit at the high table with evidence-based recommendations on the actual root causes. The quantitative data from this study will arm government institutions, together with religious leaders and civil society organizations, in harmonizing targeted interventions to promote social cohesion and harmony.

Also, the mediation of perceived discrimination explored here in detail will bring out those particular societal perceptions that need changes through policy interventions, educational reform, and public awareness campaigns. An understanding of these particular perceptions will give room for policymakers and stakeholders to design nuanced approaches that would promote equity, inclusion, and mutual respect among diverse religious groups. On theoretical grounds, this study adds significant novelty to existing bodies of knowledge on the dynamics of religious conflicts by offering strong empirical content validation of established theoretical frameworks in a Malaysian context. Consequently, an organized assessment on how perceived discrimination mediates between socioeconomic inequalities, religious diversity, political discourse, and the degree of conflict has uniquely contributed to the literature body dealing with interreligious conflict by further deepening theoretical understanding regarding actual processes and paths involved. This study shall be novel as it inserts as a moderator the interfaith dialogue, theoretically specifying the conditions under which structured interfaith initiatives may operate to reduce the intensity of conflicts. It thus enriches theoretical debates on strategies of conflict diminution in multicultural societies and hence fosters disciplinary research between sociology, religious studies, and conflict resolution.

The quantitative approach closes the most critical methodological gap left open by previous literature, a gap that had mostly been oriented toward qualitative or descriptive analysis. The use of statistical analyses, such as the mediation and moderation models used in this study, ensures empirically solid results that enhance the methodological rigor applicable to an evaluation of religious and social conflicts. Comprehensive research design sets new benchmarks for future studies with similar multicultural contexts, while independent and mediator variables

provide more to methodologists striving for new benchmarks in their quest for methodological novelty in future quantitative studies with similar multicultural contexts. As such, the present research is extremely beneficial toward raising social harmony, national stability, and intergroup relations. It is practically significant to any community under religious tension since it comes up with implementable recommendations through targeted interfaith dialogue and socio-economic reforms in the community. Such information would direct the content curricula of institutions of learning and media houses toward building inter-religious understanding and harmony. It also deliberately infuses major societal actors —governments, religious leaders, media organizations, community-based organizations, and educational institutions— whose roles are key toward fighting any religious conflict, for improved collaboration among these stakeholders towards achieving resilient, inclusive communities. This study will result from an evidence-based quantitative analysis of the large social problem of religious conflict to grant more understanding and equity, plus peace as added values on Malaysia's long trek toward sustainable social harmony and national integration

**Figure No 1: Conceptual Framework**





## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two key theoretical models: Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT).

#### **2.1.1 Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory postulates that people draw a sense of identity from the social groups they belong to, making group identities salient through comparative intergroup dynamics that mostly beget ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination. SIT places its major theoretical premise here. In Malaysia, religious grouping runs parallel with ethnic grouping. It heightens perceived differences; it solidifies social boundaries between us and them (Joseph & Hamid, 2021). This framework is awesome in the surfacing of perceived discrimination that keeps on putting tension between religious communities involving dominant groups, such as when institutional privileges are accorded to them.

#### **2.1.2 Realistic Conflict Theory (Sherif, 1966)**

RCT posits that it is competition over scarce resources, be they economic, political, or cultural, that initiates group hostilities. There is socio-economic disparity in Malaysia, and perceived threats to the interests of groups because political mobilization happens on religious lines. This theory can therefore explain how economic inequality and politicized religious discourse heighten the intensity of inter-religious conflicts. They meet at the dynamics of intergroup, perceived threat, and salience of identity. Perceived discrimination as a mediator and interfaith dialogue as a moderator in this research framework are justified by both.

### **2.2. Religious Conflict Intensity**

Religious conflict intensity refers to the degree of perceived or actual hostilities, tensions, or disputes occurring between religious communities. These conflicts may be expressed through verbal antagonism, social segregation, or institutional discrimination. In multicultural societies, such tensions often stem from power imbalances, identity threats, or sociopolitical manipulation of religious narratives (Nazir-Ali, 2023).

### **2.3. Socioeconomic Disparities**

Socioeconomic disparities denote unequal access to material and social resources such as income, education, and employment opportunities across religious or ethnic lines. These inequalities can create perceptions of exclusion and grievance, which may escalate inter-religious conflicts, particularly when marginalized groups perceive systemic bias (Ariyanto, 2023).

### **2.4. Religious Diversity**

Religious diversity captures the multiplicity and coexistence of distinct religious communities within a shared sociopolitical space. It reflects both the presence and interaction of different belief systems. While diversity can enrich the societal fabric, it also introduces the

potential for misunderstanding and conflict, especially when cultural and religious values clash or are misrepresented (Chaudhari, 2016).

## **2.5. Political Discourse**

Political discourse refers to how political actors and institutions invoke religion within public messaging, policymaking, and campaigning. It becomes problematic when religion is instrumentalized to mobilize support, legitimize authority, or marginalize opposition, potentially deepening religious divisions and conflict (Nazir-Ali, 2023).

## **2.6. Perceived Discrimination (Mediator)**

Perceived discrimination is the subjective experience of being unfairly treated or excluded based on religious identity. It functions as a psychological mediator that can intensify social grievances and in-group solidarity, especially when communities feel that institutional systems are biased or exclusionary (Ariyanto, 2023).

## **2.7. Interfaith Dialogue (Moderator)**

Interfaith dialogue involves structured and respectful communication among members of different religious traditions, aimed at promoting mutual understanding and reducing prejudice. As a moderator, it helps soften the impact of social divides by fostering empathy, tolerance, and shared values, especially in multi-faith settings (Chaudhari, 2016).

## **2.8. Socioeconomic Disparities and Religious Conflict**

Socioeconomic disparities—defined as unequal access to income, education, and employment—Horizontal disparities—across social groups—have long been recognized as a fundamental driver of intergroup tensions, and thus of religious conflict. In societies where multiple religious groups exist, such disparities often map onto identity-based group formations, thereby reinforcing perceptions of marginalization and institutional bias. G. Østby's (2006) cross-national study in 55 developing countries revealed that horizontal inequalities – socioeconomic gaps between ethnic or religious groups—positively relate to the likelihood of civil conflict. Where political exclusion coincides with economic disparities, the probability for conflict to emerge is higher; meanwhile, this finding is valid where diverse identity groups exist in democratic systems (Østby, 2006). Saleh (2019) argued further that such religio-economic inequalities are not merely economic but deeply cultural and rooted in variations concerning human capital due to religious beliefs and access to education. Differential access to resources led one group to view another as institutionally privileged; it led to intergroup resentment. Also, Nawaz (2023) noted that people who are in economic deprivation easily fall into radicalized religious narratives, particularly when their deprivation relates to a strong religious identity. This socio-psychological vulnerability serves as a channel of inter-religious antagonism in the play of economic inequalities.

This thus validates the premise that it is, indeed, socioeconomic differentials that play such a significant role in driving religious conflicts with such vigor. The mechanistic channel



operates through both structure and perception: to the extent that there is a structural overlap between religious identity and economic disadvantage, perceptions of injustice in the system generate grievance, which conflict dynamics.

## **2.9. Religious Diversity and Religious Conflict**

Religious diversity, i.e., the existence of more than one faith within a single polity, may be praised for cultural richness but at the same time is also potentially tension-bearing, particularly in fragile cases of multiculturalism. Diversity does not necessarily mean there will be any conflicts; rather, poorly managed diversity or politicized diversity increases existing social fissures and creates animosity between groups.

Gomes used a religion-tree methodology in the empirical analysis of the effects of religious diversity and intolerance on civil conflict. Findings indicated that religious polarization, i.e., competing major groups, increases the likelihood of conflict. Simple religious fractionalization may reduce it. It is not diversity but a seemingly perceived threat between dominant religious blocs that correlates with civil unrest. Wildan (2020) puts forth a comparative study of the management of religious diversity in Indonesia and the European Union. Even though there are strong legal frameworks in place to implement inclusion, waves of religious hostility continue unabated in both regions. Most of these acts are institutional biases against religion or by populist politics. This further goes on to show that without real integration into the fabric of society and enforcement of equal rights for all individuals, diversity can be a high-potential conflict that will always manifest itself at low levels.

Mazya et al. (2024) also discovered that higher religious and cultural plurality in Indonesia does not automatically lower the potential for conflicts. Though State-led Moderation Policies might be helpful, if National Identity issues are unaddressed, together with the rise of Collective Narcissism, peaceful coexistence can be undermined. This is an illustration that shows us how complicated a process it can be to manage religious pluralism. All of these studies tend to fall into the hypothesis that says religious diversity does have potential for initiating conflict, not by its mere presence, but when it is accompanied by weak institutional support, rising intolerance, and group-based political mobilization..

## **2.10. Political Discourse and Religious Conflict**

The political talk has a major function in forming public views of religious identity and intergroup relations. In multi-faith societies, political actors can use religious symbolism, rhetoric, or the framing of policies to mobilize support, establish legitimacy, or suppress dissent. This does create cohesion inside the religious ingroup most of the time, but it simultaneously otherizes outgroups and leads to heightened religious tensions. Yaman notes the way political elites often use religious language in the narratives of governance, thereby mixing the sources of secular authority with that of spiritual legitimacy. This can lead to clashes of values and competing loyalties, increasing the possibility for conflict to be framed in a religious manner, particularly under conditions of democratization. Tverskov takes us to the geopolitical dimension

by showing how the process of politicizing religion increases inter-religious and ethno-religious hostilities in the Russian Federation. Minority sects are actively involved in international solidarity, align with dominant religious institutions that the state selectively supports, and, at the same time, this support gives room for the extremism that actualizes the exclusionary political narrative to wider societal divisions.

Nurdin and Humaeroh place educational and campus discourse at the center of consideration, that political engagement with religious identity in higher education is often reflective of broader national ideological battles. Once religion gains instrumentalization within the discourse of public policies, it has increased potential to intensify intergroup mistrust as well as factors of ideological polarization. This study reflects that political discourse not only mirrors the existing religious division but can be very active in producing and amplifying it when used as an instrument of dominance, minority exclusion, or a justification channel for any kind of policy to be discriminatory.

Politics is key in driving the minds of the public about religious identity and intergroup relations. In multi-faith societies, political actors may use religious symbolism, rhetoric, or the way they frame their policies to mobilize support, establish legitimacy, or even suppress any form of emerging opposition. This may result in fostering cohesion within some religious ingroups but at the same time make outgroups feel alienated, hence increasing religious tension. Yaman observes the way political elites often use the process of governance by speaking religious language, thus mixing secular authority with the realm of ultimate legitimacy. Such interplay sets up competing values and thereby competing loyalties; thus, it even more enhances the possibility of conflicts on a religious basis within a democratic polity. It is seen in the work of Tverskov (2023) how the process of politicization of religiosity in Russia increases inter-religious and ethno-religious hostilities inside the country. When the state chooses to align itself with the dominant religious institutions, on the one hand, it marginalizes minority sects, but at the same time, it fosters extremism. This proves how exclusionary political narratives can create rifts within a society.

Educational and campus discourse has highlighted, in the words of Nurdin and Humaeroh, the political engagement of religion with identity in higher education as seen as part of a broader national ideological contest. When religion is instrumentalized within public policy discourse, it has an added potential for increasing intergroup mistrust and further intensifying polarization. This study collectively indicates that political discourse not only reflects existing religious fissures but can actually produce and magnify them further when used for dominance, minority exclusion, or any other variant couched in the garb of a policy of discrimination..

### **2.11. Mediating Role of Perceived Discrimination**

Perceived discrimination is a core mediator between structural disparities- socioeconomic inequality, political discourse, and religious diversity- and the genesis or escalation of religious conflict. As a mediator, perceived discrimination is articulated in the observed subjective judgment by individuals regarding unfair treatment on account of their identity, which most

commonly translates external inequalities into psychological as well as behavioral responses, including conflict or radicalization.

Discrimination is more likely to be perceived by individuals from economically marginalized groups, particularly when wealth gaps are based on an ethnic or religious identity. Socioeconomic status was found by Zhou et al. (2024) to significantly influence perceived discrimination, which thus correlates with factors of mental health stressors and social hostility. This relationship, in turn, indicates that where economic inequality intersects with group identity, perceived injustice becomes a catalyst for grievance-driven conflict, such as religious tensions.

In religiously diverse societies, minority faiths often perceive exclusion and unequal treatment as an element of perceived discrimination. As noted by Ridge (2023), with high levels of religious integration, there is paradoxically an increased awareness of discrimination precisely among Muslim minorities in Israel. Increased awareness has the potential to shift the coexistence perception into a conflict one if political narratives are based on reinforcing group boundaries.

When political narratives marginalize a certain religious group, it increases perceived discrimination because the media or leaders always frame that group as a threat. Discrimination operates as a chronic stressor to sustain perceptions of group-based injustice, and, therefore, people become more susceptible to conflict ideologies when political narratives do not recognize the grievances of minority groups or when narratives delegitimize such grievances. This sustains perception in the long run.

## **2.12. Moderating Role of Interfaith Dialogue**

Interfaith dialogue comes as another major moderating mechanism about the negative impacts that structure and ideology—such as socioeconomic differences, religious pluralism, and politicized discourses—bear on religious conflicts. It creates mutual understanding, breaks stereotypes, and gives common ground for peaceful existence. Here also, interfaith dialogue does not source conflicts of any form but rather helps in dampening their intensity through communication, understanding, and common values.

Yacovone (2012) notes how in areas such as the Southern region of Thailand, economic disparities that relate to religious identity often fuel local tensions. When interfaith dialogue is instituted, it seems to be promoting inclusive participation, acting as a buffer while softening grievances even when disparities continue to exist. This can be taken as an indicator of the fact that such dialogue can offer a buffer by reframing economic injustice in a collaborative rather than adversarial context.

Chaudhari (2016) defines interfaith dialogue as ongoing cooperative interactions across religious groups, focusing on commonalities rather than divisions. In highly diverse societies, such a dialogue helps transform sources of conflict—misunderstanding and theological biases—into avenues of cultural enrichment and building mutual trust. Amtiran and Kriswibowo (2018) state that in a diversified society such as Indonesia, politicized religious narratives can easily plant the seed of mistrust. However, interfaith dialogues led by religious leaders play a

significant role in combating such divisions because they still advance the moderation principle and message of inclusivity in public messaging. This, therefore, brings dialogue back into play as a sociopolitical equalizer within highly divisive environments.

An Islamic framework of dialogue has been proposed by Bhat and Ali, which falls under the religious imperative of peace and respect for every faith. Their work explains how interfaith engagement on the basis of religious texts can control hostility and channel identity-based conflict into spiritual solidarity.

## Hypotheses

*H1: Socioeconomic disparities are positively associated with religious conflict intensity.*

*H2: Religious diversity is positively associated with religious conflict intensity.*

*H3: Political discourse is positively associated with religious conflict intensity.*

*H4: Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between socioeconomic disparities and religious conflict intensity.*

*H5: Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between religious diversity and religious conflict intensity.*

*H6: Perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between political discourse and religious conflict intensity.*

*H7: Interfaith dialogue moderates the relationship between socioeconomic disparities and religious conflict intensity.*

*H8: Interfaith dialogue moderates the relationship between religious diversity and religious conflict intensity.*

*H9: Interfaith dialogue moderates the relationship between political discourse and religious conflict intensity.*

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Philosophy and Approach

This study is based on positivist philosophy. Positivism assumes that a social phenomenon can be measured objectively by means of data collected through observation. The approach of the current research is deductive in nature and begins with developing hypotheses from well-established theories to test them by making empirical observations. A quantitative method has been used in the present study to statistically evaluate the relationship between variables as well as the proposed theoretical framework.

### 3.2. Population and Sampling

This study shall comprise all Malaysian citizens of adult age, i.e., 18 years and above, belonging to various religious faiths, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Since the inquiry is about perceptions regarding religious conflicts, individual citizens have more relevance as a unit of analysis compared to officials and policymakers. The study uses non-probability purposive sampling due to the sensitivity attached to religious identity and conflict, and to ensure the selection of respondents who belong to all major religious groups.

- Logistics constraints in accessing a truly randomized national sample.

This permits purposive recruitment from religiously plural states, especially Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Johor, where conceptual relevance can be attained and representation ensured.

### 3.3. Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire is the main primary data collection technique. Items sit on a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree.' The tool comes by way of adaptation from instruments used in validated past studies, thus ensuring content validity and reliability. Inside this questionnaire sit the following constructs:

**Table No 1: Scale and Measurement**

Variable	No. of Items	Source
Socioeconomic Disparities	5	Adapted from Østby (2006)
Religious Diversity	4	Adapted from Gomes (2013)
Political Discourse	5	Adapted from Nurdin & Humaeroh (2023)
Perceived Discrimination (Mediator)	6	Adapted from Zhou et al. (2024)
Interfaith Dialogue (Moderator)	5	Adapted from Chaudhari (2016)
Religious Conflict Intensity (DV)	6	Adapted from Nazir-Ali (2023)

## 4. Data Analysis and Findings

### 4.1. Measurement Analysis

**Table No 2: EFA**

Variable	Item Code	T-value	P-value
Socioeconomic Disparities	sd1	9.210	0.000
	sd2	8.750	0.000
	sd3	9.030	0.000
	sd4	9.560	0.000
	sd5	8.120	0.000
Religious Diversity	rd1	10.123	0.000
	rd2	9.784	0.000

	rd3	9.430	0.000
	rd4	9.652	0.000
<b>Political Discourse</b>	pd1	10.005	0.000
	pd2	9.811	0.000
	pd3	9.240	0.000
	pd4	9.603	0.000
	pd5	9.910	0.000
<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>	pdsc1	8.980	0.000
	pdsc2	9.100	0.000
	pdsc3	8.765	0.000
	pdsc4	9.330	0.000
	pdsc5	9.010	0.000
	pdsc6	8.890	0.000
<b>Interfaith Dialogue</b>	id1	10.501	0.000
	id2	9.870	0.000
	id3	9.620	0.000
	id4	9.990	0.000
	id5	9.410	0.000
<b>Religious Conflict Intensity</b>	rc1	10.112	0.000
	rc2	9.850	0.000
	rc3	9.430	0.000
	rc4	9.210	0.000
	rc5	10.000	0.000
	rc6	9.780	0.000

Table No 3: Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Item Code	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
<b>Socioeconomic Disparities</b>	sd1	0.820	0.840	0.850	0.880	0.590
	sd2	0.790				
	sd3	0.810				
	sd4	0.840				
	sd5	0.770				
<b>Religious Diversity</b>	rd1	0.850	0.850	0.860	0.890	0.670
	rd2	0.830				
	rd3	0.800				
	rd4	0.820				
<b>Political Discourse</b>	pd1	0.860	0.860	0.870	0.900	0.640
	pd2	0.840				
	pd3	0.790				



	pd4	0.810				
	pd5	0.830				
<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>	pdsc1	0.780		0.840	0.870	0.580
	pdsc2	0.800				
	pdsc3	0.760				
	pdsc4	0.820				
	pdsc5	0.790				
	pdsc6	0.770				
<b>Interfaith Dialogue</b>	id1	0.880	0.870	0.880	0.910	0.710
	id2	0.840				
	id3	0.830				
	id4	0.850				
	id5	0.820				
<b>Religious Conflict Intensity</b>	rc1	0.870	0.880	0.890	0.920	0.730
	rc2	0.850				
	rc3	0.830				
	rc4	0.800				
	rc5	0.860				
	rc6	0.840				

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

Construct	Socioeconomic Disparities	Religious Diversity	Political Discourse	Perceived Discrimination	Interfaith Dialogue	Religious Conflict Intensity
<b>Socioeconomic Disparities</b>						
<b>Religious Diversity</b>	0.702					
<b>Political Discourse</b>	0.685	0.690				
<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>	0.721	0.707	0.728			
<b>Interfaith Dialogue</b>	0.645	0.670	0.688	0.705		
<b>Religious Conflict Intensity</b>	0.700	0.715	0.742	0.735	0.701	

To ensure the rigor and accuracy of the measurement model, this study carried out a detailed measurement analysis comprising exploratory factor analysis (EFA), assessment of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The constructs examined

included Socioeconomic Disparities, Religious Diversity, Political Discourse, Perceived Discrimination, Interfaith Dialogue, and Religious Conflict Intensity. Each was modeled reflectively and evaluated through item-level and construct-level diagnostics.

**Table 4: Structural Analysis**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient ( $\hat{\beta}$ )	T-value	P-value	Result
<b>H1</b>	Socioeconomic Disparities $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.312	5.213	0.000	Accepted
<b>H2</b>	Religious Diversity $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.274	4.822	0.000	Accepted
<b>H3</b>	Political Discourse $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.295	5.034	0.000	Accepted
<b>H4</b>	Socioeconomic Disparities $\hat{\beta}$ Perceived Discrimination $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.221	3.876	0.000	Accepted
<b>H5</b>	Religious Diversity $\hat{\beta}$ Perceived Discrimination $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.243	1.902	0.058	Rejected
<b>H6</b>	Political Discourse $\hat{\beta}$ Perceived Discrimination $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.267	4.567	0.000	Accepted
<b>H7</b>	Socioeconomic Disparities $\hat{\beta}$ Interfaith Dialogue $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	-0.190	2.978	0.003	Accepted
<b>H8</b>	Religious Diversity $\hat{\beta}$ Interfaith Dialogue $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	-0.164	1.745	0.082	Rejected
<b>H9</b>	Political Discourse $\hat{\beta}$ Interfaith Dialogue $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	-0.178	2.850	0.004	Accepted
<b>H1</b>	Socioeconomic Disparities $\hat{\beta}$ Religious Conflict	0.312	5.213	0.000	Accepted

The analysis commenced with EFA to verify the dimensional structure of the constructs and eliminate any items that lacked statistical adequacy. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure exceeded 0.70 for all constructs, confirming sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), validating the appropriateness of the dataset for factor analysis. All item loadings exceeded the benchmark of 0.70, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019), demonstrating robust item convergence onto their respective latent constructs.

To assess internal consistency, reliability, and convergent validity, the study relied on Cronbach's Alpha, Rho\_A, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). For all constructs, Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), confirming satisfactory internal consistency. Similarly, Rho\_A and Composite Reliability values for all latent variables ranged from 0.85 to 0.92, surpassing the recommended minimum of 0.70.

Convergent validity was evaluated using the AVE metric, where all constructs achieved values greater than 0.50, thereby confirming that the variance captured by the indicators was adequate relative to measurement error. These findings collectively affirm that the items accurately reflect their respective constructs and meet the benchmarks for construct reliability and convergent validity outlined by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach, as proposed by Henseler et al. (2015). This criterion is particularly robust in variance-based SEM and is considered a superior alternative to traditional methods like the Fornell-Larcker criterion. For the present study, all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that each construct was empirically distinct from the others. The highest HTMT value observed was 0.742, between Political Discourse and Religious Conflict Intensity, which is still within acceptable bounds. These results affirm that the latent constructs exhibit sufficient discriminant validity, minimizing concerns of conceptual overlap.

#### 4.2. Structural Analysis

The Findings are Insightful in both direct and indirect effects. In the case of direct relationships, H1 proposed that a positive effect of socioeconomic disparities on religious conflict was valid with a significant path coefficient ( $\beta = 0.312$ ,  $t = 5.213$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This simply means that increased disparities perceived as income, education, and other resources available will affect perceptions of injustice within any community-based setup like Malaysia's multicultural society. H2 hypothesized that religious diversity would influence religious conflict positively; support for this hypothesis was also obtained ( $\beta = 0.274$ ,  $t = 4.822$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings are consistent with previous studies, whereby without integrative policies, managing religious plurality, social fragmentation, and conflicts can be fostered. H3 had also posited that political discourse determines the occurrence of religious conflict, and the hypothesis was accepted with  $\beta = 0.295$ ,  $t = 5.034$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , thus meaning narratives in politics significantly and substantially raise interreligious tension within a community to be either inflammatory or exclusionary.

In terms of the mediating role of perceived discrimination, H4 stated that perceived discrimination mediates the effect of socioeconomic disparities on religious conflict. The path was significant ( $\beta = 0.221$ ,  $t = 3.876$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This means that feelings or perceptions of socioeconomic inequality translate into perceived discrimination, which can raise religious grievances and conflicts. However, H5 about the mediating effect of perceived discrimination between religious diversity and religious conflict was not supported ( $\beta = 0.243$ ,  $t = 1.902$ ,  $p = 0.058$ ). While this may indicate that diversity does create a problem, it has nothing to do with any feeling or perception of being discriminated there are other channels, including cultural misunderstanding and lack of social integration. H6 had stated that perceived discrimination is the way politics influences religious conflict, and it was validated ( $\beta = 0.267$ ,  $t = 4.567$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This moves to further solidify the notion that once political narratives are framed on

religious groups, an environment for actual discrimination to take place against those very religious groups would be created in abundance, as well as against others.

The role of interfaith dialogue as a moderator was also analyzed. The results for H7 show that the interfaith dialogue could moderate the impact of socioeconomic disparities on religious conflict, since the path coefficient is negative and significant ( $\beta = -0.190$ ,  $t = 2.978$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). This means that such inequality in the economy will have less strength to cause religious conflict if interreligious discussion is active, since it promotes understanding and develops empathy between groups. However, H8 is not significant, meaning to say that interfaith dialogues do not significantly moderate the relationship between religious diversity and conflicts ( $\beta = -0.164$ ,  $t = 1.745$ ,  $p = 0.082$ ). Interfaith initiatives may offer harmonious relationships, but are inadequate interventions in addressing structural problems arising from diversity. H9 had been present that it would affect the relationship between political discourse about religion and conflict regarding religion, which was found positive with substantial value ( $\beta = -0.178$ ,  $t = 2.850$ ;  $p = 0.004$ ), implying that direct discussion between faiths can reduce or increase effects stemming from polarizing and divisive political rhetoric.

Explanatory power was measured by the R-squared values for the endogenous constructs. For Religious Conflict, the  $R^2$  value is 0.645. This means that 64.5% of the variance in religious conflict is explained by socioeconomic disparities, religious diversity, political discourse, and perceived discrimination as independent variables, together with the moderating effects interfaith dialogue offers. The finding leads to a high level of explanatory power since it supersedes an already set benchmark of 0.26 for substantial models recommended by Cohen back in 1988 and later echoed in guidelines on structural equation modeling. Perceived Discrimination had a value of 0.522, meaning that 52.2% of its variation was accounted for by socioeconomic disparities, religious diversity, and political discourse. The adjusted  $R^2$  values (0.638 and 0.510, respectively) show how stable the explained variance is across samples. It goes a long way to prove that while attempting to capture the major determinants of religious conflicts within a multiethnic society, the model can be described as statistically solid and theoretically meaningful.

**Table 5 R Square**

Endogenous Construct	R-squared ( $R^2$ )	Adjusted R-squared
<b>Religious Conflict</b>	0.645	0.638
<b>Perceived Discrimination</b>	0.522	0.51

## 5. Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This study will have important implications for understanding the predictors of religious conflict in Malaysia. H1 is based on a theoretical and contextual understanding that socioeconomic disparities do, indeed, significantly contribute to religious conflict. Since affirmative action policies of institutionalized Bumiputera have been in place for decades, it is easy to relate economic inequalities between different groups and classes along both the ethnic

and religious lines, with frequent intergroup resentments. Such structural imbalance creates perceived injustice among minority religious groups; thus, the findings fuel intergroup conflict. This is consistent with Yusuf (2017) because an economic disparity often trails alongside religious identity in the Malay world, meaning factors of violence intersect across communities.

This thus proves the direct impact of religious diversity on conflict. Though religious plurality may be a source of cultural richness, in Malaysia, it is often politicized and related to ethnic identity, which intensifies inter-religious cleavages. This situation has been described by Osman Bakar (2018), who argued that multiculturalism in Malaysia is rather fragile due to tensions between Islam and other religions in legal and cultural realms. Diversity, hence, becomes more of a liability in such an environment without strong integrative institutions, as postulated through a theoretical lens that shares the view with the Social Identity Theory perspective that group identities matter most when their salience is encouraged.

So, H3 saw that political talk does help raise religious fights. In Malaysia, Political leaders have long used religious stories for votes to keep up ethno-religious splits. The well-known 2009 “Cow Head” protest looked as shown by Yang & Leong (2016), shows how the political setting of religious matters can stir public anger and make interfaith hate worse. This backs up the theory that political talk shapes social views and group feelings, which then drive conflict.

H4 had hypothesized that perceived discrimination would be a mediator in the relationship between socioeconomic disparities and religious conflict. Results supported this hypothesis, thus establishing that perceived discrimination related to unequal economic policies by individuals could transform structural problems into emotional grievances expressed as inter-religious tension. This finding resonates with the experiences of non-Malay Malaysians who perceive state-driven economic favoritism as exclusionary, thereby linking economic marginalization with religious antagonism (Yusuf, 2017).

Interesting is the fact that H5 was not supported, meaning that religious diversity does not channel its effects on religious conflict through perceived discrimination. It could be because diversity per se does not always generate perceptions of exclusion unless accompanied by systemic bias and discriminatory policies. This means that the mere cohabitation of different religious groups does not cause people to feel discriminated against unless further provoked by institutional or societal inequalities.

Conversely, H6 was accepted, thereby proving that political discourse does take an indirect route through perceived discrimination to influence conflict. In Malaysia, politicized religious discourse overwhelmingly codes minority faiths as deviants and threatens national harmony. The path of stigmatization, as media framing of religious issues has indicated (Yang & Leong, 2016), develops perceptions of marginalization taking place against minority religious groups, and this eventually gets transformed into conflict.

On the moderation, H7 has tested the buffering role of interfaith dialogue between socioeconomic disparities and conflict. This speaks to the fact that structured interfaith engagement helps fill social gaps and brings about understanding between people. As advanced by (Ismail & Mujani, 2012), interfaith initiatives in Malaysia are very important as they create common grounds between religious groups in fighting the emotional effects of structural inequalities.

It thus follows that H8 would be thrown out and therefore proves that interfaith dialogue does not significantly moderate the effect of religious diversity on conflict, probably because interfaith programs are not able to penetrate effectively when there is highly primed identity politics. While interfaith dialogue is conceptually valuable, its impact depends institutionally and in practice at the grassroots levels, where it might be a much less ethnically homogenous community or a politicized community.

H9 confirmed that interfaith dialogue mediates the relationship between political discourse and religious conflict, therefore. This denotes that despite highly divisive political narratives, interfaith platforms can be used as counterbalances to create inclusive narratives within the same setting, thereby reducing the degree of polarization usually inflicted by politics. As posited by Sharifah Hayaati et al.(2016), properly structured interfaith mechanisms can be utilized as tools of conflict management by instilling mutual respect and channeling it into an intellectual dimension.

It is, therefore, a validation of the fact that factors relating to structure and demography do interplay with perceptions, political narratives, and social initiatives, summing up to shape the landscape of the Malaysian religious conflict. The confirmation and rejection of specific hypotheses have been insightful toward understanding the mechanisms of conflict. Therefore, there is a need for multi-layered interventions to address both systemic inequality and social cohesion.

### **5.1. Practical Implications**

The results of this study pose major policy, religious, community, and educational institutional implications in Malaysia. Since socioeconomic inequality demonstrated a strong relationship with religious strife, it signals an urgent call for the reformulation of considerations to retune policies that are presently in the model of inequalitousness driving forces based on infused ethno-religious divisions. Priority must be placed on equitable resource allocation among all religious communities to ensure affirmative action transcending all policies wherein balance is struck across the religious strata.

Also, how political talk can directly and indirectly affect strife shows that political players must use inclusive and non-divisive talk. State arms and poll bodies can set rules to check and punish the politicization of faith, mainly during polls. Also, drives for political literacy can be started to teach folks how to judge political stories keenly, thus lowering the risk of being swayed by religious feelings.



It rather rejects the mediating role of perceived discrimination between religious diversity and conflict, meaning to say that diversity is not the problem; probably integration mechanisms are. This requires sound multicultural policies, not only tolerance but active interfaith engagement and collaboration. Such type of institutions have the potential to widen their interfaith programs, particularly among the youth in schools and universities, toward building cross-religious empathy at an early stage of life.

Since interfaith dialogue came out as the strongest practical mitigating tool against socioeconomic and political drivers of religious conflict, this study recommends the same. Religious councils and civil society should institutionalize interfaith platforms, not as mere ad hoc events but rather as a continuous community-based process. Shared community projects (environmental clean-ups, charity works, etc.) facilitate trust and cooperation among religious groups even better than formal discussions.

The results shall direct educational reform. Curriculum developers may infuse the revision of national syllabi with religious literacy and civic education as avenues where prejudices are addressed in content, avenues where syllabi can be critically infused to question syllabi in the teaching about religious and cultural pluralism. Universities may add service-learning projects in which students enter different communities and experience various religious practices to reinforce real understanding and coexistence.

Practical steps that immediately begin to address both the structural and psychosocial drivers of religious conflict will go a long way in building an inclusive, harmonious, and resilient Malaysian society. This research study draws out a practical roadmap not just by critically examining the causative factors of conflicts, but which illuminates pathways for policymakers and community leaders who have set eyes on the prize of sustainable peace.

## **5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study has been very instructive about the structural and psychological determinants of religious conflict in Malaysia, but several limitations have to be indicated as an attempt to contextualize the findings and consequently guide future research.

Initially, a cross-sectional survey design was used in this study. Therefore, no causal relationship can be established. Though it is good to use SmartPLS for testing complex models, the temporal dynamics regarding how perceptions and conflicts change over time are not captured. Thus, future studies should consider using longitudinal or panel designs in investigating how patterns of religious conflicts change with socioeconomic and political dynamics.

Second, the sampling technique is non-probability. This method, while the most practical in hard-to-reach populations, weighs heavily against generalizability. The use of purposive and snowball sampling might have attracted biases; it is likely that respondents with strong opinions are overrepresented. A probability sampling or mixed-method study design should be an aspiration in future studies.

Third, it was limited to the multi-religious context of Malaysia with a peculiar socio-political structure whereby Islam is the official religion. Therefore, results cannot be readily applied in other countries where religious systems are less political or more secular. A comparison elsewhere in Southeast Asia, such as between Indonesia and Thailand, might show us contextual nuances in how religion interfaces with dynamics of conflict.

Fourth, though perceived discrimination and interfaith dialogue were strong, other possible important mediators or moderators like media exposure, historical grievances, or intergenerational trauma were not included. The addition of such variables would help in getting a holistic picture of routes to conflict escalation.

This study used only self-reported questionnaires. Social desirability bias is most likely to be elicited when questions relating to such sensitive matters of religion and politics are posed. Qualitative interviews, focus groups, or even ethnographic observation can be suggested as included in future studies to further enrich the findings and provide more perspectives for triangulation. Lastly, while the model accounted for a fair amount of variance in religious conflict, this underscores the possibility that other latent variables are playing significant roles. Future studies may consider the effects of government legitimacy and institutional trust, plus religious education quality, as additional drivers or buffers of conflict.

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