

# The Politics of Religious Education in Indonesia: Patterns and Dynamics

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The organization of religious education in postcolonial Indonesia largely replicated the institutional patterns inherited from the colonial period, but with a shift in the locus of religious privileging. Under Dutch colonial rule, the state promoted Christian missionary schooling while restricting the growth of Islamic institutions, exemplified by the formal incorporation of church schools into the government system in 1831 (Hasbullah, 1995: 72–73; Suhadi et al., 2015: 13–14). After Indonesian independence, and particularly from the mid-1960s onward, state support shifted towards Islamic education, reflecting both the demographic dominance of Islam and the politics of national identity formation. Concurrently, the Indonesian state institutionalized a system of religious recognition, ensuring the rights to religious instruction for students of the six acknowledged religions —Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and later Confucianism— while excluding those adhering to indigenous religions. This framework simultaneously enacted exclusionary practices: students adhering to local or indigenous traditions, or to religions outside the state's classificatory schema, were denied the right to religious education in schools. This selective recognition illustrates how postcolonial governance continued to reproduce colonial logics of religious governance, replacing one form of privileging with another while sustaining the structural marginalization of non-recognized traditions. This paper aims to analyse the policy and the practice of religious education in Indonesia since independence, with particular attention to its continuities with colonial legacies, its shifting dynamics over time, and its contemporary practices. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to scholarly and policy debates on how to develop a more inclusive religious education that ensures equal rights for all students in the Indonesian context.

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