



Religion's Role in Mitigating Social Conflicts in Rural Communities: Insights from a Case Study in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Conflict Resolution; Insider Mediation; Peacebuilding; Positive Peace; Qur'anic Values; Rural Society.</p>	<p>This study investigates the role of religion in managing social conflict in rural areas, focusing on the practice of the musyawarah forum in Cimaung, Bandung Regency. Religion is conceptualized not merely as a symbol but as an epistemological framework and symbolic capital that provides social legitimacy in mediation processes. Employing a qualitative approach, this research combined participant observation, in-depth interviews, and NVivo-assisted analysis to capture discursive patterns within the forum's practices. The findings reveal that religious leaders act as <i>insider mediators</i>, whose moral legitimacy enables them to effectively bridge communal disputes. Qur'anic values such as <i>shura</i> (consultation), <i>rahmah</i> (compassion), <i>afw</i> (forgiveness), and <i>'adl</i> (justice) constitute the forum's foundation, thereby producing forms of <i>positive peace</i> that transcend immediate conflict resolution and foster long-term social cohesion. Challenges faced by the forum include the politicization of religious identity and heavy reliance on charismatic leaders. Practically, this study recommends strengthening the institutional capacity of religious-based forums to ensure inclusivity, sustainability, and resilience in rural peacebuilding.</p> <p>Contribution: This study contributes to the global discourse on <i>religious peacebuilding</i> by providing empirical evidence from rural Indonesia, offering a Qur'an-based musyawarah model as a grassroots peace infrastructure relevant to international debates.</p>
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1. INTRODUCTION

Social conflict in rural areas is a recurring phenomenon in Indonesian society. Interaction patterns that blend kinship, economics, and religion make village-level conflict not merely a material issue but also fraught with symbolic meaning and collective identity (Tan et al., 2025). Recent studies confirm that rural conflict is often triggered by simple factors such as struggles over natural resources, differing views on the management of local organizations, and friction between youth groups that then escalate into clashes over social and religious identities (Bazaanah & Mothapo, 2023). This aligns with the case in Cimaung, Bandung Regency, where initially minor differences in social interests escalated into horizontal tensions between residents. This situation demonstrates the importance of conflict-resolution tools that rely not only on formal legal approaches but also on the social and religious institutions within the community.

Religion in rural communities plays a complex dual role. On the one hand, religion has the potential to legitimize group polarization when religious interpretations are politicized. However, on the other hand, religion also provides ethical and normative values to mitigate conflict and build reconciliation (Hossain, 2024). The literature on peacebuilding emphasizes that religious institutions and religious figures possess strong social legitimacy to facilitate dialogue, mediation, and the transformation of intergroup relations (Nwachukwu, 2025). In the case of Muslim communities in West Java, including Cimaung, religious authority rests not only on formal institutions but also on the charisma of religious leaders (kyai) and religious organizations such as Persatuan Islam (Persis), which have historically enjoyed a strong base among the community.

However, academic studies on the role of religion in conflict resolution in Indonesia are still dominated by two major streams. First, research that positions religion primarily as a factor in conflict, particularly in cases of identity-based communal violence (Sidel, 2006). Second, research that links religion to peace but is limited to the normative level, for example, emphasizing religious teachings on compassion, justice, and brotherhood (Rahman et al., 2024). Both streams share the weakness of insufficiently exploring the concrete practices of how religion is operationalized in conflict mediation processes at the community level. Thus, there is a research gap between normative discourse on religion and the actual implementation of religious values in resolving rural social conflicts.

The case of PC Persis Cimaung provides an analytical opportunity to bridge this gap. This religious organization, through its deliberation forums and community wisdom councils, attempts to present a mediation model based on Islamic values, practiced in a participatory manner at the local level. This model emphasizes not only shura (deliberation) as a deliberative mechanism but also embodies the principles of 'adl (justice), rahmah (compassion), and afw (forgiveness) in the practice of resolving disputes between residents (Akhter et al., 2023). Thus, this research examines not only the role of religion at the symbolic level but also at the practical level through concrete institutional and social mechanisms.

Furthermore, the development of conflict resolution theory also demonstrates the need for a more contextual and contemporary approach. Classical theories such as Galtung's, with their framework of direct, structural, and cultural violence, remain relevant for mapping the roots of conflict (John, 1996). However, these theories require enrichment from new perspectives that place greater emphasis on the involvement of spiritual values and local wisdom. The Emancipatory Elicitive Religious Peacebuilding (EERP) approach, for example, emphasizes the importance of religion as an emancipatory force in building sustainable peace through community practices (Kwuelum, 2024). Similarly, the Qur'anic framework, based on tawhid, rahmah, and 'adl, offers a more operational contemporary Islamic perspective on addressing conflict (Davids & Waghid, 2016). This integration of old and new frameworks makes this research both academically relevant and applicable in the field.

Given these conditions, this study assumes that religion is not only a source of morality but also an effective social instrument for managing conflict at the village level. Focusing on the experience of PC Persis Cimaung is expected to demonstrate how Islamic religious organizations mobilize their theological values and social capital to manage conflict constructively. In turn, this study not only enriches the literature on religion-based conflict resolution in Indonesia but also contributes to the development of contemporary peacebuilding theory that is more contextual, participatory, and rooted in community religious values.

Classical theoretical frameworks in conflict resolution studies still play a crucial role as analytical foundations for understanding the dynamics of social conflict. One of the most influential theories is the concept of conflict transformation developed by Johan Galtung. In his work *Peace by Peaceful Means*, Galtung (1996) distinguishes three dimensions of violence: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1996). Direct violence refers to physical or verbal acts that harm others, structural violence relates to socio-political systems that create injustice, while cultural violence relates to symbolic legitimacy, ideology, or cultural practices that justify violence. This perspective is relevant for mapping the dynamics of conflict in rural areas, where conflict is seen not only in clashes between individuals or groups, but also in the social structures and cultural values that underpin them.

Furthermore, Galtung's theory emphasizes the importance of peacebuilding as a holistic transformation effort, not only resolving superficial conflicts but also changing the structures that give rise to injustice (Haq et al., 2023). In the context of rural Indonesia, this idea can be applied to understand how minor conflicts such as youth brawls or land disputes are often amplified by unequal access to resources, weak local institutions, or even cultural biases that perpetuate social segregation (Sihombing et al., 2025). In other words, Galtung's

framework provides a conceptual tool for recognizing that conflict resolution requires a multi-level approach that addresses the root causes, not simply addresses the symptoms.

Besides Galtung, another relevant classical theory is John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation approach. In *Reconcile* (2014) and his earlier work (*Building Peace*, 1997), Lederach emphasized the importance of an infrastructure for peace based on local actors and institutions (Leonardsson, 2023). He proposed that sustainable peace is only possible through broad community participation, integrating the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions of conflict. Lederach also introduced the concept of an elicitive approach, an approach that explores local potential and community cultural values to resolve conflict, rather than simply applying universal models that are often inappropriate to the context.

The relevance of Lederach's approach to the PC Persis Cimaung case is evident in the way the organization initiated a community deliberation forum. This forum can be understood as an infrastructure for peace that grows from the community, relies on the moral authority of religious leaders, and mobilizes the norms of shura and wisdom that exist within the local Muslim community (Ramsbotham, 2016). This approach aligns with Lederach's principle that conflict transformation requires the development of a safe space for dialogue where conflicting parties can meet, discuss, and find common ground based on shared values (Lederach, 2014).

Both classical frameworks, Galtung and Lederach, have advantages and limitations. Galtung's framework is strong in structural and conceptual mapping, but relatively lacks operational instruments for the specific context of religious communities. Meanwhile, Lederach's framework is more applicable at the community level and in interpersonal relationships, but it understates the ideological-religious dimension that often serves as a source of legitimacy for conflict and peace. These limitations require integration with contemporary theories that emphasize the explicit role of religion, such as the Emancipatory Elicitive Religious Peacebuilding approach or the Qur'anic framework that focuses on the values of tawhid, rahmah, and 'adl (Zajontz, 2024).

However, without an understanding of the classical framework, analysis of the Cimaung conflict will lack conceptual depth. Galtung helps us understand that inter-community conflict does not exist in isolation, but is intertwined with broader social and cultural structures. Lederach provides guidance that conflict resolution cannot be solely top-down but must involve local institutions such as PC Persis, which enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the community. Thus, this classical framework serves as a foundation for further analysis, while contemporary theory serves as an analytical tool that sharpens understanding of the role of religion in managing social conflict in rural areas.

Another important contribution comes from Qamar-ul Huda in his book **Reenvisioning Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Islam**. Huda emphasizes that conflict resolution practices in the Islamic tradition should not be viewed solely through the lens of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) or law, but also through the dimensions of ethics, spirituality, and the role of civil society (Huda, 2024). This book emphasizes that religious organizations, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and religious study groups (Majelis Taklim) can be key actors in building contextual peace in the Muslim world. Huda's perspective is highly relevant to this study because PC Persis Cimaung essentially carries out a similar function of mobilizing local religious networks to facilitate peace at the village level.

Beyond the Islamic framework, the Innsbruck School's transrational peace perspective also makes a significant contribution. Dietrich argues that peace is not merely rational or structural, but also emotional, relational, and spiritual (Dietrich, 2024). This approach understands peace as a holistic life experience, encompassing both material and spiritual dimensions. This concept aligns with the practice of the deliberation forum in Cimaung, where the dialogue process focuses not only on rational agreements but also on restoring social relations, trust, and a sense of community among residents.

Furthermore, the diplomatic perspective on religion in peacebuilding adds an analytical dimension that positions religion as both an independent and intervening variable in conflict and peace processes (Hayward, 2012). This perspective reminds us that religion can play a dual role: as a trigger for conflict when politicized, and as an instrument of reconciliation when utilized to strengthen social cohesion. Within this research framework, the religious diplomacy perspective helps explain how PC Persis navigates the ambivalent position of religion by emphasizing ethical and collective values that facilitate peace.

By combining classical and contemporary theories, this study offers a sharper and more contextual analytical framework. Galtung provides a conceptual map of the dimensions of violence, Lederach provides an orientation to local peace infrastructure, while contemporary theory provides tools for understanding how religious values are practically operationalized in community forums. Thus, this study is expected to fill a gap

in the literature by demonstrating that the role of religion in managing rural social conflict is not only normative but also concrete, contextual, and transformative.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen based on the research objective, which focuses on understanding in-depth how religion plays a role in managing social conflict at the community level (Gammelgaard, 2017). Case studies are considered relevant because they allow researchers to explore complex phenomena in a real-world context, taking into account the social, cultural, and religious dynamics unique to rural areas. With this design, researchers not only observe events but also attempt to interpret the meaning behind the actions, symbols, and social interactions of Cimaung residents.

The research location was purposively selected at PC Persis Cimaung, Bandung Regency, West Java. This location was chosen for two main reasons. First, Cimaung is an area that has experienced local-scale social conflict dynamics in recent years, such as friction between residents, tensions between youth, and differing views on community resource management. Second, PC Persis Cimaung plays a significant role in mediating and managing conflict through community deliberation forums and wisdom assemblies, which are interesting models for scientific study. In other words, this location provides a rich empirical context for examining the role of religion in rural conflict resolution.

The research subjects comprised various actors directly and indirectly involved in the conflict mediation process. They included religious leaders (ustadz, kyai, and leaders of the Persis PC), village officials, youth, and residents who had been involved in or affected by the conflict. The participants were selected purposively to ensure a diversity of perspectives and to represent the village's social structure. Participant selection was based on criteria such as direct involvement in deliberation forums, experience in conflict, and social influence within the community. This aligns with Creswell and Poth's view that in qualitative research, participants should be selected based on their ability to provide rich and relevant information to the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The number of participants was not rigidly determined from the outset, but rather followed the principle of saturation, where the interview and observation process was stopped when the data obtained was deemed saturated and no new findings were obtained (Guest et al., 2020). Thus, this study emphasized data quality over quantity, in line with the principles of qualitative methodology.

The researcher's role in this study was limited to a participant role. This meant that the researcher attempted to be present and observe the activities of the deliberation forum, but was not fully involved in the decision-making process. This position was chosen to maintain a balance between proximity to the field and the critical distance necessary for academic analysis. In practice, the researcher adopted an ethnoreligious participatory model approach that emphasizes engagement with local religious and cultural sensitivities (Kelesoglu et al., 2024). This approach was crucial to ensure the research process was not perceived as foreign or intrusive by residents, while also allowing broader access to participants' experiences.

With this methodological framework, the research is expected to comprehensively explore how religious values such as shura, 'adl, rahmah, and afw are operationalized by PC Persis Cimaung in managing conflict. The focus is not simply on the final outcome of mediation, but also on the dynamics of the process, the strategies adopted, and the meanings attached to the practice by the community. In the next stage, a description of data collection techniques, data analysis, and research ethics procedures will be presented to clarify the methodological foundation of this study.

Data collection in this study was conducted using various complementary qualitative techniques. The primary technique was in-depth interviews with religious leaders, village officials, youth, and residents directly involved in the deliberation forum. The interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility in exploring participants' narratives, experiences, and perceptions regarding the role of religion in conflict management. Questions were designed with a focus on the mediation process, the religious values used, and the forum's effectiveness in mitigating conflict. This method enabled researchers to obtain rich, detailed, and contextual data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

In addition to interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to understand the collective dynamics of interpreting the deliberation forum. The FGDs involved representatives from various groups, including religious leaders, youth, and women from religious study groups (Majelis Taklim). The presence of diverse participants allowed for interactions that demonstrated how peace discourse was negotiated collectively. This technique also served as a triangulation mechanism, as individual statements could be reexamined within the context of the collective discussion (Morgan et al., 2019).

Limited participant observation was also conducted to record actual interactions in deliberation forums and other mediation activities. Researchers noted body language, religious symbols, and communication patterns that emerged during the dialogue process. This observation is important because not all dimensions of social relations can be revealed through interviews alone. By recording actual practices, researchers can compare what participants say with what they actually do (DeWalt et al., 2011).

In addition, this research utilized local documents and archives, such as minutes of deliberation forums, internal decrees of the PC Persis, and relevant activity reports. These documents provided useful secondary data to complement the field findings and also demonstrated how religious institutions document conflict resolution practices.

Data obtained from these various techniques were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process began with transcription of interviews and observation notes, followed by initial coding to identify potential themes. These themes were then grouped into broader categories, such as the role of religious leaders, the application of Quranic values, the mechanisms of deliberation forums, and social impacts. This analysis was iterative, meaning the theme identification process continued until consistency and depth of meaning were achieved (Braun et al., 2021). To maintain credibility, the researchers employed source triangulation (interviews, observations, focus group discussions, documents) and method triangulation. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by reconfirming interpretations with several key participants to ensure the findings truly aligned with their experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The ethical aspects of the research received serious attention, given that this study dealt with sensitive conflict experiences. Prior to data collection, the researcher provided informed consent to each participant, explaining the study's purpose, procedures, benefits, and their right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time. Participants' identities were kept confidential using pseudonyms, and all data was securely stored for academic purposes only. The researcher also attempted to maintain cultural and religious sensitivity, for example, by adhering to local dress codes, maintaining decorum when interacting with religious leaders, and scheduling interviews around religious activities. This was crucial to ensure the researcher's presence did not arouse suspicion or resistance from the community (Hay & Israel, 2021).

With this methodological framework, the research is expected to produce valid, in-depth data that can be academically and ethically justified. The combination of interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, and documents allows for a comprehensive exploration of how PC Persis Cimaung operationalizes Islamic values in conflict management. Meanwhile, the application of ethical research principles ensures that the research process does not harm participants or the communities studied.

To provide a clearer picture of the methodological framework of this study, the research flow is presented in the form of a diagram. This diagram displays the main stages, from selecting the research approach to the expected results. This diagram aims to facilitate the reader's understanding of the relationship between the research design, the subjects involved, data collection techniques, analysis procedures, and the ethical aspects upheld. Thus, this diagram serves not only as a visual representation but also confirms the methodological logic underlying the research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Figures as Mediators

This study found that the Community Consultative Forum and Wisdom Council facilitated by PC Persis Cimaung played a significant role in mitigating social conflict at the community level. More than just a forum for dispute resolution, this forum served as an arena for the collective internalization of Qur'anic values. Data analysis using NVivo revealed dominant themes: religious leaders as mediators, the operationalization of Qur'anic values, and the forum's mechanism as a mediation instrument. Of the three, the most prominent theme was the role of religious leaders as mediators, which emerged with the highest code frequency. The charisma and moral legitimacy of religious figures make them trusted to mediate between conflicting parties (Koehrsen & Burchardt, 2024). Village officials, for example, described how the presence of religious figures can reduce residents' suspicion of formal authorities. In an interview, a village head stated that "when he directly intervenes, residents often judge him as biased, but when the religious teacher speaks, almost everyone is willing to listen, even the most stubborn" (AP-01, 47 years old). This statement demonstrates that trust in religious figures is not limited to the worship space but extends to the social realm as a bridge of peace.

Figure 2 Figures & Legitimacy



(Source: coding NVivo, 2025)

NVivo coding analysis shows that terms such as "belief," "ustadz," and "peace" have a high frequency within the "Religious Figures as Mediators" node. This pattern indicates that religious legitimacy operates as a social mediation mechanism that transcends administrative authority. This phenomenon aligns with Capo's findings, which show that religious figures in rural communities are often positioned as insider mediators, internal mediators who possess much stronger moral legitimacy than external actors (Capo et al., 2024).

Another prominent dimension is how religious leaders operationalize Quranic principles in mediation practices. One religious leader stated that forums always return to the principle of shura (deliberation), where all parties are given the opportunity to speak without exception. According to him, "even those considered weak in their voices are still heard, because the main purpose of the forum is not to justify oneself, but to seek collective wisdom" (TA-01, 55 years old). From this quote, it is clear that the terms shura, wisdom, silaturahmi, and brotherhood emerge as keywords that indicate that the forum functions not only as an arena for deliberation, but also as a space for moral education (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Besides shura, the values that most frequently appeared in participant quotes were rahmah (compassion) and afw (forgiveness). This was evident in an interview with a young man who admitted that previous conflicts between youths often ended in physical violence, even triggered by trivial matters such as football fields or parking spaces. However, after attending a deliberation forum, he said that religious leaders always reminded him that "forgiveness is more noble, and self-restraint is part of rahmah" (PD-01, 24 years old). From this statement, the NVivo node flagged the words rahmah, afw, forgiveness, and self-restraint as indicators of value transformation in social practices. It is understandable that the terms "ustadz," "shura," "rahmah," "afw," and "damai" dominate the quotations. This pattern aligns with Thielicke-Witt's finding that faith-based forums tend to produce a moral vocabulary that binds the collective and strengthens the legitimacy of deliberation (Thielicke-Witt, 2025). In other words, recurring keywords are not merely linguistic markers, but reflections of the internalization of religious values into conflict resolution mechanisms. When compared with global literature, these results demonstrate relevance to the concept of elicitive religious peacebuilding, where religious values are not merely symbols but epistemological tools that shape how communities understand and manage conflict (Gopin, 2015). The Cimaung Forum demonstrates that religious leaders are not only spiritual actors but also architects of social peace, working through moral legitimacy, Qur'anic vocabulary, and local wisdom (Zaman et al., 2024). Thus, their role goes beyond mere "mediators" to shaping a deep-rooted peace infrastructure.

Figure 3 Religious Figures as Mediators



(Source: Dokumentasi Peneliti, 2025)

The image above, a personal documentation of the researcher, depicts the atmosphere of a community meeting in Cimaung District, Bandung Regency, with a religious figure wearing a black peci (cap) and holding a

microphone (AK) in the center. His calm, focused body gestures, and focused gaze convey a charismatic yet authoritative role. The presence of a religious figure in the forum is not only a spiritual symbol but also a representation of moral legitimacy recognized by the community (Pagan et al., 2023).

In this context, religious figures function as insider mediators, their presence accepted by all parties due to a long-established foundation of trust (Abidin & Husin, 2025). Their central seating position between two other figures also reflects the symbolic role of "bridging" the interests of the community. This reinforces previous NVivo analysis, where the words "ustadz" and "percaya" dominated the word cloud, indicating that religious figures are positioned as centers of moral authority in the social mediation process (Buckley et al., 2023).

In the literature, Sharkey refers to this role as dual legitimacy: on the one hand, based on religious tradition, and on the other, reinforced by social recognition (Sharkey, 2024). Thus, this photograph is not only a documentation of deliberation activities, but also a visual representation of how religion operates as a source of social legitimacy and a mechanism for peacemaking at the rural community level.

Forum Mechanism as a Mediation Instrument

Field observations revealed that the deliberation forums operate with a distinctive structure. Meetings typically begin with a communal prayer, followed by a circular discussion led by a religious teacher. Religious language is present through Qur'anic and hadith quotations used to strengthen arguments (Razzaq, 2023). In one land conflict case, the forum reached an agreement on the distribution of duties based on the principle of 'adl (justice). Participants' perspectives also demonstrated widespread acceptance of the forum's mechanisms. A woman from a religious study group stated:

We mothers feel calmer since this forum was established. Previously, when children or fathers fought, we were the ones who were most anxious. Now, if there's a problem, we usually discuss it first in the forum. The Ustadz always reminds us to be patient, compassionate, and not to make small problems out of small things. Sometimes he also quotes verses or hadiths, and that reassures us that a peaceful path is best. For us, this forum isn't just about resolving conflicts, but also a place to learn about religion in our daily lives. (IB-01).

The above quote demonstrates that religion is operationalized through deliberative forums as transformative social capital. Religious leaders act as credible mediators, Quranic values serve as applicable ethical guidelines, and forum mechanisms enable citizens to resolve conflicts in a just and dignified manner (Said et al., 2022). These findings support Lederach's framework of local infrastructures for peace, with its distinctive local emphasis on shura (law and wisdom) and hikmah (wisdom) (Lederach, 2014).

The Community Consultative Forum and Wisdom Council facilitated by PC Persis in Cimaung not only serves as a mediation space but also has a significant social impact on community life. One of the most noticeable changes is the reemergence of a sense of togetherness among residents who were previously often torn apart by conflict. Residents have become accustomed to resolving problems through open dialogue, resulting in a gradual decline in the physical clashes that once occurred. One young man, for example, recounted how old habits associated with prestige contests have slowly eroded since the forum became the primary reference for conflict resolution. He explained,

In the past, when there were problems, especially between young people, it usually immediately led to verbal arguments, sometimes escalating into physical ones. That was the habit. But after the forum was established, if there was any friction, we were asked to bring it to a meeting. The religious teacher usually reminded us about brotherhood, about the importance of controlling our anger, and finding a peaceful solution. Eventually, we became more accustomed to waiting for the forum rather than immediately fighting. Maybe not everyone has changed, but most have become more patient. (PD-02, 22 years old).

This quote demonstrates that forums not only suppress potential escalation but also play a role in shaping new behavioral patterns, particularly among young people (Rzayeva et al., 2023). NVivo coding results show that this theme of behavioral change emerged most frequently in interview transcripts with young respondents, indicating that forums successfully targeted groups previously most vulnerable to becoming actors in conflict. Thus, forums not only played a role in mitigating superficial symptoms but also addressed the roots of the culture of violence that was once embedded in social life.

Another impact felt is an increased sense of security, especially among women. A mother from a religious study group admitted that before the forum was present, she often felt anxious whenever there was a disturbance in the village, for fear that her children would be dragged into the conflict. But now the situation has begun to change. She

said, "Before, when the fathers argued, we mothers were the most anxious. Sometimes we didn't sleep at night for fear that the children would get involved. Since the forum has been established, we feel safer. If there is a problem, it is usually resolved in the forum. Even before a disturbance occurs, sometimes the religious teacher has already intervened to calm things down. That makes us feel calm, because we know that there is a peaceful approach that is preferred" (IB-02). This narrative shows that the forum has brought a new psychological dimension in the form of a sense of security, which in Galtung's context can be understood as part of positive peace—a peace that goes beyond the mere absence of physical violence, but also brings inner peace to social life (Galtung, 1996).

Figure 4 Involvement of the Majelis Taklim Mothers in the Deliberation



(Source: Researcher Documentation, 2025)

The image above depicts a deliberation forum in Cimaung District, with the active involvement of mothers from the religious study group. Their parallel seating at the front of the class emphasizes the forum's inclusive structure, where women are present not only as listeners but also as part of the collective discussion (Barbabela & Villalba, 2022). One participant is seen holding a microphone, demonstrating that the forum provides equal space for discussion regardless of gender or social status.

Women's involvement in forums demonstrates an important dimension: the internalization of Quranic values in everyday life (Mahariah, 2023). As one mother explained, these forums are not only an arena for conflict resolution but also a space for moral education where the values of patience, compassion, mercy, and justice ('adl) are put into practice. This aligns with the results of NVivo analysis, which shows that keywords such as patience, compassion, forum, deliberation, and justice emerged as strong indicators of the internalization of religious values within social mechanisms.

From a legitimacy perspective, this demonstrates that religious authority is not solely monopolized by male figures (ustadz), but is also expanded through collective acceptance by society, including women (Ismah, 2016). The presence of the women from the majelis taklim (Islamic study group) adds moral weight to the forum, strengthening the agreement that emerged not merely as a result of pragmatic compromise, but rather as a result of deliberation based on Qur'anic values.

In addition to providing a sense of security, forums also demonstrate how religion serves as a source of legitimacy in decision-making (Rubin, 2025). One religious figure explained that forum decisions tend to be more acceptable to citizens because they are seen as based on Qur'anic principles, not simply the logic of majority vote. He asserted, "If decisions are based solely on majority vote, usually some parties feel defeated and disappointed. But if we base our decisions on Qur'anic values, such as justice, patience, and deliberation, then all parties are more receptive. Even if they are not completely satisfied, they remain respectful because decisions are made on the basis of religion. So religion not only regulates worship, but also calms the hearts of those in conflict" (DT-02, 64 years). This perspective demonstrates that forums are not merely deliberative spaces, but also arenas of religious legitimacy that allow decisions to be more widely accepted (Lenard, 2025).

Figure 5 Religious Figures Lead the Forum



(Source: Researcher Documentation, 2025)

Despite its positive impact, the forum still faces several obstacles. One is the politicization of identity, where some residents view the forum as too closely tied to a particular religious organization and are reluctant to participate. A village official stated, "Not all residents immediately want to join the forum. Some feel this forum is only for Persis people, so they are reluctant to come. In fact, its contents are actually for all residents. Sometimes this problem arises when there are differences in religious organizations, so not all parties are open from the start" (AP-02, 49 years old). Another obstacle is limited facilitation. Forums cannot always be held quickly because they depend on the time and capacity of religious leaders. One young man even mentioned that waiting for a forum can sometimes be difficult when a conflict is already escalating: "Sometimes problems arise suddenly, but the forum can't necessarily be held quickly. So sometimes we have to wait a long time. If people are already emotional, waiting is difficult. Although the forum can ultimately calm people down, the waiting process is often problematic" (PD-03, 21 years old).

Figure 6 Participants Express Their Opinions



(Source: Researcher Documentation, 2025)

These findings demonstrate a dual dynamic: on the one hand, the forum has proven effective in mitigating conflict and building social cohesion, but on the other hand, it is not yet fully inclusive and remains hampered by technical limitations (Löhr et al., 2021). Thus, the forum can be understood as a transformative form of social capital, but also as a fragile local institution if not continuously strengthened (Angeles et al., 2021). Beyond demonstrating a tangible impact on conflict resolution, the deliberation forum in Cimaung also generated various strengthening strategies implemented by residents to ensure its long-term relevance and functionality. These strategies are not only technical but also encompass cultural and spiritual dimensions rooted in the community's religious traditions (Muhsan & Haris, 2022). Thus, the forum has evolved beyond simply serving as an emergency mechanism for mitigating conflict and into a local peace infrastructure that is lived out daily.

One of the most prominent strategies is the institutionalization of the forum through a regular agenda. Meetings, initially held only when conflict arose, are now scheduled regularly as a forum for community engagement. A religious leader explained that these regular meetings aim to prevent conflict early: "If we only meet when there is a problem, the forum will always be synonymous with conflict. That's why we create a regular schedule, for example once a month, where residents can gather, discuss, or simply listen to a sermon. This way, the forum isn't just present when problems arise, but also becomes a space for togetherness that maintains good relationships. This is also how we build trust between residents before problems arise" (TA-03, 50 years old).

In addition to the routine agenda, another strategy is cross-generational engagement. Forums are not only attended by elders and village officials, but are also increasingly involving youth and women more actively. One young man expressed his appreciation for this new space for participation: "Previously, the forum felt like it was only for the elders, so we young people were rarely invited to speak. But now, during regular meetings, we are often asked to express our opinions. Sometimes the religious teacher also deliberately assigns us to speak, so that we become accustomed to resolving problems positively. I feel this is important, because when young people are invited to speak, we feel valued, and automatically take more responsibility for maintaining a peaceful atmosphere" (PD-04, 23 years old).

This quote emphasizes that youth involvement is not merely a form of representation, but also a social education strategy to instill a culture of peace from an early age. A similar approach is evident in the involvement of women's groups, particularly women from religious study groups (Majelis Taklim), who are given a platform to express their concerns regarding domestic issues such as adolescent relationships, inter-family conflicts, and household financial issues. Thus, the forum becomes a more inclusive space, not limited to religious elites or village officials (Annahar et al., 2023).

Another strengthening strategy is the use of religious language as a persuasive tool (Hackenburg & Margetts, 2024). In almost all forums, religious leaders consistently cite Quranic verses or hadiths relevant to the issues being discussed. A village official said: "If I speak in the language of law or village regulations, residents are often less interested. But when a religious teacher conveys it using Quranic verses, people immediately listen. Even difficult decisions can be accepted if they are framed in religious values. So, I think religious language is key to maintaining the strength of this forum" (AP-03, 46 years old).

However, the strategy of strengthening this forum is not without challenges. Some residents believe that the forum is still vulnerable to fragmentation due to differences within religious organizations. To address this, religious leaders are attempting a more inclusive approach by citing universal Islamic sources that are acceptable across groups. One leader explained: "*If we only use our own organizational perspective, it will be considered biased. Therefore, in the forum, I always quote general verses that are acceptable to all groups. The goal is to ensure that everyone feels ownership of this forum, not just a specific group*" (TA-04, 58 years old).

Thus, this session emphasized that the deliberation forum in Cimaung is not only an arena for conflict resolution but has also developed into a social institution consciously managed by the community. Through regular agendas, cross-generational engagement, the use of religious language, and inclusive strategies, this forum is slowly building its capacity to become a sustainable peace infrastructure (Mammadova et al., 2025). However, challenges such as limited resources and identity fragmentation remain challenges that need to be addressed.

Discussion

The deliberation forum in Cimaung serves not only as a dispute resolution instrument but also as a space for the production of values, legitimacy, and social cohesion. Interviews and observations indicate that religious leaders occupy a central position in this forum, not simply because of their rhetorical capacity, but because they hold a mutually recognized moral legitimacy. This aligns with the insider mediation framework widely discussed in the peace literature, where the presence of local mediators with religious roots can bridge social gaps beyond the reach of formal mechanisms (Lederach, 2014).

From a peace theory perspective, the Cimaung deliberation forum can be understood as a concrete practice of positive peace (Galtung, 1996). This forum not only reduces the potential for direct violence but also forms new social relations rooted in Qur'anic values such as shura (consultation), rahmah (compassion), afw (forgiveness), and 'adl (justice). Thus, this forum creates a climate in which peace is understood not merely as the absence of violence, but as the presence of a just, equitable, and moral social structure. This view aligns with conceptual updates in the everyday peace literature, which emphasize the importance of micro-practices, symbols, and local values in supporting long-term social stability (Mac Ginty, 2022).

Furthermore, this study's findings confirm the role of religious language as a source of social legitimacy. Forum decisions citing Quranic verses or hadiths have been shown to be more readily accepted by citizens, even by those dissatisfied with the deliberations. In other words, religion is not merely a symbol but also serves as symbolic capital that provides moral strength for any consensus (Bolton, 2023). This strengthens the argument that in rural communities, religion functions as a more effective epistemic and social resource than formal legal instruments, which are often perceived as distant from the realities of citizens. The international relevance of these findings is reflected in the discourse on religious legitimacy in peacebuilding, which is now increasingly recognized in global forums, including the United Nations Sustaining Peace Agenda (Berents & Mollica, 2022).

However, this research also highlights the serious challenge of politicizing religious identity. Some residents refused to participate because they considered the forum too closely identified with a particular organization, potentially diminishing the universality of religious messages. This situation aligns with Al-Attas's warning that religion can become distorted when institutional identity takes precedence over spiritual substance (Huringjiin & Azfathir, 2018). This phenomenon of religious exclusivism has also been highlighted in recent literature on the sectarianization of religion, which emphasizes how religious symbols can be mobilized to reinforce social fragmentation (Hadaya, 2020). In this context, the strategy of religious leaders in Cimaung, emphasizing the universal source of Islam, is a significant step in maintaining the forum's inclusiveness and acceptance by all groups.

Another limitation arises from institutional sustainability. The forum's reliance on charismatic religious figures limits its capacity to respond to sudden conflicts. Daskalopoulou argues that for religious peacebuilding practices to be sustainable, institutionalized religious capital is needed, enabling peace to be sustained not only by individuals but also by a more established social system (Daskalopoulou et al., 2023). From a global perspective, this aligns with the concept of resilient peace infrastructures (Black et al., 2022), which emphasizes the importance

of combining local social capital with institutional support to ensure peace mechanisms can withstand complex social dynamics.

Thus, the deliberation forum in Cimaung demonstrates a dual contribution. Locally, it serves as an arena for dispute resolution grounded in Qur'anic values, thereby strengthening social cohesion. Globally, it offers an elicitive model of religious peacebuilding relevant to current discourse on the importance of integrating religious values, moral symbols, and social legitimacy into sustainable peace architecture (Mahmuluddin, 2024). This research, therefore, contributes not only to the discourse on religion-based conflict resolution in Indonesia but also to the international debate on how religious values can be institutionalized as an inclusive, participatory, and sustainable peace infrastructure.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and descriptions above, the deliberation forum facilitated by religious leaders in Cimaung is not only an instrument for conflict resolution, but also an arena for internalizing Qur'anic values that bind the social life of residents. The research question regarding the role of religion in managing social conflict in rural areas is clearly answered: religious leaders function as insider mediators with stronger moral and social legitimacy than formal actors, thereby building bridges of peace rooted in community trust. The main findings show that the concepts of positive peace and elicitive religious peacebuilding are clearly present through the practices of shura, rahmah, afw, and 'adl in this forum. The theoretical implication of this research is the strengthening of the discourse that religion can be positioned not only as an identity but also as symbolic and epistemic capital in peacebuilding. Practically, this research confirms that faith-based forums can serve as inclusive and participatory community peace infrastructure. However, this study has limitations, particularly the forum's reliance on charismatic religious figures and the potential for exclusivism when institutional identity is emphasized. For further research, broader exploration of similar forums in other rural areas is recommended, comparing multireligious contexts and the role of interfaith groups in conflict management. Furthermore, longitudinal analysis can demonstrate the extent to which deliberative forums can withstand increasingly complex social dynamics.

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