

INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY AND THE QUALITY OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLYARCHY IN THE CASE OF GKJW MOJOROTO, KEDIRI

Fransiskus X. Gian Tue Mali¹, Angel Damayanti²

¹Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia

²Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia

fxgiantue.mali@uki.ac.id, angel.damayanti@uki.ac.id

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32332/moderatio.vxxxxxxx>

Received 5 January 2026	Revised 20 April 2026	Accepted 7 Mei 2026	Published 30 June 2026
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Abstract: This study examines the dynamics of Muslim–Christian relations and their implications for the quality of local democracy in the case of the GKJW Mojoroto congregation in Kediri City, Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative case study approach using in-depth interviews, document analysis, and literature review. The analysis applies Robert D. Putnam’s theory of social capital and Robert A. Dahl’s concept of polyarchy. The findings show that everyday relations between the GKJW congregation and the Muslim community have generally been harmonious through social cooperation and participation in community activities. However, such harmony has not developed into strong bridging social capital regarding the construction of a permanent church in public space. The dominant form of social capital remains bonding social capital, in which majority-group solidarity is stronger than cross-identity solidarity. From the perspective of local democracy, the case demonstrates that democracy operates procedurally through dialogue and administrative mechanisms, yet has not become fully substantive in protecting minority rights. This study concludes that the quality of local democracy in plural societies depends on the development of inclusive social capital and institutional protection for minority rights.

Keywords: social capital, polyarchy, local democracy, interreligious harmony, GKJW Mojoroto.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1998 Reformasi marked a major transformation in Indonesia’s political system toward a more open democracy through the expansion of civil liberties, decentralization of power, and increased public participation in the public sphere. Normatively, this transformation strengthened constitutional guarantees regarding equality before the law and freedom of religion as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Empirically, however, democratization has also generated new challenges, including the strengthening of identity politics, heightened sensitivity in majority–minority relations, and increasing religious contestation at the local level (Damayanti et al., 2022). In this context, the quality of democracy in Indonesia cannot be measured solely through electoral procedures and the existence of formal participation, but also through the capacity of political institutions and society to manage diversity in an inclusive, just, and democratic manner (R. Dahl, 1989).

One of the issues that most frequently generates tension in interreligious relations in Indonesia is the establishment of houses of worship. The Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs Numbers 8 and

9 of 2006 concerning Guidelines for Regional Heads/Vice Regional Heads in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Empowering the Religious Harmony Forum, and Establishing Houses of Worship was essentially formulated to preserve interreligious harmony through mechanisms requiring congregational approval and support from surrounding communities. In practice, however, the regulation often places the rights of minority religious groups in a position dependent upon the social acceptance of majority groups. The National Human Rights Commission has argued that the implementation of the 2006 Joint Regulation potentially creates legal uncertainty and opens space for indirect discrimination against minority groups, as the constitutional rights of citizens become highly dependent on local social dynamics (Suntoro, Agus, 2020). Consequently, the issue of establishing houses of worship is no longer merely an administrative matter, but also concerns social power relations, majority-minority identity configurations, and the quality of local democracy.

To explain these dynamics, this study integrates Robert D. Putnam's theory of social capital with Robert A. Dahl's concept of polyarchy. Putnam argues that the quality of democracy and the effectiveness of social cooperation are strongly influenced by the existence of social capital consisting of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and social trust (Putnam, 2000; Robert D. Putnam, 1995). Putnam distinguishes between bonding social capital, which strengthens internal group solidarity, and bridging social capital, which builds connections across social identities. In plural societies, the dominance of bonding social capital without sufficient bridging social capital may generate social exclusivism and intensify resistance toward other groups. Meanwhile, Dahl emphasizes that the quality of modern democracy is determined by the existence of polyarchic institutions that guarantee inclusive participation, civil liberties, protection of minority rights, and state neutrality in ensuring citizens' political equality (R. . Dahl, 1971; R. Dahl, 1989). Therefore, this study views conflicts surrounding houses of worship not merely as administrative legal issues, but as reflections of the relationship between social capital configurations and the quality of local democracy.

Various previous studies have discussed interreligious relations, conflicts surrounding houses of worship, and local democracy in Indonesia, yet they have not fully integrated these three dimensions within a comprehensive analytical framework. Research by Higa Awik Nugrahawati and Natal Kristiono (Nugrahawati & Kristiono, 2024) demonstrates that Muslim-Christian relations can remain harmonious through social cooperation, interpersonal communication, and community participation in everyday life. The study highlights the importance of daily social interaction in maintaining tolerance within plural societies. However, it does not explain how such social relations change when confronted with sensitive public policy issues such as the establishment of permanent houses of worship.

Research by Samsi Pomalingo and Arfan Nusi (Pomalingo & Nusi, 2020) on Muslim-Christian relations through a theological approach provides an important contribution to understanding interfaith dialogue and the potential reduction of doctrinally based conflict. Nevertheless, the study primarily focuses on normative-theological dimensions and does not address socio-political dynamics or public policy issues. Meanwhile, Ahmad Sadzali's (Sadzali, 2020) study on religion and the state in

Indonesia emphasizes legislation and the role of religion in public policymaking. Although important in explaining the legalistic dimensions of religion–state relations, the study does not directly connect these issues to the configuration of social capital and the quality of local democracy.

In addition, studies by Ichwanuddin and Widyaningrum (Ichwanuddin, A., & Widyaningrum, 2021) and the Komnas HAM report (Suntoro, Agus, 2020) demonstrate that the implementation of the 2006 Joint Regulation frequently turns the requirement for community approval into a majoritarian veto instrument against minority groups. These studies successfully reveal structural problems in the protection of religious freedom in Indonesia. However, most of these works remain focused on normative critiques of the regulation and have not systematically integrated analyses of social capital and the quality of local democracy.

Based on these previous studies, there remains a conceptual gap in explaining the relationship between social capital, majority–minority relations, and the quality of local democracy in conflicts over houses of worship in post-Reformasi Indonesia. This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how the configuration of bonding social capital and bridging social capital influences Muslim–Christian relations and the quality of local democracy in the case of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto in Kediri City. Thus, this study not only offers a critique of regulations concerning the establishment of houses of worship, but also provides a sociological and political explanation regarding the relationship between interreligious harmony and local democracy.

Based on this background, the research question of this study is: how do the dynamics of Muslim–Christian relations in the case of the construction of Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan Mojoroto (GKJW Mojoroto), Kediri City, influence the quality of local democracy in the post-Reformasi era? This study aims to analyze the relationship between the configuration of community social capital, majority–minority relations, and the implementation of local democracy in the context of conflicts surrounding the establishment of houses of worship. The study is also grounded in the theoretical assumption that the dominance of bonding social capital without sufficient bridging social capital across identities has the potential to intensify majority pressure against minority groups, thereby causing local democracy to function procedurally rather than substantively in guaranteeing equal rights for citizens.

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. The case of GKJW Mojoroto was selected because it represents the dynamics of conflicts over houses of worship and majority–minority relations within the context of post-Reformasi local democracy in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with religious leaders and parties involved in the church construction process, document studies of regulations and administrative data, as well as reviews of relevant media reports and academic literature. Data validity was strengthened through source and methodological triangulation.

This study offers three main contributions. First, it integrates Robert Putnam’s theory of social capital and Robert Dahl’s theory of polyarchy into a single analytical framework to explain the relationship between interreligious relations and the quality of local democracy. Second, it demonstrates that everyday social harmony does not

automatically produce substantive equality in public decision-making. Third, it emphasizes that strengthening bridging social capital across identities constitutes an essential prerequisite for the creation of inclusive local democracy in plural societies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations and their implications for the quality of local democracy in the case of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto Congregation in Kediri City. A qualitative approach was selected because this research aims to understand social meanings, actors' experiences, institutional relations, and the majority-minority dynamics that develop within a particular social context. Qualitative research enables researchers to understand social phenomena interpretively and contextually in natural settings (Perreault, 2011). Meanwhile, the case study design was chosen because the research focuses on a specific case characterized by strong social, political, and religious complexities within the context of post-Reformasi local democracy in Indonesia. A case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts in a holistic manner (Yin, 2018).

The case of GKJW Mojoroto was selected because it represents the dynamics of majority-minority relations in a plural society, particularly regarding the implementation of the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs Numbers 8 and 9 of 2006 concerning the establishment of houses of worship. Furthermore, this case demonstrates the paradox of democracy and tolerance at the local level: while Kediri City is widely recognized as one of the most tolerant cities in Indonesia at the macro level, social resistance toward the construction of a minority group's house of worship still emerges at the local level. Therefore, the case of GKJW Mojoroto is considered relevant for examining the relationship between social capital, religious freedom, and the quality of local democracy.

Field data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview techniques with key informants who were directly involved in the process of constructing GKJW Mojoroto. The primary informants in this study were Rev. Puput Yuniatmoko, serving as the pastor of GKJW Kediri, and Dr. Jesicha Yenny, S.H., M.H., serving as the legal counsel assisting the GKJW congregation in the administrative and mediation processes related to the church construction. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on their direct involvement, capacity, and strategic positions in the case under study. Semi-structured interviews were employed to provide flexibility in exploring the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the informants while maintaining consistency with themes relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015).

In addition to interviews, this study also employed document analysis and literature review to strengthen both empirical and theoretical analysis. The analyzed documents included laws and regulations, administrative documents related to the church construction, letters of support and rejection from residents, mass media reports, local government publications, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), reports from the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), and various

academic journals related to social capital, polyarchy, local democracy, interreligious relations, religious freedom, and the implementation of the 2006 Joint Regulation. Document analysis was conducted to understand the socio-political context of the case while simultaneously comparing interview data with relevant written sources.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis. All interview and documentation data were transcribed, classified, and analyzed through several stages, namely data reduction, open coding, theme categorization, conceptual interpretation, and synthesis of findings (Sugiyono, 2016). The coding process was conducted to identify major patterns related to bonding social capital, bridging social capital, norms of reciprocity, social trust, majority-minority relations, and the quality of local democracy. The identified themes were then analyzed using Robert D. Putnam's theory of social capital and Robert A. Dahl's concept of polyarchy as the study's primary analytical frameworks.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study applied source triangulation and data triangulation. Information obtained from interviews was verified through administrative documents, media reports, government regulations, statistical data, and relevant academic literature. Triangulation was conducted to minimize subjective bias and enhance the reliability of the research interpretation (Patton, 2015). In addition, this study also considered ethical aspects by ensuring that informants' participation was voluntary and by maintaining the confidentiality of certain informants' identities when necessary.

This study has certain limitations because the perspectives of community groups opposing the church construction could not be fully obtained through direct interviews. Therefore, the views of opposing groups were analyzed through official documents from the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB), media reports, administrative documents, and public statements related to the GKJW Mojoroto case. Nevertheless, the combination of interviews, document analysis, and source triangulation is expected to produce a comprehensive interpretation of the social dynamics and local democracy reflected in the case.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Muslim-Christian Relations from the Perspective of Social Capital

Robert Putnam (Putnam, 1993a) argues that the quality of democracy and the effectiveness of social cooperation are influenced by social capital, which consists of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and social trust. Social capital enables communities to build collective cooperation through repeated social interactions, mutual trust, and reciprocal norms. In the context of interreligious relations, social capital determines whether diversity develops into inclusive cooperation or instead gives rise to group exclusivism.

In the case of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto Congregation, the issues that emerged cannot be understood merely as an administrative conflict concerning the establishment of a house of worship. The conflict reflects the interaction between state regulations, majority-minority relations, and social perceptions toward religious symbols in the public sphere. Therefore, the Joint Regulation of the Minister of

Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs of 2006 constitutes an institutional factor influencing the dynamics of interreligious relations at the local level.

Demographically, Kediri City demonstrates a relatively clear majority-minority configuration. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Kediri City in 2024, the population of Kediri City reached 301,424 people, with Muslims forming the majority at 277,879 individuals, while Protestants numbered 16,076 individuals (B. K. Kediri, 2026). The number of houses of worship consists of 271 mosques, 624 prayer rooms (*mushola*), 76 Protestant churches, 3 Catholic churches, 1 Hindu temple (*pura*), and 3 Buddhist temples (*vihara*) (BPS Kota Kediri, 2024). These data indicate that the Protestant Christian community occupies a minority position both demographically and spatially.

On the other hand, Kediri City has consistently ranked among the top 10 Most Tolerant Cities in Indonesia for five consecutive years based on the Setara Institute's Tolerant City Index in 2025, ranking 8th nationally with a score of 5.792. The Kediri City Government attributes this achievement to political and bureaucratic commitments in maintaining interfaith dialogue and cooperation among religious communities (P. K. Kediri, 2026). Nevertheless, the case of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto reveals a paradox of tolerance between the high tolerance index at the macro level and social resistance toward the construction of minority houses of worship at the local level.

A similar phenomenon was also identified in the study conducted by Setinawati et al. (2025), which explains that although Indonesia's plural society constitutionally guarantees religious freedom, conflicts over the establishment of houses of worship still frequently emerge in local social practices, particularly those involving minority groups. This condition demonstrates that social tolerance in everyday life has not always developed into full acceptance of the symbolic expression of other religions within the public sphere.

Social Network Structure

The social network structure in Mojoroto demonstrates relatively harmonious everyday social integration, yet it has not developed into strong bridging social capital in strategic religious issues. GKJW Kediri City has existed since 1931 and is considered one of the oldest Protestant churches in the Greater Kediri area. In 2024, the congregation numbered approximately 2,370 individuals, or around 1,100 households, spread across Kota District, Pesantren District, Mojoroto District, and several areas of Kediri Regency. One of the congregation's developments occurred in Pepanthan Mojoroto, which consisted of approximately 150 households or around 300 congregants (*Wawancara Pendeta Puput Yuniatmokok (Pendeta GKJW Kota Kediri)*, n.d.).

According to Rev. Puput Yuniatmoko, the need to construct a church in Mojoroto emerged due to congregational service needs, particularly for elderly congregants and members who experienced difficulties accessing the main church in the center of Kediri City. The distance of approximately three kilometers from Mojoroto to GKJW Kediri City created challenges for congregants who did not own private vehicles. Therefore, in 1995, a 600-square-meter plot of land located on Jalan Lintasan RT 17 RW 05, Mojoroto Subdistrict, was donated to GKJW Kediri City for the construction of a

permanent church building (*Wawancara Pendeta Puput Yuniatmokok (Pendeta GKJW Kota Kediri)*, n.d.).

In 1997, a groundbreaking ceremony was conducted by the then Mayor of Kediri, Wijoto. However, several days after the ceremony, demonstrations rejecting the construction emerged from sections of the local community, resulting in the suspension of the project. Following this rejection, the conflict resolution process was never fully completed, causing the conflict to persist as a latent conflict embedded in the community's social memory until it resurfaced in 2024 ((*Wawancara Pendeta Puput Yuniatmokok (Pendeta GKJW Kota Kediri)*, n.d.).

Although the construction of a permanent church was halted, the GKJW Mojoroto congregation was still permitted to conduct regular Sunday worship services in a semi-permanent building at the same location for nearly three decades. This fact indicates that the social resistance that emerged was not entirely directed toward the existence of Protestant Christianity itself, but was more closely related to the presence of a permanent house of worship as a religious symbol within a predominantly Muslim residential public space.

According to Putnam, sustained participation in social associations should strengthen society's collective capacity to build cooperation across groups (Putnam, 1993). However, in the case of Mojoroto, the social networks that developed were more heavily dominated by everyday social interactions rather than deliberative networks capable of supporting inclusive public decision-making. For decades, both the GKJW congregation and sections of the surrounding community continued to maintain differing preferences regarding the construction of a permanent church.

Furthermore, only approximately 858 meters from the planned construction site of GKJW Mojoroto stands Saint Vincentius Catholic Church, located on one of Kediri City's main roads. This fact demonstrates that the people of Kediri City do not fundamentally reject the existence of Christian houses of worship, especially considering that in 2024 Kediri City had 76 Protestant churches (B. K. Kediri, 2025). However, because the planned GKJW church was situated within a densely populated residential neighborhood, the issue of church construction came to be perceived as a matter concerning local social space rather than merely the presence of another religion.

The desire of the GKJW Mojoroto congregation to possess a permanent church building was also influenced by the condition of the semi-permanent structure that had been used for worship for decades. The building was largely constructed from wooden boards, woven bamboo walls (*gedek*), and simple masonry, making it inadequate for routine worship activities. The building could only accommodate around 40 people, while Sunday worship attendance often reached 80–100 congregants. In fact, parts of the rear section of the building had collapsed and suffered significant damage.

On the other hand, everyday social relations between the GKJW congregation and the Muslim community in Mojoroto were generally relatively harmonious. Congregation members actively participated in neighborhood association activities (*RT/RW*), communal work activities (*kerja bakti*), Independence Day celebrations, and other social activities. The GKJW semi-permanent building had also been used several

times as a polling station during elections, for community meetings, and for various neighborhood social activities. These conditions illustrate the existence of fluid social relations in everyday life.

However, when the issue concerned a permanent religious symbol within the public sphere, these social networks proved insufficiently strong to prevent the mobilization of resistance. Putnam distinguishes bonding social capital as internal group solidarity and bridging social capital as solidarity bridges across identities (Putnam, 2000). In the case of Mojoroto, the internal solidarity of the majority group appeared quite strong, as demonstrated by the mobilization of more than 250 signatures rejecting the church construction (Wasono, 2025). In contrast, interreligious bridging social capital had not developed sufficiently to withstand such collective social pressure.

From Putnam's perspective, strong social networks within majority communities may indeed reinforce internal group solidarity. However, such networks can also generate social exclusivism if they are not balanced by bridging social capital across identities. Research on the rejection of houses of worship construction in Indonesia demonstrates that social resistance is often triggered not merely by theological issues, but also by concerns regarding changes in social identity, transformations of public space structures, and perceptions of threats to local cultural dominance (Setinawati, Isabella Jeniva, Tanyid, Maidiantius, 2025).

A similar condition can be observed in the GKJW Mojoroto case, where the construction of a permanent church was perceived by some members of the community not merely as the physical construction of a house of worship, but also as a symbolic transformation of social space within a predominantly Muslim environment. Therefore, the social resistance that emerged cannot simply be understood as religious intolerance alone, but must also be interpreted in relation to negotiations over social identity, public space, and perceptions of change within the local social environment.

Norms of Reciprocity

According to Robert Putnam, norms of reciprocity constitute one of the essential elements of social capital that enables the creation of cooperation and social order within society. These norms operate through reciprocal expectations that every act of kindness, assistance, or cooperation provided by an individual or group will eventually be returned with similar positive behavior by others in the future (Putnam, 1995). In societies with strong norms of reciprocity, social relations are not built merely upon short-term personal interests, but also upon mutual trust, moral obligations, and commitments to maintaining long-term social relationships. Therefore, norms of reciprocity become a crucial foundation for building social solidarity, strengthening tolerance, and encouraging the development of cooperative social life, including interreligious relations within plural societies.

In the social life of Mojoroto, particularly in RT 17 RW 05, the number of GKJW congregants residing in the area is actually very small, amounting to no more than 10 households. Nevertheless, everyday social relations between the GKJW congregation and the Muslim community have generally been quite harmonious. This can be observed from the use of the GKJW semi-permanent building as a community hall, a

venue for neighborhood meetings (*RT/RW* meetings), and a polling station during elections. GKJW congregants also actively participated in communal work activities (*kerja bakti*), neighborhood social activities, and other community events. During Christmas celebrations, the congregation routinely distributed gifts to nearby residents as a form of social solidarity and gratitude for the good relationships that had been maintained for many years. These conditions indicate that, at the level of everyday life, cooperative social relations reflecting practices of interreligious reciprocity had already developed.

This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Setinawati et al. (2025), who explain that social harmony in multicultural societies can grow through the internalization of inclusiveness, openness to differences, social cooperation, and active participation in interreligious community life. According to their study, the integration of cultural and religious values can foster social cohesion and strengthen peaceful coexistence in plural societies. In the context of Mojoroto, the involvement of GKJW congregants in community social activities demonstrates that everyday social relations had, in fact, generated relatively strong interpersonal social capital.

Nevertheless, these norms of reciprocity did not fully function when the issue concerned the rights of minority groups to permanent symbolic space. In February 2024, the GKJW construction committee resubmitted a proposal for church construction by collecting 65 signatures from residents of different religious backgrounds, in accordance with the requirements of the 2006 Joint Regulation. However, during the process, controversy emerged regarding changes in the wording of the support letter from “No Objection to the Construction of a Church Building or Community Development Center (*Tempat Pembinaan Warga/TPW*)” to “Support for the Construction of a Church Building.”

FKUB of Kediri City explained that the primary issue did not concern religious identity itself, but rather the incomplete socialization process among residents, as some residents claimed they had signed the support document without receiving adequate explanation regarding the plan to construct a permanent church. Some residents understood the process merely as the renovation of an existing worship building rather than the construction of a new church. The narrative that residents had been “deceived” subsequently spread and triggered social resistance.

As a consequence of this situation, a rejection letter signed by approximately 250 residents under the name *Forum Silaturahmi Umat Muslim* emerged. The letter even included threats of demonstrations should the church construction proceed. From Putnam’s perspective, this condition demonstrates that norms of reciprocity lost their consistency when confronted with collective social pressure from the majority group. Social norms that had previously been inclusive transformed into instruments of social conformity pressure.

Putnam explains that social capital may generate exclusive consequences when internal group solidarity develops more strongly than solidarity across identities. This phenomenon has also been observed in various conflicts concerning the establishment of houses of worship in Indonesia, where individual support for minority groups often weakens when confronted with social pressure from the majority.

Resistance toward minority houses of worship is frequently associated with community concerns regarding changes in the social character of the environment, disruptions to social harmony, transformations of regional identity, and perceptions of threats to local cultural dominance. In the Manokwari case, some community members believed that the construction of a new house of worship could affect the social balance and religious character of the local area. This situation bears similarities to the case of GKJW Mojoroto, where the construction of a permanent church was perceived not merely as the physical establishment of a house of worship, but also as a symbolic transformation of social space within a predominantly Muslim neighborhood.

Furthermore, research by Ismail et al. (2024). on conflicts over the establishment of houses of worship in Tangerang demonstrates that conflict escalation frequently occurs when socialization processes, public communication, and the identification of actors possessing social authority are not conducted effectively. They argue that conflicts over house-of-worship construction may develop into mass mobilization when governments and social actors fail to establish collaborative communication from the outset. These findings are relevant to the Mojoroto case because social resistance intensified after perceptions emerged regarding a lack of clarity in information concerning the construction of the permanent church.

On the other hand, Warnis et al. (2024) explain that the successful establishment of minority houses of worship is strongly influenced by the minority community's ability to build good social and cultural relations with the majority community through dialogue, communication, and active participation in social life. However, the study also emphasizes that conflicts surrounding houses of worship frequently arise from majority-group discomfort toward the presence of minority religious symbols, fears of socio-cultural change, and limited constructive dialogue between religious groups. In the context of Mojoroto, although everyday social relations had developed relatively well, these social relations had not yet evolved into full acceptance of permanent minority religious symbols within the public sphere.

Additionally, research by Sutomo and Budihardjo (2021) on religious nationalism in Indonesia explains that religious leaders in Indonesia fundamentally support democratic religious freedom without discrimination and encourage the implementation of universal religious values within the public sphere. This perspective demonstrates that the values of harmony and tolerance actually possess relatively strong social and religious foundations within Indonesian society. However, at the local level, the implementation of these values often encounters obstacles when confronted with the dynamics of majority-minority identities and perceptions regarding changes in social space.

Moreover, the issue of church construction is also related to negotiations over social and public space within densely populated residential areas. The legal counsel assisting GKJW explained that the construction of houses of worship must consider spatial planning aspects, traffic congestion, limited parking space, and potential social disturbances in order to maintain public order. Nevertheless, this argument becomes problematic because RT 17 RW 05, according to the Kediri City Detailed Spatial Plan

(RDTR) 2021–2041, is categorized as a High-Density Residential Zone, which, to a limited extent, does permit the construction of houses of worship.

The conflict surrounding the construction of GKJW Mojoroto demonstrates that norms of social reciprocity in plural societies may function effectively at the level of interpersonal relations, but do not necessarily develop into support for the symbolic equality of minority groups within the public sphere. Harmonious social relations in everyday life have, in reality, not been fully capable of overcoming the pressures of majority-group solidarity when issues involve permanent religious symbols within local public spaces.

Social Trust

Social trust constitutes a central element of social capital because it enables social cooperation to function without strict supervision and control (Putnam, 1993). In societies with high levels of social trust, individuals tend to believe that others will act honestly, cooperatively, and without harming collective interests, thereby allowing social relations to operate more effectively and stably. Putnam explains that social trust strengthens society's capacity to build collective cooperation, resolve shared problems, and maintain social cohesion within democratic life (Putnam, 2000). Research conducted by Jesús Peiró-Palomino et al. (2024) demonstrates that social trust has a positive influence on the quality of governance, prosocial behavior, civic participation, social tolerance, and the quality of public services. Societies with higher levels of social trust tend to exhibit stronger tolerance and inclusiveness toward other groups because of the belief that social differences do not necessarily threaten collective life.

In the context of Mojoroto, routine worship activities conducted by the GKJW congregation in the semi-permanent building were never directly prohibited. However, the construction of a permanent church continuously faced resistance through procedural arguments, spatial planning concerns, parking issues, and considerations of social order. This situation demonstrates the existence of acceptance toward minorities within everyday social spaces, but not yet full acceptance of permanent minority religious symbols within the public sphere. From Putnam's perspective, this condition reflects the weakness of generalized trust in sustaining intergroup relations across identities at the institutional level.

The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) argues that the 2006 Joint Regulation creates legal uncertainty because the rights of minority groups become dependent upon the approval of majority groups. The consideration given by the Kediri City FKUB to approximately 250 signatures from residents identifying themselves as members of the *Forum Silaturahmi Umat Muslim* appeared to carry greater weight than the 65 residents who had signed in support of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto. In fact, the 2006 Joint Regulation does not regulate any quantitative comparison between supporters and opponents, but only stipulates a minimum requirement of 60 supporting signatures from residents surrounding the proposed location of the house of worship (Article 14 paragraph (2) letter b). This dependency causes the protection of minority constitutional rights to become heavily influenced by local social dynamics. When public institutions fail to act neutrally and consistently, social trust in state institutions also begins to erode.

During the development of the conflict in 2025, the situation became increasingly complex after the issue of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto gained widespread attention on social media and online news platforms. Narratives regarding intolerance in Kediri City spread broadly and intensified social pressure at the local level. According to the GKJW congregation, media framing actually worsened the social situation because the conflict evolved from a local administrative issue into a national public discourse concerning religious intolerance.

Furthermore, the gradual suspension of construction activities by the police in July 2025 was not framed as a prohibition of worship activities. According to the GKJW congregation, the police requested a temporary halt to construction until administrative processes were completed and social conditions within the community became conducive again in order to preserve interreligious harmony.

Interestingly, the conflict surrounding the construction of GKJW Mojoroto did not end through formal conflict resolution or substantive agreements between the involved parties. Instead, the conflict subsided because the GKJW congregation chose not to actively continue the construction process after concluding that social resistance would likely persist and potentially intensify horizontal conflict within the community. Thus, the cessation of the construction process reflected more a strategy to avoid conflict escalation than the result of a genuinely comprehensive conflict resolution.

In plural societies, social trust is not only built through interpersonal interaction, but also through society's ability to develop values of religious moderation in everyday social life. Setinawati et al. (2025) explain that social harmony within multicultural societies can grow when communities internalize values of inclusiveness, openness toward differences, social cooperation, and active involvement in interreligious community life.

In the case of GKJW Mojoroto, these values were actually visible within everyday social interactions through communal work activities, the use of the GKJW building as a community social facility, and the involvement of congregants in neighborhood activities. Nevertheless, these values of social moderation had not yet fully developed into institutional trust capable of supporting acceptance of permanent minority religious symbols within the public sphere.

The dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in the case of GKJW Mojoroto demonstrate that social capital at the local level functions in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand, everyday social networks, norms of reciprocity, and interreligious social interactions successfully maintained the stability of social relations within the community. On the other hand, social capital that was more heavily characterized by bonding social capital actually strengthened majority social pressure when issues concerned permanent religious symbols in the public sphere. Consequently, the tolerance that developed remained largely limited to interpersonal social tolerance and had not yet fully evolved into structural tolerance capable of guaranteeing equal rights for minority groups within a democratic public sphere.

Implications for the Quality of Local Democracy

Robert A. Dahl explains that modern democracy is measured through the existence of polyarchic institutions, namely political systems that guarantee inclusive

participation, open competition, civil liberties, and the protection of minority rights (R. . Dahl, 1971; R. Dahl, 1989). From Dahl's perspective, democracy is not merely understood as the existence of formal procedures, but also as the capacity of the political system to guarantee equal participation and the protection of the rights of all citizens without discrimination. Therefore, the dynamics surrounding the construction of GKJW Mojoroto Congregation are relevant not only as an administrative issue concerning the establishment of a house of worship, but also as an indicator of the quality of local democracy in managing majority-minority relations within a plural society.

In the context of Kediri City, the paradox of local democracy appears quite evident. On the one hand, Kediri City has consistently ranked among the top 10 Most Tolerant Cities in Indonesia for five consecutive years based on the Setara Institute's Tolerant City Index in 2025. The Kediri City Government has emphasized that this achievement reflects political and bureaucratic commitments to maintaining interfaith dialogue and social harmony. On the other hand, the case of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto demonstrates that local democracy at the grassroots level still faces serious challenges related to the protection of minority rights, social pressure from majority groups, and the dominance of social stability considerations over the fulfillment of citizens' constitutional rights.

Inclusiveness of Participation

The first dimension of polyarchy according to Dahl is inclusiveness of participation, namely the extent to which all citizens have equal opportunities to participate in public decision-making processes (R. . Dahl, 1971). Substantive democracy is not sufficiently fulfilled merely by providing procedural mechanisms; it must also guarantee that every group has equal opportunities to influence political decisions (R. Dahl, 1989).

In the case of GKJW Mojoroto, the church construction committee had formally complied with the procedures stipulated in the 2006 Joint Regulation by obtaining 65 signatures from residents of different religious backgrounds, involving neighborhood authorities (*RT*, *RW*, and village officials), and submitting applications to the FKUB and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The local government also facilitated several public hearings involving FKUB, the National Unity and Politics Agency (*Kesbangpol*), village authorities, and the church construction committee. Administratively, these conditions indicate that formal participatory spaces were available for minority groups.

However, this participation had not yet become fully substantive because the bargaining position of the minority group remained dependent upon social acceptance from the majority community. Controversy emerged when FKUB requested a change in the wording of the support letter from "No Objection to the Construction of a Church Building or Community Development Center (*Tempat Pembinaan Warga/TPW*)" to "Support for the Construction of a Church Building." Some residents subsequently claimed that they had not understood that the signatures they provided were related to the construction of a permanent church. This situation demonstrates that the participatory process was not supported by sufficiently robust public deliberation.

This condition was further reinforced by the emergence of a rejection letter signed by more than 250 residents under the name *Forum Silaturahmi Umat Muslim*, accompanied by threats of demonstrations if the church construction proceeded. From Dahl's perspective, substantive democracy requires not only the existence of formal participatory spaces, but also citizens' freedom to express political positions without pressure from majority social forces.

Research by Muh. Arif Rezki Ananda et al. (2024) demonstrates that healthy local democracy requires openness in participation and an equal distribution of influence in public decision-making processes. In the case of Mojoroto, although formal participation was available, the political influence of the minority group remained weaker than the social mobilization capacity of the majority group.

Furthermore, research by Jafar Aghazadeh and Reza Mahmoudoghli (2017) explains that religiosity is closely associated with political participation within society. In religious societies such as Indonesia, religious identity can become a powerful source of collective political mobilization. However, within plural democracies, identity-based mobilization rooted in religion has the potential to create participatory inequalities if not balanced by the protection of minority rights.

In the context of Mojoroto, this dynamic became visible when some residents who had initially supported the church construction began to feel afraid after their identities became publicly known. According to Rev. Puput Yuniatmoko, several residents expressed concerns about experiencing social pressure because they were perceived as supporting the church construction. This situation demonstrates that citizens' political participation had not yet become fully free from collective social pressure exerted by the majority.

Civil Liberties and Minority Rights

The second dimension of polyarchy is the protection of civil liberties and minority rights (R. . Dahl, 1971). A healthy democracy not only provides space for political participation, but also guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and the protection of citizens' rights without discrimination (R. Dahl, 1989). From Dahl's perspective, the quality of democracy is measured not only by the existence of formal procedures, but also by the ability of the state and society to guarantee civil liberties equally for all citizens.

In the case of GKJW Mojoroto, there was no direct prohibition against the routine worship activities conducted by the GKJW congregation in the semi-permanent building that had been used for decades. The congregation remained able to conduct worship services and maintain relatively harmonious social relations through communal work activities (*kerja bakti*), neighborhood meetings, and the use of the building as a polling station during elections and as a community hall. These conditions indicate that everyday interreligious social tolerance at the local level functioned relatively well.

Nevertheless, problems emerged when the minority group attempted to establish a permanent religious symbol within the public sphere. From the groundbreaking ceremony in 1997 to the renewed application process in 2024–2025, the construction of the permanent church continuously faced social resistance. This demonstrates that acceptance of minority groups remained limited to everyday social

spaces and had not yet developed into full acceptance of minority religious symbols within the permanent public sphere.

The National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) argues that the 2006 Joint Regulation creates dependency of minority rights upon majority social approval, thereby opening space for indirect discrimination against minority religious groups (Suntoro, 2020a). In the Mojoroto case, this dependency became evident when the formal support of 65 residents was still considered insufficient because social resistance from sections of the community remained present.

Social pressure exerted upon residents supporting the church construction also demonstrates the weakness of civil liberties protection at the local level. Rev. Puput Yuniatmoko stated that some residents admitted experiencing social pressure after becoming known as supporters of the church construction. This situation indicates that civil liberties were formally available, but socially not yet fully protected from majority pressure.

According to Saiful Mujani (Jahar et al., 2019), pluralistic democracy requires political tolerance and equality of rights for minority groups. Tolerance should not merely be understood as social acceptance in everyday life, but must also be reflected in support for the political and civil rights of other groups, including the right to express religious identity within the public sphere. In the context of Mojoroto, although everyday social tolerance was relatively good, political tolerance toward the construction of minority houses of worship had not yet fully developed.

Moreover, the dynamics of social media further complicated the quality of local democracy. In 2025, the controversy surrounding the construction of GKJW Mojoroto spread widely across social media, accompanied by narratives claiming that Kediri City was experiencing increasing intolerance. According to the GKJW congregation, such media coverage actually worsened the local social situation because the conflict evolved into a broader identity-based issue. Kholili et al. (2024) explain that digital media can intensify identity polarization and exacerbate religious social conflicts within society.

The Role of Local Government and the Risk of Majoritarianism

The third dimension of polyarchy according to Dahl is the existence of neutral state institutions that guarantee political equality and the protection of citizens' rights (R. Dahl, 1989). A democratic state not only functions to maintain social stability, but also ensures that the rights of all citizens are equally protected without being influenced by the dominance of majority groups. If the state prioritizes compromise with majority social pressure over the protection of minority rights, democracy tends to shift toward majoritarianism.

In the case of GKJW Mojoroto, the local government and the Religious Harmony Forum positioned themselves as mediators of social stability. FKUB Kediri City emphasized that it had never rejected the church construction, but instead requested that the administrative procedures and public socialization process be repeated in order to preserve social harmony. The police also requested a temporary suspension of construction activities until the administrative process was completed and the social situation became conducive again.

From the perspective of public administration, these measures may be understood as efforts to maintain social order and prevent horizontal conflict. However, from Dahl's perspective, substantive democracy is not measured solely by procedural compliance, but also by the state's willingness to protect the constitutional rights of minority groups (R. Dahl, 1989). In this context, the risk of majoritarianism emerges, namely a condition in which public decisions are influenced more by majority social pressure than by the protection of minority rights.

Amir Hamzah (2026) emphasizes that Dahl's concept of polyarchy requires the protection of political equality and social justice as the foundations of substantive democracy. In the case of Mojoroto, the state tended to adopt a cautious position in order to preserve social stability rather than provide firm guarantees for minority rights protection. This tendency can be observed in the acceptance of 250 signatures rejecting the church construction as a significant social consideration, even though the 2006 Joint Regulation only requires a minimum of 60 supporting signatures from nearby residents.

Saputro (2011) had previously demonstrated that, in the post-Reformasi era, local democracy is often influenced by configurations of social power and local religious authority. In the context of Mojoroto, the sensitivity of religious identity and majority social pressure affected the position of state authorities in making decisions regarding the construction of minority houses of worship.

This phenomenon was further identified by Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin (2020) as a tendency among certain Islamist groups to critically view pluralism and liberal democracy, particularly concerning the relationship between majority religious identity and minority rights within the public sphere. In such situations, the construction of minority houses of worship is no longer understood merely as an administrative matter, but develops into a socially and politically sensitive issue of collective identity.

In the context of Mojoroto, this condition became visible through the emergence of resistance toward the construction of a permanent church despite the relatively harmonious everyday social relations among religious communities. In several social forums, accusations even emerged claiming that Christmas gifts distributed by the GKJW congregation constituted an attempt to gain support for the church construction. This phenomenon demonstrates the increasing sensitivity of religious identity within the local public sphere.

In fact, the development in the number of Protestant churches in Kediri City indicates that, during previous periods, the construction of Christian houses of worship generally did not encounter significant resistance. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Kediri City show that the number of Protestant churches increased from 29 churches in 2010 to 76 churches in 2024 (BPS Kota Kediri, 2016, 2025, 2026)bps. This condition indicates that resistance toward the construction of minority houses of worship is more closely related to contemporary socio-political dynamics than to any historical rejection of the presence of other religions.

Synthesis: Social Capital and the Challenges of Post-Reformasi Democracy

The dynamics surrounding the construction of the GKJW Mojoroto congregation church demonstrate that interreligious relations in post-Reform Indonesia cannot be understood merely as an administrative conflict over the establishment of a house of worship. Rather, the issue is closely related to the configuration of social capital within society and the quality of local democracy. Robert Putnam's perspective on social capital and Robert A. Dahl's theory of polyarchy indicate that the success of democracy in plural societies is strongly determined by the ability of communities to develop cross-identity social networks, inclusive norms of reciprocity, and social trust that support equal protection of citizens' rights (Dahl, 1971; 1989; Putnam, 1993b, 2000). In the context of Mojoroto, local democracy procedurally functioned through dialogue forums, mediation by local government, and administrative mechanisms related to the establishment of houses of worship. However, substantive democracy has not been fully realized because the protection of minority groups remains highly influenced by majority social pressure and local religious identity dynamics.

From Putnam's perspective, the GKJW Mojoroto case illustrates the ambivalent nature of social capital. On the one hand, the people of Mojoroto maintain relatively harmonious everyday social relations. GKJW congregants actively participate in communal activities such as neighborhood meetings, community service, and other social engagements. The semi-permanent GKJW building has also been used as a polling station, community hall, and shared social space. These conditions reflect the existence of *bonding social capital* and certain forms of *bridging social capital* that allow interreligious relations to remain stable at the interpersonal level. However, when the issue concerns permanent religious symbols in public space, the internal solidarity of the majority group becomes more dominant than cross-identity solidarity. Consequently, social networks that were initially cooperative transformed into collective social pressure against the minority group through mobilized opposition, repeated administrative processes, and resistance toward the construction of a permanent church (Putnam, 2000).

This phenomenon demonstrates that social tolerance in everyday life does not necessarily develop into structural tolerance within democratic public spaces. Research conducted by Mohamad Anas et al. on Salatiga revealed that even cities with high tolerance index scores still face inequalities in majority-minority relations and the potential for interreligious conflict at the local level (2025). The study emphasizes that social harmony requires inclusive policies, community participation, and active governmental involvement in fostering acceptance of "the Others," namely groups with different religious identities. In plural societies, social capital dominated solely by *bonding social capital* may produce social exclusivism when group identity is perceived to be threatened by symbolic changes in public space. Putnam argues that healthy democracy requires a balance between internal group solidarity and the capacity to build *bridging social capital* across identities (Putnam, 2000). In the Mojoroto case, interreligious social relations appear relatively harmonious in everyday interactions, yet they have not evolved into full acceptance of minority religious symbols within permanent public spaces. This indicates that plural societies in Indonesia are often capable of maintaining social harmony in daily life, while still

encountering difficulties when religious differences appear symbolically in the public sphere.

From Robert Dahl's perspective, this condition indicates that local democracy in Mojooroto remains largely procedural rather than substantive. Dahl argues that modern democracy must guarantee inclusive participation, civil liberties, minority rights protection, and institutional neutrality (Dahl, 1971; R. Dahl, 1989). In the GKJW Mojooroto case, formal participation channels were indeed available through the Joint Ministerial Decree (PBM) of 2006, public hearings with local government, mediation by the FKUB, and the process of collecting community support signatures. Nevertheless, the bargaining position of minority groups remained dependent upon majority social acceptance. The approval of 65 residents, which had formally fulfilled administrative requirements, did not automatically guarantee legal certainty because it remained subject to social pressure from majority groups opposing the church construction. This condition indicates that local democracy remains vulnerable to majority social domination and has not fully guaranteed equal political influence for minority groups.

Furthermore, the GKJW Mojooroto case also reflects the paradox of post-Reform democracy in Indonesia. The 1998 Reform era opened broader opportunities for democratization, civil liberties, and public participation. At the same time, however, political decentralization strengthened identity politics and heightened majority-minority sensitivities at the local level. In this context, local governments often occupy a dilemmatic position between maintaining social stability and protecting citizens' constitutional rights. The Kediri City Government and FKUB did not explicitly prohibit church construction, yet they preferred administrative and stability-oriented approaches through repeated socialization processes, temporary suspension of construction, and ongoing mediation efforts. While such approaches succeeded in preventing open horizontal conflict, they also demonstrate that the state has not fully taken a substantive stance in guaranteeing minority rights protection when confronted with majority social pressure (Suntoro, 2020).

These findings are consistent with the study by Anas et al., which demonstrates that the success of tolerant cities depends not only on formal regulations, but also on the government's ability to develop anti-discrimination policies, interfaith dialogue spaces, religious moderation education, and community participation in public life (2025). The study further found that although Salatiga is widely recognized as a tolerant city, conflicts and inequalities in majority-minority relations may still emerge in social practice. This indicates that local democracy in plural societies continuously faces the challenge of balancing social stability with the substantive protection of equal citizenship rights.

This situation reflects a tendency toward majoritarianism in local democracy, namely a condition in which public decisions are influenced more by majority social sensitivities than by the protection of minority rights. Procedural democracy continues to function through coordination forums and administrative mechanisms, yet substantive democracy weakens because the state prioritizes social stability over the principle of equal citizenship rights. In this context, the GKJW Mojooroto case demonstrates that the primary challenge of post-Reform democracy in Indonesia is

not merely expanding political participation, but also building a democracy capable of substantively protecting minority rights within a plural society. The configuration of social power and local religious identities ultimately shapes the quality of local democracy, making minority rights protection highly dependent upon the social dynamics of majority communities.

At the same time, the development of social media and digital platforms has introduced new transformations in local democratic dynamics. The controversy surrounding the GKJW Mojoroto construction evolved from a local administrative issue into a broader public discourse on religious intolerance in Kediri City. Social media accelerated the spread of identity-based narratives, intensified social polarization, and amplified social pressure on the actors involved in the conflict. In the context of digital democracy, public space is no longer formed solely through face-to-face interaction at the local level, but also through public opinion circulating widely across online platforms. Consequently, conflicts over houses of worship become increasingly complex because they involve social pressures extending beyond local community boundaries. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Kholili et al. (2024), which explain that digital media strengthens the dissemination of religious narratives and intensifies identity polarization within Indonesian society.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the case of the construction of GKJW Mojoroto Congregation reflects the complex relationship between social capital and the quality of local democracy within a plural post-Reformasi society. Everyday interreligious social relations in Mojoroto were relatively harmonious through social interaction, neighborhood activities, and community cooperation. However, such harmony had not yet developed into bridging social capital capable of supporting acceptance of minority religious symbols within the public sphere.

From Robert Putnam's perspective, the social capital that developed remained predominantly characterized by bonding social capital within each group, particularly among the majority group. This condition caused internal solidarity to become stronger than networks across identities, resulting in social tolerance that remained primarily interpersonal rather than structural tolerance capable of guaranteeing symbolic equality and minority rights.

Meanwhile, based on Robert Dahl's perspective of polyarchy, local democracy in Kediri City still tends to remain at the level of procedural democracy. Formal mechanisms of participation, mediation, and dialogue were indeed available, yet the protection of minority rights continued to be influenced by majority social pressure. The implementation of the 2006 Joint Regulation demonstrates that, in practice, the fulfillment of minority religious rights remains highly dependent upon social acceptance within local communities.

This study also identifies the existence of a paradox of tolerance in Kediri City. Although Kediri City has consistently received recognition as a tolerant city, resistance toward the construction of minority houses of worship continues to emerge at the local level. These findings emphasize that macro-level tolerance does not necessarily correspond to substantive acceptance of diversity within the public sphere of society. Therefore, strengthening local democracy in Indonesia requires the

development of more inclusive social capital, stronger trust across identities, and more robust institutional protection of minority rights.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

FXGTM conceived and designed the study, developed the theoretical framework, conducted data analysis, interpreted the findings, and wrote the original manuscript draft. AD contributed to research design refinement, data interpretation, critical review of the manuscript, and supervision of the research process. GKJ contributed to literature review, manuscript editing, language refinement, and provided critical feedback on the final version of the manuscript. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final manuscript before submission.

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