

Violations of Religious Freedom and Belief in West Sumatra: Forms, Actors, and Resolution Patterns

Anjali Sabna¹, Martalia², Ismail Halim³

¹sabnaanjali@gmail.com, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

²martalia845@gmail.com, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

³ih10032000@gmail.com, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: sabnaanjali@gmail.com

Abstrak

This research aims to identify the forms of violations, the actors involved, and the conflict resolution mechanisms related to Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) in West Sumatra. This study uses a qualitative method with a documentation approach, sourced from advocacy reports, online media, and interviews with purposively selected informants. Data analysis was conducted thru the stages of reduction, visualization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The research results show that FRB violations in West Sumatra are dominated by restrictions on freedom of expression in the form of hate speech, followed by criminal acts against religious activities or places of worship, and pressure to convert to another religion. The most dominant violators come from state institutions, followed by community organizations, religious leaders, and other non-state actors. Minority groups, particularly Christians and Ahmadiyah followers, are the most vulnerable to violations, although cases also target other social groups more broadly. In terms of conflict resolution, the approach used tends to be dominated by a repressive formal legal pathway, accompanied by community-based mediation mechanisms. However, both approaches have not fully guarantyd substantive justice, especially for minority groups who often find themselves in vulnerable positions. These findings indicate a gap between the normative guaranties of FRB in regulations and their implementation practices at the local level. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen a conflict resolution system that is more inclusive, fair, and based on the protection of human rights.

Keywords: Freedom of Religion; Intolerance; West Sumatra; Social Conflict; FRB

1. Introduction

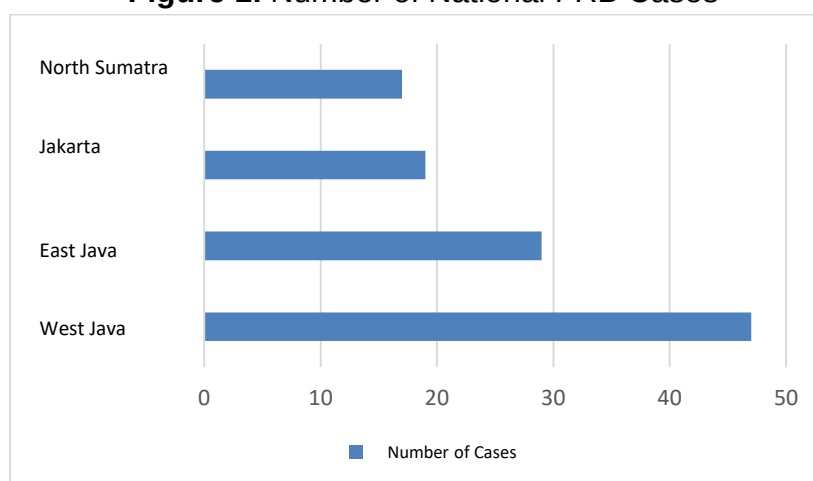
The guaranty of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) in Indonesia still faces various challenges that can be categorized into three aspects: conceptual, social, and legal (Imparsial: The Indonesia Human Rights Monitor, 2022; Jehanu, 2023; LBH Pengayoman, 2021; SETARA Institute for Democracy and Peace, 2024). At the conceptual level, some members of society view the Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) as a concept imported from Western traditions and consider it less aligned with Indonesia's religious culture. The idea of religious freedom is often misunderstood as an attempt to promote unlimited freedom, which is considered contrary to local values. Misunderstandings of the concept of religious freedom and belief not only impact the realm of ideas but also affect social dynamics, creating

obstacles in building harmonious relations among religious communities (Yudipratomo, 2020).

At the social level, the main challenge lies in the persistent prejudice and stigma against groups that hold beliefs different from the dominant group. Although Indonesia is known as a country that upholds pluralism, in practice, discrimination against certain religious or belief groups still often occurs (Fulthoni et al., 2009; Seo et al., 2025). These forms of discrimination vary, ranging from persecution of individuals or groups considered different, denial of fundamental rights such as access to places of worship, to acts of violence based on religion. The lack of collective awareness regarding the importance of tolerance and living together in diversity exacerbates this condition (Windar et al., 2023). Meanwhile, at the legal level, although Indonesia has various regulations governing freedom of religion and belief, the implementation of these policies is still far from adequate. In many cases, the law is more often used as a tool to limit the enforcement of rules related to violations of freedom of religion and belief, which is still far from adequate. It is not uncommon for victims from minority groups to be criminalized on charges of blasphemy or disturbing public order, instead of receiving the protection they deserve (Jehanu, 2023; LBH Pengayoman, 2021).

So far, various reports indicate that violations of freedom of religion or belief (FRB) continue to occur in various regions in Indonesia. Based on data collected by the SETARA Institute in 2023, there were 217 incidents of religious freedom or belief violations with a total of 329 national-scale violations. This figure shows a significant increasing trend compared to the previous year, where 175 incidents and 333 violations were recorded in 2022.

Figure 1. Number of National FRB Cases



Although the number of cases in West Sumatra is not as high as in other provinces such as North Sumatra (17 cases), DKI Jakarta (19 cases), East Java (29 cases), or West Java (47 cases) (SETARA Institute for Democracy and Peace, 2024), the social and cultural dynamics in West Sumatra make this region interesting to discuss. West Sumatra, with its strong Minangkabau culture and dominant Islamic

influence, often faces challenges in maintaining harmony among religious communities (A.Hakim, 2012). The politicization of religion in West Sumatra often triggers tensions between religious communities, especially when religious issues are used as tools to gain political support, which can exacerbate the situation of religious freedom, particularly for minority groups. Not only that, some local Sharia-based policies in West Sumatra, such as dress codes, also affect the level of FRB violations in this region. Minority groups such as Ahmadiyah and Christians often become victims of FRB violations, whether thru acts of violence, discrimination, or restrictions on their right to worship. Social conflicts involving these groups are often triggered by prejudice, and the low level of religious understanding among the community also becomes a catalyst for intolerant and exclusive attitudes (Shalihin et al., 2015).

The shift from an authoritarian regime to democracy should be good news for freedom of religion, belief, expression, and association in Indonesia. However, in reality, despite the larger space for freedom, violations of these rights still frequently occur, especially in the context of religious life (Situmorang, 2019). West Sumatra FRB activist, Angelique Maria Cuaca, highlights that the root of the problem in violations of religious freedom and belief (FRB) often begins with social conflicts involving the community. When differences in beliefs become the main basis for disputes, the potential for conflict increases. Deteriorating social and economic conditions further exacerbate the situation, creating an increasingly fragile and conflict-prone environment (Iqbal & Asa, 2021). Furthermore, Shalihin et al., (2015) in their writing, *The Map of Religious Life Issues in West Sumatra*, show that the root of the main problems in religious life in West Sumatra lies in the low level of religious understanding in the community. The lack of religious literacy not only opens the door for the development of intolerant attitudes but also increases the risk of conflicts triggered by misunderstandings of different beliefs. In facing this situation, the government's role is expected to go beyond merely issuing formal policies. Concrete steps are needed, including preventive measures to reduce potential conflicts, curative actions in responding to emerging issues, and rehabilitative actions to restore social harmony in the community post-conflict (Shalihin et al., 2015).

There are several studies that have discussed Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) with various focuses. First, studies that highlight the role of the state in guaranteeing constitutional rights related to freedom of religion, which show that although there are regulations related to FRB, the implementation on the ground still faces challenges (Al-Fatih & Aditya, 2020; Bagir et al., 2019; Hermanto & Isnur, 2024; Jufri, 2016, 2021; Latansa, 2020; Mahatir Manese, 2020; Marzuki, 2019; Pamungkas, 2014; Pasu Purba & Yudi, 2019; Pinandito, 2017; Prabowo, 2024; Situmorang, 2019; Syafi'ie, 2011; Tobroni, 2010; Utama & Toni, 2020; Yunazwardi & Nabila, 2021; Zainuddin, 2009; Zulhidayat, 2021). Second, other studies focus on discussing structural and social barriers in the implementation of religious freedom in Indonesia (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2017; Hannan, 2022; Jehanu, 2023; Muktiono, 2012; Nella Sumika Putri, 2011; Padang & Surajiman, 2022; Rahmah & Sudrajat, 2009; Salim, 2017). Additionally, these studies also examine how social and political factors

exacerbate injustices against minority groups (Mulia, 2010; Putra, 2017; Samosir et al., 2022; Sumbulah, 2014; Taufik, 2023; Ummah, 2016). Third, there are several studies that focus on the economic impact in the context of freedom of religion (Alon et al., 2017). Fourth, studies that discuss the concept of freedom of religion (Bakar, 2015; Horbachevska, 2024; Nainggolan, 2010; Utami, 2018).

Although various studies have addressed the issue of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) in Indonesia, most research still focuses on normative aspects, such as regulatory analysis, constitutional guarantees, and the role of the state within the national legal framework. On the other hand, several studies have also examined structural and social barriers in the implementation of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB), including factors of intolerance, discrimination, and the politicization of religion. However, these studies are generally macro in nature and have not specifically elaborated on local dynamics at the regional level, particularly in the context of West Sumatra, which has distinct social, cultural, and religious characteristics. Furthermore, research that systematically maps patterns of violations, identifies the actors involved, and links them to conflict resolution mechanisms is still relatively limited.

Starting from the above issues, this research not only focuses on normative or regulatory aspects but also on the empirical mapping of FRB violation patterns in West Sumatra over a specific period. This research specifically integrates three main dimensions, namely the types of violations, the actors involved, and the patterns of conflict resolution within a comprehensive analytical framework. With this approach, the research not only identifies the forms of violations that occur but also explains the relationship between the violators and the resolution responses taken. Furthermore, the focus on the local context of West Sumatra provides an important contribution to enriching the study of FRB in Indonesia, particularly in understanding how social, cultural, and power dynamics influence the practice of religious freedom at the regional level. Therefore, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of FRB studies as well as practical contributions as a basis for formulating more contextual and evidence-based policies.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design and a type of documentation study. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is capable of deeply understanding social phenomena in their natural context and emphasizes the meaning behind the data (Creswell, 2015). The unit of analysis in this study is incidents of FRB violations that occurred between 2019 and 2024, focusing on the identification of types of violations, actors of violations, victim groups, and patterns of conflict resolution regarding freedom of religion and belief (FRB) in West Sumatra.

This research is a documentation study. Data is sourced from reports by human rights monitoring agencies, such as the SETARA Institute, Imparsial, and the Legal Aid Institute (LBH), as well as online media coverage, scientific journal articles, and

relevant policy documents. Documentation study is used as the primary technique because it allows researchers to systematically trace social events thru available archives and documents (Bowen, 2009).

The data collection process is carried out thru the stages of inventory, selection, and classification of documents based on inclusion criteria, namely documents containing empirical information related to FRB violation events, involved actors, victims, incident locations, and case resolution mechanisms. To maintain data reliability, a verification process is conducted thru cross-checking techniques among different sources. Data analysis is conducted with reference to an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). In the data reduction stage, an open coding process is carried out to identify main themes, which are then categorized into research variables, such as types of violations, actors of violations, and forms of conflict resolution.

The analyzed data is then presented in the form of descriptive-analytical narratives supported by tables and data visualizations to show emerging patterns and trends. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, this research employs the source triangulation technique, which involves comparing data from various documents and publications. In addition, an audit trail was also applied to ensure the transparency and traceability of the research process (Creswell, 2015).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Freedom of Religion and Belief in Indonesia

Freedom of religion and belief, which is an important part of human rights, needs to be reviewed in two main contexts. First, the internal freedom that is absolute includes the freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and the freedom to embrace a religion or belief. In this context, no party has the right to limit that freedom. Second, the freedom to express or manifest religion or belief. In this context, that freedom can be limited by legislation for specific purposes, such as maintaining public security, public morality, and respect for the freedom of others. The right to freedom of religion and belief is a priority in various laws and policies, both international and national instruments. This right is a form of respect for human dignity guarantyd by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia Article 29 paragraph (2), which states that the state guarantees the freedom of every resident to embrace a religion and worship according to their beliefs. The state is fully responsible for protecting and upholding human rights constitutionally.

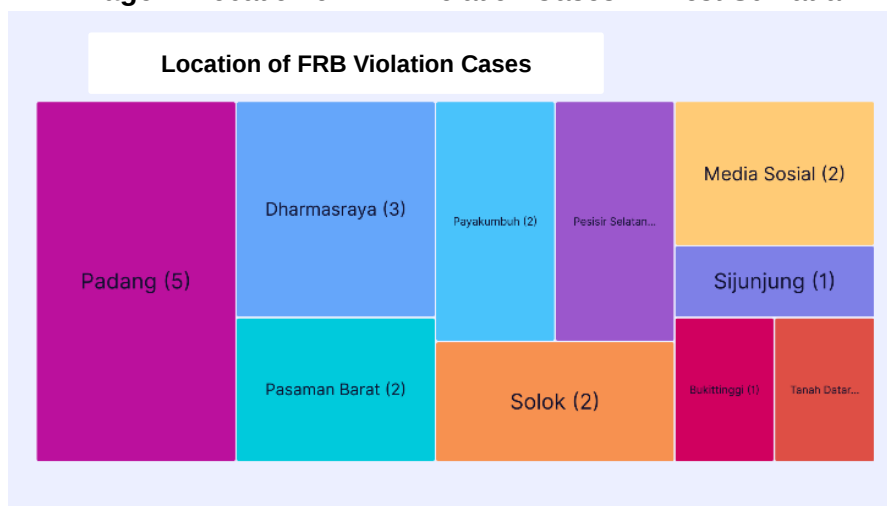
In Indonesia, there are various legal products that regulate interfaith harmony. One of the regulations that is often referenced is Law Number 1/PNPS of 1965 concerning the Prevention of Abuse and/or Defamation of Religion, which is still in effect to this day despite receiving much criticism and revision proposals (Arsil et al., 2018). In addition, legal regulations regarding the eradication of terrorism are also part of the policies related to FRB, such as Law Number 15 of 2003, which is the enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2002. Some provisions in this regulation have been updated thru Law Number 5 of 2018 to

address contemporary challenges in counter-terrorism efforts. In addition, Indonesia has also ratified various international conventions related to this issue, such as Law Number 5 of 2006 on the Ratification of the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing, 1997, and Law Number 6 of 2006 on the Ratification of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, 1999, which are still in effect to this day.

In the aspect of family law, Law Number 1 of 1974 on marriage is also an important regulation, especially in relation to the legal aspects of interfaith marriages and the rights of partners with different beliefs. This law has undergone changes, one of which is thru Law Number 16 of 2019, which amended the minimum age for marriage to prevent child marriage. Meanwhile, in the education sector, Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System remains the main reference in the administration of education, including religious education in schools. However, some of its provisions have been adjusted thru derivative regulations, such as Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards. As a nation that yearns for unity, it is important to implement these rules, including in religious life. Law Number 39 of 1999 explicitly states that Indonesia has a moral and legal responsibility to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments that have been accepted by the Republic of Indonesia (Putra, 2017). In practice, Robinson identified seven forms of intolerance in the name of religion. First, spreading false information about a certain religion/belief. Second, spreading hatred (hate speech) against a certain religious/belief group. Third, mocking, insulting, or blaspheming a certain religion/belief. Fourth, forcing a certain religion/belief on another group. Fifth, prohibiting a certain religious/belief group from performing worship or rituals. Sixth, belittling another religion/belief. Seventh, obstructing an individual's freedom to change their religion or belief (Pasu Purba & Yudi, 2019).

3.2. Forms of Religious Freedom Violations in West Sumatra

Violations of Religious Freedom and Belief in West Sumatra are spread across various locations. Padang City is recorded as the area with the highest number of cases, with 5 incidents, indicating a high level of violations of religious freedom and belief in this provincial capital. In the next position, Dharmasraya recorded 3 violations, followed by several other areas such as Payakumbuh, Pasaman Barat, Pesisir Selatan, and Solok, each recording 2 cases. Interestingly, FRB violations also occurred in the digital realm, particularly thru social media, contributing 2 cases. Meanwhile, areas such as Sijunjung, Bukittinggi, and Tanah Datar each recorded 1 case of violation. From the data, it can be seen that FRB violations occur not only offline but also online. This can be seen in the data visualization in the following figure 1.

Image 1. Location of FRB Violation Cases in West Sumatra

Processed by the author from various sources (2019-2024)

The types of violations against freedom of religion and belief (FRB) in various regions show variations influenced by the social, cultural, and political characteristics of each area. Sociologically, the dominance of the majority group tends to shape norms that restrict the expression of minority groups (Hannan, 2022; Ali-Fauzi et al., 2017). From a political perspective, religion is often mobilized as a tool to gain support, which has the potential to strengthen polarization and increase pressure on minority groups (Mietzner, 2018; Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Three main forms of FRB violations have been recorded in West Sumatra province. Among them, the most dominant violation is the violation of freedom of expression, particularly in the form of hate speech, with the number of incidents reaching 20 cases. The high number reflects the strong obstacles to freedom of expression, especially when it comes to religious and belief issues. Forms of violations in this category include the prohibition of certain religious or spiritual activities, insults against traditions or beliefs, labeling certain religious groups as heretical, difficulties in practicing worship, obstacles in managing population administration, and the implementation of discriminatory public policies.

Second, a form of violation of religious freedom and belief (FRB) in West Sumatra is incitement to abandon or convert from one's religion. Although the number is relatively low compared to other categories, this violation remains substantively significant, with one incident recorded. This form of violation includes invitations or pressure on individuals or certain groups to abandon their beliefs or convert to another religion. In some cases, this is manifested thru coercion to study certain religious teachings and the use of religious clothing that does not align with the beliefs held by the individual or group.

During the same period, the third type of violation related to criminal acts targeting worship activities or facilities occurred six times. Although the number is lower compared to violations of freedom of expression, these incidents have serious implications as they concern the fundamental right to practice worship safely and freely. These forms of violations include disturbances to the worship activities of

certain religious groups and acts of vandalism against places of worship. The three forms of violations are visualized in the form of a table in the following image;

Image 2. Forms of FRB Violations in West Sumatra

Forms of Violation	Number of Cases
Hate Speech/Restriction of Freedom of Speech	20
Incitement Not to Convert/Change Religion	1
Criminal Acts Against Worship Activities/Facilities	6

Image processed from various sources

3.3. Actors and Victims of FRB Violations in West Sumatra

Violations of freedom of religion and belief (FRB) are not merely a matter of intolerance, but also reveal who holds power or influence in shaping the climate of diversity in society. These findings indicate that the most dominant actors in the violations of religious freedom and belief (FRB) in West Sumatra come from the state itself. This shows that state institutions, both thru policies and the actions of field officials, play a central role in the restriction and violation of the right to freedom of belief. Beside the state, other actors contributing to these violations include community organizations (ormas), religious institutions, and traditional leaders. They occupy the second position in the number of incidents, indicating that local social and cultural pressures also reinforce discriminatory practices against minority groups or those considered different. The percentage of involvement of each actor in FRB violations can be seen in the following data.

Image 3. Actors of FRB Violations

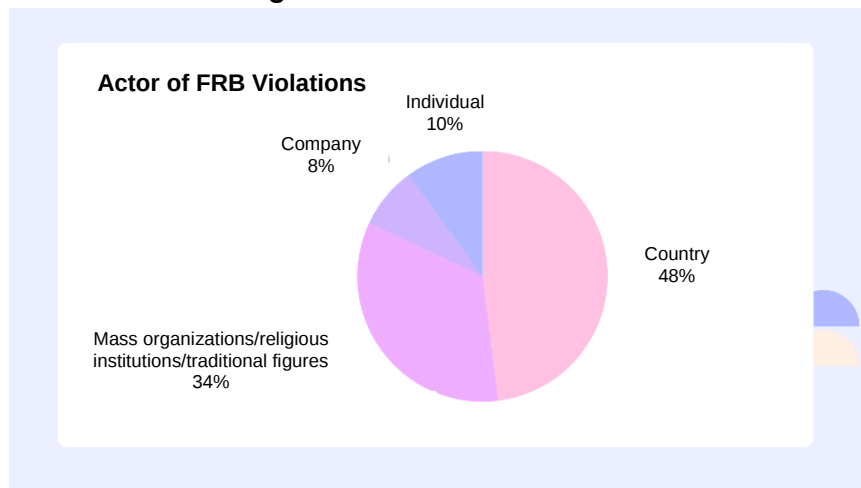


Image processed from various sources

Meanwhile, individuals and companies are also recorded as violators, albeit on a smaller scale. This shows that violations of religious freedom do not only originate from large institutions but can also occur in personal and private sectors. The complexity of these violators emphasizes that the protection of religious freedom

requires a cross-sectoral approach and stronger collective awareness at all levels of society.

In the context of West Sumatra, the analysis of the target groups of FRB violations shows that acts of intolerance do not only target religious groups that are quantitatively non-dominant but also extend to various layers of society with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The group of Christians holds the highest position as victims of violations, with a significantly larger number of incidents compared to other groups. This indicates the highest level of vulnerability for this group in the socio-religious context of the region. Other groups that also experience violations include Islamic groups, including Ahmadiyah.

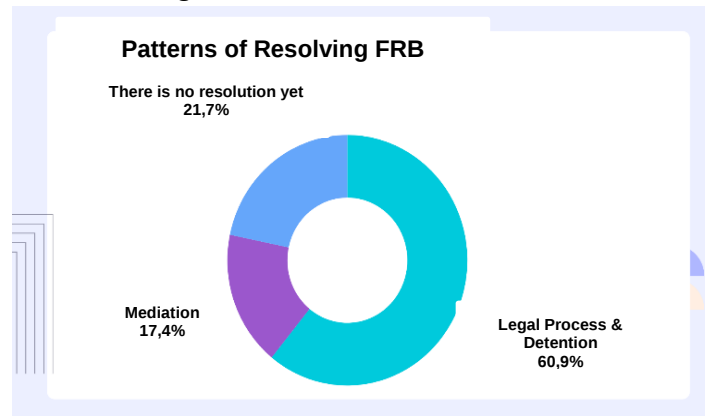
Beyond the religious dimension, FRB violations also affect ethnic groups such as the Chinese ethnic group and the Mentawai tribe, as well as residents from certain regions. In addition, there are also individuals and social communities that have become targets of violations, including religious leaders, students, and Christian students, human rights activists, karaoke singers, followers of Muhammadiyah, and local communities.

Image 4. *Victims of FRB Violations*



The image is processed from various sources

These findings indicate that FRB violations in West Sumatra are not limited to religious issues alone, but are also closely related to social identity tensions, customs, and the dynamics of the community's living space. In line with that, the resolution patterns become important to analyze in order to understand the extent of the state's and society's responses to various forms of these violations. Based on the visualization in Figure 5, the resolution of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) violations in West Sumatra shows an uneven approach.

Image 5. Patterns of FRB Resolution

The image is processed from various sources

3.4. Patterns of Resolving FRB Conflicts in West Sumatra

The resolution of conflicts regarding violations of religious freedom and belief (FRB) in West Sumatra shows diverse patterns, reflecting the complexity of relations between the state, society, and the groups involved in the conflicts. Generally, most cases of FRB violations are handled thru formal legal channels and, in many cases, end up in detention processes. This pattern indicates that the state tends to view FRB violations as serious issues, especially when the cases involve elements of violence, disturb public order, or have the potential to trigger broader social conflicts. This legal approach simultaneously demonstrates the active role of law enforcement in maintaining social stability and upholding the prevailing legal norms.

However, the dominance of a repressive approach thru legal channels does not always guaranty the creation of substantive justice, especially for minority groups. In several cases, law enforcement actually reveals structural bias, where victims from minority groups do not always receive adequate protection, and in some situations, may even face criminalization. This shows a gap between the legal framework that normatively guaranties freedom of religion and its implementation in practice. Factors such as the limited capacity of the authorities, social pressure from majority groups, and certain political interests also influence the direction of case resolutions, resulting in them not being entirely fair and impartial.

In addition to the formal legal route, some cases of FRB violations are also resolved thru non-litigation mechanisms, especially thru mediation. This approach generally involves community leaders, customary institutions, and local organizations as mediators who strive to resolve conflicts thru dialog and deliberation. This community-based resolution reflects the strong local values in managing social conflicts and serves as a relatively more flexible and quicker alternative compared to formal legal processes. In some cases, mediation is able to prevent the escalation of conflicts and maintain social stability at the local level.

However, the effectiveness of mediation highly depends on the bargaining positions of each party involved. In the context of an unbalanced majority-minority relationship, the mediation process has the potential to produce agreements that are not entirely fair, as minority groups often find themselves in a weaker and more

pressured position. Moreover, the absence of strong oversight mechanisms in the mediation process also opens up the possibility of compromises that sacrifice the basic rights of certain groups. Therefore, although mediation can be a pragmatic solution in the short term, this approach still requires a clear framework for human rights protection to avoid reproducing injustice.

On the other hand, there are also cases of FRB violations that are not adequately resolved, and are even tend to be ignored by law enforcement officials and policymakers. This phenomenon indicates the presence of obstacles in the conflict resolution mechanism, both in terms of access to justice, institutional bias, and social pressure that hinders reporting and handling of cases. In some situations, victims choose not to pursue legal proceedings due to concerns about social stigma or the potential for greater conflict escalation. This condition shows that the resolution of FRB conflicts does not only depend on legal instruments but also on the broader social context.

Thus, the patterns of resolving FRB violations in West Sumatra show a spectrum of diverse approaches, ranging from repressive law enforcement, community-based resolution thru mediation, to cases that are not optimally addressed. The diversity of these patterns reflects the absence of an integrated conflict resolution system that is oriented toward comprehensive rights protection. Therefore, efforts are needed to strengthen a conflict resolution system that is more just, transparent, and inclusive, which not only emphasizes law enforcement but also prioritizes the principles of substantive justice, protection for vulnerable groups, and the strengthening of equal dialog mechanisms at the community level.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FRB) in West Sumatra are a complex phenomenon influenced by the interaction of social, cultural, political, and legal factors. The dominant pattern of violations consists of restrictions on freedom of expression thru hate speech, followed by disturbances to worship activities and forms of pressure on individual beliefs. This emphasizes that the issue of FRB is not only related to religious practices but also concerns the space for expression and the social identity of the community. The actors of violations do not only come from society, but also involve state institutions, which are supposed to be the protectors of citizens' rights. The dominance of the state's role in these violations indicates issues in policy implementation and law enforcement that do not fully align with the principles of justice and human rights protection. On the other hand, the involvement of non-state actors such as community organizations and local figures shows the strong influence of social and cultural norms in shaping practices of intolerance. In terms of conflict resolution, the approach used is still partial and not yet integrated. The formal legal path tends to be repressive and has not fully guarantyd substantive justice, while mediation mechanisms are often influenced by the power imbalance between majority and minority groups. Moreover, there are still cases that are not optimally addressed, indicating structural barriers in access to

justice. Overall, this research emphasizes that the protection of minority rights in West Sumatra still faces serious challenges. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed that not only focus on strengthening regulations but also on improving policy implementation, enhancing the capacity of officials, and raising social awareness about the importance of tolerance and diversity. A more inclusive, fair, and human rights-based approach is key to realizing harmonious religious life at the local level.

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