

## **Resistance and Exclusion of the Shia Community in South Sulawesi**

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### **Abstract**

*This research aims to delve the problem of resistance and exclusion research experienced by Shia groups carried out by other religious movements and local governments. Through qualitative interviews some figures from Shia, anti-Shia, and local governments who issued regulations banning Shia. The findings of this research show that resistance and persecution carried out by anti-Shia groups are carried out through attacks to sabotage the Shia groups' religious activities, especially the commemoration of Ashura. Discrimination against Shia groups in South Sulawesi also involved government officials supporting the anti-Shia movement. A circular letter containing an appeal to be wary of Shia groups was issued by the South Sulawesi Provincial Government in 2017, Makassar (2019), Gowa (2019), and Parepare (2021). Resistance and exclusion of Shia groups in South Sulawesi have implications for the non-freedom of Shia groups to publicly declare their religious identity. Several Shia adherents eventually chose the path of taqiyah because social conditions were not conducive to the existence of Shia groups.*

**Keywords:** *Anti-Shia Movement; Religious Discrimination; Shia Indonesia; Social Conditions; Taqiyya.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Shia and Sunni relations in Indonesia, tensions and even conflicts often arise. This is a consequence of differences in Islamic construction and the impact of identity politics. Stigma about Shia is continually constructed and propagated in a stereotypic impression. Even stigmatization leads to other and even demonizing processes (Imran 2021). Several tensions to horizontal conflicts have occurred, for example, in Bondowoso 2008, the Sampang case 2012, attacks on Ashura commemoration activities in Makassar from 2012-2018. The Sampang conflict is the most significant Sunni-Shia conflict in Indonesia. It caused casualties until hundreds of people were forced to flee and, until now, could not return to their hometowns. The root of the conflict is internal family problems

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which then expand into ideological issues and religious group identity (Ida and Dyson 2015). In the digital era, Sunni-Shia conflicts in Indonesia also widen to cyberspace involving Shia and anti-Shia groups (Rachmah 2016). South Sulawesi, the location of this research, is one of Indonesia's Shia development centers.

Shia in Makassar grew rapidly during the reform era. Almost on every campus, there is a Shia community that intensely conducts studies. The massive development of Shia also coincides with the "golden moment" of extra-campus student organizations. In that era, many activists and activists of student organizations, especially HMI, introduced Shia through discussions and philosophical studies (Ahmad 2017). Until now, the development of Shia in Makassar and its surroundings has been relatively rapid, and its development is colored by dynamics in its relations with Sunni groups. The development of Shia as a madhab can be said to be a new phenomenon in South Sulawesi.

Entering the decade of the 2010s, the tension between Sunni-Shia relations in Makassar has sharpened. Several times there have been acts of exclusion and persecution against Shia individuals and groups. Local governments are also involved in the exclusion process. For example, on September 9, 2019, the Makassar City Government issued Circular No. 400/402/Kesra/IX/2019 concerning the Appeal to Beware and Anticipate the Spread of Shia. The circular is intended for sub-districts throughout Makassar City. It appeals to the public to be vigilant so as not to be influenced by Shia teachings (especially in commemorating Ashura 10 Muharram 1441 H, and not to provide opportunities for the spread of Shia, which is very likely to cause public unrest that can threaten the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia; to act decisively in dealing with deviant sects (especially Shia) as this does not include freedom of religion but blasphemy.

Previously, the Provincial Government of South Sulawesi, through the Provincial Secretary, issued Circular Number: 450/0224/B. Welfare addressed to regents/mayors, MUI, and Islamic mass organizations. The letter, dated January 12, 2018, contains Beware and Anticipation of the Spread of Shia Sects. The Parepare City Government also issued a Circular Letter signed by the City Regional Secretary Number 441/161/Kesra concerning Anticipating and Beware of Shia Teachings. A series of resistance and exclusions involving Muslim groups and local governments implicated the freedom of Shia groups to express their identity, including in celebrating religious holidays, especially the commemoration of Ashura. Resistance and exclusion and their implications for Shia groups in South Sulawesi are research problems discussed in this paper. This paper limits the duration of post-2010 research and focuses on the Shia community in South Sulawesi. This limitation is based on the argument that the increasing polarization of Sunni-Shia identity has increased resistance and exclusion of Shia groups since 2010 in South Sulawesi.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many previous writings and studies have reviewed Shia in Indonesia and its encounters with the Sunni majority. Zulkifli (2009, 2013, and 2014) writes about the education and identity formation of the Shia community in Indonesia and gaining recognition and resistance from the Sunni majority group. Formichi (2014) reviews the increasing violence against Shia groups in Indonesia by radical Sunni groups. The research team of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs conducted a study on Shia groups in 22 regions in Indonesia, their teachings and rituals, factors triggering the emergence of anti-Shia movements, relations between the Shia community and other communities, and government efforts in building harmonious relations between the Shia community and other communities in Indonesia (Rosidi et al. 2017). The studies also acknowledge good relations between Shia and Sunni groups. However, it is undeniable that some stigmatization efforts in the demonizing stage involve mainstream Islamic groups and state authorities in some places (Imran 2021).

In Kayane's findings (2020), the Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict in Indonesia is influenced by global political dynamics and catalyzed by scripturalist groups. The influence of international political dynamics, such as the Non-Aligned Summit that took place in Iran, has a relationship with a number of Sunni-Shia conflicts in Indonesia (Ardiyanti 2012). An interesting finding from Kayane is that a series of incidents of intolerance against Shia groups are precisely the result of provocations from NU clerics, especially in East Java. The involvement of some Nu circles towards Shia intolerance can be confirmed through (Mietzner and Muhtadi 2020), which found discrepancies between the perceptions of NU leaders and facts at the grassroots.

Specifically, several writings question Shia's development and its resistance by mainstream Islamic groups and the state in Makassar. Sabara (2012) writes about the development of Shia in Makassar, which influenced changes in the city's understanding and religious attitudes of Muslim students. Ahmad (2017) described findings on Shia dynamics in Makassar City. He found the development of Shia and its relationship with Sunni mainstream groups. He also found a small number of Sunni groups in Makassar that did not accept the presence of Shia groups. Wahid, Karim, and Amsir (2020) wrote that certain groups carried out discrimination against Shia groups in Makassar to attacks and persecution of religious activities carried out by Shia groups. Sabara (2021) found that several groups consider Shia groups as the other on behalf of mainstream Sunnis in Makassar. This has resulted in a series of exclusions and persecutions experienced by Shia groups. The survey results from Cita Semesta Riset Makassar found that 28% of Makassar Muslims who know about Shia consider Shia not part of Islam, and 15% are willing to join the dissolution of Shia religious activities (Sabara et al. 2022). Farida (2022) revealed the involvement of the state, in this case, the local government in South Sulawesi, in the exclusion of Shia groups.

This paper focuses on the involvement of anti-Shia groups and local governments in discrimination against Shia groups in South Sulawesi. The locus of this paper is not limited to Makassar City as the capital of South Sulawesi. The selection of religious groups and governments as actors is based on the power of religion and politics, two pillars of tolerance referred to by Menchik (2016) as twin tolerations. Religious and political authorities (government) are the source of full authority over tolerance or intolerance in Indonesia.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

Qualitative research uses interview methods with several figures from Shia, anti-Shia, and local governments. The authors observed the incidents of discrimination experienced by Shia groups since 2010. A study of documents complements this paper through findings from previous research on Shia in Makassar.

### **4. RESULTS**

#### **4.1. Resistance and Persecution of Shia Groups**

Before 2010, resistance to Shia groups from anti-Shia groups was soft. The resistance shown is still at the level of building a discourse on Shia heresy and danger. The discourse was built through recitations, seminars, and pamphlets to disseminate books containing Shia heresy. As the debate over Shia widens, Shia theological adherents consider it contrary to the orthodoxy doctrine of the Sunni faith, and it is difficult to find justification. This is perceived by the contestation approach by some Sunni groups by viewing Shia as "opponents" (Sapriillah et al. 2020). Several incidents of intolerance against Shia groups occurred after 2010, either by groups in the name of Sunni orthodoxy

or by the government. Throughout 2011, two cases of violence experienced by Shia groups in Indonesia caused material losses for Shia (The Wahid Institute 2011).

Strengthening resistance to national groups also affected South Sulawesi, especially in Makassar. Anti-Shia groups organize themselves in the group of the Institute for Hunting Heretical Sects (LePAS), the Institute for Islamic Studies and Research (LPPI) East Indonesia, MUI Fatwa Socialization Volunteers (Resofa), Laskar Al-Qalam, Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Islamic Community Forum (FUD), Anti-Shia National Alliance (ANAS) and others. Increasingly actively carrying out Shia heresy campaigns openly through recitation and grand tabligh. The grand recitation and tabligh activities presented speakers known as anti-Shia, both from local South Sulawesi and outside South Sulawesi. In order to smooth the steps against Shia, anti-Shia groups tried to garner support from some clerics from NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI. Several times the names and signatures of prominent clerics were found to be included in statements of support for the movement against Shia groups. The anti-Shia group even approached the government and police to support them in countering the spread of the Shia. Not only acting in Makassar, the anti-Shia group also spread and acted in other cities/regencies in South Sulawesi.

The resistance they show leads to acts of intimidation and persecution, especially in religious activities carried out by Shia groups. Shia group activities are always sought to be sabotaged. The masses of the group always visit every activity attended by Jalaluddin Rakhmat (Indonesian Shia figure). Some religious activities held by Shia groups, such as the commemoration of Mawlid, Ashura, and Arbaeen were visited by the group mob as a form of psychological terror and intimidation against Shia groups.

Acts of intolerance committed by anti-Shia circles have increased to acts of violence and persecution. Acts of violence and persecution occurred in an attempt to thwart religious activities carried out by Shia groups. Acts of persecution against Shia religious activities occurred at the 2011 Arbaeen commemoration, which took place at Hasanuddin University, and the 2012 and 2013 Ashura commemorations. In this last act, there were even attacks and acts of violence against Shia groups at the event location, causing injuries to some Shia adherents. Attacks on the Ashura commemoration of Shia groups continued in the following years and on a more massive scale. Ahead of Ashura's commemoration, anti-Shia groups spread banners at various points in Makassar City and its surroundings that read "Shia is Not Islam".

Several institutions, such as LPPI Indonesia Timur and Resofa, established ANAS in Makassar. In addition, several other Islamic groups carried out movements against the existence of Shia in South Sulawesi. Their reason for attacking Shia is that they consider Shia to be a cult; Accusations are always made by anti-Shia circles, tahrif of the Qur'an, mut'ah marriage, and disbelief of the Prophet's companions, even though Shia never did; Shia was equated with PKI; and is associated with the upheaval in Syria.

#### 4.2. Government Exclusion

Full support from local governments in South Sulawesi can be seen with the issuance of a circular signed by the Provincial Secretary Number 450/0224/B. dated January 12, 2017, concerning "Beware and Anticipating the Spread of Shia Teachings". The Circular Letter appealed to the Regent / Mayor of South Sulawesi, the Head of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of South Sulawesi, MUI and Islamic Organizations of South Sulawesi, and Islamic Community Components to monitor the development, situation, and conditions of the spread of Shia teachings and identify mass organizations that bring Shia beliefs. The issuance of the letter cannot be separated from the political efforts made by anti-Shia groups, especially LPPI Indonesia Timur led by Said Shamad, against the ranks of the government in South Sulawesi.

The circular letter of the Makassar City Government and Gowa Regency was issued ahead of the Ashura Day celebration in 2019. If you look at the content, the circular

issued by the Makassar city government goes further in discriminating against the Shia minority group. In the letter's logic, celebrating Ashura and Shia is generally seen as a form of deviation. According to the letter's claim, it is not a form of interpretation and expression of different interpretations and expressions of Islam and a form of religious freedom protected by the country's constitution. Still, it is a form of blasphemy that can threaten the integrity and security of society. A circular banning Shia was subsequently issued by the Parepare Municipality in 2021. On July 14, 2021, the Parepare City Secretary issued circular 441/161/Kesra regarding anticipating and being aware of Shia teachings. The circular letter addressed to the sub-district and sub-district of Parepare City stated that it followed up on the letter of the Regional Secretary of South Sulawesi Province.

The exclusion of Shia groups stems from generalizing all Shia with one designation, namely Rafidhah. (Sugiarto 2017) As a result of this generalization, Shia is seen as "completely different", giving birth to an attitude of exclusion towards them by some Muslims, as happened in Makassar. The exclusion of Shiites, as well as minorities, is undoubtedly not only theological. Political tendencies are also present, especially if the state, through its apparatus, is involved in the exclusion process. This political tendency is related to the process called by Sofjan (2016) minoritization of Shia. This underlies discrimination against Shia groups, where the government then affirms the aspirations of groups that claim to represent the majority (Sunni) (Farida 2022).

In addition to minoritization, Sofjan (2016) also mentioned criminalization as a perspective in looking at the discrimination process against Shia groups in Indonesia, especially after 2010. Misguided fatwas claimed to originate from the MUI, and pressure from several figures in the name of Sunni representation make those who believe in and practice the Shia sect violative. Shia religious rites are eventually seen as an offense by which they are legal to be dissolved, or their execution can be criminalized. The criminalization of Shia groups and their religious practices make the police involved in the exclusion process and prevent Shia groups from practicing their faith, especially at Ashura commemoration events.

Since 2016, Shia groups can no longer carry out overt Ashura activities. Several times Ashura warnings were sabotaged, and in the process of sabotage, the police were involved, at least in the category of ignoring the actions of anti-Shia groups. The police, who are supposed to provide assurance and protection to all citizens regardless of faith, in the case of Shia, are just the opposite after the issuance of a circular letter from the Mayor of Makassar and the Regent of Gowa ahead of the commemoration of Ashura 2019. Police heavily guard all Shia community gathering points thought to commemorate Ashura. The secretariat of Gowa's Al-Bahrain Foundation and even a police squad have been on standby since morning to block the Shia community from commemorating Ashura.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Various cases of violence against Shia groups in Makassar by groups that are the perpetrators are claimed as an effort to "defend" Islam from heretical and misleading groups. The actors who perpetrated these acts of persecution always claim to be defenders of religion and guardians of ulema fatwas (MUI) (Saprillah 2020). As a result, anti-Shia groups gained theological legitimacy to give Shia adherents a stigmatic stamp, which made Shia groups lose their freedom to practice their faith.

The anti-Shia movement in Makassar gained the upper hand after successfully thwarting the Ashura commemoration in 2017 and 2018. In the years that followed, attacks on Shia groups intensified, especially in the run-up to the anniversary of Ashura. Shia groups finally can no longer carry out religious commemorations, especially Ashura, and choose

to practice more taqiyah. The taqiyah strategy was chosen by Shia groups in South Sulawesi in the form of a survival strategy to maintain the existence of themselves and their groups because of situations that do not allow them to show their existence. This survival strategy is a rational choice for minority groups to survive amid the threat of the majority group.

Survival strategy can be done in various ways, both individually and in communities, by building self-defense mechanisms and groups so that they can still exist and develop. Survival strategy gives birth to the creativity of the struggle to survive against threats, both internal and mainly external. Each religious group usually has a specific strategy formulation to survive as a group with distinctive teachings. The strategy formulation can be developed from the religious doctrine adopted and then articulated individually and in groups according to the context and social challenges faced (Sabara 2021). In the case of Shias, taqiyah is the formulation of the survival strategy. Shia in South Sulawesi carries the survival strategy personally, communally, and institutionally.

Most Shia in South Sulawesi practice taqiyah in their daily lives. Almost rarely know their Shia identity, even those closest to them. Stigmatization of Shia identity has a broader effect on social and work relationships, even the harmony of relationships with close family. As a group that has always been under many threats and stigmas, the practice of taqiyah can effectively eventually save Shia adherents from the various mudharat they may receive if their Shia identity is known to the public, including by their immediate environment, whether in the family, social environment, or in the work environment. The practice of taqiyah, for example, when in public places by following the way commonly done by Muslims. Prayers following Shia jurisprudence are only performed in specific spaces they think are safe. The practice of taqiyah makes it possible for Shiites to carry out their cultural strategies to blend in and be accepted by society (Bilecen, 2022; Smirnova, 2022).

Since 2016, Shia groups in South Sulawesi have been unable to carry out activities openly in public spaces, especially on a large scale, especially the commemoration of Ashura. The strategy carried out so that routine activities can still be carried out is to deconcentrate places of activity at many points in Makassar and its surroundings. Commemorative activities previously attended by large crowds were then transferred to implementation by each foundation, community, or private residence. This deconcentration has the effect of spreading the Shia community with activities that are not centralized. Indirectly helped the development of Shia in Makassar more sporadically and quietly. Many Shia communities that intensely carry out recitation activities and commemorate religious holidays grow at various points in Makassar.

Another strategy Shia groups adopt in responding to acts of exclusion and persecution against their group is through affiliation with community groups that promote tolerance and religious freedom in Makassar. In the Jalin Harmoni association, for example, several Shia activists joined in it, as well as community nodes promoting peace and pluralism, such as Peace Generation and interfaith organizations. The Shia did not respond alone to the exclusion or persecution of Shia groups, such as the Makassar Mayor Circular that prohibits the commemoration of Ashura or acts of violence against Shia adherents. The Shia joined forces with tolerant civil alliances. So that the resistance is no longer just between Shia groups versus anti-Shia groups but between tolerant community groups and intolerant community groups. This is also effectively an effort to raise public awareness that acts of exclusion and persecution carried out by anti-Shia groups are intolerant acts contrary to the constitution's mandate in Indonesia.

The survival strategy carried out by Shia groups in Makassar is to intensely establish communication and friendship with figures and scholars in Makassar. Shia groups, through IJABI and ABI mass organizations, often visit MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah figures, Islamic religious leaders, academics, as well as community leaders, and the

government. Its purpose is to gather and introduce oneself and, more importantly, clarify the various oblique accusations made against Shia. For example, the accusation that Shiites have a different Qur'an is clarified by gifting Iranian-printed Qur'an to those who visit. In some activities carried out by Shia groups, these figures were even present and gave speeches.

The Shia community, which has experienced massive development in South Sulawesi, has sparked a response of resistance from several Islamic circles. The anti-Shia movement became a common issue and agenda of the group and strengthened after 2010. Resistance to Shia groups is carried out through anti-Shia campaigns and acts of violence against Shia groups in the form of attacks on Shia religious activities, especially the commemoration of Ashura. Anti-Shia groups managed to garner support from the government and security forces. As a result, regulations were issued in the form of circular letters issued by the Provincial Government of South Sulawesi, Makassar City Government, and Parepare City, each of which was signed by the Regional Secretary. Police officers are also involved in the exclusion of Shia groups in the form of neglect of attacks carried out by anti-Shia groups. The resistance and persecution experienced by Shia groups and further strengthened by exclusion policies issued by local governments made the Shia movement in South Sulawesi experience a cooling down. In order to keep the community safe, Shia groups choose to carry out religious activities clandestinely on their community bases. Most Shia in Makassar even selects the path of taqiyah strongly to cover their faith's identity so as not to be known by those around them.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Author declares that all works are original and this manuscript has not been published in any other journal.

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