

Minorities Within the Majority: Intra-Muslim marginality and the Unequal Distribution of Religious Citizenship in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Studies of religious minorities in Muslim-majority societies have largely focused on Muslim-non-Muslim relations, leaving intra-Muslim inequality and its effects on citizenship less clearly explained. This article examined how intra-Muslim marginality produced unequal religious citizenship among Ahmadi communities and Shia residents displaced from Sampang between 2008 and 2025. It used qualitative document analysis of regulations, court decisions, official statements, human rights reports, monitoring reports, and peer-reviewed studies. The findings showed that doctrinal classifications acquired civic consequences when public institutions enforced, accepted, or failed to overcome them. Ahmadi marginality operated more directly through written rules, mosque closure, and institutional decisions limiting public activity. In Sampang, marginality developed through locally organised religious opposition, prolonged displacement, and failure to secure return after violence. These routes did not remove formal citizenship, but made the use or restoration of rights less secure. The article developed orthodoxy-conditioned citizenship to describe legal membership that remained intact while religious rights became harder to use or recover because institutions gave practical force to dominant interpretations of Islam. Local variation showed that these outcomes depended on institutional choices rather than doctrine alone.



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INTRODUCTION

Being counted as Muslim does not guarantee equal standing within a Muslim majority. In Indonesia, Ahmadi citizens and Shia residents displaced from Sampang remain legally Indonesian and are commonly classified within Islam, yet their religious presence has often been treated as a problem to be managed. Places of worship may be closed, collective gatherings may be restricted, and return to a home area may become subject to negotiation. These are not simply disputes over doctrine. They reveal an internal hierarchy in which some Muslims can practise religion without first proving that their identity is acceptable, while others must repeatedly justify their right to gather, remain visible, or return to their own communities. The phrase minorities within the majority captures this condition, but only if minority is understood as a political and institutional position rather than a numerical fact. Research on Ahmadiyya citizenship in Indonesia similarly shows how a community may remain formally included while experiencing exclusion through institutional and social practices (Mursyidi et al., 2020). Their location inside the majority, therefore, does not remove the unequal terms on which belonging is granted.

The language of religious intolerance explains part of this problem, especially prejudice, hostility, and public rejection. It is less effective when the issue concerns how such attitudes acquire administrative and spatial consequences. A citizen may retain an identity card, vote, work, and attend school while having less freedom to maintain a mosque, organise a religious meeting, or live safely in

a particular place. Formal citizenship therefore says little about how rights are actually enjoyed. Recent work on minority freedom of religion or belief stresses that legal recognition alone does not settle whether minority communities can exercise rights under equal institutional conditions (Badurdeen et al., 2026). Substantive citizenship is more useful here because it draws attention to the practical ability to claim protection and sustain communal life without being required to hide or modify religious identity.

Indonesia sharpens this tension. Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom exist alongside laws and administrative practices that allow public institutions to regulate contested forms of belief. Religious authorities do not formally replace the state, yet their judgments can shape how officials understand deviance, harmony, and public order. Recent scholarship on institutional religious freedom in Indonesia shows that constitutional protection operates through a dense institutional field in which state agencies and religious organisations jointly shape the practical boundaries of religious liberty (Hefner, 2021). The problem is not only a gap between law and practice. Legal protection itself may be interpreted through dominant religious expectations.

Ahmadiyah and the Sampang Shia case are compared because they expose different mechanisms rather than equivalent histories. Restrictions affecting Ahmadi communities have accumulated through national policy, regional rules, and disputes over worship or public gatherings. The Sampang case followed another route. Violence, displacement, prolonged residence outside the place of origin, and contested return tied religious marginality to territory and livelihood. Recent historical work on religious pluralism and conflict in Indonesia likewise shows that the management of diversity is shaped by changing relations among state institutions, religious authority, and collective memory rather than by doctrine alone (Rumadi, 2025). One case therefore offers a clearer view of regulatory containment, while the other shows how exclusion can be sustained through displacement and pressure to adapt.

Studies of Ahmadiyah, Shia, and other small religious communities in Indonesia have shown that exclusion cannot be reduced to private theological disagreement. Research on micro religious minorities, for example, demonstrates how civic space is shaped by institutional access and the ability of minority groups to make claims in public life (Hurriyah, 2023). Legal and human rights research has documented restrictions and failures of protection, while work on local conflict has explained mobilisation and clerical authority. Citizenship, however, often remains a background assumption. Legal studies document violations but do not always explain why some citizens must negotiate rights that others exercise more predictably. Conflict studies show how hostility is organised, though the link between doctrinal classification, administrative action, and the long-term distribution of civic capacity is less often treated as one continuous process. What requires explanation is the production of a Muslim citizen whose rights are valid in principle but uncertain in practice.

The period from 2008 to 2025 provides the main empirical frame. The starting point marks the Joint Ministerial Decree on Ahmadiyah, which gave national regulatory force to an already contested theological boundary. The closing year is the latest full period covered by the monitoring corpus used in this study. Comparative documentary analysis draws on regulations, court decisions, official statements, monitoring reports, and academic studies from the two cases. It asks how intra-Muslim marginality has shaped religious citizenship, how institutional actors have converted doctrinal boundaries into public consequences, and why Ahmadi communities and displaced Shia residents from Sampang have faced different forms of restriction.

This study aims to explain how intra-Muslim marginality shapes the unequal distribution of religious citizenship in Indonesia by comparing Ahmadi communities and Shia residents displaced from Sampang. More specifically, it examines how doctrinal classifications acquire institutional consequences, how these consequences affect the exercise and restoration of religious rights, and why the two communities experience different forms of marginalisation. The study also seeks to develop a more precise account of religious citizenship that can explain inequality among citizens who remain formally included within the same Muslim majority.

Unequal religious citizenship, the analysis argues, emerges through delegated doctrinal governance. The state need not define theological truth on its own. It can give public effect to classifications endorsed by dominant religious authorities and translate them through regulation, policing, mediation, or local administration. This produces what the article calls orthodoxy-conditioned citizenship. The concept differs from segregated citizenship because its main concern is conditionality. Ahmadi and Shia citizens remain members of the polity, but the enjoyment of rights varies with their

proximity to accepted interpretations of Islam. For Ahmadi communities, marginality appears mainly through regulation and control of public presence. In Sampang, it became more territorial and tied to safety, return, and local acceptance. Formal equality survives. Equal Muslim citizenship does not.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used qualitative document analysis to examine the unequal distribution of religious citizenship among Ahmadi communities and Shia residents displaced from Sampang. Document analysis is well established for research that reconstructs institutional positions and policy processes from written sources, particularly when the provenance and function of documents are assessed systematically (Dalglish et al., 2020). The two cases were compared because both are well documented but show different forms of intra-Muslim marginalisation. The study covered the period from 2008 to 2025. The year 2008 marks the issuance of the Joint Ministerial Decree on Ahmadiyah, while 2025 was the latest complete year covered by the selected monitoring reports. The comparison focused on institutional responses and their consequences for religious practice, protection, public presence, and residence. It did not compare the numerical prevalence of violations between the two communities.

Data were collected through targeted searches of academic databases, government repositories, court databases, and publications issued by human rights organisations. Documents were selected purposively when they discussed Ahmadiyah or the Sampang Shia case, were available in full text, and came from identifiable authors or institutions. The sources included regulations, court decisions, official statements, human rights reports, religious freedom monitoring reports, and peer-reviewed articles.

The unit of analysis was an institutional action or decision affecting religious practice, protection, or residence. The documents were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in religious classification, institutional response, and the practical exercise of citizenship rights. Reflexive thematic analysis is appropriate for identifying patterned meaning in qualitative materials when the analytical concepts remain open to revision rather than being treated as fixed coding categories (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Worked applications of the approach also show how themes can be developed transparently from qualitative material without reducing analysis to frequency counts (Byrne, 2022). Documents relating to each community were first examined separately before the patterns were compared. Major claims were checked against different types of sources whenever possible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Producing the Internal Muslim Minority

The 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree did not decide whether Ahmadi citizens belonged to Indonesia. It addressed a narrower question that proved more consequential in practice, namely which forms of their religious teaching could appear in public. The decree warned members of Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia who identified their religion as Islam to stop disseminating interpretations and activities judged to depart from the principal teachings of Islam. Read alongside the 2005 Indonesian Ulema Council fatwa, the measure placed an external judgment about Islamic legitimacy inside a state instrument. Recent research on contemporary Ahmadiyya discourse similarly traces how the 2005 fatwa and the 2008 decree reinforced a public frame of deviance while state protection remained uncertain (Putri, 2023). Neither document alone explains every restriction that followed. What changed was the balance of authority. Ahmadi self-identification remained legally possible, but officials now had a written basis for treating some expressions of that identity as a matter of supervision. A linguistic study of the same fatwa also shows how authoritative religious language constructed Ahmadiyah through unequal relations of ideology and institutional power (Alnizar, 2025).

Government accounts defended the decree as a measure for maintaining religious harmony. That explanation should not be dismissed as empty rhetoric, since officials often faced pressure to prevent confrontation. Nevertheless, the language of harmony could shift attention away from those threatening disruption and toward the activities of the targeted community. Research on limitations to freedom of religion or belief in Indonesia shows how public order and religious values have been used in practice to justify restrictions beyond the abstract guarantees found in law (Bagir et al., 2020). An Ahmadi meeting could therefore be discussed less as an exercise of religion than as a possible source of disorder. The state did not openly deny Ahmadi membership in Islam, but it narrowed the circumstances in which that membership could be expressed without administrative scrutiny. Related analysis of the MUI fatwa

shows how authoritative religious language can legitimise wider exclusion beyond the immediate doctrinal dispute (Alnizar et al., 2021).

Local restrictions require more caution than a simple claim that the national decree caused them. The evidence does not support one uniform chain across Indonesia. Research on the diffusion of anti-Ahmadiyah regulations shows that discriminatory local rules had important societal and political origins and did not arise mechanically from one national command (Buehler, 2023). Established claims of deviance nevertheless became available to officials and local organisations when they opposed worship, public meetings, or institutional presence. The same classification travelled, although its force depended on local politics and administrative choices. Boundary-making was sustained through repetition, but local variation remained central to its effects.

Sampang followed a less formal route. No national decree specifically organised the treatment of Shia communities, and the conflict cannot be reduced to theology. Comparative research on Sampang and Yogyakarta shows that different regional policies and local social-political configurations help explain why Shia communities encounter violent conflict in one setting and relative peace in another (Abidin et al., 2020). Religious classification still mattered, but it worked among other pressures and did not operate through the same written chain found in the Ahmadi case. In Sampang, dominant clerical judgments shaped the public terms of the dispute while state institutions responded to an exclusion that had already gathered local force.

The Sampang conflict also developed through a combination of religious difference, local authority, social tension, and the escalation of violence. Analysis using Johan Galtung's conflict framework shows that direct violence was connected to deeper structural and cultural conditions rather than to a single doctrinal disagreement (Zattullah, 2021). Ahmadi marginalisation had a clearer written chain from religious judgment to national regulation, although implementation varied locally. In Sampang, exclusion gathered force through clerical authority and communal conflict before public institutions consolidated some of its effects. The routes were not parallel, and the available documents do not support treating them as equivalent. What they shared was a weakening of the affected communities' authority to define the terms of their own religious presence.

Delegated doctrinal governance describes part of this process, not all of it. The concept applies most clearly when a doctrinal judgment can be traced into regulation or public policy, as in the Ahmadi case. Research on efforts to reduce discordant religious relations involving Ahmadiyya likewise shows that the interaction of state law, religious authority, and local social relations remains central to whether exclusion is reproduced or reduced (Ja'far, 2024). In Sampang, the delegation was less direct and often appeared as institutional accommodation of exclusion already organised locally. Political interests, security calculations, and personal conflict still mattered greatly. Minoritisation occurred when religious categories began to influence which Muslim citizens were monitored, restricted, or required to negotiate the terms of their presence (Kadir, 2025c). Research on the motives and institutional role of MUI fatwas further shows how doctrinal judgments can acquire relevance beyond the immediate sphere of religious debate (Alnizar et al., 2022).

2. From Religious Rights to Conditional Access

On 10 June 2025, the government of Banjar City resealed the Istiqamah Mosque used by the local Ahmadi congregation. The action followed an earlier visit by an enforcement team and relied on a mayoral regulation issued in 2011, the West Java governor's regulation from the same year, and the 2008 Joint Ministerial Decree. These documents did not abolish Ahmadi citizenship or announce a general ban on worship. Their effect was narrower but still serious. Local officials could treat access to an existing mosque as an administrative question rather than an ordinary exercise of religion. Recent analysis of local regulations on tolerance in Indonesia shows that measures framed around order and interreligious management can themselves acquire repressive effects when they authorise restrictions on minority practice (Hadi & Heron, 2026). The Banjar case should not be taken as proof of a single national pattern, since local responses have varied. A related study of Ahmadiyya freedom of religion likewise identifies persistent tension between legal guarantees and religious politics in Indonesia (Fadhil & Sudrajat, 2023).

Officials often justified restrictions of this kind in the name of security or social order. Immediate protection may require temporary limits when a credible threat exists, and the documents do not permit every such decision to be dismissed as prejudice. The problem begins when threats from opposing

groups are accepted as a continuing reason to restrict the community under pressure. No comparable demand is then placed on those creating the threat. A short-term safety response can harden into an unequal administrative arrangement if the mosque remains closed and no effective route to restoration follows (Kadir, 2025b). Research on disputes over places of worship similarly shows how social and institutional barriers can narrow religious freedom at the point where formal rights must be exercised in practice (Arifin et al., 2021).

The cancelled book discussion at IAIN Manado in 2025 reveals a different use of institutional discretion. The rector had initially allowed the event on condition that a speaker from the Indonesian Ulema Council be invited. After the city and provincial MUI offices sent letters objecting to the discussion and referring to the 2008 decree and the 2005 fatwa, the campus leadership cancelled it to maintain security and order. The institutional record does not show that the university endorsed every theological claim in those letters. It does show that external doctrinal pressure changed an academic decision. Recent research on the recognition of Ahmadiyah under Indonesia's religious moderation agenda similarly identifies continuing tension between official commitments to moderation and restrictions supported by religious authorities (Nisa et al., 2024).

The Sampang displacement involved a more severe interruption of citizenship. After the August 2012 attack, hundreds of Shia residents were separated from their villages and later moved to government-prepared accommodation in Sidoarjo. Relocation reduced the immediate danger, but the emergency response lasted well beyond the attack itself. Residents remained away from homes and local livelihoods while return was disputed. Research with displaced Shia women from Sampang documents how forced displacement reshaped religious identity, gendered citizenship, and everyday security long after the conflict (Ida & Saud, 2021). These findings do not prove that every official supported the religious demands made by opponents of the community. They do show that protection did not quickly lead to restitution or safe return. Once temporary shelter became a long residence outside Sampang, public institutions were no longer dealing only with immediate security. They were also administering the continued absence of citizens from their villages after the emergency had passed.

The difficulty of return continued after some displaced residents publicly declared adherence to Sunni teaching in November 2020. Research on the protection of civil rights for Sampang's Shia refugees found that access to health, education, and administrative services had improved while freedom of religion and the right to return remained unresolved (Muhtada et al., 2022). A later human rights analysis of the oath-taking process likewise shows that religious adjustment did not immediately settle the territorial dispute or erase the role of local acceptance in determining return (Muhlis & Hannan, 2024). The declaration therefore did not by itself restore belonging in the home area. This does not establish a formal state rule requiring conversion. It points instead to a social condition that public authorities had not overcome even after residents made the adjustment demanded by local opponents.

Local outcomes were not uniformly restrictive. Research in Manislor, Kuningan, documents post-conflict reconciliation and the gradual fulfilment of civil rights when local government, community elites, and socio-religious organisations created sustained space for dialogue (Sodik et al., 2023). National classifications did not mechanically determine local practice. Officials and community leaders retained room to protect religious life rather than accommodate pressure against it. The contrast is important because it shows that the effect of national rules depends on local institutional choices and the quality of social relationships surrounding the minority community.

The institutional problem was not the same across the cases. In Banjar and Manado, a mosque and an academic event were controlled through administrative decisions taken under older regulations or external pressure. In Sampang, the central issue was not permission for a single activity but the prolonged inability to return and rebuild communal life. Evidence from Ahmadiyya refugees in Lombok likewise shows that negative stigma and unequal public services can persist even when formal citizenship remains intact (Gaffar, 2024). The connection between these cases is therefore narrower than a claim that all rights were withdrawn. A recognised right became dependent on decisions and social conditions that did not apply equally to every citizen.

3. Orthodoxy-Conditioned Citizenship and the Stratification of Muslim Belonging

The mosque in Banjar could be resealed without any change to the citizenship of its congregation. Residents displaced from Sampang also remained citizens, yet that status did not return them to their villages. These cases expose an inequality that citizenship law does not name and that constitutional

language alone cannot explain in everyday institutional practice. Research on the distribution of rights in Ahmadi conflicts similarly shows that formal legal status can coexist with uneven access to social justice and local institutional protection (Lathifah, 2022). The evidence does not justify treating Muslim citizens as two formal classes. It does show that the communities examined encountered additional scrutiny because their religious identity remained contested before institutions with greater authority. Hostility acquired civic consequence when officials enforced a restriction, retreated from an activity, or failed to provide a reliable route for restoring disrupted rights. Research on Ahmadiyya social exclusion also finds that constitutional guarantees can coexist with exclusion in everyday institutional practice (Mahardhika, 2023).

Orthodoxy-conditioned citizenship refers to this narrower situation, rather than to every dispute within Islam (Kadir, 2025a). It exists when a community retains legal membership, a religious right becomes harder to use or restore, and that difficulty can be traced to the way public institutions accept or accommodate a doctrinal classification in a durable way. Institutional discourse analysis of Ahmadiyya discrimination in Indonesia demonstrates how blasphemy, religious freedom, and official understandings of deviance can interact within public institutions rather than remaining separate domains (Irawan & Adnan, 2021). Orthodoxy here is not a theological judgment made by the researcher. Social hostility alone is insufficient. The concept applies only after that hostility shapes an institutional decision, sustains a restriction, or blocks effective restoration over time. This broader tension is consistent with evidence that religious legislation can coexist with measurable religious discrimination even under democratic guarantees (Sumaktoyo, 2020).

This emphasis on institutional conditions separates the concept from intolerance and from a single discriminatory act. It also develops the account of segregated citizenship rather than replacing it outright. Research on religious nationalism in Indonesia uses segregated citizenship to describe the differentiation of accepted minorities from groups treated as deviant within the national order (Simandjuntak, 2021). The present cases show a related but narrower problem. Ahmadi and Shia residents were not removed from the polity. Instead, particular rights remained available only through extra approval, local acceptance, or negotiation after conflict. Orthodoxy-conditioned citizenship is useful because it follows the conditions attached to the use and recovery of rights rather than assuming that exclusion must be complete before citizenship becomes unequal in practice.

The evidence is stronger and more direct in the Ahmadi case. The 2008 decree, regional rules, the resealing in Banjar, and the cancellation at IAIN Manado provide a visible path from doctrinal classification to institutional action. Sampang followed a less direct route. Public institutions did not rely on an equivalent national rule against Shia residents. Recent comparative research on Ahmadiyya and Shia peacebuilding in Indonesia similarly shows that accusations of heresy interact with different local institutions and conflict histories, producing distinct challenges rather than one uniform pattern (Farabi, 2025). In Sampang, inequality emerged after local religious opposition, violence, displacement, and the failure to secure return on terms independent of that opposition. Both processes weakened religious citizenship, but they did so through different institutional relationships.

Malang complicates any claim that national classifications automatically produce local exclusion. Research there finds that Ahmadi residents maintained peaceful coexistence with other religious communities despite wider national and regional hostility, supported by everyday interaction and local social accommodation (Widiyanto et al., 2024). The case shows that restrictive outcomes depend on institutional and social choices. Rules and religious judgments may be available, but local actors do not always convert them into exclusion. Orthodoxy-conditioned citizenship is therefore contingent. It becomes visible where institutions accept pressure more readily than they protect or restore the rights at issue. The importance of everyday interaction is also consistent with research showing that religious citizenship is negotiated through encounters with difference and participation in shared public life (Kusmayani, 2023).

Across the two cases, intra-Muslim marginality produced unequal citizenship through decisions that made some rights more difficult to secure after religious identity had been publicly disputed. Ahmadi communities faced clearer restrictions on worship and public activity. In Sampang, the more persistent problem was the failure to restore residence and communal life after violence over an extended period. The comparison does not support one uniform model of exclusion. It shows that doctrinal judgments matter most when institutions convert them into regulation, administrative retreat, or prolonged inaction. Unequal religious citizenship emerged not from the formal loss of membership,

but from the unequal institutional effort required to exercise a right or recover it after disruption. Comparable research on minority citizenship in Aceh describes a related condition in which formal membership persists while religious and ethnic hierarchies weaken substantive participation (Ichwan et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Intra-Muslim marginality produced unequal religious citizenship not by removing legal membership, but by changing the conditions under which rights could be used or restored. In the Ahmadi case, doctrinal classifications gained public force through regulations, local enforcement, mosque closures, and institutional decisions made after external pressure. The Sampang case followed a less direct route. Religious opposition, violence, displacement, and the failure to secure return left Shia residents formally recognised as citizens while their place in local life remained unsettled. These cases reveal different mechanisms rather than one uniform pattern. Ahmadi marginality was more closely tied to regulation and public visibility, whereas the Sampang experience concerned prolonged displacement and the difficulty of rebuilding communal life. In both cases, institutional responses extended the effects of religious disputes and made particular rights less predictable.

The concept of orthodoxy-conditioned citizenship captures this limited but important pattern. It refers to situations in which citizenship remains formally intact, yet the use or restoration of rights becomes harder because public institutions enforce, accept, or fail to overcome a dominant religious classification. This develops earlier work on segregated citizenship by focusing on the conditions attached to rights rather than on exclusion alone. The evidence also shows that such outcomes are not automatic. Local evidence demonstrates that officials and religious leaders can protect minority communities even when wider doctrinal hostility exists. As a document-based study, this article does not represent every Ahmadi or Shia experience in Indonesia. It does, however, show that equal religious citizenship depends on more than constitutional recognition. It requires institutions to protect religious life and restore disrupted rights without making those rights depend on the theological approval of more powerful groups.

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