

Islamophobia and Social Conflicts in West Borneo

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Abstract. *This study investigates the phenomenon of Islamophobia and its connection to social conflicts in West Borneo, Indonesia, emphasizing how negative stereotypes against Islam affect interreligious relations and community dynamics. Using a phenomenological and qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including religious leaders, community figures, Muslim and non-Muslim students, as well as local opinion leaders. The data were analyzed through content analysis using NVivo 12 software to identify recurring themes and patterns. Findings indicate that Islamophobia in West Borneo manifests in subtle but significant ways, such as misrepresentations in media, biased perceptions in education, and the persistence of negative stereotypes that often marginalize Muslim communities. Contributing factors include limited understanding of Islam, politicization of religion, the role of media in reinforcing prejudices, and insufficient interfaith dialogue. The impact is reflected in strained social interactions, growing mistrust among different groups, and the potential escalation of latent conflicts. This study highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to reduce Islamophobia, including inclusive education, objective media representation, and policies promoting interfaith tolerance and cooperation. The originality of this research lies in contextualizing Islamophobia within a regional setting, showing how global phenomena intersect with local realities. The results are expected to contribute to academic discussions and provide practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to foster social harmony and resilience against religious intolerance.*

Keywords : *Islamophobia; Social Conflict; Negative Stereotypes.*

Abstrak. *Studi ini menyelidiki fenomena Islamophobia dan kaitannya dengan konflik sosial di Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia, menekankan bagaimana stereotip negatif terhadap Islam memengaruhi hubungan antaragama dan dinamika komunitas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis dan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan informan kunci, termasuk pemimpin agama, tokoh masyarakat, mahasiswa Muslim dan non-Muslim, serta pemimpin opini lokal. Data dianalisis melalui analisis konten menggunakan perangkat lunak NVivo 12 untuk mengidentifikasi tema dan pola yang berulang. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Islamophobia di Kalimantan Barat muncul dengan cara yang halus tetapi signifikan, seperti salah representasi di media, persepsi bias dalam pendidikan, dan ketahanan stereotip negatif yang sering memarginalkan komunitas Muslim. Faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi termasuk pemahaman Islam yang terbatas, politisasi agama, peran media dalam memperkuat prasangka, dan kurangnya dialog antaragama. Dampaknya tercermin dalam interaksi sosial yang tegang, meningkatnya ketidakpercayaan di antara berbagai kelompok, dan potensi eskalasi konflik laten. Studi ini menyoroti kebutuhan akan strategi komprehensif untuk mengurangi Islamofobia, termasuk pendidikan inklusif, representasi media yang objektif, dan kebijakan yang mempromosikan toleransi dan kerja sama antaragama. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada penempatan Islamofobia dalam konteks regional, menunjukkan bagaimana fenomena global berinteraksi dengan realitas lokal. Hasilnya diharapkan dapat berkontribusi pada diskusi akademik dan memberikan rekomendasi praktis bagi pembuat kebijakan, pendidik, dan pemimpin komunitas untuk mendorong harmoni sosial dan ketahanan terhadap intoleransi agama.*

Kata Kunci : *Islamofobia; Konflik Sosial; Stereotip Negatif*

INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia has become a global phenomenon that continues to attract significant scholarly attention. In Western countries, prejudice and discrimination against Muslims intensified after the 9/11 attacks (abdulqareeb & Kalimoddin, 2023; Musakar et al., 2023) ; Lepage, 2023). While these studies illustrate how terrorism-related narratives reinforced negative stereotypes, they also reveal that Islamophobia is not merely a spontaneous reaction but rather a socially constructed bias, deliberately reproduced by political discourses and mass media (Miladi, 2021). This underscores the need to view Islamophobia as a systemic issue embedded in structures of power, which provides a lens for examining its presence in other contexts, including Asia. In Asia, including Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, signs of Islamophobia have also emerged, particularly in regions with high religious plurality such as West Borneo (Muzayyanah et al., 2023; Damayanti et al., 2024). Unlike Western contexts, where Islamophobia is often associated with terrorism, in West Borneo it appears to intersect with longstanding ethnic and cultural divisions. This suggests that Islamophobia in the region cannot be explained solely as an imported Western discourse, but rather as a hybrid phenomenon shaped by both global narratives and local historical experiences. Recognizing this distinction is essential for a nuanced analysis, as it shows that Islamophobia adapts to and reinforces pre-existing identity-based tensions.

West Borneo is marked by significant ethnic and religious diversity, with long-standing interactions among Malay, Dayak, and Chinese communities. These relationships have often been accompanied by tensions rooted in differences of identity (Ruslan et al., 2024; Kristianus, 2022). Previous studies emphasize ethnic factors as the main source of conflict, citing the violent clashes of the late 1990s between Dayaks and Madurese and between Malays and Chinese (Kurniawan & Miftah, 2021 ; Wahyudhi, 2020). Nevertheless, the religious dimension particularly prejudice against Islam remains underexplored, even though there are indications of its presence. While such accounts are valuable, reducing conflict in West Borneo solely to ethnicity risks overlooking the role of religion as a parallel source of prejudice. demonstrate, identity politics in the region often merges cultural, ethnic, and religious dimensions, meaning that religious prejudice, including Islamophobia, could exacerbate existing intergroup distrust (Abdullah, 2022; Ruslan et al., 2024).

This gap highlights the importance of investigating Islamophobia as a potential factor shaping intergroup relations in multicultural societies (Gravelle, 2021; Siah et al., 2022; Uenal et al., 2021). Global studies show that religious prejudice significantly fuels social tensions in diverse communities (Chui et al., 2020; Lak et al., 2024; Nashori et al., 2024; Rowatt & Al-Kire, 2021). Critically applying these insights to West Borneo suggests that although Islamophobia has not yet escalated into open conflict, its early signs may represent a latent risk that could magnify when combined with historical ethnic rivalries. This calls for proactive research and policy attention to understand how religious prejudice might interact with ethnic divisions, creating new layers of tension. Although Islamophobia in West Borneo remains largely speculative, its relevance cannot be ignored given the region's long history of identity-based conflict. The potential emergence of Islamophobia may reflect global patterns in which Islam is perceived as a threat to social stability by non-Muslim groups (Bertrand & Soedirgo, 2016). This study aims to address this empirical gap by examining whether Islamophobia exists in West Borneo and how prejudice against Islam interacts with the region's complex social dynamics. If such evidence is found, the study will expand a literature base that has thus far been centered on Western contexts and will enrich our understanding of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority societies (Ejiofor, 2023; Kozaric, 2024). Moreover, the findings are expected to provide insights for policymakers, particularly on how religious prejudice may intensify tensions in multicultural regions and how it can be managed to prevent future conflict. Beyond West Borneo, this research also aims to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in other parts of Indonesia with similar characteristics.

Previous research has tended to focus on ethnic conflict in West Borneo while paying limited attention to the role of religious prejudice. In regions with a history of social conflict and cultural plurality, stereotypes about Islam and Muslims may exacerbate underlying tensions. Factors such as biased media coverage, limited interfaith engagement, and the politicization of religion are suspected of perpetuating these stereotypes, though they have yet to be explored in depth. This study is therefore designed to examine these issues comprehensively, positioning Islamophobia within the wider social and cultural dynamics of West Borneo. Accordingly, this study aims to address the empirical gap by exploring whether Islamophobia exists in West Borneo and how prejudice against Islam interacts with the region's complex social dynamics. Beyond confirming its presence, the research seeks to analyze the mechanisms through which Islamophobia manifests locally and to evaluate its potential consequences for interfaith relations and social conflict. By situating the study within both global and local frameworks, the findings are expected to enrich academic discourse on Islamophobia in Muslim-majority societies while also offering practical insights for policymakers. Specifically, understanding Islamophobia in this context will provide guidance on strategies such as inclusive education, balanced media representation, and interfaith dialogue to prevent escalation and promote long-term social harmony. This broader contribution will also be relevant to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in other multicultural regions of Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employed a phenomenological and qualitative approach to explore Islamophobia and negative stereotypes that may trigger social conflict in West Borneo. Phenomenology focuses on understanding individual experiences within specific contexts (Taufiq & Handayati, 2020), while qualitative methods emphasize deep and subjective insights to produce rich and detailed (Ikeda et al., 2025; Lim, 2025). The research involved 4 Muslim community members, 3 Muslim leaders, 2 non-Muslim students, and 1 non-Muslim religious leader who met the inclusion criteria. Informants were categorized as main (non-Muslim communities), key (Muslim leaders), and supporting (non-Muslim students and religious leaders). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, which allow researchers to capture detailed perspectives and experiences of participants (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). The data were then analyzed using content analysis with NVIVO 12 software, a technique that helps identify themes and patterns from qualitative data (Salahudin et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This qualitative study analyzes the phenomenon of Islamophobia and negative stereotypes against Islam in West Borneo. The main themes identified include public understanding of the indications of Islamophobia, the factors contributing to its emergence, the role of media and education in shaping perceptions, its impact on Muslim communities, and strategies to reduce the phenomenon. To strengthen the findings from key informants, the data were compared with information from supporting informants, namely students and non-Muslim leaders, thus providing a more comprehensive picture. The results of this study have important implications for understanding how Muslim communities respond to Islamophobia and serve as a foundation for developing more effective strategies to address it and improve the image of Islam in society. The interview data were then analyzed and visualized using NVIVO 12 software as follows:

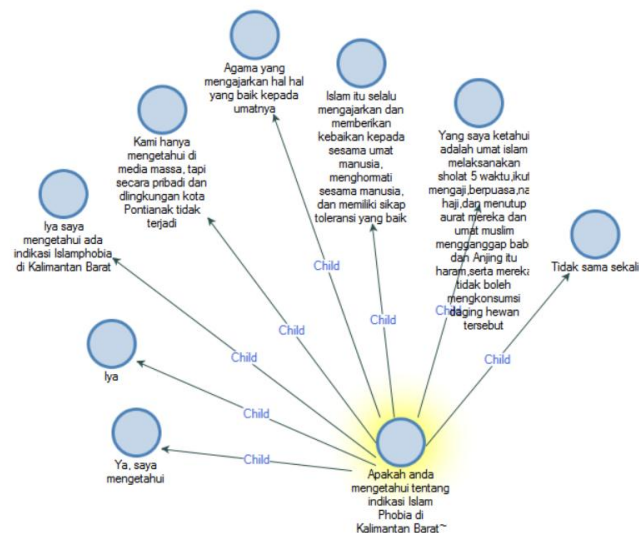


Figure 1. Explore Diagram of Indications of Islamophobia in West Borneo.

Based on the exposure of data in the form of Explorer Diagram in Figure 1, most informants in the study revealed that they were aware of indications of Islamophobia in West Borneo. This result was reinforced through a triangulation process with key informants, namely Muslim figures in West Borneo. This high level of awareness shows that the Muslim community in the region is quite concerned about this issue and has a basis to confront and overcome the problem. This awareness can encourage joint efforts in creating a more tolerant and inclusive environment for all parties.

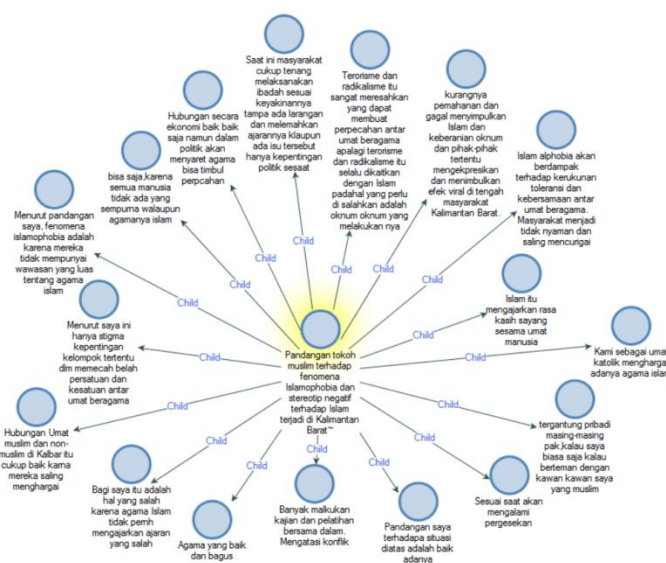


Figure 2. Muslim Leaders' Views on the Islamophobia Phenomenon in West Borneo.

Based on the exposure of data in Figure 2, Islamophobia can have a negative impact on inter-religious relations. Rifts in inter-religious relations are one of the consequences of Islamophobia, hindering social interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and creating disharmony in social life. This, in turn, can increase the potential for horizontal and social conflict, where tensions and conflicts in society can be triggered if indications of Islamophobia are not properly addressed. In addition, the existence of discrimination and negative stereotypes associated with Islam can create discomfort in social life for Muslim communities. They may feel depressed and not free to live their

beliefs because of negative and wrong views about their religion. To overcome these negative impacts, there needs to be a concerted effort from various parties, including governments, religious leaders, and communities, to increase understanding, dialogue, and tolerance between religious communities.

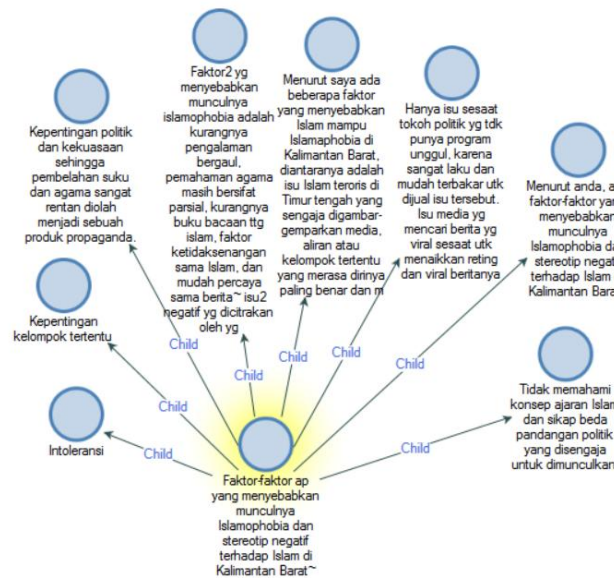


Figure 3. Factors Leading to the Emergence of Islamophobia in West Borneo.

Factors influencing the emergence of Islamophobia in West Borneo include several aspects. First, negative perceptions of Islam stem from stereotypes and prejudices against the religion and Muslims, which may be based on misperceptions or inaccurate information. Second, the politicization of religion, where religion is used as a tool to achieve certain political interests, can exacerbate inter-religious tensions, and create unwarranted fear. Third, a lack of inter-religious interaction can lead to false or limited perceptions about Islam and Muslims and reinforce pre-existing prejudices. Fourth, an unbalanced media plays a role in reinforcing negative perceptions by tending to corner or expose negative Muslim behavior, which should not represent Islam as a whole.

Lastly, partial religious education and a lack of a holistic and comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings can affect how societies understand the religion and Muslims, which can ultimately exacerbate Islamophobia. Addressing these factors through education, dialogue, and joint efforts between governments, religious leaders, and communities can help reduce Islamophobia and create a more inclusive and tolerant environment.

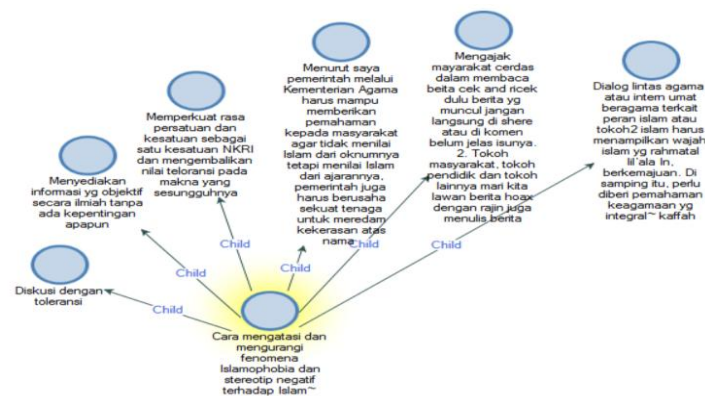


Figure 4. Explorer Diagram How to Overcome and Reduce Islamophobia

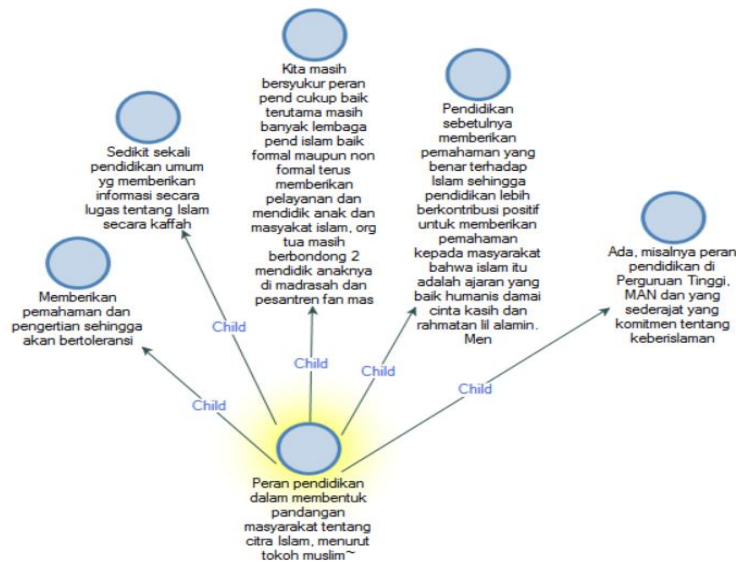


Figure 6. The Role of Education in Shaping the Image of Islam.

Education plays a very crucial role in shaping people's views about Islam. Through formal and non-formal education, such as madrassas and *pesantren*, a more holistic understanding of Islam can be conveyed to the community, by emphasizing the social, cultural, and spiritual aspects present in the teachings of Islam, the community will get a more complete picture of these teachings.

The development of an educational curriculum that includes a holistic understanding of Islam will help reduce negative stereotypes and misconceptions that often arise in society. This can be achieved by introducing subjects that emphasize the basic principles of Islam, Islamic history, and culture, as well as the values of tolerance and harmony between religious communities. In addition, inclusive and dialogical teaching methods will enable students to better understand and appreciate the diversity that exists in society. Thus, a more holistic and inclusive education will contribute to reducing unwarranted fears and prejudices against Islam, as well as promoting a deeper understanding of these teachings. Education can play a very important role in overcoming Islamophobia or, conversely, strengthen it. The way education affects Islamophobia depends largely on the content, methods, and goals of education itself. If education is focused on increasing understanding of religions and cultures, including Islam, as well as teaching tolerance and respect for diversity, education can contribute significantly to reducing Islamophobia. Inclusive education, which emphasizes interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange, and a better understanding of Islamic values and principles, can help reduce unwarranted fear and prejudice against Muslims. However, education can also reinforce Islamophobia if the curriculum and teaching methods used encourage prejudice, fear, or negative stereotypes about Islam. If educational sources are not objective or influenced by narrow views, this can lead to the spread of misinformation about Islam and Muslims, which in turn can reinforce Islamophobia.



Figure 7. Word Cloud Islamophobia Phenomenon in West Borneo.

Based on the results of interviews with Muslim communities and leaders in West Borneo presented in the form of Word Cloud in Figure 7, it can be concluded that there are indications of Islamophobia in the area, although the impact has not been felt significantly. Factors that cause this phenomenon include negative stereotypes about Islam, lack of understanding of Islamic teachings, and cultural and religious differences. Mass and social media play an important role in spreading negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, which in turn have the potential to fuel Islamophobia. Therefore, inclusive education and education about religion and culture are essential to increase people's understanding and reduce unwarranted fear of Islam.

Interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange play an important role in building trust and reducing tensions. The government and non-governmental organizations need to initiate programs that focus on maintaining and improving inter-religious harmony. Collaboration between various parties, including governments, religious leaders, NGOs, communities, and individuals, is essential to tackle Islamophobia effectively and integrated. To deal with Islamophobia, a holistic and integrated approach is needed, as well as cooperation from various parties. The focus in this effort is increasing understanding, dialogue, and tolerance between religious communities.

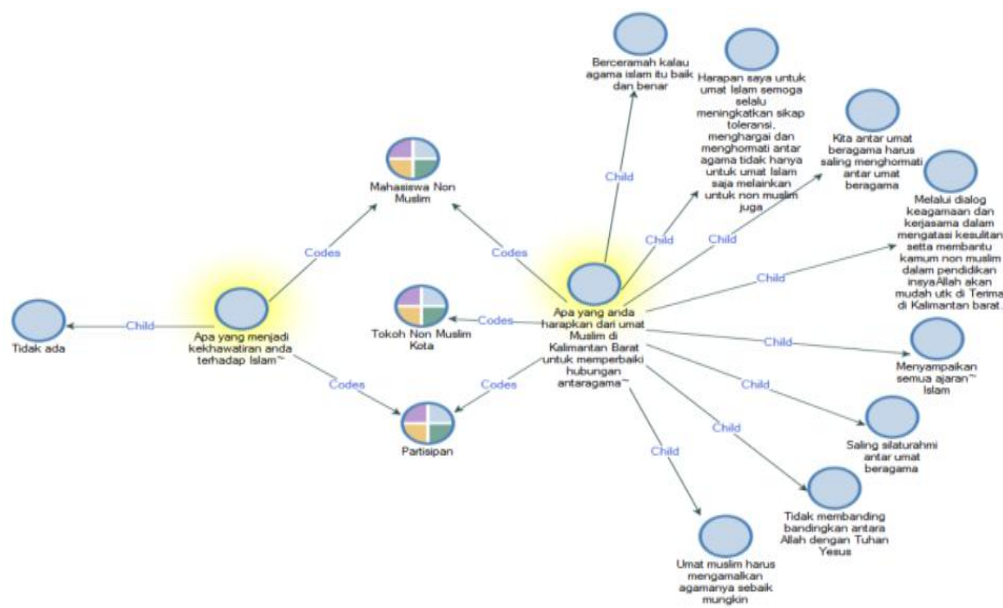


Figure 8. Exploratory Diagram of Student Opinions and Non-Muslim Leaders Towards Muslims in West Borneo

The informants revealed that they had no concerns towards Islam. Nevertheless, they are aware of issues such as terrorism and radicalism that are often associated with Islam. According to the informant, it should be blamed on the people who committed the act, not the religion itself. The informant also stressed the importance of efforts to increase interfaith understanding and tolerance. They strongly support initiatives such as religious dialogue, joint studies, and training in conflict resolution, as well as cooperation to assist non-Muslim communities in education.

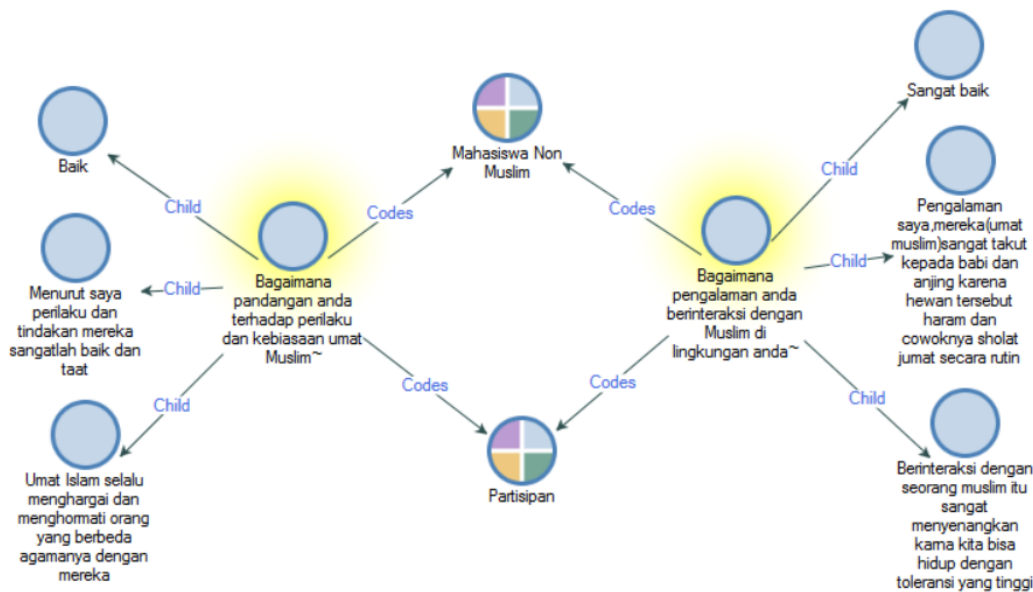


Figure 9. The Experience of Students and Non-Muslim Leaders with Muslims in West Borneo.

Most informants showed a positive view of Islam and Muslims in West Borneo. They appreciate the teachings and behavior of Muslims and recognize that Islam teaches kindness, tolerance, and mutual respect between religions. In addition, their experience of interacting with Muslims in the surrounding environment is generally harmonious and pleasant. This reflects the good and tolerant relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in West Borneo.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Islamophobia in West Borneo is a serious concern, shaped by multiple factors and carrying significant social consequences. While earlier studies have emphasized the national or global dimensions of Islamophobia (Damayanti et al., 2024; Muzayyanah et al., 2023) our results demonstrate that its local manifestation is unique. Specifically, Islamophobia in West Borneo does not exist in isolation but intersects with longstanding ethnic and cultural divisions, creating a layered form of prejudice that distinguishes it from purely religious bias observed in Western contexts. This highlights the importance of contextualizing Islamophobia within regional socio-cultural dynamics, rather than treating it as a uniform global phenomenon. A critical analysis of our findings shows that Islamophobia in West Borneo is not simply a reflection of external narratives but is actively reproduced through local structures such as media, politics, and education. For instance, unbalanced media portrayals of Muslims reinforce negative stereotypes, not only confirming earlier research (Richter & Paasch-Colberg, 2023; Kabir, 2006) but also revealing how media at the regional level sustains systemic prejudice. Likewise, the politicization of religion identified globally as a driver of tension (Basedau et al., 2011; Lepage, 2023) takes on new significance in West Borneo, where religion becomes an additional layer of identity politics that amplifies pre-existing ethnic rivalries.

The study further reveals that early signs of Islamophobia should be seen as a latent risk factor. Although the phenomenon has not yet escalated into large-scale conflict, its persistence has the potential to destabilize interreligious relations if left unaddressed. This interpretation moves beyond merely comparing with prior studies by underscoring the preventive value of early recognition. Islamophobia here is not only a problem of perception but a structural issue that, if ignored, could catalyze broader social tensions. Our findings also invite critical reflection on strategies to mitigate Islamophobia. While inclusive education and interfaith dialogue are widely recommended (Faisal &

Setiawan, 2024); Pallavicini, 2016), our analysis argues that these measures may be insufficient unless accompanied by structural reforms in media practices and political accountability. Without such systemic changes, efforts to promote tolerance risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative. Thus, addressing Islamophobia requires a multi-level approach: strengthening grassroots initiatives while simultaneously reforming institutional structures that perpetuate prejudice.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the alleged existence of Islamophobia in West Borneo is not just an issue but a natural phenomenon that affects people's social lives. The main factors driving Islamophobia in the region include a lack of understanding of Islam, negative stereotypes, and the role of inaccurate and unbalanced media. The findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders, including the government, communities, media and educational institutions, to mitigate potential religious-based conflicts. Recommended measures include inclusive education, more intensive interfaith dialogue, and an increased role for the media in presenting objective and balanced information. This study has limitations in terms of regional coverage, which is limited to West Borneo and the small number of informants, so the results may not be generalizable to other regions. Nevertheless, the findings offer practical implications in the form of the need for inclusive education policies, improved quality of balanced media coverage, and interfaith dialogue to overcome Islamophobia and promote tolerance in society.

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