

Community-Based Strategies for Countering Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism

Sony Kristiantoro^{1*}

¹ Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana Salatiga, Indonesia; e-mail: sonykristiantoro@yahoo.com

* Correspondence

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Abstract: This study examines the role of community structures in preventing the emergence and growth of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) using Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism theory as its conceptual framework. The relevance of this research lies in the increasing challenges to social cohesion in pluralistic settings, including spatial segregation and exclusivist narratives that have the potential to fuel radicalisation. Employing a qualitative approach, the study draws on literature review, in-depth interviews, and field observations, focusing on an interfaith cooperation model developed in Salatiga City, Central Java, by the Salatiga Church Cooperation Agency (BKGS) in partnership with Muslim and Christian community networks. The findings reveal three main points. First, community-based organizations such as BKGS, Banser NU, Forum Hati Beriman, and the Interfaith Young Friends Movement (Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman) play a central role in fostering trust, solidarity, and mutual respect through interfaith collaboration in religious events, public services, and humanitarian programs. Second, interfaith education initiatives by UIN Salatiga and UKSW—through the integration of Islamology courses, halal studies, and the Kampus Kebangsaan program—strengthen interreligious understanding and engage students as agents of tolerance. Third, challenges remain, including the development of exclusive sharia housing, moral superiority narratives, rejection of interfaith activities, and weak assertiveness among local authorities, all of which can limit interfaith interaction and create fertile ground for radicalism. The study's implications underscore the importance of synergy among four pillars—grassroots organizations, educational institutions, collaborative public initiatives, and responsive local governance—in community-based pre-conflict prevention. Its original contribution lies in the practical application of Assertive Pluralism in the Indonesian context, offering a conceptual model that can be replicated in other pluralistic regions to strengthen social resilience against FRT.

Keywords: Assertive pluralism; Cherian George; fundamentalism; interfaith collaboration; radicalism; terrorism.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji peran struktur komunitas dalam mencegah muncul dan berkembangnya Fundamentalisme, Radikalisme, dan Terorisme (FRT) dengan menggunakan teori Pluralisme Asertif Cherian George sebagai kerangka konseptual. Relevansi penelitian ini terletak pada meningkatnya tantangan terhadap kohesi sosial di wilayah plural, termasuk segregasi spasial dan narasi eksklusif yang berpotensi memicu radikalisasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi literatur, wawancara mendalam, dan observasi lapangan, dengan fokus pada model kerja sama lintas iman yang dikembangkan di Kota Salatiga, Jawa Tengah, oleh Badan Kerjasama Gereja Salatiga (BKGS) beserta jejaring komunitas Muslim dan Kristen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, organisasi berbasis komunitas seperti BKGS, Banser NU, Forum Hati Beriman, dan Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman berperan sentral membangun kepercayaan, solidaritas, dan rasa saling menghormati melalui kolaborasi lintas iman dalam kegiatan keagamaan, pelayanan publik, dan program kemanusiaan. Kedua, program pendidikan lintas iman UIN Salatiga dan UKSW—melalui integrasi Islamologi, studi halal, dan Kampus Kebangsaan—memperkuat pemahaman antaragama dan melibatkan mahasiswa sebagai agen toleransi. Ketiga, terdapat tantangan berupa perumahan syariah eksklusif, narasi superioritas moral, penolakan

kegiatan lintas iman, dan lemahnya ketegasan aparat lokal yang dapat mempersempit ruang interaksi serta menumbuhkan bibit radikalisme. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya sinergi empat pilar—organisasi akar rumput, institusi pendidikan, inisiatif publik kolaboratif, dan pemerintahan lokal responsif—dalam pencegahan prakonflik berbasis komunitas. Kontribusi orisinal terletak pada penerapan praktis teori Pluralisme Asertif di Indonesia melalui model konseptual yang dapat direplikasi di wilayah plural lainnya untuk memperkuat ketahanan sosial terhadap FRT.

Kata Kunci: Pluralisme asertif; Cherian George; fundamentalisme; kolaborasi lintas iman; radikalisme; terorisme.

1. Introduction

Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) continue to pose a serious threat to social stability in Indonesia. Based on a report from the Centre for Detention Studies (Centre for Detention Studies, 2024), between 2018-2023, there were 1,713 cases of terrorism crimes identified. Of these, 822 perpetrators have been prosecuted, while the death toll reached 410 people, and 840 people were injured. In addition, this criminal act also caused damage to 552 buildings, ranging from places of worship to public facilities. Meanwhile, as many as 796 terrorism cases have received court judgments, showing a significant increase in legal action. This data confirms that FRT not only damages social aspects, but also physical infrastructure, deepening the collective wounds of Indonesia's plural society.

Indonesia is also included in the category of countries with high impact due to terrorism. Based on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), in 2024 Indonesia ranked 31st out of 89 countries and fell 7 places from the previous year (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the threat of terrorism has become more complex with a 101% increase in suspicious financial transactions related to terrorism activities (BNPT, 2021). The internet has also become the main medium for spreading extreme ideologies, as seen in the case of the young woman who attacked the National Police Headquarters in 2021, who was exposed to the teachings of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) through the internet. The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) affirms that terrorism is an enemy of human rights because its actions violate the rights to life, security, and individual freedom (Komnas HAM, 2018). This phenomenon shows that terrorism not only affects direct victims but also threatens the social structure of Indonesian society.

Although Salatiga is known as one of the most tolerant cities in Indonesia, it is not free from the threat of FRT. A report from the SETARA Institute (2024) notes that on the outskirts of the city, there has been the emergence of sharia-based housing complexes exclusively for Muslims, which raises concerns about reinforcing social segregation. In addition, there have been several reports of rejections of interfaith worship activities in certain areas (M. A. Nugroho, 2024), such as the *Jalan Sehat* (Fun Walk) event commemorating the anniversary of GBI Karangalit Church on September 8, 2024. This situation is relevant to study because the tolerance that has been built in Salatiga over many years could be at risk if seeds of intolerance are not addressed. This study applies Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism theory, which emphasizes the need for active involvement of both the state and the community in restricting expressions that threaten social cohesion while promoting an inclusive public sphere, with the aim of exploring community strategies to prevent the escalation of FRT in Salatiga, which could serve as a model for other cities in Indonesia to maintain social harmony.

Research related to Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) in Indonesia can be categorised into three main groups, namely the relationship between fundamentalism and terrorism, social factors that influence radicalisation, and countermeasure approaches through education and civil society. In the first group, which is related to the relationship between fundamentalism and terrorism, for example, research by Putra and Sukabdi (I. E. Putra & Sukabdi, 2014) revealed that the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and support for terrorism is influenced by belief in peaceful Islam and rationalisation of violence. Another study by Abbas (Abbas, 2003) showed that fundamentalism emerged as a reaction to modernity and secularism, with a pattern of literal interpretation of religious

texts. Barr's (Barr, 1994) study compares Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, showing that both share characteristics such as the rejection of pluralism and the strengthening of group identity. This research provides important insights, but has not specifically related how such relationships develop in plural communities like Salatiga, where interfaith interaction is an important factor.

The second group is research related to social factors that influence radicalisation. In this group, Hertanto et al. (Hertanto, Mulyaningsih, Suropto, & Sudarman, 2022) concluded that high levels of religiosity without sufficient tolerance encourage radicalisation among youth, especially in educational settings. Nugroho's study (S. W. H. Nugroho, 2023) showed that the interfaith community in Salatiga plays an important role in building tolerance through social activities and dialogue. However, this result contradicts the findings of Al Qurtuby (Al Qurtuby, 2010), who highlights that radicalisation is also influenced by social and political history, including contact with transnational ideologies. Meanwhile, research by Wahid (A Wahid, 2009) suggests that exclusive teaching patterns in some religious education institutions reinforce ideological segregation. This combination of studies shows the strong influence of social factors in radicalisation, but does not explore how interfaith relations can strengthen resistance to radicalism.

The third group is countering approaches through education and civil society. Hasan's (Hasan, 2017) research shows how Muslim civil society organisations use humanist and cultural approaches to counter extremism. On the other hand, Muhajir and Nurcholis (Muhajir & Nurcholis, 2024) emphasise the importance of moderate religious education in countering radicalism, utilising the values of Pancasila. Winarni's study (Winarni, 2020) highlights the role of education in revitalising diversity values through a collaborative approach between educational institutions and the government. Zakuan and Seniwati (Zakuan & Seniwati, 2021) studied a model of community collaboration with the government to prevent terrorism through a community-based deradicalisation programme. However, these studies do not explore how the smallest structures of society, such as families and local communities, can play a direct role in prevention and de-radicalisation efforts.

The various studies above have provided insights into the dynamics of FRT and its coping strategies. However, there is a gap that has not been explored, namely the role of society in the smallest structures, such as families or local organisations, as the first bulwark against radicalism. In addition, studies on how interfaith interaction in a pluralistic community like Salatiga can be an effective prevention model are lacking. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of the community within the framework of Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism theory, which is relevant in preventing radicalisation while strengthening social harmony in Indonesia (George, 2017).

This research aims to explore the role of the community as part of *civic activism* within the framework of Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism theory, to counteract Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT). The focus of this study is on interfaith relations between Islamic and Christian communities in Salatiga, which is known as one of the most tolerant cities in Indonesia. This study is designed to fill an identified gap in the literature, namely the lack of research that explores the contribution of the smallest societal structures-such as families, local communities, and faith-based organisations-in preventing the spread of radical ideologies (Purnomo, 2009). It also aims to develop a locally-based model of interfaith harmony that can be replicated in other regions, addressing the still significant challenges of radicalisation and intolerance in Indonesia.

This research argues that *civic activism*, starting from the smallest social structures such as family, neighbourhood association (RT/RW), to interfaith institutions, can effectively counteract the spread of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) in Salatiga. Within the framework of Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism theory, *civic activism* includes active community participation in promoting tolerance values through interfaith dialogue, social collaboration, and the formation of anti-radicalism narratives. George emphasises that pluralism requires not only legal mechanisms and political leadership, but also community engagement as a social force capable of identifying and counteracting radical ideologies before they develop. By relating this theory to the local context of Salatiga, where interfaith harmony has been established but is being threatened by the seeds of

intolerance, this study argues that local communities have great potential to be the first line of defence against FRT, while creating a model that can be adopted in other parts of Indonesia (Titaley, 2013).

2. Methods

This research focuses on interfaith relations and the role of community organisations in Salatiga in preventing the spread of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) (Sidik, 2019). The unit of analysis includes individuals such as community leaders and members of religious organisations, groups such as the Salatiga Church Cooperation Agency (BKGS) and interfaith youth movements, as well as institutions including local government and religious bodies. These units were chosen because of their direct engagement in civic activism and their significant contributions to maintaining interfaith harmony in Salatiga.

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative approach was employed (Sutopo, 2002). This approach was deemed suitable for exploring the nuanced dynamics of interfaith relations, cultural practices, and organisational activities aimed at addressing FRT. Qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of context-specific phenomena, particularly the strategies adopted by communities in a pluralistic city like Salatiga, which has historically been a model of religious tolerance (Titaley, 2013).

The data for this study were derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including former and current leaders of BKGS, members of the GKI Soka Church, and representatives of interfaith organisations. These interviews aimed to capture insights into their experiences, perceptions, and strategies in countering FRT. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, journal articles, seminar proceedings, and institutional reports from entities such as BNPT, Komnas HAM, and SETARA Institute. Additional data were gathered from government publications and media articles documenting the activities of interfaith communities and the broader context of FRT in Indonesia.

Data collection involved a combination of methods. Direct observations were conducted to study BKGS activities and interfaith collaborations in Salatiga, focusing on joint religious celebrations, community service initiatives, and other events that foster tolerance. Semi-structured interviews provided detailed narratives from informants about their engagement in interfaith dialogue, civic activism, and the challenges they face in promoting social harmony. Document analysis was also performed, examining organisational reports, media articles, and historical records to enrich the understanding of the context and to triangulate findings from observations and interviews (Moleong, 2004).

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. This technique was employed to identify and interpret patterns and themes, which were subsequently categorised into topics such as interfaith initiatives, civic engagement strategies, and barriers to tolerance. The analysis was framed within Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism theory, which provided a lens for evaluating the effectiveness of community roles in countering FRT. The results were synthesised to draw conclusions and offer recommendations for strengthening interfaith harmony and preventing radicalisation, both in Salatiga and as a model for other pluralistic communities in Indonesia.

3. Results

The Role of Community-Based Organisations in Countering FRT

Community-based organisations in Salatiga, particularly the Salatiga Church Cooperation Agency (BKGS), have demonstrated a critical role in fostering interfaith harmony by facilitating community activities such as joint religious celebrations, public service initiatives, and interfaith dialogues. These efforts exemplify the active integration of diverse faith communities to promote tolerance and counteract the spread of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT). A prominent example of these efforts is the participation of Banser NU, a Muslim organisation, in maintaining security during Christmas and Easter celebrations. For instance, during the 2023 Christmas event held at Pancasila

Field, Banser NU deployed 20 personnel to manage crowds and ensure safety, which BKGS acknowledged as a significant contribution to fostering trust and cooperation between religious groups. Similarly, during Eid al-Fitr prayers, Christian organisations reciprocate by assisting in crowd management, highlighting a cyclical collaboration that reinforces mutual respect and coexistence among faith communities (RMOL, 2023).

Our partnership with Banser NU during Christmas celebrations has been instrumental in maintaining safety and fostering mutual respect between faith communities. This collaboration shows how religious organisations can work together to uphold harmony.” (DHI, Former BKGS Chair, Personal Communication, March 23, 2023)

Beyond religious events, BKGS has played a vital role in public service initiatives. During the Covid-19 pandemic, BKGS partnered with interfaith organisations to distribute masks, food packages, and medical aid to vulnerable communities. This initiative was supported by students from UIN Salatiga and Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW), who actively participated in logistical planning and distribution. Additionally, BKGS collaborated with local mosques and churches to organise vaccination drives, which not only addressed pressing public health concerns but also served as platforms to strengthen interfaith partnerships (Kemenag, 2021).

The role of youth in fostering tolerance is exemplified by the *Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman* (Interfaith Young Friends Movement). This movement conducts educational workshops on topics such as peacebuilding, countering extremism, and interfaith dialogue. In 2022, the group organised disaster relief programs to assist flood victims in Salatiga, where Muslim and Christian youths collaboratively provided shelter and basic necessities, showcasing the power of collective action. The group also holds monthly interfaith dialogues, which serve as platforms to address contemporary issues such as intolerance and strategies to combat radical ideologies (S. W. H. Nugroho, 2023).

Through interfaith workshops, we aim to educate the younger generation on the values of tolerance and peacebuilding. Our disaster relief programs further strengthen our commitment to collective action (AKH, Member *Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman* Member, Personal Communication, October 23, 2022).

Interfaith collaboration at the grassroots level is facilitated by forums such as *Forum Hati Beriman* and the *PUASA Council*. Established in 2002, Forum Hati Beriman has conducted community service activities, such as cleaning public spaces and organising health campaigns, which promote unity and shared values among different faith communities. The *PUASA Council*, also founded in 2002, brings together leaders from various religious groups to discuss shared concerns and develop collaborative strategies. The council’s initiative, the Healthy Kinship Network (*KEHATI*), maintains active communication among interfaith leaders and fosters continued dialogue and understanding (Yedija, 2023).

These initiatives underscore the pivotal role of community-based organisations in implementing Cherian George’s Assertive Pluralism theory, particularly through the element of civic activism. By fostering interfaith collaboration, engaging youth, and addressing social challenges, these organisations in Salatiga not only strengthen social harmony but also serve as a replicable model for countering FRT in other regions of Indonesia. Their efforts align with the principles of promoting tolerance and understanding in a pluralistic society, addressing both immediate and long-term challenges posed by radical ideologies.

Table 1. Key Contributions of Community-Based Organisations in Salatiga

Activity	Organisation Involved	Impact
Christmas Security Support	Banser NU, BKGS	20 personnel deployed for crowd management, fostering trust and cooperation.
Eid al-Fitr Security Support	Christian Organisations, BKGS	Reciprocal participation in crowd management during public Eid prayers.

Covid-19 Relief Initiatives	BKGS, UIN Salatiga, UKSW	Distributed masks, food, and medical aid; supported vaccination drives.
Disaster Relief Programs	<i>Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman</i>	Youth collaboration in providing flood relief and essential supplies to affected families.
Community Health Campaigns	<i>Forum Hati Beriman, PUASA Council</i>	Organised health campaigns and public space cleaning to enhance grassroots cooperation.

The findings, as illustrated in Table 1, indicate that interfaith collaboration in Salatiga extends beyond mere ceremonial participation. It involves various impactful activities that foster trust, solidarity, and mutual respect among diverse religious communities. For example, initiatives such as Christmas and Eid al-Fitr security support, disaster relief programs, and community health campaigns highlight the active and reciprocal involvement of community-based organisations like BKGS, Banser NU, and *Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman*. These efforts not only address immediate social and public needs but also strengthen interfaith relationships by promoting shared values and collective action.

The findings of interfaith collaboration in Salatiga reveal three significant patterns that demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based organisations in countering Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT). First, integrated community activities play a pivotal role in fostering solidarity and mutual respect among faith communities. For example, the active participation of Banser NU in maintaining security during Christmas celebrations and the reciprocal involvement of Christian organisations during Eid al-Fitr prayers illustrate a shared commitment to creating harmonious interfaith relations. These collaborative efforts not only build trust but also set a precedent for broader societal cooperation. Second, youth engagement emerges as a critical strategy for fostering tolerance and shared values. Initiatives by the *Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman*, such as interfaith workshops and disaster relief programs, have successfully mobilised young people from diverse religious backgrounds, equipping them with knowledge on peacebuilding and counter-extremism. By reducing the risk of radical ideologies influencing the younger generation, these initiatives underscore the role of youth as active agents in promoting interfaith harmony. Lastly, support structures provided by organisations such as the BKGS, *Forum Hati Beriman*, and the *PUASA Council* act as essential bridges between religious groups. These organisations facilitate dialogue, collaboration, and mutual assistance, as seen in BKGS's public service initiatives during the Covid-19 pandemic and the *PUASA Council's* health campaigns. Collectively, these efforts not only address immediate social needs but also strengthen long-term goals of fostering unity and understanding, offering a model for replicable strategies in pluralistic societies facing similar challenges.

The active involvement of civic organisations in interfaith collaborations in Salatiga embodies the core principles of Cherian George's Assertive Pluralism, which emphasises proactive and sustained efforts to uphold harmony in pluralistic societies. These initiatives demonstrate how community-driven strategies, such as interfaith youth engagement, collaborative religious events, and public service programs, can effectively pre-empt the emergence of intolerance and mitigate the spread of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT). By fostering trust, solidarity, and mutual respect across diverse religious communities, these efforts not only address immediate social needs but also strengthen the resilience of interfaith relationships against ideological divisions. Furthermore, the model of collaboration established in Salatiga offers practical lessons and a replicable framework for other regions facing similar challenges. It highlights the potential of grassroots activism to act as a first line of defence against radical ideologies, demonstrating that locally-driven initiatives are essential in building cohesive and tolerant societies.

Educational Programs Promoting Interfaith Tolerance

Educational programs in Salatiga have played a critical role in fostering interfaith tolerance and addressing the challenges posed by modernity, pluralism, and radicalism. Collaborations between institutions such as Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW) and Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Salatiga exemplify how education can serve as a platform for dialogue, mutual learning, and collective

action. Through joint academic initiatives, cultural programs, and public service projects, these institutions actively promote interfaith understanding while mitigating the risks of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT).

A significant step in this collaboration was marked by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 7 March 2023, where UIN Salatiga and UKSW committed to strengthening partnerships in education, research, and community service (Humas, 2023). This renewed agreement builds on a history of collaboration between the two universities, with UIN Salatiga expressing its readiness to provide Islamic Studies lecturers to support UKSW's curriculum, particularly in courses related to Islamology. According to UIN Salatiga Rector, Prof. Zakiyuddin Baidhaw, "If UKSW needs experts in Islamic studies, we are ready to provide competent human resources in this field." This offer reflects the shared commitment to fostering understanding of Islamic perspectives within a broader interfaith academic environment. On the other hand, UKSW, with its well-established science laboratory facilities, is prepared to collaborate with UIN Salatiga in the development of *Halal Studies*, highlighting the mutual exchange of expertise and resources (Humas, 2023).

The collaboration aims to create a framework that not only enriches academic offerings at both institutions but also promotes interreligious harmony. Prof. Intiyas Utami, Rector of UKSW, emphasized that this partnership demonstrates how two religiously diverse universities can join forces to contribute to national development. "The presence of UIN and UKSW in Salatiga must continue to enrich the community and educate the nation," she remarked, underscoring the shared vision of fostering interfaith coexistence. This initiative is a practical reflection of mutual respect and a commitment to build a more inclusive and harmonious society through education (Humas, 2023).

Another notable initiative is the formation of *Kampus Kebangsaan*, a national campus resilience program spearheaded by the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT). This program targets both UIN Salatiga and UKSW as part of efforts to enhance campus resilience against the influences of radical ideologies. As part of the program, the universities are set to implement *Jurnalisme Kebangsaan* (National Journalism) competitions, aiming to foster student participation in raising awareness about the dangers of extremist ideologies. UIN Salatiga Rector, Prof. Zakiyuddin, described the initiative as a significant step toward empowering students to build national consciousness. Similarly, UKSW's Director of Student Affairs, Giner Maslebo, affirmed the institution's commitment to mobilising student organisations in support of the program. Beyond journalism, the initiative also includes the development of *Warung NKRI Digital* in Salatiga, a digital platform designed to strengthen civic engagement and counter radicalism (Sudoyo, 2024).

Table 2. Key Educational Initiatives Promoting Interfaith Tolerance in Salatiga

Initiative	Institutions Involved	Description	Impact
Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)	UIN Salatiga and UKSW	Renewal of partnership to collaborate on education, research, and community service, including the provision of Islamic Studies lecturers and joint Halal Studies development.	Promotes academic exchange and mutual understanding in interfaith contexts, enriching institutional collaboration.
Islamology Courses	UIN Salatiga and UKSW	UIN Salatiga offers Islamic Studies expertise to integrate Islamology courses in UKSW's curriculum.	Enhances knowledge sharing, fostering interfaith academic engagement.
Kampus Kebangsaan Program	UIN Salatiga, UKSW, and BNPT	National resilience initiative to counter radical ideologies through Jurnalisme Kebangsaan competitions and digital civic engagement platforms.	Strengthens campus resilience, raises student awareness, and counters radical ideologies.

Jurnalisme Kebangsaan Competitions	UIN Salatiga, UKSW, and BNPT	Aimed at fostering student participation in creating awareness about extremist ideologies.	Builds student capacity as advocates for tolerance and national consciousness.
Warung NKRI Digital	UIN Salatiga, UKSW, and BNPT	A digital platform to promote civic engagement and counter radicalism.	Provides an innovative tool for fostering dialogue and community cohesion.

As illustrated in *Table 2*, the educational collaboration between UIN Salatiga and WSSW includes various initiatives that actively promote interfaith tolerance, mutual respect, and community harmony. These efforts, such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), establish a formal commitment to academic exchange and community collaboration, allowing both institutions to effectively share expertise and resources. For example, the provision of Islamic Studies lecturers from UIN Salatiga supports the integration of Islamology into the UKSW curriculum, which encourages interfaith dialogue and understanding in the academic environment.

Programmes such as *Kampus Kebangsaan* further demonstrate the institution's dedication to enhancing campus resilience against radical ideologies through innovative approaches, including the *Kebangsaan Journalism Competition*. This competition not only raises awareness among students about the dangers of extremism, but also positions them as advocates for tolerance and national awareness. In addition, the *Warung NKRI Digital* initiative highlights the integration of digital platforms to facilitate community engagement and counter radicalism, showcasing the forward-thinking strategies employed in this collaboration.

These initiatives reflect a shared vision of empowering students as agents of change, equipped with the necessary knowledge and values to counter radical ideologies and contribute to a more inclusive society. The collaborative framework established by UIN Salatiga and UKSW serves as a model for other institutions to emulate, emphasising the important role of education in addressing societal challenges and fostering sustainable interfaith harmony.

The results show that three main patterns emerge from the educational collaboration between UIN Salatiga and UKSW in promoting interfaith tolerance and counteracting radical ideologies. These patterns reflect the strategic approach taken by both institutions in building interfaith harmony through education.

First, there is a pattern of deep academic collaboration to strengthen interfaith understanding. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 7 March 2023 became an important milestone in renewing the cooperation between the two institutions. In this context, UIN Salatiga contributes by providing lecturers to integrate Islamology courses in the UKSW curriculum. This step not only broadens students' knowledge of Islamic teachings, but also creates a space for inclusive academic dialogue. This collaboration shows how education is used as a platform to foster interfaith harmony and build mutual understanding in the academic environment.

Second, the initiative to strengthen campus resilience through the *Kampus Kebangsaan* programme initiated by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) shows a pattern of integrating education with the national agenda in countering radicalism. The programme involves a *National Journalism competition* that aims to raise students' awareness of the dangers of extremism and radicalism. The competition encourages students to become pioneers of tolerance and national awareness. In addition, the programme also includes the development of *Warung NKRI Digital*, an innovative digital platform that facilitates interfaith dialogue and strengthens civic engagement in efforts to prevent the spread of radical ideologies.

Third, the pattern of exchanging resources for the development of educational innovations is another distinctive feature of this collaboration. UKSW utilises its science laboratory to support the development of *Halal Studies* initiated by UIN Salatiga, while UIN Salatiga provides support in the form of competent human resources in the field of Islamology studies. This exchange creates a cross-disciplinary synergy that not only strengthens academic quality, but also supports the sustainability of inclusive education in both institutions.

Finally, there is a pattern of digital approaches used by both institutions in enhancing social engagement. Through *Warung NKRI Digital*, both universities demonstrate adaptation to the challenges of modernity by creating technology-based interfaith dialogue spaces. This platform is not only designed to prevent radicalism in the digital space, but also to strengthen interfaith social relations in society.

The patterns identified from the collaboration between UIN Salatiga and UKSW show that education has a strategic role in creating interfaith harmony and counteracting radical ideologies. Academic collaboration, campus resilience initiatives, resource exchange, and digital approaches are key elements that support the success of this endeavour. By engaging students as agents of change, these two institutions not only contribute to national development, but also provide a model of interfaith collaboration that can be replicated in other institutions. This collaboration emphasises the importance of interfaith synergy in addressing the challenges of modernity and plurality in Indonesia.

Findings from the educational collaboration between UIN Salatiga and UKSW underscore the strategic role of education in promoting interfaith tolerance and countering radical ideologies in Indonesia. Through initiatives such as the integration of Islamology courses at UKSW with the support of lecturers from UIN Salatiga, the Kampus Kebangsaan programme involving BNPT, and the development of *Warung NKRI Digital*, this collaboration creates spaces for interfaith dialogue, student engagement in national issues, and adaptation to modernity through digital technology. Cross-institutional synergies in resource exchange, such as the UKSW science laboratory for the development of Halal Studies at UIN Salatiga, demonstrate the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in creating inclusive educational innovations. The findings confirm that interfaith-based educational collaboration is not only relevant but also essential in facing the challenges of pluralism, modernity, and radicalism, and can be replicated in other institutions to build a more tolerant, inclusive, and harmonious society.

Challenges and Emerging Threats in Maintaining Tolerance

Although Salatiga is known as a tolerant city, new challenges are emerging that threaten interfaith harmony. One such challenge is the development of exclusive sharia housing in suburban areas, which raises concerns of increased social segregation. A report by SETARA Institute (2024) suggests that such segregated residential zones can narrow the space for interaction between religious communities. In addition, there have been reports from communities of resistance to interfaith activities, such as joint prayers or interfaith events, in some peripheral areas, reflecting an ideological resistance to inclusivity.

Some of the sharia housing estates include PT M. Housing with the tagline “*Building a Sakinah, Mawadah, Warohmah Family*”. FRS Housing, which claims to be the first sharia housing estate in Salatiga, and has built housing in the Gamol, Bendosari, Tegalrejo, and Dayaan areas of Salatiga, with the tagline “*Islamic housing, quality neighbours*”. Next, there is a developer who has entered, namely CAR which has 14 plots and is located in Kumpulrejo village, Argomulyo, Salatiga. In one of the promotions for this cluster, there is a sentence that reads, “... the residence will be filled by Muslims who obey the sharia and avoid the sin of usury”. So, sharia housing exists and the requirements are being Muslim, obeying the sharia, and building a *sakinah, mawadah, warohmah* family. This gives rise to prospective residents or buyers who tend to be homogeneous. There is an assumption that those who obey the sharia are considered to have better quality than others. This certainly carries the risk of social segregation, which is the opposite of social integration, and a climate of tolerance will not be sufficiently built in it, which if not considered will become the seeds of intolerance that threaten the unity of society, and not just the title of the most tolerant city.

In addition, there was an incident in September 2024 that needs to be continuously watched out for, because of the intolerant actions of several influential people and then the RT, RW and Kelurahan officials were not firm enough to fight back. The incident was about the prohibition of the Fun Walk in the context of the GBI Karangalit church anniversary on September 8 which was rejected by residents. The cancellation issue has been mediated, and the activity continues. The plan for the fun walk on Sunday, September 8, 2024 finally went ahead and was resolved well, and was still attended by

residents of RW 5 Karangalit. Although it was considered a form of misunderstanding because the church was registering residents who would participate to ensure consumption, this was easily twisted into an issue that the church was registering residents to be the target of the Gospel mission.

Table 3. Forms of Challenges and Potential Impacts on Tolerance in Salatiga

Form of Challenge	Potential Impact
Development of exclusive sharia housing based on religious homogeneity	Social segregation, reduced interaction between religious communities
Promotional narratives implying moral superiority of certain groups	Stigmatisation of non-Muslim residents, reinforcement of religious exclusivism
Rejection of interfaith religious activities in public spaces	Interreligious tension, decreased sense of security in worship and social interaction
Lack of assertiveness from local authorities in handling intolerance	Legitimisation of intolerance, weakened protection of religious freedom
Misinformation about certain faith community activities	Growing interreligious suspicion, erosion of trust and social cohesion

Although Salatiga has long been recognised as one of the most tolerant cities in Indonesia, recent social developments indicate that such a status does not guarantee immunity from the threats of intolerance. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of exclusive sharia housing being developed in the outskirts of Salatiga. These housing projects not only restrict prospective residents to a single religious group but also promote narratives that implicitly convey moral superiority. Phrases such as “quality neighbours,” “free from usury,” or “Muslims who adhere to sharia” shape a community identity that is not only religiously homogeneous but also socially exclusive. As a result, the shared public space—where tolerance and integration should flourish—shrinks, leaving deeper divides between religious communities.

Another emerging phenomenon is the resistance to interfaith activities. A notable incident occurred in September 2024 when some residents of Karangalit opposed a planned Fun Walk commemorating the anniversary of the GBI church. Although the event was open and aimed to promote community togetherness, the simple act of participant registration—which was intended for meal provision—was misinterpreted as a covert evangelism effort. The residents’ reaction, marked by suspicion and rejection without verification, illustrates that seeds of tension still persist in the community. More concerning is the lack of assertiveness from local authorities, such as neighbourhood and subdistrict leaders, in addressing the situation, signalling weak protection for inclusive public space.

These two phenomena reveal several emerging patterns of threat. First, there is a tendency toward spatial segregation based on religion, which reduces opportunities for daily interfaith interaction. Second, the exclusivist narratives embedded in housing promotions foster the perception that one religious group is morally superior to others. Third, there is ideological resistance to interfaith events, especially when they are perceived to “threaten” the religious identity of certain groups. Fourth, structural weaknesses exist at the local governance level, where officials are often passive in responding to signs of intolerance.

The implications of these findings suggest that tolerance is not a static condition, but a social process that requires continuous and active care. In the framework of assertive pluralism, as articulated by Cherian George, firm and proactive responses from both civil society and government institutions are needed to keep public spaces open to all groups. If social segregation and suspicion are left unaddressed, they will create fertile ground for the subtle growth of radicalism—less visible, but equally dangerous. Salatiga may still hold the title of a tolerant city, but without vigilance against these emerging challenges, the title risks becoming a mere symbol devoid of real and sustained social substance.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal three key insights regarding the role of society in preventing the escalation of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) in Salatiga. First, community-based organisations such as the Salatiga Church Cooperation Agency (BKGS), Banser NU, Forum Hati Beriman, and the Interfaith Young Friends Movement (*Gerakan Sobat Muda Lintas Iman*) play a central role through interfaith collaboration in religious events, public services, and humanitarian programs. These collaborations foster mutual trust, solidarity, and respect between Muslim and Christian communities. Second, interfaith education programs initiated by the State Islamic University (UIN) of Salatiga and Satya Wacana Christian University (UKSW) strengthen interreligious understanding through the integration of Islamology courses, the development of halal studies, and the *Kampus Kebangsaan* program in collaboration with the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT). These initiatives encourage student engagement as agents of change who promote tolerance and national awareness. Third, new challenges and emerging threats have arisen, including the development of exclusive sharia housing, narratives of moral superiority, resistance to interfaith activities, and the weak assertiveness of local authorities in addressing intolerance. These phenomena have the potential to reduce interreligious interaction and nurture the seeds of radicalism if left unaddressed.

These findings can be explained through Cherian George's assertive pluralism framework, which emphasises the need for active engagement by both the state and society in restricting expressions that threaten social cohesion while maintaining an inclusive public sphere. In the context of Salatiga, interfaith harmony is realized through the synergy of four elements: (1) Grassroots Organizations serving as the front line for early detection of radicalization, (2) Educational Institutions integrating interfaith dialogue into curricula, (3) Collaborative Public Initiatives facilitating positive interaction in public spaces, and (4) Responsive Local Governance that acts decisively against intolerance.

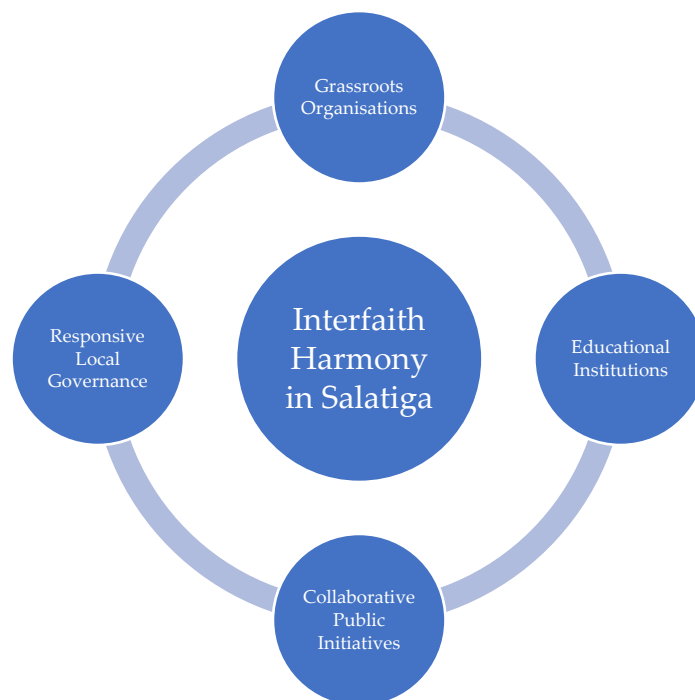


Figure 1. The Interfaith Harmony Model of Salatiga Based on Assertive Pluralism

This model demonstrates that social cohesion in Salatiga is built through reciprocal interactions between social and institutional actors. When these four elements operate synergistically, they create a preventive mechanism against radicalisation, strengthen interfaith trust, and maintain a safe public space for all citizens.

The findings of this study reinforce the work of Putra & Sukabdi (I. E. Putra & Sukabdi, 2014) and Abbas (Abbas, 2003), which argues that fundamentalism is often linked to the rationalisation of violence and as a reaction to modernity. However, unlike those studies, this research illustrates how active pluralism at the community level can mitigate the direct relationship between fundamentalism and support for terrorism. This study also aligns with Nugroho (S. W. H. Nugroho, 2023), who emphasises the role of interfaith communities in fostering tolerance, but it complements these findings by identifying structural barriers, such as weak responses from local authorities, which have rarely been discussed in previous literature. Furthermore, the results expand upon the education-based prevention models proposed by Hasan (Hasan, 2017) and Muhajir & Nurcholis (Muhajir & Nurcholis, 2024) by adding the dimension of synergy between educational institutions, civil society organisations, and local governments, making it more comprehensive than approaches that focus solely on the education sector or civil society.

Historically, interfaith collaboration in Salatiga reflects a long-standing legacy of peaceful interaction between Muslims and Christians since the colonial era, in line with the complex pattern of interreligious relations in Indonesia—marked by periods of both cooperation and conflict. Shared cultural practices and communal identities, such as simultaneous Muslim–Hindu religious ceremonies at Taman Kemaliq, Lombok or interfaith marriages in Pemenang Timur, North Lombok, have served as adhesives of social cohesion. In Toraja, interfaith marriages also contribute to social tolerance (Radjab, Genda, Haris, & Abdullah, 2020), despite being formally prohibited under Islamic law (Koschorke, 2019; Setiawan et al., 2024) and often conducted abroad to circumvent administrative barriers (Wahyuni, Luthviati, Hayat, & Mishra, 2022). At the diplomatic level, Pope Francis’s visit to Indonesia underscored the importance of Muslim–Catholic collaboration in addressing poverty and radicalism, while bilateral relations between Indonesia and the Vatican have further strengthened religious freedom (Supriyanto, 2024).

However, the history of interfaith relations is also marked by conflicts, such as those in Maluku and Aceh, driven by territorialised narratives of religious history and state policies (Birchok, 2021; Bräuchler, 2015). Violations of religious freedom, including restrictions on the establishment of houses of worship and violence against minorities, still occur despite constitutional guarantees (Yasin & Mantu, 2021). In this context, Salatiga faces modern challenges in the form of spatial segregation through the development of exclusive sharia housing and the infiltration of exclusivist ideologies, both of which have the potential to narrow spaces for interfaith interaction. This phenomenon underscores that the legacy of interreligious harmony requires active efforts to preserve it, in line with assertive pluralism, which demands the involvement of both the state and society in safeguarding inclusive public spaces.

Socially, practices such as cooperation in securing religious events and implementing interfaith educational programs serve as bonds that strengthen trust and solidarity between communities, as reflected in various forms of interfaith collaboration across Indonesia. In Salatiga, for example, Muslim–Christian interactions are built on the principles of unity, freedom, honesty, and mutual respect that sustain peaceful coexistence (Kuswaya & Ali, 2021). These efforts are reinforced by diplomatic initiatives such as Pope Francis’s visit, which emphasised love, human dignity, and collaboration in addressing poverty and radicalism, as well as bilateral relations between Indonesia and the Vatican that support religious freedom through tolerance village programs and interfaith events (Supriyanto, 2024). *Pesantren* also play an important role in promoting religious moderation by integrating interfaith education, critical thinking, and gender equality into their curricula, despite facing resource constraints (Athoillah, Rahman, Firdaus, & Septiadi, 2024). In Mandailing Natal, the local wisdom of *Dalihan Na Tolu* encourages cooperation and mutual respect between Muslim and Christian communities (Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024), while the Minahasa tradition emphasises openness and constructive dialogue to reduce fundamentalist attitudes (Pangalila & Rumbay, 2024). Nevertheless, challenges such as violations of religious freedom (Yasin & Mantu, 2021), the prohibition of interfaith greetings by the Indonesian Ulema Council, and the legal complexities of interfaith marriage (Kuswandi, 2019), indicate

that interfaith cooperation requires continuous dialogue, inclusive policies, and active public engagement to maintain social harmony.

Ideologically, the assertive pluralism approach shifts the paradigm from passive tolerance to active engagement in protecting public spaces, aligning with the practice of *active pluralism* in Indonesia, which is supported by diverse legal, social, and political frameworks. Legally, pluralism is manifested through the recognition of traditional systems such as *noken* in Papua (Faiz, Isra, Rachman, Ghoffar, & Fahmi, 2023), the special status of Yogyakarta (G. P. Putra, Irianto, & Manullang, 2023), and the integration of Islamic law, *adat* law, and civil law (Lukito, 2012). In the religious sphere, Nahdlatul Ulama plays a key role in promoting moderate Islam and rejecting religion-based violence (Fealy, 2008; Hamdi, 2021), while studies on interpretations of pluralism by Indonesian Muslim scholars reveal a diversity of perspectives influenced by political and ideological factors. These efforts are reinforced through pluralism education in schools (Nurman, Yusriadi, & Hamim, 2022) and community-government collaboration in locally grounded urban development. Politically, the relationship between Islam, democracy, and pluralism continues to be negotiated through governmental strategies that accommodate Islamic norms within a democratic framework, demonstrating that protecting pluralism in Indonesia requires collective engagement across sectors.

This study serves positively as empirical documentation of the effectiveness of interfaith collaboration in preventing radicalisation within plural societies. Another function is to provide a conceptual model that can be replicated in other regions. However, there is a dysfunction that needs to be addressed, namely the potential vulnerability of this model to the weak assertiveness of local authorities and the sustainability of collaboration that heavily depends on the commitment of individuals and specific community leaders. If these key actors become inactive, the program's effectiveness can decline significantly—a finding consistent with studies in Indonesia showing that community leadership plays a crucial role in building adaptive capacity through strengthening social capital, mobilising resources, and organising collective action. The sustainability of community-based initiatives, such as liquid waste management in Yogyakarta, has been shown to depend more on the commitment of leaders than on direct community participation (Fajarwati, Setyaningrum, Rachmawati, & Prakoso, 2020). Participatory approaches in spatial planning in Aceh (Sugiri, 2010) and post-mining ecological transitions in Bantar Karet (Sutrisno, Lee, & Suryawan, 2024) also demonstrate that the effectiveness of collaboration is strongly influenced by leadership style, strategic flexibility, and organisational support. Challenges such as resource limitations, minimal recognition of rights, and weak collective-choice arrangements (Massiri, Nugroho, Kartodihardjo, & Soekmadi, 2019) highlight that, to maintain sustainability, community leadership must be strengthened through training, strategic adaptation, the use of local wisdom (Wardhani, Arisanty, Nugroho, & Utami, 2024), and the adoption of transformational or green leadership styles that encourage engagement, innovation, and pro-environmental behaviour (Udin, 2023).

Based on the identified dysfunctions, the recommended action plan includes: first, strengthening the capacity of local authorities (RT/RW, *kelurahan*) to address intolerance issues through training based on *Assertive Pluralism*; second, establishing a community-based early warning system to detect and respond to signs of intolerance at an early stage; third, integrating interfaith education curricula at the secondary school and university levels that involve the active role of civil society organizations; and fourth, implementing municipal government policies prohibiting spatial segregation practices based on religion through housing regulations. The implementation of this action plan is expected to strengthen social resilience and maintain Salatiga's reputation as a tolerant city with substantive qualities, not merely a symbolic label.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that community-based strategies play a decisive role in preventing the escalation of Fundamentalism, Radicalism, and Terrorism (FRT) in pluralistic settings such as Salatiga. Three main findings emerge. First, *grassroots* organisations—including BKGS, Banser NU, Forum Hati Beriman, and the Interfaith Young Friends Movement—are central to fostering trust, solidarity, and

mutual respect through interfaith collaboration in religious events, public services, and humanitarian programs. Second, interfaith educational initiatives led by UIN Salatiga and UKSW, supported by the *Kampus Kebangsaan* program and curriculum integration such as *Islamology* courses and halal studies, strengthen interreligious understanding and engage students as agents of tolerance and national awareness. Third, emerging threats—including exclusive sharia housing, moral superiority narratives, rejection of interfaith activities, and weak assertiveness of local authorities—pose risks to interfaith interaction and create potential breeding grounds for radicalism if left unaddressed.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its empirical application of Cherian George's assertive pluralism framework within the Indonesian context, offering a four-pillar model for interfaith harmony: grassroots organisations, educational institutions, collaborative public initiatives, and responsive local governance. By integrating these pillars, the study provides a conceptual and replicable model for community-driven, pre-conflict prevention in pluralistic societies. Furthermore, the findings advance existing literature by identifying structural weaknesses—such as local governance passivity and overreliance on key individuals—that have been largely overlooked, and by demonstrating how synergy among education, civil society, and local government strengthens social resilience.

This research is not without limitations. The case study approach, while rich in contextual detail, limits the generalizability of findings beyond settings with similar socio-cultural dynamics. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on interfaith relations between Muslim and Christian communities, which may not fully capture the dynamics involving other religious groups. Future research could expand the model to diverse religious landscapes, conduct longitudinal assessments of interfaith initiatives, and evaluate the impact of leadership regeneration strategies on the sustainability of community collaboration.

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