

The Balun Village Tolerance Model for Addressing Religious Intolerance In Indonesia: A Sociology of Law Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's religious diversity requires social mechanisms capable of transforming legal guarantees of equality into everyday practices of coexistence. This study examined the tolerance model of Balun Village, Lamongan, and assessed its relevance to selected cases of religious intolerance in Garut from a sociology of law perspective. A qualitative literature-based case analysis was employed using 21 sources published between 2017 and 2025, comprising 19 journal articles, one scholarly book, and one institutional report. The sources were coded thematically and compared across patterns of social interaction, leadership, education, local norms, and the management of religious space. The findings showed that tolerance in Balun was sustained by a shared civic identity, routine interreligious cooperation, cross-religious protection of worship, community deliberation, educational transmission, and negotiated use of public and religious spaces. Compared with selected Garut cases, Balun demonstrated that formal rights were more effective when supported by trust, bridging leadership, and socially accepted local norms. The study concluded that Balun offered an adaptable socio-legal model for strengthening religious freedom and social cohesion without requiring the uniform replication of local practices.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is constituted by extensive ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. This plurality is a major social resource, but it also creates recurring challenges when differences are interpreted through exclusive group boundaries or when access to public and religious space is contested. The constitutional and ideological promise of unity in diversity is therefore not sustained by formal norms alone; it also depends on social practices that make equality, mutual recognition, and peaceful interaction meaningful in daily life. Azra (2018) emphasized the importance of pluralism, moderation, and religious tolerance in the Indonesian context, while SETARA Institute (2022) documented continuing challenges to freedom of religion or belief. In the digital environment, the circulation of polarizing information may further intensify identity-based divisions and strengthen closed social enclaves (Lim, 2017). These conditions make tolerance not merely an ethical preference but a practical requirement for social cohesion and the effective realization of religious rights.

Balun Village in Lamongan Regency, East Java, commonly described as a Pancasila Village, provides a relevant setting for examining how tolerance is produced through everyday social relations. Muslims, Christians, and Hindus live within the same village and participate in social, cultural, and communal activities across religious boundaries. Previous studies have described the strength of intergenerational tolerance and open interaction in Balun (Bettaliyah et al., 2025), the role of religiosity and moral commitment in reinforcing tolerance (Alfariz, 2021), socio-cultural foundations of moderation among younger generations (Musdalifah et al., 2021), and the contribution of formal education to religious moderation (Wahyuddin et al., 2022). Other studies have explored Balun as a community-based tourism destination (Abdullah, 2024), the implementation of multicultural education in elementary schools (Apriliya & Rosyidi, 2025), and the use of local wisdom and tolerance-oriented character formation (Susandi et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies show that tolerance in Balun is embedded in institutions and routines rather than expressed only as an abstract attitude.

Despite this growing literature, two analytical limitations remain. First, much of the existing research examines particular sectors such as education, tourism, intergenerational communication, local wisdom, or religious moderation. Fewer studies synthesize these elements as a socio-legal mechanism that explains why legal principles of equal citizenship can become socially effective in a plural community. Second, the transferability of the Balun experience is often asserted normatively but is less frequently tested through comparison with situations in which interreligious relations become contested. A sociology of law perspective is useful for addressing this gap because it focuses attention on the relationship between formal norms, social acceptance, local institutions, collective identities, and patterns of compliance in everyday life. From this perspective, the effectiveness of religious freedom depends not only on the existence of rules but also on the social structures and cultural practices through which those rules are interpreted and implemented.

Accordingly, this study analyzes the practices and supporting mechanisms of tolerance in Balun Village and compares them with selected cases concerning houses of worship and minority religious groups in Garut Regency. The comparison does not treat Garut as uniformly intolerant; rather, it uses documented cases in Nyalindung and Dayeuhmanggung to identify socio-legal conditions that can obstruct or facilitate the practical exercise of religious rights (Rodiyah et al., 2021; Shabilla Utami et al., 2021). The novelty of the study lies in formulating Balun's experience as an adaptable socio-legal model built on five interconnected mechanisms: shared civic identity, routine intergroup contact, bridging leadership, intergenerational education, and negotiated public space. The study therefore aims to contribute to the sociology of law by explaining how community-level norms and relationships may reinforce formal rights, while also offering a context-sensitive reference for local governments, religious leaders, schools, and community organizations seeking to prevent intolerance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative literature-based case analysis. Rather than claiming to constitute a field-based case study, the research treated Balun Village as the principal analytical case and selected documented cases from Garut Regency as a comparative contrast. The analytical corpus consisted of 21 sources published between 2017 and 2025: 19 journal articles, one scholarly book, and one institutional report. Sources were purposively selected when they met at least one of the following relevance criteria: they documented tolerance practices, social institutions, education, local wisdom, or interreligious relations in Balun; they examined disputes over religious space or minority religious rights in Garut; or they provided contextual analysis of tolerance and intolerance in Indonesia. This selection maintained the journal template's emphasis on recent and predominantly primary academic references.

The analysis proceeded through thematic coding and comparative interpretation. Information from the literature was organized into four main categories: forms of everyday tolerance, social and institutional supports, socio-legal mechanisms that connect norms with behavior, and conditions affecting transferability to other areas. The Balun literature was then compared with studies of religious interaction and disputes over houses of worship in Garut, particularly the Nyalindung Ahmadiyah case and the Dayeuhmanggung church-construction case (Rodiyah et al., 2021; Shabilla Utami et al., 2021). Findings were cross-checked across multiple publications where possible to avoid relying on a single account. The resulting interpretation focused on patterns that recurred across sources rather than treating individual observations as universally representative.

Because the study relied exclusively on secondary literature, it did not generate new interview, observation, or survey data. Its conclusions are therefore analytical syntheses of documented findings and should not be interpreted as a current ethnographic description of every resident or institution in Balun or Garut. This limitation was addressed by distinguishing community-level patterns from broader regional generalizations and by emphasizing that any proposed tolerance model requires adaptation and empirical assessment in the receiving locality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Balun Village as a Socio-Legal Space of Religious Pluralism

Balun Village is repeatedly described in the literature as a multi-religious community in which Muslims, Christians, and Hindus share a relatively integrated social environment. A prominent physical feature is the close location of a mosque, church, and Hindu temple in the village center. Rohman (2018)

interpreted this arrangement as a form of negotiation over both physical and non-physical space, showing that the presence of different religious institutions in proximity does not automatically produce conflict when the surrounding community accepts shared access to public life. Widayati (2019) similarly found that tolerance in Balun was supported by inclusive religious understandings, pluralist policies, socio-cultural traditions, and interfaith social relations. From a sociology of law perspective, these findings indicate that the practical meaning of religious freedom is shaped by the social legitimacy of diversity. Formal rights become more workable when the community recognizes the presence of other religious groups as normal and legitimate rather than as a threat.

The village's pluralism is also sustained through repeated social interaction. Bettaliyah et al. (2025) showed that tolerance in Balun is negotiated across generations through interaction and the transmission of values, while Manuaba and Sartini (2022) identified rural social traditions and cultural experience as important foundations of harmony in plural communities. Such interaction reduces the social distance that often allows stereotypes to persist. In socio-legal terms, routine contact functions as an informal institution: it creates expectations about acceptable conduct, develops trust, and encourages residents to resolve differences within an established framework of coexistence. These informal expectations do not replace law, but they affect whether legal norms concerning equality and freedom of religion are supported, resisted, or ignored in everyday settings.

The literature also suggests that Balun's identity as a Pancasila Village has symbolic and regulatory significance. The label does not operate as a formal legal status that independently guarantees tolerance; instead, it provides a shared civic narrative through which residents can connect distinct religious identities with membership in the same village and nation. Susandi et al. (2025) emphasized the role of local wisdom and tolerance-oriented character, while Alfariz (2021) linked tolerance with religiosity, instrumental social values, and moral commitment. This combination is important because a shared civic identity can reduce the tendency to interpret social relationships exclusively through majority-minority categories. The result is a form of social integration in which religious difference remains visible but does not necessarily determine access to community participation.

Tolerance as a Living Social Norm

Tolerance in Balun is most visible not in declarations but in recurring practices. The reviewed studies document cooperation in communal events, mutual assistance across religious lines, participation in social activities, and forms of cross-religious support during religious celebrations. Rohman (2018), for example, reported that young residents from different religious communities helped secure one another's religious events. This practice is significant because it turns the abstract principle of freedom of worship into a shared social responsibility. The right to worship is not treated solely as an individual or group entitlement protected from interference; it is also supported through positive cooperation by neighbors who do not share the same faith.

The practice of gotong royong also functions as a bridging mechanism. Community cooperation creates social encounters in which residents participate primarily as neighbors and members of the same village rather than as representatives of separate religious blocs. Susandi et al. (2025) linked local wisdom in Balun with tolerance-oriented character, and Musdalifah et al. (2021) found that socio-cultural moderation among younger residents was strengthened by family and community environments. In sociology of law, this type of repeated cooperation can be understood as a process of normative internalization. Residents learn not only that tolerance is desirable but also how tolerant conduct is expected to occur in specific situations, such as communal work, ceremonies, neighborhood assistance, and conflict avoidance.

The management of burial space illustrates the same principle in material form. Rohman (2018) documented the historical use of a common village cemetery across religious backgrounds, while also noting later changes in burial arrangements. The importance of this finding lies less in the permanence of one particular cemetery arrangement than in the underlying social principle: community spaces were negotiated in ways that recognized residents across religious boundaries. Similarly, Maharani (2024) showed how the Ogoh-Ogoh tradition in Balun is socially constructed within a multi-religious environment, demonstrating that cultural practices can become arenas for negotiating recognition rather than merely expressing the identity of one group. These examples reveal how local norms acquire practical force through shared spaces and collective routines.

The socio-legal relevance of these practices is that they create a form of living normative order. Formal law establishes broad rights and obligations, but everyday compliance is often mediated by community expectations, trusted relationships, and accepted routines. In Balun, the literature suggests that social norms generally align with the principle of equal participation, thereby reducing the gap between formal recognition and social practice. This alignment is essential: when local norms contradict legal guarantees, minority rights may remain difficult to exercise even when they exist formally. Conversely, when local norms reinforce equal treatment, the law receives social support that increases its practical effectiveness.

Supporting Mechanisms: Leadership, Education, Communication, and Deliberation

A central factor supporting tolerance in Balun is bridging leadership. Religious leaders and community figures occupy positions from which they can either intensify group boundaries or create communication across them. Amrullah and Rofiq (2025) found that religious leaders contributed to the development of religious moderation through educational and communicative strategies, while Muthowah (2025) showed that Islamic religious communication in Balun was linked with moderation through sermons, discussion, social interaction, and joint activities. Rohman (2018) further documented efforts by local elites to ensure that invited religious messages were sensitive to the village's multi-religious context. These findings demonstrate a form of preventive social regulation: leaders help define the boundaries of acceptable public communication before provocative messages develop into open conflict.

Education provides a second mechanism. Musdalifah et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of family-based transmission of tolerance among younger generations. Formal institutions also contribute. Wahyuddin et al. (2022) described the incorporation of religious moderation within educational activities at MI Tarbiyatus Sibyan, while Fitrotulloh et al. (2024) examined multicultural approaches to the revitalization of religious tolerance in an elementary-school setting in Balun. Hidayatussholihah et al. (2024) likewise discussed the role of multicultural education in building tolerance and moderation among younger residents. These studies indicate that tolerance is reproduced rather than assumed. Children and adolescents encounter narratives, examples, and social experiences that normalize religious difference and provide behavioral models for interacting with others.

The relationship between family, school, religious institutions, and community activity is particularly important. If one institution promotes tolerance while others reward exclusion, the resulting normative message is inconsistent. Balun's strength, as presented in the literature, lies in the relative convergence of these institutions around coexistence. This convergence creates what can be described as a supportive legal culture: residents are more likely to regard equal treatment and peaceful religious practice as legitimate because those principles are repeatedly reinforced by significant social institutions. Muharromah et al. (2024), for example, connected tolerance character education with the Pancasila Village context, further illustrating the role of educational environments in maintaining shared civic values.

Community deliberation and long-term social familiarity also reduce the risk that disagreement will immediately become adversarial. The original literature on Balun consistently points to communication, cooperation, and recurring contact as ways of maintaining trust. In socio-legal terms, deliberation provides an informal dispute-management mechanism that can operate before formal legal processes become necessary. This does not mean that informal settlement should replace legal protection, especially when fundamental rights are threatened. Rather, it suggests that early communication can prevent misunderstandings, clarify competing interests, and increase voluntary compliance with principles of coexistence. The most effective arrangement is therefore complementary: community deliberation helps manage relationships, while formal law remains the safeguard for rights that cannot be made dependent on majority approval.

Comparative Socio-Legal Analysis Of Balun and Selected Garut Cases

The contrast with selected cases in Garut helps clarify why the Balun model matters. Rodiyah et al. (2021) examined conflict surrounding an Ahmadiyah place of worship in Nyalindung, Cilawu District, Garut Regency. Their study described stigma, intimidation, contested religious space, and difficulties experienced by a minority group in exercising religious activities. Shabilla Utami et al. (2021) analyzed Muslim-Christian interaction in Dayeuhmanggung, also in Cilawu District, and found

that everyday relations could remain relatively cooperative while disagreement over church construction exposed deeper limits in the local acceptance of religious difference. These studies are important because they show that general social contact does not automatically ensure equal access to religious space. The critical question is whether tolerance extends to the concrete exercise of minority rights when those rights become socially contested.

The comparison should not be read as a binary judgment in which Balun is wholly tolerant and Garut is wholly intolerant. Both locations contain complex actors and relationships. The analytical difference concerns the mechanisms documented in the literature. In Balun, interreligious contact is institutionalized through routine cooperation, shared civic identity, supportive leadership, educational transmission, and negotiated space. In the selected Garut cases, social boundaries became more salient when the establishment or use of houses of worship was contested. The gap between formal rights and social acceptance was therefore more visible. This contrast illustrates a basic socio-legal principle: legal protection is most vulnerable when the exercise of a right depends in practice on local approval but the local normative environment is marked by stigma, fear, or weak intergroup trust.

The comparison also highlights the importance of public space. In Balun, neighboring places of worship and cross-religious assistance during religious events demonstrate a pattern in which religious space is socially acknowledged as part of the collective environment (Rohman, 2018). In the Garut cases, the establishment or use of a house of worship became a focal point of contestation (Rodiyah et al., 2021; Shabilla Utami et al., 2021). The same broad national legal order can therefore produce different lived outcomes depending on local institutions and social relations. This does not diminish the importance of formal regulation; instead, it shows why implementation requires both enforceable rights and a social environment that does not treat minority religious presence as illegitimate.

Table 1 synthesizes the principal differences identified in the reviewed literature. The table is not intended to generalize about all communities in Lamongan or Garut. It summarizes patterns reported in the specific studies included in this review and uses them to identify socio-legal variables relevant to the effectiveness of religious freedom.

Table 1 Comparative Socio-Legal Characteristics of Balun Village and Selected Garut Cases

Dimension	Balun Village	Selected Garut cases	Socio-legal implication
Intergroup contact	Routine cross-religious cooperation and social participation are repeatedly documented (Bettaliyah et al., 2025; Rohman, 2018).	Everyday interaction may coexist with sharper disagreement when religious space becomes contested (Shabilla Utami et al., 2021).	Contact is most protective when it extends to contested rights, not only ordinary social relations.
Leadership and communication	Religious and village leaders support moderation, communication, and conflict prevention (Amrullah & Rofiq, 2025; Muthowah, 2025).	The reviewed disputes show limits in mediation and protection when stigma or rejection escalates (Rodiyah et al., 2021).	Bridging leadership can connect formal rights with local acceptance and early dispute management.
Religious and public space	Places of worship coexist in close proximity and religious activities are supported across groups (Rohman, 2018).	The establishment or use of houses of worship becomes a point of contestation (Rodiyah et al., 2021; Shabilla Utami et al., 2021).	The practical exercise of religious freedom depends on both legal guarantees and socially legitimate access to space.
Normative identity	Shared village and national identities complement rather than erase religious identities (Alfariz, 2021; Susandi et al., 2025).	Group boundaries and stigma can become more salient during disputes (Rodiyah et al., 2021).	A shared civic identity can reduce zero-sum majority-minority framing.
Education and reproduction of norms	Family, school, and community institutions transmit tolerance across generations (Musdalifah et al., 2021; Wahyuddin et al., 2022).	The selected Garut literature emphasizes contested interaction more than an integrated system of tolerance education.	Tolerance is more sustainable when supportive norms are reproduced across institutions and generations.

Note. Synthesized by the authors from the literature reviewed in this study; the Garut column refers only to the documented cases cited, not to Garut Regency as a whole.

An Adaptable Tolerance Model from a Sociology of Law Perspective

The comparative analysis supports a model of tolerance built on five mutually reinforcing mechanisms. The first is shared civic identity. Religious identities remain important, but residents also

understand themselves as members of a common village and nation. This creates a normative basis for treating the interests of other religious groups as part of the collective social order. The second mechanism is routine intergroup contact. Cooperation in neighborhood activities, ceremonies, and mutual assistance provides repeated opportunities to build trust and correct stereotypes. The third is bridging leadership. Religious leaders, village officials, and community figures can establish communication across groups and prevent public messages from escalating tension. The fourth is intergenerational education through family, school, and community institutions. The fifth is negotiated access to public and religious space, supported by clear legal protection so that compromise does not become a mechanism for withholding fundamental rights.

These mechanisms are interdependent. Shared identity without regular interaction may remain symbolic; interaction without trusted leadership may fail when disputes arise; education without consistent community practice may be viewed as merely rhetorical; and negotiation without enforceable legal standards may leave minorities dependent on majority consent. The contribution of the Balun case is therefore not a single program that can be copied mechanically, but an institutional configuration in which social norms broadly support the practical exercise of equal citizenship. This distinction is essential for transferability. A village with different religious demographics, local traditions, political structures, or histories of conflict should not be expected to reproduce Balun's ceremonies, burial arrangements, or symbolic identity in identical form.

For other regions, the transferable element is the mechanism rather than the surface practice. Local governments can create regular forums in which religious leaders and residents discuss shared concerns before disputes escalate. Schools can combine multicultural learning with actual intergroup encounters rather than relying exclusively on classroom instruction. Community organizations can design joint activities around universally shared needs such as sanitation, disaster preparedness, youth programs, public health, or neighborhood security. Religious leaders can establish communication protocols for major religious events and respond collectively to inflammatory messages. These measures should be designed to strengthen, not condition, constitutional and statutory protections for religious freedom.

The model also has implications for legal policy. Sociology of law directs attention to the social conditions under which a rule becomes effective. Where communities distrust one another, formal regulation alone may be insufficient to prevent obstruction, stigma, or informal exclusion. At the same time, reliance on harmony without enforceable rights can pressure minorities to remain silent in order to avoid conflict. The appropriate balance is a rights-based model of social harmony: formal institutions protect equal religious freedom, while community institutions build the trust and communication needed for those rights to be exercised without recurring confrontation. In this sense, Balun offers a useful illustration of how legal culture and social structure can work together, while the Garut cases illustrate the risks that emerge when social acceptance is weaker at the point where concrete religious rights are asserted.

This interpretation also clarifies the study's contribution to earlier research. Studies of tourism (Abdullah, 2024), education (Apriliya & Rosyidi, 2025; Fitrotulloh et al., 2024; Hidayatussholihah et al., 2024), local traditions (Maharani, 2024), intergenerational tolerance (Bettaliyah et al., 2025), local wisdom (Susandi et al., 2025), and religious moderation (Musdalifah et al., 2021; Wahyuddin et al., 2022) each identify important components of the Balun experience. By integrating these components with comparative evidence from Garut, the present study shows that their significance lies in the way they collectively reduce the distance between formal equality and lived social practice. The resulting model is therefore socio-legal: it treats law, social norms, institutions, identities, and everyday interaction as connected elements in the production of tolerance.

CONCLUSION

This study found that tolerance in Balun Village is sustained by an interconnected socio-legal environment rather than by a single cultural tradition or formal rule. Shared civic identity, routine interreligious cooperation, bridging leadership, family and school-based education, community deliberation, and negotiated use of religious and public space collectively support the practical exercise of religious freedom. The comparison with selected Garut cases showed that everyday coexistence is not sufficient when concrete religious rights become contested; legal guarantees are more effective when they are reinforced by trust, communication, and socially accepted norms of equal participation.

Balun should therefore be treated as an adaptable reference rather than a model to be replicated mechanically. Local governments and community institutions can adopt its underlying mechanisms by strengthening interfaith communication, rights-based conflict prevention, multicultural education, shared civic activities, and early mediation, while maintaining firm legal protection for minority rights. Future research should test this framework through fieldwork in Balun and in other plural communities so that the relative contribution of each mechanism and the limits of transferability can be assessed empirically.

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