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# Integration of Religious Values in Public Ethics in a Multicultural Society

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT		
Keywords: Integration; Multicultural; Public Ethics; Religious Values; *Correspondence desieandreastuti@fisip.unm u.ac.id	This article aims to describe the relevance of integrating religious values into public codes of ethics to drive social transformation within a multicultural society. Utilizing a narrative review method of previous literature, the article identifies the potential of religious moderation and local cultural values, such as <i>gotong royong</i> (mutual cooperation), as foundational elements to strengthen public ethics. The findings indicate that the application of religion-based public ethics in Indonesia has had a positive impact, including enhancing integrity, reducing corruption, and increasing public awareness of the importance of ethics in public life. Integration of religious values into public ethics holds significant potential to address social challenges in a diverse society like Indonesia. In conclusion, by harmonizing religious principles with cultural norms, public ethics can serve as a unifying framework that promotes inclusivity, accountability, and social harmony, thereby fostering a more just and ethical society.		

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2021, Setara Institute reported 333 violations of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia, encompassing acts of intolerance, discrimination, and religionbased violence. This phenomenon underscores significant challenges in fostering interfaith tolerance within the nation. Religious intolerance and discrimination have been widely recognized as critical social issues that threaten the principles of pluralism and coexistence (Siregar, 2016). The persistence of these challenges reflects gaps in law enforcement and the promotion of inclusive values.

Moreover, Indonesia's public sector grapples with serious integrity and transparency concerns. According to Transparency International (2022) the country scored 34/100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), indicating high levels of corruption in public administration. This score reflects systemic abuse of

power and weak ethical implementation across government institutions. Corruption significantly undermines public trust and the effectiveness of governance (Quah, 2021). Consequently, reforming institutional frameworks and promoting ethical leadership are imperative for improving public accountability and integrity.

In the digital era, Indonesia also faces new challenges related to the shifting moral and ethical values within society. A report by We Are Social (2023) reveals that approximately 77% of Indonesia's population actively uses social media platforms. These platforms often serve as conduits for disseminating inaccurate information, including hoaxes and hate speech. The unregulated flow of digital content has exacerbated social polarization, particularly among the younger generation (Ida et al., 2025). This issue highlights the urgent need for digital literacy initiatives and a stronger regulatory framework to mitigate the societal impact of misinformation and harmful online behavior.

In this context, integrating religious values and local cultural heritage into a robust public code of ethics offers a promising strategy to address these multifaceted challenges. Indigenous values such as *gotong royong* (collective cooperation) and tolerance hold significant potential for shaping ethical public behavior. *Gotong royong* embodies the spirit of collaboration and mutual assistance, providing a moral foundation for public decision-making processes. Similarly, the deeply rooted principle of tolerance, long upheld by Indonesia's diverse ethnic groups, demonstrates the capacity to navigate diversity with mutual respect and understanding (Ruja, 2017). Incorporating these values into public ethics can serve as an effective approach to fostering harmony within Indonesia's multicultural society.

Religion and culture hold immense potential as foundations for developing adaptive public ethics that embrace diversity. Religious teachings such as justice, compassion, and responsibility, when aligned with local cultural traditions, can form ethical principles that are universally relevant and acceptable across social groups (Moodood, 2007). These integrated values can guide public ethics toward fostering tolerance and unity amidst pluralism. However, the digital era has significantly shifted societal ethics, often replacing traditional values such as direct interpersonal interaction and courtesy with digital dependency and anonymity (Madung, 2012)

The crisis of morality in Indonesia, characterized by rampant corruption, abuse of power, and weakened integrity in public service, exacerbates these ethical challenges. Todorović, (2019) argues that this issue is linked to insufficient moral education rooted in religious values and weak social control mechanisms. For instance, corruption cases involving high-ranking officials, demonstrate the inconsistency between religious teachings like honesty and accountability and their application in bureaucratic practice (Ramdhani, 2018). This underscores the urgency of incorporating stronger religious moral education and effective oversight in governance.

In regions such as Papua and Sulawesi, reports of intolerance toward religious minorities highlight the lack of education promoting tolerance and respect for differing beliefs (Anam et al., 2016). Social control mechanisms, including proactive measures by local authorities and religious leaders, are often absent, allowing discrimination to persist. Similarly, the rise of hoaxes on social media, often targeting religious issues, reflects inadequate emphasis on digital ethics and the failure of societal oversight (Ida et al., 2025). These phenomena illustrate the disconnect between religious values and their practice in digital and communal interactions.

Educational institutions are not immune to this ethical crisis. According to Susilowati (2022) 77% of faculty members in Indonesian universities reported instances of sexual harassment on campus, yet 63% chose not to report them. This reflects weak enforcement of moral and ethical education emphasizing human rights and gender equality. Despite religious teachings advocating justice and respect, the lack of sanctions and societal silence perpetuates a culture of impunity in academic settings (Grivijitr, 2021).

Given these challenges, integrating religious and cultural values into public ethics is crucial for fostering a more just and harmonious society. Values such as justice, honesty, responsibility, and tolerance could serve as foundational principles for addressing ethical issues in Indonesia's multicultural context. This integration requires effective strategies to balance religious teachings with respect for diversity and ensure their practical application in governance and social life. By addressing potential barriers and leveraging these values, public ethics can be strengthened to improve service delivery and social cohesion in Indonesia's plural society.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a narrative review methodology to explore the integration of religious values into public ethics, particularly within the context of multicultural societies. The narrative review approach was selected for its comprehensive and flexible framework in analyzing existing literature, enabling qualitative synthesis of previous research findings (Greenhalgh, 2014). This method allows researchers to identify trends, patterns, and gaps in the literature while providing a deeper understanding of the research topic (Grant & Booth, 2009).

The primary materials used in this study include peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on public ethics, religious moderation, and multiculturalism. Selected articles are those that make significant contributions to understanding the relationship between religious values and ethical practices in multicultural societies. These journals encompass recent research findings and relevant theories, offering insights into how religious values can be integrated into the framework of public ethics. Furthermore, reports and publications from governmental and nongovernmental organizations addressing ethical challenges and solutions in public administration are utilized. These documents provide practical perspectives on applying ethical principles in multicultural and religiously diverse public sectors (United Nations, 2017). Reports often include policy analyses, case studies, and recommendations to strengthen the integration of religious values into inclusive and equitable public policies.

The literature for this study was identified using targeted keyword searches such as "public ethics," "religious values," and "multiculturalism." Articles and topics were selected based on their relevance to the integration of religious values into public ethics and their applicability in multicultural contexts. The selection process involved a critical evaluation of the quality and contribution of each source, ensuring that only the most relevant and credible literature was included in the analysis. This rigorous selection enhances the validity and depth of the findings presented (Miles et al., 2014).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### The Shift in Moral and Ethical Values and the Role of Religion in Public Ethics

In a study by Kasanah et al. (2022), argue that the rapid development of digital technology has significantly impacted societal thinking, behavior, and ethics. This change is particularly pronounced among younger generations, where traditional moral values often shift due to the growing dominance of technology in daily life. While digital advancements have brought numerous benefits, such as faster access to information and broader communication opportunities, they have also led to challenges, including the erosion of traditional etiquette and the rise of individualism in social interactions (Belgradoputra & Mardani, 2023)

Belgradoputra & Mardani (2023) highlights that technology often acts as a catalyst for unhealthy moral shifts, emphasizing the need to address these challenges. However, (Kasanah et al., 2022) suggest that technology should not merely be viewed as a threat but also as an opportunity. If used wisely, digital platforms can become powerful tools for disseminating positive moral values. The authors underline the importance of religious-based ethics education as a strategic

approach to countering the negative impacts of the digital age. Such education equips individuals to balance modern life with strong moral foundations, fostering resilience against the erosion of ethical values.

Suhartono (2013) discusses how integrating religious values into public education can positively influence social interactions, particularly in multicultural settings. For instance, he highlights the role of multicultural education in universities, where students are encouraged to appreciate cultural and religious differences. This educational approach not only fosters tolerance but also empowers students to become social change agents who actively promote peace and harmony. Research has shown that incorporating religious values into educational curricula is effective in cultivating an awareness of peaceful coexistence amidst diversity (Risladiba & Ramdhani, 2021)

Despite the significant role of religion in strengthening public ethics, its integration into a diverse society like Indonesia faces many challenges. One of the main obstacles is the prevalence of stereotypes, prejudices, and deeply ingrained discrimination among various social groups. These social tensions often arise from a lack of deep understanding among groups with differing cultural, religious, and belief systems (Van Tongeren et al., 2020). Moreover, the collective awareness to apply religious teachings inclusively remains low. Many individuals perceive religious doctrines as relevant only to their own groups, which exacerbates social disparities and deepens polarization in diverse communities (Gill, 2020).

#### **Discourse Ethics as a Framework for Multicultural Society and Public Ethics**

To address challenges in fostering inclusivity and reducing discrimination in multicultural societies, the approach of discourse ethics offers a viable solution (Supartiningsih, 2007) Discourse ethics emphasizes open, rational dialogue to build moral consensus among individuals or groups with diverse perspectives, values, and backgrounds. This concept is deeply rooted in the philosophical framework developed by Jürgen Habermas, a German philosopher who advocates for free and open communication as a means to achieve consensus on societal norms of what is considered good and just. According to (Seran, 2010), the core principles of discourse ethics include:

- 1. Discourse ethics prioritizes honest, open, and rational communication among all parties involved. Each participant is entitled to express their views without coercion or suppression.
- 2. The approach acknowledges diverse perspectives, beliefs, and values. Dialogue provides a platform for these differences to be respected and integrated into a consensus that upholds pluralism.

- 3. The ultimate goal is a shared agreement acceptable to all parties, grounded not merely on majority rule but on reasoned arguments and rational deliberation.
- 4. Every participant is considered equal, with their arguments deserving of attention and fair consideration. The discourse ensures that all contributions are accountable and evaluated impartially

Discourse ethics is particularly relevant in multicultural societies where diversity often leads to differing opinions. By applying these principles, societies can seek mutual understanding and construct shared norms that reflect the interests of both majority and minority groups (Habermas, 2003). This method can also be a powerful tool in developing public codes of ethics that are inclusive and equitable, avoiding the imposition of norms based solely on majority preferences.

An example of its application is the promotion of open, rational dialogue across social groups to reduce stereotypes and prejudice. This approach fosters collective consensus that includes values acceptable to all parties without diminishing individual beliefs or traditions. Additionally, integrating social ethics education that combines religious values with local cultural wisdom is another important strategy. (Sleeter, 1996).

A concrete example of integrating religious values into public ethics is Indonesia's Integrity Zone (*Zona Integritas*) program, initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The program aims to create work environments free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism while promoting clean, effective, and efficient public services. This initiative is part of Indonesia's broader national bureaucratic reform agenda to enhance governance quality in both central and local government institutions.

The Integrity Zone initiative is implemented by institutions committed to establishing Corruption-Free Areas (*Wilayah Bebas Korupsi/WBK*) and Clean Bureaucracy Zones (*Wilayah Birokrasi Bersih Melayani/WBBM*). Units achieving WBK or WBBM status are recognized for meeting specific indicators set by Ministry of Administrative Reform and Bureaucratic Reform (Kementerian PAN-RB). The program incorporates religious values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and accountability into workplace culture, focusing on improving civil servants' integrity through moral training rooted in religious principles.

Research has shown the effectiveness of this program in reducing corruption and improving public service quality. For instance, case studies have indicated a reduction in corruption rates by up to 40% in several government institutions following the program's implementation. With such success, scholars recommend expanding the program to other institutions to further enhance transparency, accountability, and integrity in public service delivery.

#### Moral Challenges in Society and the Role of Legal Awareness

Pertiwi et al. (2022) highlighted that ethical violations in society stem from a lack of moral education and limited public understanding of the law. The study reveals that low legal awareness is one of the primary factors contributing to frequent violations of social norms. Law not only functions as an instrument of regulation but also as a reflection of societal values. Fundamentally, the law emerges from social values rooted in community life, which are later formalized into binding regulations.

Within the Indonesian context, the current legal framework is significantly influenced by prevailing societal values, including religious and local cultural principles. For instance, values such as justice, honesty, responsibility, and compassion taught by religions like Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and others play an essential role in shaping social norms. These values serve not only as religious teachings but also as foundations for legal formulations aimed at fostering a just and civilized society (Siregar, 2016).

However, the study finds that low legal awareness often leads individuals to disregard legally established norms. This can occur due to discrepancies between individual understandings of moral values and the implementation of existing laws. While laws may reflect religious and cultural values that advocate honesty and fairness, many individuals fail to recognize that violating social norms also constitutes a breach of legal principles derived from these shared values (Pertiwi et al., 2022)

Another significant issue is the gap between written laws and their practical enforcement. For example, although laws prohibit corruption, violence, and discrimination, violations persist due to inequities in legal enforcement. This disparity often arises from insufficient social control mechanisms and weak law enforcement by authorities who are expected to uphold integrity. The inconsistency in applying legal standards undermines public trust in the law and its role as a protector of social harmony (Kawangung, 2019).

The correlation between low legal awareness and the values embedded in religion and culture suggests that enhancing legal awareness requires strengthening education on religious and moral values. If individuals understand that laws are not merely government-imposed regulations but also manifestations of religious and cultural norms they uphold, they are more likely to respect and adhere to these laws.

Therefore, integrating moral education based on religion and local culture is crucial to fostering higher legal awareness within (Suprapto et al., 2021).

The authors emphasize the critical importance of synergy between society and the government to reinforce the moral foundation of the nation. Religious values and local cultural traditions are highlighted as essential elements for shaping a more ethical society. To achieve this, the formulation of specific legislation governing societal ethics has been proposed. Such a law is expected to strengthen existing social norms and provide a clear legal foundation to prevent future moral violations.

If such legislation is developed similar to the current "BerAKHLAK" values applied to civil servants (*Aparatur Sipil Negara, ASN*)—and implemented broadly across society, Indonesia could experience significant positive transformations. The ethical principles codified in such laws would serve not only as formal guidelines but also as shared values that bolster social, cultural, and political life in Indonesia's multicultural context. Several potential impacts of this approach include:

- 1. Enhancing Awareness and Adherence to Moral Values
  - Legislation on ethics would provide clear guidelines for how individuals should behave within a national framework. Core values such as integrity, accountability, harmony, loyalty, adaptability, and collaboration would become benchmarks for social interactions. Proper implementation of such principles could encourage citizens to recognize their responsibilities within the nation, thereby increasing compliance with social norms and laws.
- 2. Strengthening Unity Amid Diversity

Indonesia, as a nation rich in cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, faces unique challenges in maintaining social harmony. If the entire society adheres to shared ethical values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation, the essence of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) would be more tangibly realized. Legislation could serve as a bridge to strengthen unity, ensuring that all citizens share a common vision of peaceful coexistence amidst differences.

3. Promoting Social Justice and Clean Governance

The application of ethical values would extend not only to daily life but also to governance. By fostering societal adherence to values such as transparency and responsibility, public oversight of government behavior would become stronger. Over time, this could lead to cleaner and more equitable governance. A society grounded in ethical awareness can exert significant influence on governmental accountability, leading to sustained reform. 4. Reducing Social Conflicts

Social conflicts often arise due to ignorance or disregard for shared ethical values. A well-defined legal framework governing ethics could delineate what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable in interpersonal interactions. This would mitigate conflicts, particularly those rooted in ethnic, religious, racial, or intergroup (SARA) differences, as individuals are guided to act with mutual respect and fairness. Establishing such boundaries could significantly reduce instances of discrimination and prejudice.

No.	Program	Integrated Religious Values	Result	Source
1	Integrity Zone by Ministry of Religious Affairs	Honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility	40% reduction in abuse of power in government agencies	KPK Report (2022)
2	Anti- Corruption Education in Schools	Honesty, responsibility, integrity	Increased collective public awareness, more effective oversight of public officials	Dinas Pendidikan Jawa Timur (2009)
3	Religious Ethics Training for ASN	Work ethic, justice and compassion	Increase ASN's commitment to clean and transparent public services	Peraturan Gubernur Jawa Timur (2023)
4	Collaboration with Local Religious Leaders	Religious moderation, deliberation, and mutual cooperation	Enhance social harmony and moral policing in the public sphere	Studi Multikultura (Triana, 2024)

Table 1. Examples of Programs that Integrate Religious Values in Public Ethics

Several government institutions have successfully implemented public ethics based on religious values, exemplified by the Ministry of Religious Affairs at the provincial level. These efforts have earned recognition as *Wilayah Bebas Korupsi* (WBK, Corruption-Free Zone) and *Wilayah Birokrasi Bersih Melayani* (WBBM, Clean Bureaucracy Serving Zone) from the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (Kementerian Agama RI, 2021). This recognition underscores the effectiveness of integrating religious principles—such as honesty, responsibility, and trustworthiness—into bureaucratic management to enhance institutional integrity and reduce corruption. Data from the 2022 report by the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK) also reveal that institutions employing this approach experienced a 40% reduction in abuses of power compared to pre-implementation levels, reflecting the positive impact of religiously grounded public ethics.

The city of Surabaya stands out as a successful example of integrating religious values into public ethics. Through its anti-corruption education program, which

incorporates teachings on honesty and responsibility from various religious traditions, the city has fostered collective awareness of the importance of public ethics. This program, implemented in schools, instills these values in younger generations, resulting in greater public vigilance regarding the behavior of public officials. The initiative demonstrates that religiously grounded education can not only create social harmony but also serve as an effective tool for reducing corruption across sectors (Kawangung, 2019; Triana et al., 2024)

The integration of religious values into public ethics represents a strategic initiative for fostering a more orderly and harmonious society. Supported by government programs and active collaboration with all societal elements, this integration can address a range of social challenges in Indonesia. Although Indonesia is a multicultural nation with diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultures, the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), serves as a constant reminder that differences should not hinder unity. Instead, this diversity is a resource to be managed wisely through universally applicable ethical principles (Risladiba & Ramdhani, 2021)

Every major religion practiced in Indonesia: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism teaches noble values relevant to social life. Principles of honesty, responsibility, tolerance, justice, and compassion form a universal ethical foundation that aligns with the societal need for harmonious coexistence. With this shared ethos, all religions have the potential to contribute significantly to the formation of stronger public ethics.

Religious values, when integrated into public ethics, can act as a moral compass for society. This applies not only to daily interpersonal interactions but also to the public service sector. Imagine a society collectively embracing these values. The government, as a policymaker, can serve as a catalyst by introducing supportive programs, such as moral education in schools, ethics training for civil servants (ASN), or public campaigns promoting ethical values across platforms.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Religious and cultural differences often trigger conflicts if not managed wisely. Here lies the critical role of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the glue of national unity. The spirit of "unity in diversity" must be continually promoted in every multicultural initiative. By focusing on shared ethical values taught by all religions, rather than differences, the nation can find common ground.

With the government's support and collective societal effort, integrating religious values into public ethics can become a powerful tool to promote awareness, reduce social conflicts, and foster harmony amid diversity. This effort also reflects Indonesia's longstanding cultural values, such as *gotong royong* (mutual

cooperation) and *musyawarah* (deliberation), which are deeply embedded in the nation's identity.

## CONCLUSION

Despite notable progress, the integration of religious values into public ethics in Indonesia continues to face significant challenges that require urgent attention. Low legal awareness and limited understanding of religious values in social life remain major contributors to the prevalence of social norm violations. Tensions between groups, often fueled by stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, also hinder the effective integration of religious principles. Moreover, low moral values driven by technological advancements, particularly through social media, exacerbates social gaps and weakens social control. The unregulated freedom of expression on these platforms has often become a breeding ground for the spread of misinformation and hate speech, further polarizing society and undermining intergroup cohesion.

To address these challenges, an inclusive approach is essential. This can be achieved through discourse ethics, which emphasizes open and rational dialogue among all societal groups. Such dialogue provides a platform for mutual understanding, fostering a consensus that respects diverse religious and cultural values. Additionally, incorporating social ethics education into school curricula integrating religious teachings with local cultural values can play a pivotal role. By prioritizing moral education that instills tolerance, honesty, responsibility, and justice, future generations will be better equipped to navigate diversity and actively contribute to building a harmonious and equitable society. The integration of religious values into public ethics holds tremendous potential to drive positive social change, improving public service quality, promoting clean governance, and strengthening social harmony amidst Indonesia's rich diversity. However, achieving this vision requires a collective commitment from all stakeholders, including the government, religious leaders, and the public, to foster collective awareness and consistently implement these values in everyday life.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of various literature and the challenges faced by Indonesia as a multicultural society, several actionable recommendations can be proposed to enhance ethical awareness in public life:

Structured Religion-Based Ethics Education
 Incorporating values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance into
 education curricula that integrate religious and local cultural teachings is vital.
 This approach aligns with Pancasila's principles, particularly the first pillar,

Belief in One Supreme God, and fosters harmony by emphasizing unity in diversity as outlined in Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

2. Strengthening Discourse Ethics

Promoting open, rational dialogue across diverse groups supports mutual understanding and reduces intergroup tensions. This approach reflects Pancasila's fourth pillar, Democracy Led by Wisdom in Deliberation/Representation, and reinforces the principle of embracing diversity for collective strength.

3. Stricter Law Enforcement

Upholding justice and integrity through fair and consistent law enforcement, as emphasized in Pancasila's fifth pillar, Social Justice for All Indonesians, is critical. Ensuring equality before the law irrespective of cultural or religious background strengthens trust in public institutions.

- 4. Leveraging Technology for Moral Education Digital platforms should be utilized to disseminate moral and ethical education based on religious values, particularly targeting younger generations. This aligns with Pancasila's vision of using technological advancements for societal well-being and promotes inclusive access to ethical teachings.
- 5. Collaboration Between Government and Religious Leaders Religious leaders, as moral role models, can work alongside the government to enhance collective awareness of ethical values. This collaboration reflects the spirit of Pancasila's first pillar and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, fostering unity while respecting cultural and religious diversity.

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