



Civic Culture in a Multi-Religious Society: A Case Study of the Sekaran Community

Welling Yonado; Winarno; Mohamad Hendri Nuryadi

Department Pancasila and Civic Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article discusses the role of civic culture in the context of a multi-religious society, using a case study of the community in Sekaran Village, located in Kayen Kidul Subdistrict, Kediri Regency, East Java Province. The people of Sekaran represent the social reality of Indonesia, where various religions and beliefs coexist harmoniously. This research aims to explore how civic culture plays a key role in fostering tolerance, cooperation, and social integration amidst religious diversity. The research method used is a qualitative approach through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of both primary and secondary data. The findings show that the Sekaran community possesses a strong civic culture, reflected in inclusive attitudes, mutual respect, and a spirit of communal cooperation (gotong royong). Interfaith collaboration in daily activities such as religious ceremonies, traditional rituals, and social events strengthens the sense of unity and togetherness among community members.

Keywords: *Civic Culture; Multi-Religious; Community*

Introduction

The Indonesian society, with its cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, has long been recognized as a unique social laboratory. A concrete example of this reality can be found in the community of Sekaran, which is the focus of this study. Sekaran, a village located in Kayen Kidul Subdistrict, Kediri Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia, is a religiously heterogeneous area that offers an intriguing context for understanding how civic culture develops and functions within a multi-religious society. According to Kurniati et al. (2021:108), civic culture varies significantly in terms of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns, all of which are closely related to the development of a democratic climate. With a strong and evolving civic culture within a society, it is expected that people will become more aware, engaged, and responsible in building and maintaining the sustainability of their nation. Specifically, civic culture refers to a culture that supports citizenship, consisting of a set of ideas that can be effectively expressed through cultural representation with the aim of shaping citizens' identity (Winataputra, U. S., & Budimansyah, D., 2012).

The community of Sekaran possesses the characteristics of a social microcosm, where its residents represent a broad spectrum of religions, including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism,

and several others. This diversity challenges the community to develop inclusive, tolerant, and cooperative patterns of interaction. The people of Sekaran have demonstrated this ability by earning the title of "Harmonious Village" at the East Java Provincial level in 2021 award granted by the East Java Provincial Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the Harmonious Village Program. This recognition was not achieved without reason; there are specific components that make Sekaran deserving of such a title. The village has proven itself capable of fostering unity amid diversity, offering a hopeful example of national integration in Indonesia. It serves as a model for other villages across East Java and the country as a whole in promoting peaceful coexistence. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the National Harmony Index in 2020 was 67.46%, rising to 72.3% in 2021. Meanwhile, the Harmony Index for East Java stood at 73.57%, indicating that the level of harmony in East Java exceeds the national average. This achievement further inspires the ongoing commitment to maintain and nurture tolerance and harmony in the face of diversity.

Research on civic culture in Sekaran Village is highly relevant to efforts to understand social dynamics amid religious plurality. Over the past few decades, discourse surrounding civic culture has gained increasing attention, particularly in the context of multicultural societies. Recognition and respect for religious diversity have been identified as crucial factors in shaping an inclusive civic identity. However, in recent times, waves of conflict and social unrest are still frequently observed alarming social reality. According to the official website of the Setara Institute, there has been a rise in cases of intolerance in Indonesia during the early part of 2023, with the state of tolerance in the country stagnating since 2015. These conflicts may occur both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal conflicts emerge between community groups, often in the form of communal clashes, while vertical conflicts arise between the public and the government or security forces. Such conflicts reflect a shift from the traditional image of Indonesia as a nation known for its friendliness, politeness, and a tendency to maintain harmony rather than resort to violence.

Many of these communal conflicts are strongly marked by tensions involving identity factors such as religion. According to Hadi S. (2006:2), religious conflicts in Indonesia are, in reality, not easy to comprehend, as they involve a wide range of issues political, economic, social, and cultural. Therefore, serious efforts are needed to prevent such conflicts, considering that religious tensions not only disrupt national stability but also pose a threat to national integration. The presence of civic culture becomes increasingly urgent, especially in highly pluralistic regions in terms of both ethnicity and religion (Suprpto et al., 2013:3). It is important to recognize that social differences, on one hand, can lead to disputes and conflict. However, on the other hand, when well-managed, social diversity within a society can become a powerful force that synergizes to achieve common goals.

Through deeper analysis, it becomes evident that various communal conflicts in the country are driven by the deterioration of interpersonal relationships among citizens and the rise of identity politics based on ethnicity and religion. Thus, social conflict is closely linked to the lack of civic culture. As stated by Putnam, R. (1993), the concept of civic culture is contrasted with what he refers to as uncivic culture. He describes two types of social cycles: the virtuous circle and the vicious circle. The virtuous circle is characterized by high levels of social cooperation, mutual trust, reciprocity, citizen participation, and engagement aimed at achieving the common good. In contrast, the vicious circle is marked by low willingness to cooperate, betrayal, mutual suspicion, social withdrawal, exploitation, and dominating behavior. These negative attitudes and behaviors give rise to what is known as uncivic culture, which can hinder the sustainability and development of democracy as well as economic progress in society. This aligns with research conducted by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), which shows a correlation between a high degree of civic culture and peaceful societal conditions. In secure areas, higher levels of civic culture are observed, while in conflict-prone areas, lower levels of civic culture tend to prevail (Hisyam, M. et al., 2006).

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the elements of civic culture within the multi-religious community of Sekaran Village. The aforementioned discussion illustrates that social activities in Sekaran run well and are effectively integrated, strengthening social harmony and minimizing the potential for religious conflict. This has prompted the researcher to explore further how the community develops and sustains its civic culture. Using a qualitative approach, this article aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how civic culture is reflected in the daily practices of the Sekaran community. With a better understanding of these dynamics, the study is expected to offer valuable insights for the development of more inclusive citizenship policies and practices at both local and national levels.

Method

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach aimed at gaining a deep understanding of civic culture within the multi-religious society of Sekaran Village. This approach allows the researcher to gain insights from participants through participatory observation. In-depth interviews were also employed as the primary tool for collecting primary data. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, selecting informants with knowledge and direct involvement in the social life of the multi-religious community in Sekaran, such as religious leaders and community figures. Additionally, secondary data were utilized, including books and scholarly journals. Content analysis was then used to process data from observations and interviews. Data analysis involved organizing, sorting, categorizing, and coding the data in order to discover and formulate working hypotheses based on the information provided (Rijali, 2018). The primary data obtained from both sources were organized and analyzed to identify patterns related to civic culture.

Result and Discussions

General Overview of the Sekaran Village Community

Sekaran is a village located in the Kayen Kidul sub-district, Kediri Regency, East Java Province. According to monographic data cited from the 2024 village profile of Sekaran, the village covers an area of approximately 200.90 hectares with a total population of 2,860 people and 924 households. The majority of the residents earn their livelihood as farmers. As a multi-religious village, there are four officially recognized religions practiced by the community, with the following distribution: Islam has 2,161 followers, Christianity (Protestant) 205 followers, Catholicism 176 followers, and Hinduism 318 followers. Each religious group in Sekaran has its own place of worship, including 2 mosques, 8 prayer rooms (*mushola*), 1 Protestant church, 1 Catholic church, and 1 Hindu temple (*pura*). Some of these places of worship are located very close to each other for instance, the mosque and the temple are less than 100 meters apart. However, this proximity has never posed any problems for the residents in carrying out their religious practices, which have continued peacefully for many years.

Sekaran Village has its own uniqueness in terms of diversity. Unlike most areas that tend to cluster based on religious backgrounds, the population distribution pattern in this village is evenly spread. Each house stands next to another regardless of religious differences. This creates a living environment with minimal prejudice, where tolerance and mutual respect naturally grow in the daily lives of its residents. According to Jannah et al. (2018), habits that are consistently practiced and have become part of daily life encourage the development of strong tolerance, as people naturally respect each other's religious practices without triggering interreligious conflicts. This statement emphasizes that tolerance is not merely the result of formal education or policy, but also of continuous social practices such as helping neighbors of different faiths, providing space for worship, and maintaining open communication across beliefs. These routines help foster an inclusive and harmonious social climate, ultimately reducing the likelihood of religion-based conflict.

There is a source of pride in the life of the Sekaran Village community: in 2021, the village received an award as a "Village of Religious Harmony Awareness" at the provincial level from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of East Java. This achievement was supported by various contributing indicators, making Sekaran Village a worthy example of a community that has successfully strengthened unity amid diversity and reflects optimism for national integration in Indonesia. The religious and social diversity within the Sekaran community does not pose a problem, as the people consistently uphold prevailing norms and values by living harmoniously without discriminating based on social status or religious background. This is reflected in various activities, such as interactions between neighbors, communal work (*gotong royong*), participation in government programs, and other social engagements.

Civic Culture in a Multi-Religious Society

Civic culture is a concept that underlies the behavior and values of citizenship within a society. According to Docherty, I., et al (2001), the concept of civic culture is defined as a framework that encompasses the attitudes, behaviors, and values that facilitate active citizen participation in community and civic life. Thus, the concept of civic culture serves as a framework for understanding how citizens from various religious backgrounds coexist within a single community. In a multi-religious society, the representation of civic culture cannot be separated from values such as interreligious tolerance, respect for differences, social solidarity, and a collective commitment to peaceful coexistence. These civic ideals are not merely abstract norms but are manifested through local traditions, social interactions, and the daily practices of residents who respect one another's beliefs.

According to Winataputra, U. S., & Budimansyah, D. (2012), civic culture is a culture that supports citizenship, consisting of a set of ideas that can be effectively manifested through cultural representation for the purpose of shaping citizens' identity. They identify several key elements within civic culture, including civic virtue, civic disposition, and civic commitments. These elements reflect efforts to develop an empowered and responsible civic culture within a democratic life.

Civic virtue encompasses the attitudes and behaviors that encourage active citizen engagement, such as trust, tolerance, and solidarity. The community of Sekaran Village clearly demonstrates civic virtue through their tolerant way of life amid religious diversity. Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism coexist within the same area without any significant social conflict. In everyday life, residents not only respect one another but also actively participate in interfaith social activities. For instance, during religious celebrations such as Nyepi, Christmas, or Eid al-Fitr, people from different faiths contribute by helping with preparations or maintaining peace and order in the neighborhood. They also visit each other to share greetings and build bonds during religious holidays. Cultural practices also shape the strong civic behavior of Sekaran residents. Traditional events involve all religious groups for example, *Suranan* (Javanese New Year celebration), *Nyadran* or *Bersih Desa* (rituals to honor ancestors and pray for village safety), and life-cycle ceremonies such as those for birth, marriage, and death within the Javanese tradition. This clearly shows that values like solidarity and mutual trust are not merely slogans, but have become ingrained social habits built on mutual understanding. Such civic morality serves as an ethical foundation for maintaining social cohesion in a diverse society.

Civic Disposition in the Sekaran Village community refers to the attitudes and habitual ways of thinking among citizens that support healthy social functions and the public interest within a democratic system. The civic disposition of Sekaran residents is evident in their active participation in village deliberation forums and various collective decision-making processes. The people of Sekaran are accustomed to open-minded thinking and considering the common good when determining the direction of village development. They do so without imposing personal or group interests, allowing religious diversity to pose no obstacle in democratic processes. For instance, in the election of the village head or community leaders such as neighborhood (RT) and hamlet (RW) heads, the criteria prioritized are integrity and track record, rather than religious background. This is reflected in the fact that Sekaran

Village has, at times, been led by a Christian village head, and the structure of village governance including RT and RW leaders includes individuals from various religious backgrounds. This condition illustrates that residents possess a habit of rational and inclusive thinking, which is essential for maintaining a healthy social system within the framework of local democracy. This aligns with the statement by Docherty, I., et al. (2001): Citizen participation may be fostered as much by the creation of opportunity structures that build confidence in the efficacy of participation as by the intrinsic levels of civic culture. The key policy lesson is that the effort devoted to creating greater institutional thickness and participatory structures is not wasted. This statement is highly relevant to democratic practices in many developing countries, including Indonesia. Often, low levels of citizen participation are not due to apathy, but because people do not see real and functional spaces for engagement. Therefore, the Sekaran Village government actively builds structures that facilitate citizen involvement, such as interfaith dialogue forums, inclusive policies involving all religious groups, and transparent decision-making processes. A strong civic culture must be supported by participatory institutions and structures. Building genuine channels for participation is a crucial strategy for fostering citizens' trust and ensuring that democracy functions in a healthier and more inclusive way.

Civic Commitments within the Sekaran Village community refer to the voluntary dedication of citizens to the core values and principles of citizenship. These commitments are reflected in the residents' willingness to uphold shared values in their daily lives without coercion. In the context of a multi-religious society, this commitment is evident through citizens' initiatives to form interfaith communication forums that serve as platforms for dialogue and the strengthening of solidarity. Residents also actively preserve peaceful narratives through the Javanese cultural values passed down by their ancestors. The collective awareness to live harmoniously side by side is not merely the result of formal regulations, but stems from a moral conviction that maintaining peace and social order is a fundamental responsibility of being a citizen. This commitment becomes a cultural strength that sustains peaceful coexistence in the midst of diversity. According to Flanagan, C. A., et al. (1998), "Civic commitment is shaped by family values that instill social responsibility, involvement in volunteer work, and a school climate that fosters solidarity and active participation in community life." In line with this view, Civic Commitments in Sekaran Village begin with family education, where noble Javanese cultural values are taught from an early age through various narratives such as "*tepa slira*," which means being considerate in one's actions, words, and behavior by taking into account the feelings, conditions, and rights of others. In practice, *tepa slira* promotes tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect in social life, and becomes an essential part of the civic commitment that underpins the peaceful and inclusive fabric of the Sekaran community.

Civic culture in a multi-religious society serves as tangible proof that civic identity can be shaped and sustained not through uniformity, but through diversity that is wisely and inclusively managed. This concept provides a strong conceptual foundation for exploring how civic culture can grow amid religious differences, as can be observed in the case of the Sekaran Village community. This aligns with the view of Chen, C. C., & Eastman, W. (1997), who state that "civic culture refers to a set of overarching values that unify a multicultural social unit or organization. It is not just an ordinary organizational culture but a culture that emphasizes shared values transcending ethnic, cultural, or individual differences within the organization." Therefore, civic culture functions as a shared ethical space that enables harmonious living in a religiously plural society. Building civic culture in a multireligious community is not only a social necessity but also a commitment to a just and peaceful shared life.

Conclusion

Civic culture in a multireligious society serves as a vital foundation for maintaining social harmony and strengthening democratic life amid diversity. A case study of the Sekaran community demonstrates that religious diversity among its residents is not a source of conflict, but rather forms an

inclusive and tolerant social space. Civic culture is reflected in various social practices such as interfaith dialogue, interreligious communal work (*gotong royong*), and active participation in village deliberations that prioritize the common good. Civic values like tolerance, solidarity, and mutual trust are built organically through daily interactions rooted in local wisdom. Thus, the people of Sekaran provide a concrete example of how civic culture can develop healthily within a multireligious society, while also strengthening a sense of civic identity grounded in shared human values and communal togetherness.

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