**Vigilante Justice Persists Amid the Enforcement of Indonesian Anti-Blasphemy Law's Failure to Preserve Justice.**

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, scholars have conducted extensive research to investigate how Indonesia's Anti-Blasphemy Law has hindered individuals' freedom of religion and expression, specifically as it pertains to International Human Rights Laws. Despite the law's enforcement, public disorder has continued to escalate, manifesting in acts of vigilante justice. The purpose of this socio-legal study is to answer three critical questions regarding blasphemy in Indonesia. These include, how does vigilante justice persist despite the enforcement of blasphemy law? To what extent vigilantism actions shaped the court decisions? Why has the continued enforcement of the Anti-Blasphemy Law not led to ensuring justice? This study examines various data, namely interviews, cases study, statues and court rulings. The study's results demonstrate that the claim of enforcing the Anti-Blasphemy Law with the aim of maintaining public order is not substantiated by evidence. Instead, the neglectful and ambiguous enforcement of the law has depleted trust in Indonesia's legal system, resulting in social injustice. Additionally, instances of blasphemy in Indonesia have often led to acts of vigilante justice, which are legitimized by the law. Among many factors, the study points to the rising Islamic populism in Indonesia as a major contributor to such behavior. Continuing to enforce the Anti-Blasphemy Law disregards the democratic foundations and the rule of law, making social justice unattainable.

**Keywords: vigilante justice, anti-blasphemy law enforcement, Indonesia, human rights, social justice.**

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Amidst the legal prosecution of blasphemy charges, vigilantism continues to occur against defendants or their followers. Vigilante justice is often perpetrated by the public in dissatisfaction with the legal process applied to the suspect. This study's analysis of blasphemy cases found that vigilante justice generally occurs before the court reaches a verdict on the accused, or because the report of the blasphemy act was delayed or postponed in the legal process. Aside from ideological, socio-cultural, and political factors, vigilante justice gains legitimacy due to fatwas labeled on suspects as perpetrators of deviant acts, desecrating or insulting Islam, issued by the Indonesian Ulama Council or religious figures from the majority group, and the fatwas are reinforced by the statements or actions of public policymakers at the city/regency and province levels who generally agree or support the MUI/Ulama statements about the suspect.

After the pressure from the majority group to expedite the punishment for the suspect arises, further vigilante actions often occur against the accused. Then, when the blasphemy suspect is brought to the court, justice is not served because the court fails to be independent in deciding the case. The vigilante group's demand for severe punishment for the accused dominates the court process, and the MUI/Ulama fatwa stating that the accused has insulted Islam, as well as various local policies that are made to dampen vigilante acts, also dominate the information in the public space. Therefore, the defendant's position in the trial becomes very weak and unfair. The court, which is no longer independent, cannot properly assess and fairly judge blasphemy cases to prove the defendant's intentionality and guilt, and finally, the court passes a sentence on the defendant under the pressure of vigilantism group.

By examining the course of events in blasphemy cases discussed in this study, the defendants in these cases can be said to suffer twice. First, they suffer not only from the violent acts committed by vigilante groups that injure their bodies, damage their property and disrupt their exercise of religious freedom. Second, these defendants, despite losing their human rights, must still accept the decision of the unjust court sentence, decided under the pressure of the vigilante group, and the decision of policymakers outside the court, who have already labeled the defendants as deviant and anti-Islamic.

**INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is among the few countries that still uphold anti-blasphemy laws, despite commonly recognized allegations of infringement upon freedom of religion and expression in modern democratic nations leading to their repeal. Scholars argue that the Indonesia’s Anti- Blasphemy is flawed due to ambiguity in content (....). In addition, recent research (Pratiwi, 2021) contends that the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia disregarded the principle of non-discrimination in the right to freedom of religion, thereby rejecting a request for a judicial review to annul the law out of concern for the potential for conflict between different religious communities in the event of a legal vacuum. However, the legal philosophy of Constitutional Court does not reflect actuality. Despite efforts to enforce the Law Against Blasphemy of Religion, vigilante attacks on religious minorities accused of heresy persisted.

In the case of Ahok, who was accused of insulting Islam due to his criticism of the politicization of QS Al-Maida 51 so that Muslims would only choose Islamic leaders, or the case of Meliana, who criticized the sound of the call to prayer that was too loud, or the Ahmadiyya and Gafatar, who were judged to follow heretical teachings, all the accused not only faced violent or physical attacks at their place of worship, but the courts also handed down quite harsh sentences. The Setara Institute found that between 1965 and 2017, 42 of the 97 blasphemy cases involved vigilante groups. Out of the total cases, 76 were resolved through "pro-justicia," with 47 cases receiving jail sentences ranging from one to 4.5 years, five receiving over 4.5 years, and eight receiving less than a year in prison (Nalle, 2017).

Previous studies on vigilante justice against offenders of common offenses were frequently influenced by corruption among law enforcement officials, resulting in offenders escaping legal consequences. People who take the law into their own hands based on emotions rather than evidence-based facts (Scheuerman, 202). Hassner (2011) determined, in the case of blasphemy, that reactive religious violence results from inadequate protection of religious values against transgressive acts, irrespective of religious affiliation. However, in cases of blasphemy, vigilante justice has shifted from spontaneous action to more structured and even state-sponsored actions. Pratiwi & Sunaryo (2021) argues that vigilante violence surrounding accusations of blasphemy in countries like Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia cannot be separated from structural violence created by the states through discriminatory anti-blasphemy laws. This study investigates not only the causes of vigilantism, but also the extent to which vigilante justice influences law enforcement in blasphemy cases.

This socio-legal analysis adds that blasphemy vigilantes existed prior to court decisions made by hardliner vigilante groups that designate religious minorities as blasphemy offenders and employ hate-spinning strategies to portray themselves as victims of hatred. Multiple factors influenced vigilantism. Existence of a vague blasphemy law encourages power holders to issue public policies to give more protection to majority religious groups, which the court cannot disregard when determining blasphemy cases, thereby undermining the independence of the courts to administer justice.

Indonesia is among the few countries that still uphold anti-blasphemy laws, despite commonly recognized allegations of infringement upon freedom of religion and expression in modern democratic nations leading to their repeal. While many scholars argue that Indonesia's Anti-Blasphemy Law is flawed due to language issues and a lack of interfaith balance, the Constitutional Court has refused to overturn them, fearing potential conflict between different religious communities (Pratiwi, 2021). However, reality differs from law, as the enforcement of the Anti-Blasphemy Law often triggers vigilante justice against minority religious groups accused of deviancy. Islamic hardliners mostly form vigilante groups who label minority religious groups as blasphemy offenders and use hate spin tactics, portraying themselves as victims of hate.

Blasphemy suspects, often belonging to minority religious groups, not only endure legal trials but also face violent attacks on their places of worship. The Setara Institute found that between 1965 and 2017, 42 of the 97 blasphemy cases involved vigilante groups. Out of the total cases, 76 were resolved through "pro-justicia," with 47 cases receiving jail sentences ranging from one to 4.5 years, five receiving over 4.5 years, and eight receiving less than a year in prison (Nalle, 2017).

Public outrage towards criminal acts, ranging from serious cases like murder to minor ones like stealing loudspeakers in mosques, is often due to law enforcement officials' corruption resulting in perpetrators escaping legal consequences. Citizens then punish the accused based on emotions and not evidence-based facts (Scheuerman, 2022). Hassner's (2011) research found that reactive religious violence can occur globally, wherever fundamentalist movements confront threatening transgressive acts in political environments that permit protests but fail to protect religious principles. The shared implication is that reactive religious violence results from inadequate protection of religious values against transgressive acts, regardless of religious affiliation.

This study has significant findings that complement Hassner's views with more finding and different conclusions regarding the occurrence of vigilante justice over blasphemy allegations, its impact on judicial independence in deciding blasphemy cases, and why anti-blasphemy laws have failed to preserve justice. The study found that the perpetuation of vigilante justice over blasphemy allegations is influenced by various factors, particularly the legitimacy it receives from public policies that stigmatize the accused and the local court often follows the policies that aim to dampen public unrest, leading to an unjust and unfair trial process.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Numerous studies have analysed the Anti-Blasphemy Law in Indonesia, primarily focusing on normative evaluations of the law's substance and its non-conformity with international human rights standards (Bielefeldt, 2012; Pratiwi, 2021). Other studies have examined public perceptions of the law through empirical legal analysis utilizing a socio-legal approach to explore the gap between ideal legal norms and the reality of law's implementation in society (Banakar, 2019; Bedner & Vel, 2010). This study has gathered a wide array of data, including case studies, statutory analysis, and in-depth interviews with experts, judges, religious followers, members of religious groups, and minority religious groups.

The research has looked into at least four cases, with the first being the case of Ahok, a Cristian Chinese Governor of Jakarta who were found guilty of blasphemy after criticized the politization of QS. Al-Maida verse 51 to gain Muslims supports on election. The second is Meiliana case, a Buddhist woman from Medan who criticized the loudness of the adhan call to prayer, exemplifying how the enforcement of blasphemy laws has often resulted in intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities. She was subjected to hateful incitement, accused of blasphemy against Islam, leading to the burning and damaging of several Buddhist temples in her area, despite undergoing trial, which resulted in a sentence of 1 year and 8 months. The third and fourth cases are the experiences of the Ahmadiyya and Gafatar groups, highlighting the dangers of vigilantism in response to blasphemy law enforcement. Thus, it is crucial to re-evaluate the role of the law, ensuring that its enforcement upholds human rights principles and promotes religious tolerance, while sternly condemning acts of vigilantism aimed at harming minorities in Indonesia.

Subsequently, the collected data is assessed, selected, and inventoried to address the research questions. A critical legal study approach is utilized to derive conclusions from the analysed data. By evaluating the gap between the theoretical and practical implementation of the law, the anticipated outcomes of this research are expected to answer the research questions mentioned earlier and may provide recommendations that promote the preservation of human rights and social justice in Indonesia.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study departs from the theories of the Rule of Law and Justice that are essential for creating fair and equitable societies (Bellamy, 2017; Merkel, 2012). The enforcement of the law is a manifestation of the Rule of Law, where the community is expected to use legal channels to address problems, rather than resorting to vigilantism or other illegal means to mete out justice (Scheuerman, 2022). The court system exists to ensure that the enforcement of the law is carried out correctly, based on clear and specific laws, convincing evidence, and respect for proper legal procedures, where every individual is treated equally. Ultimately, upholding the Rule of Law in law enforcement will guarantee the creation of a fair judicial decision for all parties and society.

The presence of clear and unambiguous laws is essential for judges to qualify someone's behaviour as wrong (Beckett et al., 2018). On the other hand, ambiguous laws can make it difficult for the court to qualify whether someone's behaviour is prohibited. Ambiguous laws can cause the court to subjectively interpret criminal behaviour. In such a context, judges can easily be influenced by external factors (Malle & Nelson, 2003). Therefore, this study will provide substantial insights into the critical role that the Rule of Law plays in ensuring justice for all in the Indonesian context. In particular, the study will examine how the Rule of Law affects the enforcement of Anti-Blasphemy Law and the role of the court system in upholding justice, especially for minority religious groups.

The Anti-Blasphemy Law is a remnant of the old order that has been maintained until today (Temperman & Koltay, 2017). Several studies have indicated that the law has two main weaknesses. The first weakness is that the law no longer aligns with human rights law development (Bush, 2015; Fischer, 2021; Telle, 2017). The law prohibits individuals who hold beliefs or teachings that differ from officially recognized religions in Indonesia. Consequently, minority religious teachings can be deemed heretical, and freedom of religion or belief can be violated. The second weakness is that the law contains normative provisions that are ambiguous and open to interpretation. When enforced, subjectivity in interpretation could lead to discrimination against religious minority groups. If used as the basis for court rulings, it could result in discriminatory decisions against minority religious groups.

Research conducted by George Cherian (2017) indicates that hate spin is a contributing factor that supports the enforcement of the blasphemy law. According to Cherian, hate spin has become an instrument of political campaigning, planned as a sophisticated instrument designed to paralyse political opponents through identity concerns. Cherian elaborates that hate spin tactics involve "manufactured vilification or anger employed as a political technique". This tactic of hate spin is disseminated in a way that opportunistic or hardliner groups exploit sentiments of the dominant religious group to seek extensive support, aided by online communication mediums that travel swiftly and unfiltered.

Fischer (2021) stated that out of the 164 observations of anti-blasphemy law enforcement in different countries in 2020, 76 of them were accompanied by mass mobilization activities, threats of violence, and actual violence. Vigilante justice, also known as *Main Hakim Sendiri* in Indonesia, is generally considered illegal and occurs spontaneously as a result of public anger over criminal offenses or immoral behaviour that is caught red-handed. *Main Hakim Sendiri* is typically described as the act of trying to convict an accused individual without proper legal proceedings or taking justice into one's own hands. Alternatively, *Main Hakim Sendiri* can also be seen as arbitrary acts of power or vigilante justice without the consent of the affected parties, as per Manan's interpretation (Manan, 2013). In essence, *Main Hakim Sendiri* characterizes the execution of sanctions by individuals. Additionally, Indonesia is currently experiencing an increasing trend of religious intolerance (Sebastian & Arifianto, 2020).

The court serves as the final option for those seeking justice. Therefore, it is crucial that the court acts professionally in enforcing the law and treats every individual equally. A person suspected of a crime must be considered innocent until proven guilty by the judge. Therefore, every defendant has the right to defend themselves and present evidence that could prove their innocence. In cases of criminal offenses, the element of intention is vital; a person must be acquitted of any suspicion in the absence of intent. Having said that, in practice, the determination of blasphemy actions is ultimately based on various considerations by judges and factors outside of the court.

**RESULT, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

**Vigilante Justice on Blasphemy Cases triggered by Islamic Populism**

This injustice gains legitimacy due to fatwas labelling suspects as perpetrators of deviant acts, desecrating or insulting Islam, resulting from the Indonesian Ulama Council or religious figures from the majority group's actions. With public policymakers at the city, regency, and province levels' support, the vigilante actions manipulate social situations by resorting to hate speech and spreading fake news, successfully mobilizing pressure on law enforcement agencies and courts to hasten the legal process and override the rights of minority religious groups.

The practice of vigilante justice, or "Main Hakim Sendiri," against religious minorities is widespread, especially during the enforcement of the Anti-Blasphemy Law. Referring to the Hate Spin Theory proposed by Josh Cherian, the increase of vigilantism is influenced by the hate spin strategy carried out by hardcore Islamic groups, where perpetrators carry out their actions after being motivated by hateful speeches from influential figures within their group, while the victims come from minority groups (George, 2017). One prominent minority group that has experienced acts of vigilantism is Ahmadiyya, which is a legally recognized entity in Indonesia established by the Indonesian Islamic Community and approved by the Ministry of Law in 1953. In 2017, a new case emerged in which five members of the Fajar Nusantara Movement (Gafatar) were accused of using their organization to promote the heretical teachings of Ajaran Millah Abraham and were subsequently criminalized.

According to SETARA Institute's records, persecution against minorities in Indonesia takes various forms. One of the most frequent occurrences is the disturbance of places of worship. Such disturbances include the rejection of building a place of worship, disruptions during the construction of a place of worship, sealing off places of worship, disruptions during worship at places of worship, destruction of places of worship, and attacks on individuals in places of worship/places of worship carried out by non-state and/or state actors (SETARA Institute, 2022). Table 1 indicates the number of incidents of disturbances to interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

Table 1. Incidents Related to the Interreligious Harmony in Indonesia[[1]](#footnote-1)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Year | Number of Incidents |
| 2017 | 17 |
| 2018 | 20 |
| 2019 | 31 |
| 2020 | 24 |
| 2021 | 44 |
| 2022 (Jan-Sep) | 32 |

Source:(SETARA Institute, 2022)

This study indicates that from the four cases study, the vigilante justice were repeatedly happened as described in Table 2. As seen by the incidents above, society might misread legal standards' ambiguity. Critics of Islam, religious activities, and non-Muslims risk being accused of "defiling Islam." Ministerial circulars, governor regulations, and local rules support this interpretation. Social media continues to fabricate blasphemy and "true" Islamic teaching accusations to attract support and indignation.

Hardline Islamic groups organize enormous protests to demand justice, which often leads to vigilante punishment. Ahok and Meiliana were convicted for Islam-related charges because hatred was organized. The Ahmadiyya and Gafatar instances were also seen as straying from "true" Islam and violating Islamic rules. This animosity fueled propaganda and vigilante action against these communities.

Indonesians worry about social media disinformation and fact-bending. Thus, citizens must be taught to respect religious pluralism and the law. To avoid misinterpretation, the government must also clarify legal principles. Interfaith discourse and respect for other religions may also promote tolerance and inclusion.

The twisting of facts and the spread of misinformation through social media and other channels is a serious concern in Indonesia. Therefore, it is necessary to educate citizens about the importance of respecting religious diversity and the rule of law. The government must also take measures to ensure that legal norms are clear and unambiguous to prevent them from being misinterpreted. Promoting interfaith dialogue and mutual respect for different religious beliefs can also help foster a more tolerant and inclusive society.

Table 2. Vigilante Justice and Hate Spin

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Cases*** | ***Vigilante Justice*** | ***Hate Spin Strategy Against Victims*** |
| ***Ahok Case*** | Ahok's statement that referenced QS. Al-Maida verse 51 regarding non-Muslim leaders to his constituents in the Thousand Islands triggered vigilante justice as Islamic groups staged mob protests, including the Aksi 212 and Aksi 414. Belajar Islam 55 also marched to persuade the Constitutional Court to reject Ahok's judicial review of the anti-blasphemy bill. | The Hate Spin Strategy was employed to frame the Ahok protest movement as defending Islam, implying that Ahok had attacked Islam and justifying the protests as retaliation for his supposed hatred of the religion. Ahok's critique of using QS. Al-Maida verse 51 to oppose non-Muslim candidates was seen as a disgrace to Islam. Budi Yani incited hate by editing a video of Ahok and adding a narrative that falsely accused him of disrespecting Islam. |
| ***Meiliana Case*** | The Meiliana case exposes Indonesian vigilantism against religious minorities. Buddhist Meiliana was sentenced to one year and eight months in jail for insulting Islam after complaining to her neighbour about the excessively loud call of pray (*adzan).* During the trial, vigilantes burnt many Buddhist temples, damaged Meiliana's home, and forced her to leave. | The case of Meiliana began with her complaint to a neighbor about the unusually loud volume of the mosque's call to prayer (athan). However, as the information spread through social media, it was distorted to portray Meiliana, a Chinese-Indonesian Buddhist woman, as rejecting the athan. This shift in information represents a form of hate spin, with unclear origins, that quickly spread due to the presence of anti-Islamic sentiment |
| ***Gafatar Case*** | Moton Panjang and Tanjung Pasir villages in Kalimantan opposed Gafatar, a legal body founded in 2012 with 55,000 members, leading to serious repercussions for its supporters. Despite initial clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Gafatar was liquidated in 2015. Human Rights Watch reported that 2,422 families (7,916 people) were forcibly expelled from Kalimantan within two months, and over 6,000 Gafatar members were detained in illegal detention centers across Indonesia. The former Gafatar chairman, Mahful M Tumanurung, expressed regret over the forced evictions, property damage, and asset looting against Gafatar members. | The hate spin strategy against Gafatar has had adverse effects on its followers, who have suffered from acts of vigilantism resulting in displacement, property damage, and severe injuries. The declaration of Gafatar as a heretical movement has placed undue burden and harm to its members. |
| ***Ahmadiyya Case*** | Since 1980, Indonesia's Ahmadiyya community has faced vigilante justice. Ahmadiyya followers in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Tangerang, Bogor, and East Java have been violently attacked, resulting in damage to their houses of worship and buildings, minor and severe injuries, deaths, and displacement. The Indonesian government must avoid such violence and promote religious tolerance and understanding. | The hate spin strategy has been used against the Ahmadiyya community, which is considered heretical by the MUI due to their belief in Mirza Gulam Ahmad as the last prophet and having a sacred book other than the Qur'an. This fundamental difference has led to tensions and vigilante justice against Ahmadiyya followers. Despite their religious practices being similar to mainstream Islam, they are rejected by Pakistan, Malaysia, and OIC countries. The MUI's advice for Ahmadiyya adherents to renounce Islam has not resolved the issue, as they continue to follow Islamic precepts. |

The politicization of religion, through blasphemy laws, has led to the prosecution of political opponents in Indonesia, as seen in Ahok and Meiliana's cases (Mulyartono et al., 2021). The politicization of religion in Indonesia's political climate exacerbates this issue since the majority's voice, often the Islamic community, can determine election results. The manipulation of information and editing of Ahok's statements has successfully sparked hatred and accusations against him and disrespected Islam. Upholding legal norms and preventing the misuse of laws to assert political agendas is crucial to safeguard the rights and well-being of all citizens. Promoting transparency and accountability in governance can also help reduce the potential for political exploitation of religious differences.

**Factors And Actors Influence the Act of *Vigilante Justice over Blasphemy Allegations***

The issue of vigilante justice against religious minority groups in Indonesia is a concerning problem that has been influenced by various factors and actors. Some of these influential factors and actors can be explained as follows:

1. The close connections between state officials and vigilante groups have significantly influenced the Indonesian state's response to violence against Ahmadiyya and Shi’a minority communities. The connection has allowed vigilante groups to commit violent acts against minority congregations with a degree of impunity (Hewson, 2017).
2. The Indonesian state's reluctance to assist or permit minority groups to practice their faith freely but instead strongly accommodate Majority groups' demand for religious issues has contributed to the prevalence of vigilante violence against religious minorities.
3. Populism of Islam plays a role in this issue, considering that although the majority of disturbances that disrupt interfaith harmony involve mosque destruction, these mosques come from Ahmadiyya followers and other Muslim minority groups (Suryana, 2019). Hence, in this context, populism of Islam refers to the Islam practiced by the majority of Indonesia's population.

The Constitutional Court's decision regarding the multiple interpretations of the Anti-Blasphemy Law, which is a product of the past using terminology from the time it was created, has led to ambiguity in various judicial reviews of it. However, the judge believes that the law is still constitutional, and it is essential to urge lawmakers to modify it in line with current needs.]

Unfortunately, the vagueness of the Constitutional Court's decision has led the legislative body, the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, to underestimate the necessity of amending the Anti-Defamation Law. As a result, despite the Constitutional Court's decision Number 140/PUU-VII/2009 for more than a decade and a half, there have been no attempts by the DPR to make immediate changes to the Anti-Defamation Law. The consequence of this inaction is that both the Ahok case in 2016 and the Meiliana case in 2017, which occurred after the Constitutional Court's decision, resulted in criminalization, despite the lack of clarity in the Anti-Blasphemy Law.

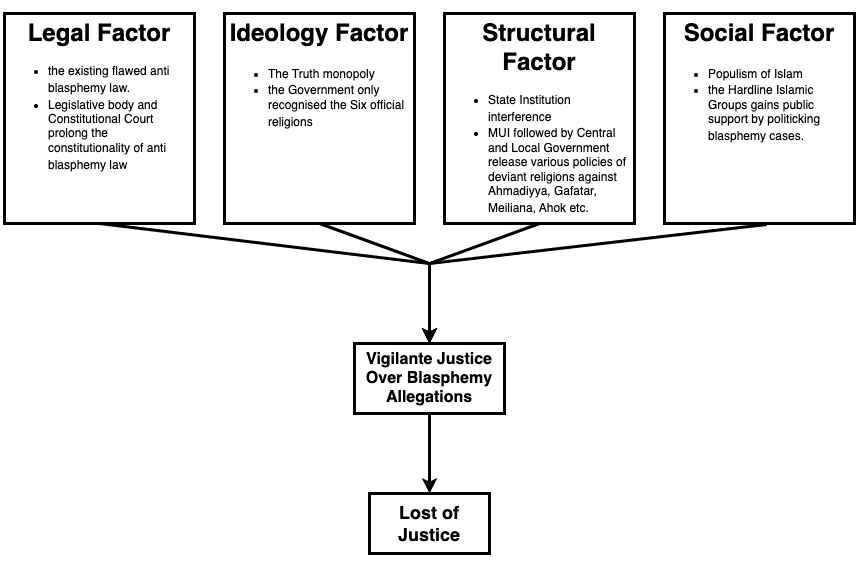


Figure . Factors and actors influence the act of Vigilante Justice

The ideology of Godly Nationalism in Indonesia contributes to prolonged enforcement of the Anti-Blasphemy Law by creating a law enforcement system that glorifies vigilante acts. Scholars suggest that Godly Nationalism results in religious intolerance and upholds religious values that are seen as contrary to blasphemy (Menchik, 2014; Telle, 2017). Indonesia's political climate further reinforces the rising trend of law enforcement against blasphemy, aiming to protect orthodox religions from deviant teachings and intolerant actions. The Constitutional Court reaffirms Godly Nationalism as embodied in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution. However, this ideology also leads to the justification of vigilante acts against those accused of deviating from orthodox teachings, causing religious intolerance and promoting mob violence.

A study conducted by Barton et al. (2021) highlights that the Front Defender of Islam (FPI) is a hard-line Islamic organization, and its activities, led by Rizieq Shihab (RS), have been characterized by vigilantism. Hate narratives are utilized to antagonize those outside its group, including politicians and the government, and encourage its followers to take vigilant action against all forms of action that are contrary to Islamic values. RS has used his popularity to influence FPI in various anti-Ahok protests, accused of tarnishing Islam, under the pretext of defending Islam, and when there are accusations of blasphemy against a person or group of people, FPI is often involved in the action of Main Hakim Sendiri.

Ultimately, taking the law into one's own hands to deliver 'justice' undermines the rule of law and democratic principles that Indonesia upholds. Robust legal frameworks and their implementation are essential to protect individual rights while promoting a tolerant and inclusive society. Allowing hardline Islamic groups to take actions that contravene the law in the name of religion will only lead Indonesia down a dangerous path that undermines its national identity and democratic foundations.

**Vigilante Justice Upsetting Independency of the Court**

In 1964, the Supreme Court issued Circular Letter Number 11 of 1964, which essentially ordered courts under its jurisdiction to punish severely those who commit blasphemy. Despite criticism of the Anti-Blasphemy Law's weaknesses, judges continue to uphold the law. The Chairperson of the Gafatar Trial Panel, Mohammad Said, stated that the court is obliged to comply with the Supreme Court's Circular Letter. Additionally, the Supreme Court spokesperson confirmed that the letter has never formally been revoked.

The court's independence was undermined in Meiliana's case due to the lack of thorough investigation and reliance on biased testimony. Meiliana's categorization as a suspect was a result of MUI's demands, influencing the court's decision making. The same pattern occurred in the Ahmadiyya and Gafatar cases, where vigilantism was used as a reference for the court's decision and the MUI's one-sided truth claims were supported. The court's decision in the case of Mahful Muis and Ahmad Musaddeq was also criticized, lacking evidence to support the prosecutor's charge. Upholding legal rights and the rule of law is crucial to prevent vigilantism and safeguard the safety of religious minority groups.In the Ahmadiyya case, both the court of first instance and the high court believed that a person who has religious teachings different from the religion adhered to in Indonesia is prohibited from being the perpetrator of religious blasphemy. The court focused on Ahmadiyya adherents who "intentionally commit an act publicly that is basically blasphemy against a religion adhered to in Indonesia." This means that Ahmadiyya followers are not permitted to preach their religion in Indonesia if it contradicts mainstream Islam, which is the main

This incident illustrates that vigilante actions against religious minority groups cannot be justified and have grave consequences for the targeted individuals and communities. Upholding the principle of the rule of law is critical in combating such vigilantism and protecting the rights and well-being of citizens of different religious affiliations.

**The Failure of Anti-Blasphemy Law Enforcement to Preserve Justice**

Defending the Anti-Blasphemy Law does not guarantee an increase in interfaith tolerance, but rather provides an opportunity for the majority religious groups to utilize the flawed law in order to gain more protection than other minority religious groups. Cases such as Meiliana, Ahmadiyya, and Gafatar provide evidence that the punishment of Meiliana and the leaders of Ahmadiyya and Gafatar did not prevent hardline Islamic groups from engaging in vigilantism.

The court's decision in the Meiliana, Ahmadiyya, and Gafatar cases failed to provide justice for Meiliana and the leaders of Gafatar and Ahmadiyya because they were sentenced to criminal punishment without due process. The court's failure to prove the "intention" element of the defendants in the blasphemy of Islam indicates that the court has ignored the substantial weakness of the Anti-Blasphemy Law and has forced conviction based on social justice decisions. The court's insistence on convicting the defendants with a flawed law demonstrates the court's failure to provide substantial justice. Additionally, the lack of evidence presented in court to prove the defendants' guilt shows that the court has failed to provide procedural justice.

This pattern of law enforcement in blasphemy cases that fails to provide procedural and substantial justice is likely to be repeated in similar cases.

**CONCLUSION**

In contrast to vigilantism in ordinary crimes, which generally aims to punish perpetrators of crimes caught red-handed or for crimes that continue to occur where law enforcement fails to apprehend the perpetrators, vigilantism in cases of blasphemy is not solely motivated by the existence of crime in society, but by the monopoly of religious truth by established religions, viewing different religious teachings as crimes. The narrow definition of "Godly Nationalism" contradicts the right to freedom of religion and belief guaranteed in the Indonesian Constitution. Articles 29 and 28E expressly respect the right of everyone to choose and embrace their own religion or belief and worship according to that religion or belief.

The findings of the study negate the argument put forward by the Constitutional Court that abolishing the Anti-Blasphemy Law would pose a threat to society in the event of horizontal conflicts between religions. The reality is quite the opposite; from the cases of Ahok, Meiliana, Gafatar, and Ahmadiyya, all trigger the emergence of vigilante justice. Maintaining a flawed Anti-Blasphemy Law not only provides a justification for hard-line Islamic groups to pursue hate spin strategies but also significantly hinders the courts from delivering fair and just judgement.

Through the hate spin strategy, the flawed anti-blasphemy laws can easily be manipulated and interpreted such that criticism of religious manipulation or intolerance or preaching of different religions can be construed as blasphemy against the primary religions professed in Indonesia. This strategy has succeeded in garnering significant support, legitimizing vigilante justice even before the actual trial. Secondly, structural factors, through the roles played by the MUI and the central and regional governments that support the declaration of heretical religions, provide the foundations for the legitimization of vigilante groups to continue exerting pressure. Thirdly, the monopolization of truth claimed by orthodox religions overtly denies space for other beliefs or minority religions to freely embrace and practice their religion as per Article 29 of the Indonesian Constitution. Fourth, Muslim populism via the advocacy of hardliner Islam obtains widespread support.

It is essential for lawmakers and law enforcers to reconsider the importance of rectifying the existing flaws in the Anti-Blasphemy Law and to refrain from enforcing this law, so that violations of the rights to freedom of religion and belief for minority groups do not continue. It is vital to ensure that social justice is upheld and that a law is created that is equal to the principles of the rule of law and human rights. This study stresses the need to rethink the role of the Anti-Blasphemy Law in Indonesia to ensure due protection of human rights and promote social justice. By exposing the multiple factors that perpetuate vigilante justice, the study advocates for reassessing the limitations and challenges of law enforcement in the context of religious intolerance. Ultimately, the study's findings may be valuable for policymakers and legislators seeking to promote a fair and just society in Indonesia.

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1. However, it is important to emphasize that the majority of mosques targeted for disruption are Ahmadiyya mosques and other mosques that differ from the mainstream Muslim groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)