

# The role of religious beliefs and collective narcissism in interreligious contact on university students

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## Research article

## The role of religious beliefs and collective narcissism in interreligious contact on university students

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of exclusive puritanism movements challenges several communities to live in peaceful coexistence. This research aimed to observe the level of interreligious contact among university students. This was a threefold study. The first part was an initial inquiry to construct an interreligious contact scale. The second sought to see the inferential association between interreligious contact, belief in religious teachings (i.e. religious fundamentalism, kindly religious belief, and meta-religion endorsement), and collective narcissism. The third part was to investigate differences in those variables between students who joined student political organizations with religion-based ideology and those who did not. There were 381 respondents from various religious backgrounds (e.g. Muslim, Christian, and other) participating in this research. The result of the exploratory factor analysis indicated a unidimensionality of the interreligious contact scale. Regression analysis found that religious fundamentalism and collective narcissism made individuals less likely to exhibit interreligious contact. However, kindly religious belief and meta-religion endorsement encouraged interreligious contact. In addition, an independent sample t-test suggested that there was a difference in the inclusivism level between religion-based student organization members and non-members. Members of such organization tended to exhibit a lower level of interreligious contact, while their level of religious fundamentalism and collective narcissism were higher compared to their non-member counterparts.

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia was known as a multi-religion country with a high level of religious tolerance (Kersten, 2015; Parlindungan, 2008). However, intolerance becomes a severe issue as the number of puritanism- and religious exclusivism-based political movement sympathizers, who exploit the freedom of expression in the era of democracy, keeps rising (Carnegie, 2009; Jati, 2013; Kersten, 2015; van Bruinessen, 2002). Community heterogeneity as manifested in the ethnical, cultural, and religious diversity in Indonesia, if well-managed, could be a national forte. Otherwise, it may promote potential conflicts, particularly pertaining to majority-versus-minority issues (Arifianto, 2009; Jonathan et al., 2016). In some areas in Indonesia, in which the majority of the residents are Muslim, acts of intolerance against minorities are common (Department of State, 2017; Widiyari, 2018). Similarly, in other regions (e.g. Papua) where the majority is Christian, acts of intolerance against Muslim as a minority are often found (Harsono, 2018).

In some cases, puritan and exclusive religious movements gained their supporters from education institutions. Mass media reports that

many student activists agree with a Caliphate system, which potentially discredits other groups. For instance, at a national symposium of *dawah* (i.e. Islamic proselytizing) institutions in Bogor Agricultural University (IPB) on 25–27 March 2016, activists from *dawah* groups based in 242 higher educations across Indonesia, declared their pledge to enforce a Caliphate system in Indonesia (Saudale, 2017). A survey by Wahid Foundation and the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs found that 60 percent of activists of Islam-based high school organizations were ready to wage jihad at that time, and 68 percent were ready for future jihad. Among these percentages, 37 percent strongly agreed, and 41 percent agreed with the enforcement of a Caliphate system (Huda, 2017).

Act of intolerance is one of the repercussions of religious exclusivism (Jonathan et al., 2016). In such a view, it is believed that one's religion is the only way of truth and salvation, while other views are wrong. If such religious exclusive view is accompanied by an exclusive political movement, it may result in totalitarianism and authoritarianism in the name of religion (Jonathan et al., 2016). Political movements leading to religious authoritarianism are now targeting university students in Indonesia (Arifah and Renaldi, 2018).

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Some scholars suggest the importance of contact and dialogues between different groups of religion and faith to build trust and tolerance (Jonathan et al., 2016) and to lower prejudice and suspicion among religious adherents (Arifianto, 2009). Kanas et al. (2017) emphasize the significance of interreligious friendship in lowering negative attitudes towards outgroups. Also, interreligious friendship should be genuine, indicated by voluntary and egalitarian contact instead of merely artificial and casual contact (Kanas et al., 2015; Kanas et al., 2017). Arifianto (2009) further recommends interfaith religious services, in which believers of various religions are invited to join and participate in some events.

Interreligious contact can be deemed similar to intergroup contact but within the context of religion. If intergroup contact is defined as an actual face-to-face interaction between members of different and clearly defined groups that provide a means to relieve intergroup tension and conflict (Christ and Kauff, 2019), in the case of interreligious contact, the groups here refer to different religious groups.

Comprehension and interpretation of religious teachings are believed to play a role in the quality of interactions with adherents of other religions. Individuals' religious typology, which reflects the extent to which the teachings of their religion can be openly interpreted as well as their faith orientation towards religious diversity, has a considerable contribution in shaping their interreligious interaction. Generally, the typology of positions on religious diversity can be classified into three categories, namely: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (Cush, 1994; McCarthy, 2007; Feldmeier, 2017). The exclusive faith orientation tends to see one's religion as the truest one by interpreting the religious teachings rigidly and dogmatically and emphasizing differences between "us" and "them" (Cush, 1994; Huang, 1995; McCarthy, 2007). On the other end, religious inclusivism and pluralism recognize that there is truth in each different religion. However, while inclusive believers regard their religion as the perfect one, adherents of religious pluralism see all religious teachings as equally valid paths (McCarthy, 2007).

Interreligious contact and interaction are surely not easy for those who do not interpret their religious teachings openly. Iannaccone (1994) found that there was a strong negative association between strict, obedient, rigid, and exclusive religious understanding and contact with outgroups from different faiths. A similar finding was found by Merino (2010), which demonstrated that exclusive religious belief was associated with a negative view against religious diversity and would reduce the willingness to exhibit contact with members of different religions.

In the current study, religious belief was classified into two types, namely religious exclusivism and kindly religious belief. Religious exclusivism that prevents an open interpretation of religious teachings is analogous to religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism is defined by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) as a belief in a set of religious teachings that explicitly contains a fundamental, radical, essential, and incontestable truth about humanity and divinity. Religious fundamentalism is linked to three interrelated stances (Koopmans, 2015), namely: that all adherents must come back to eternal and unchangeable rules which are predetermined in the past; that these rules only allow for a single interpretation which binds all believers; that religious rules should be given priority over secular laws. McConochie (2007) specifically implies a similar notion that religious fundamentalism is a radical faith in which the world, its contents, and the relationship among them can only be interpreted based solely on the absolute laws of God that cannot be disputed. In this view, every interpretation of anything is top-down, vertical, or only deemed as the black-and-white laws of God in which those who have sinned or are culpable will get punished by God.

Nevertheless, although some believers of religions might recognize that some religious laws should be absolutely adhered to, they could also emphasize their faith in the harmony with the world and fellow humans as a form of religious piety and spirituality. It means that religious fundamentalism is not the only manner in which an individual might endorse the truth in their religion. One might also hold a less orthodox belief in the teachings of their religion. Such a religious belief is then

known as the kindly religious belief. Saucier and Skrzypińska (2006) coined the "subjective spirituality" term to refer to an unorthodox understanding of religious thinking that is not literal or dogmatic. It refers to the transcendence in human subjective experience which allows an individual to reflect their personal existence in the context of a harmonious relationship with their surroundings, including nature and other creatures. For it is subjective and contextual, religious teachings are no longer interpreted in a literal or dogmatic fashion. To denote such a contextual religious faith that emphasizes the harmony between humankind and the world, McConochie (2007) proposed the term "kindly religious belief". Specifically, McConochie (2007) implies the definition of kindly religious belief as a belief that brings an individual to an open and non-literal interpretation and comprehension of the world, along with its contents and the relationship among them, as a place that must be filled with kindness, peace, and forgiveness for all people.

Religious belief is a set of ideas and a belief system that governs the ideas about "I", others, and the world Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992; Kossowska et al. (2018). This system of belief is the foundation for manifestations in attitudes and behaviors, including adherence and obedience (Bock and Warren, 1972). In other words, it precedes adherence. It is also a factor influencing one's obedience to authority (Bock and Warren, 1972). This system of religious belief is assumed to have a considerable role in the level of tolerance and acceptance of diversity (Merino, 2010), as well as in the interaction between different religious groups (Merino, 2010). Taking into account the two dimensions of religious belief (i.e. religious fundamentalism and kindly religious belief), we could predict that individuals with a higher level of religious fundamentalism would be less likely to exhibit contact with people of different religions. On the other hand, higher degree of kindly religious belief would mean higher tendency to engage in interreligious contact.

However, most of the previous research (e.g. Jackson and Esses, 1997; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2008; Hodson et al., 2013; Kunst et al., 2014; Schaaafma and Williams, 2012; Kunst and Thomsen, 2015) only investigated religious belief as a unidimensional construct by using the religious fundamentalism instrument by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992, 2004) where individuals with high scores were assumed to have a high level of fanaticism towards strict, incontestable religious teachings, while lower scores were assumed to reflect tolerant and open stances. Similarly, Saucier dan Skrzypińska (2006) also mentioned that "psychologists outside the specialized discipline of psychology of religion often treat religious/spiritual beliefs as a unitary aspect of individual differences."

In contrast with preceding works, the current study departed on the assumption that individuals' religious faith may be paradoxical depending on the manifestation in religious orientation emphasizing on dogmatic and solely vertical relationships versus harmonious, horizontal relationships. Such paradoxical faith is reflected in an instrument by McConochie (2007) which accommodates both dimensions of faith. On one side, an individual may have an absolute, black-and-white, and indisputable belief in religious laws that are deemed compulsory to practice in every aspect of life (i.e. religious fundamentalism) as a form of sincerity or piety in vertical faith in God and humans. On the other hand, one may also believe that religions teach virtues and peace as a manifestation of a harmonious horizontal relationship between humans regardless of group memberships.

Additionally, believing that there are virtues in every religion would usually lead to positive attitudes towards other religious faiths. McConochie (2007) refers to this stance as a meta-religion endorsement, which is a positive attitude toward universal morals in every religion. In a glimpse, a meta-religion endorsement may seem overlapping with kindly religious belief. However, the two differ from each other in a way that kindly religious belief is more closely related to faith within each religion, while meta-religion endorsement emphasizes more on positive attitudes towards morality teachings of other religions. Positive attitudes will in turn determine whether or not individuals decide to interact with others. A study by Turner et al. (2013) shows that trust in outgroups and

positive attitudes towards outgroups are influential in approach behavioral tendency to engage in contact with other groups. In other words, positive attitudes toward different teachings as reflected in meta-religion endorsement are predicted to have a significant role in the level of interreligious contact.

A report by Kanas et al. (2015, 2017) concerning the importance of egalitarian and voluntary interreligious contact explicitly shows that contact that is based on superiority bias (i.e. that a particular religion is superior over others) has a counterproductive effect instead. A number of studies demonstrate that sense of superiority over other groups, known as collective narcissism, is associated with a negative attitude towards outgroups, which is perceived as different from the ingroup (Cichocka, 2016; de Zavala and Cichocka, 2012; Lyons et al., 2013). Collective narcissism is defined as the tendency to overestimate the positive image and important values of the ingroup (de Zavala et al., 2009). It emphasizes that an individual may overrate their group and that a group may function as a narcissistic entity (de Zavala et al., 2009). According to de Zavala et al. (2009), collective narcissism can occur to individuals of any social group, including nations, ethnicities, religions, ideologies, politics, and organizations. That is to say, one can identify themselves in a narcissistic manner with any social group (de Zavala et al., 2013), including with their religious group.

de Zavala et al. (2009) also affirm that collective narcissism is a form of group esteem that is reliably associated with intergroup bias and aggressiveness. Considering that hostility and aggression are negative forms of interactions, the present study predicted that a collective narcissistic tendency would be negatively associated with interreligious contact. It means that collective narcissism would decrease interreligious interaction and exacerbate conflicts.

In addition, this study also examined how students' participation in a religion-based extra-campus organization was associated with the degree of interreligious contact, religious belief, and collective narcissism. As mentioned earlier, the urgency of this examination is indicated by the fact that religion-based militant political movements in Indonesia often target university students (Saudale, 2017; Arifah and Renaldi, 2018).

Before examining the relationship between the aforementioned variables (i.e. interreligious contact, religious belief, meta-religion endorsement, and collective narcissism), the interreligious contact scale was constructed first. It was necessary as no suitable psychological scale for interreligious contact was available. A similar measure to inclusive and exclusive interreligious interaction scale was constructed by Sterkens and Anthony (2008), but it focuses on religiocentrism, which refers to positive attitude towards religious ingroup and negative attitude towards outgroups. The scale does not directly show how an individual wants to exhibit contact, but rather focus on ingroup favoritism and negative prejudice against outgroups. Measurement of interreligious contact was also conducted by Merino (2010) where he only used a single question related to interreligious contact (i.e. "how much personal contact you have had with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus"). The available response options were "a great deal", "a fair amount", "only a little", "almost none", and "none". The single-item instrument by Merino (2010) and its response range are inadequate to measure individual tendency to make friends, neighbor, and cooperate with people of different faiths and religions. A common issue with a single-item scale is concerns about its poor construct and content validity, as well as internal consistency (Sarstedt and Wilczynski, 2009). What distinguishes the newly constructed interreligious contact instrument in this study from the previous ones is its focus on directly measuring the tendency for interreligious interaction, as opposed to measuring ingroup favoritism or prejudice. Moreover, the new instrument would consist of multiple items. Therefore, prior to the research hypotheses testing, this research focused on the construction of an interreligious contact scale.

The hypothesis of this research is (H1) religious fundamentalism (H2) kindly religious belief, (H3) meta-religion endorsement, and (H4) collective narcissism predict interreligious contact. Also, (H5) there is a difference between students joining a religion-based organization and

those who do not in term of a) interreligious contact; b) religious fundamentalism; c) kindly religious belief; d) meta-religion endorsement; and e) collective narcissism.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants of this study were activists of student organizations with and without political ideology, from six universities in Surabaya, Indonesia. Specifically, the student organizations could be grouped into two categories, namely extra-campus organizations with a specific ideology and non-ideological intra-campus organizations. Extra-campus organizations are organizations that operate outside campus bureaucracy. These organizations usually aim to recruit political cadres and have either a religion-based or a nationalistic ideology. Also, they are often nation-wide organizations. This characteristic separates them from intra-campus organizations which operation are limited within the campus milieu. Non-ideological intra-campus organizations are student bodies within the campus environment that are not affiliated with any political organization. These organizations are usually student associations related to hobbies, extracurricular study, art, or community service program.

The respondents were 381 participants ranging from 17 to 24-year-old. The average age was 20.41-year-old. Gender proportion was 52.8 percent male and 47.2 percent female. The majority of participant identified themselves with Islam (68.8%), followed by Christianity (21.5%), Catholicism (6.8%), Buddhism (2.1%), Hinduism (0.3%), Agnosticism (0.3%), and Atheism (0.3%).

Of all respondents, 61.1% joined religious-nuanced extra-campus student organizations, only one person (0.3%) participated in an organization with nationalistic ideology, and the other 38.6% only participated in non-ideological intra-campus organizations. Additionally, those who joined non-ideological intra-campus activities comprised 66.7% of all participants. The figures here contain an overlap, representing the 157 out of 381 (41.20%) students who joined both an extra- and an intra-campus organization. The mean comparison to test H5 was only conducted between students who joined a religious-nuanced extra-campus organization (61.1%) and those who only participated in a non-ideological intra-campus organization (38.6%). This implies that one respondent with a membership to a nationalistic extra-campus organization was excluded from the analysis.

Those who joined extra-campus organizations -both with nationalistic and religion-based ideology - took roles in the management (25.2%), as members (31.5%), sympathizer (4.7%), or other roles (38.6%). Meanwhile, students who were affiliated with non-ideological intra-campus organization took roles in the management (48.8%), as members (32%), and others (19.2%).

The most common political preference among all participants was religious nationalism (47.2%), and it was consecutively followed by nationalism (23.6%), social democracy (17.8%), religion-based nation (7.3%), and others (3.9%).

Most participants (56.2%) spent one to three million rupiahs a month, 34.4% of them had a monthly expense below one million rupiahs, 6.6% spent between three to six million rupiahs every month, and the rest (0.5%) spent more than 6 million rupiahs a month.

### 2.2. Procedures

Data collection was carried out from 15 July 2018 to 30 November 2018 through paper-based delivery. All participants provided a verbal consent statement of willingness to answer all questions related to the study. Prior to conducting the study, we obtained ethical clearance confirming that the study complies with all regulations from the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Airlangga.

The measuring instruments in this research included: 1) the interreligious contact scale which was newly constructed for this study; 2) the religious belief scale by McConochie (2007), consisting of two dimensions, namely religious fundamentalism (14 items;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and kindly religious belief (10 items;  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). These two dimensions were proposed by McConochie (2007) to examine the degree of vertical or horizontal religious orientation. It indicates one's level of tolerance and openness in interpreting the teaching of their religions. Religious fundamentalism concerns a vertical orientation where religious teachings, along with laws and prohibitions of God are irrefutable; while kindly religious belief represents an orientation towards an emphasis on keeping harmonious relations with fellow humans.; 3) a modified-version of meta-religion endorsement scale by McConochie (2007; 4 items;  $\alpha = 0.76$ ) was used to assess positive attitudes toward universal spirituality and morality in every religion; 4) the collective narcissism scale (de Zavala et al., 2009; 8 items,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ) was utilized to measure participants' tendency to overestimate the positive image and important values of their religious ingroup. All of the aforementioned scales used five-point Likert-scaling ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Some items in each instrument were eliminated to improve the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients (Nunnally, 1978) and the final numbers of items in each scale were as stated before. Here are some sample items from each scale: 1) religious fundamentalism, e.g. "there is only one source of absolute truth, the holy religious scriptures or writings of my religion" and "there are fundamental, unchanging religious truths that are more important than any other realities"; 2) kindly religious belief, e.g. "kindness toward persons different from us is a primary spiritual virtue" and "when people first offend us, we should turn the other cheek and forgive them"; 3) meta-religion endorsement, e.g. "I believe each person in the world who has religious interest should be encouraged to think about the welfare of all humans everywhere, even in the future"; 4) collective narcissism, e.g. "my group deserves special treatment."

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Initial construction of the interreligious contact scale

The construction of the interreligious contact scale was based on a review of items of a qualitative pilot study. The scale was designed to measure the tendency to cooperate with, have conversations, and be friends with people from different faiths. A cognitive interview was conducted to ensure that the items were well-understood by respondents. This process resulted in twelve items describing individuals' tendency to exhibit interreligious contact.

Initially, exploratory factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation was carried out by extracting factors based on eigenvalue  $>1$  (see Table 1). A 3-factor structure that explained that 62.11 percent of the total variance (Eigenvalue = 1.171) was obtained. With these 3 factors, it was found that interreligious contact scale had the KMO value of 0.82, and the result of Bartlett's test of sphericity was  $\chi^2(66) = 1774.41, p < 0.01$ . The first factor consisted of only 1 item (item 7) with a factor loading of .83. The second factor comprised of 5 items (item 1, 3, 4, 5, 8) with factor loadings between 0.52-0.85. Meanwhile, the third factor consisted of 5 items (item 6, 9, 10, 11, 12) with factor loadings ranging from 0.46 to 0.82. Item number 2 wasn't classified into any factor as its factor loading was below 0.32 on all factors (see Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

However, as this scale was intended to measure the unidimensionality of interreligious contact, another exploratory factor analysis was carried out aiming to extract a single factor only. Using a cutoff point of 0.32 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013), nine valid items were selected with factor loadings within a ranged from 0.38 to 0.89 (see Table 2). The final result showed that the interreligious contact scale had an adequate sample for factor analyses (KMO = 0.83), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(36) = 1495.95, p = 0.000$ ). Exploratory factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation yielded a one-factor structure, explaining 45.68 percent of the total variance (Eigenvalue = 4.111). Thus, it can be concluded that the 9-item interreligious contact scale is unidimensional. The reliability obtained (Cronbach's alpha) for the nine items of interreligious contact scale was 0.84.

#### 3.2. Hypothesis testing

In order to test H1 through H4, a multiple linear regression was conducted. The dependent variable was interreligious contact, while the independent variables were religious fundamentalism, kindly religious belief, meta-religion endorsement, and collective narcissism. In this analysis, the entry method was employed in which all independent variables are entered into the equation at the same time.

Prior to the regression analysis, association between all of the research variables were tested using Pearson's correlation method (Table 3). The result of regression analysis (see Table 4 and Figure 1) showed that the model was significant ( $F(4, 376) = 76.19, p = 0.000, R^2 = .448$ ). Providing support for the hypothesis, kindly religious belief ( $\beta = 0.35, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.29, 0.49], t(376) = 7.61, p = 0.000$ ) and meta-religion endorsement ( $\beta = 0.21, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.28], t(376) = 4.61, p = 0.000$ ) were found to be positively predictive of interreligious contact, while religious fundamentalism ( $\beta = -0.22, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.28, -0.12], t(376) = -5.06, p = 0.000$ ) and collective narcissism ( $\beta = -0.28, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.36, -0.19], t(376) = -6.51, p = 0.000$ ) negatively predicted it. This implies confirmation for Hypothesis 1 to 4.

**Table 1.** Factor loading of items in the interreligious contact scale.

No.	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1.	I decide to collaborate with someone regardless of their religious background	0.07	0.58	0.20
2.	Topics pertaining to one's choice of religion are sensitive and I avoid them	0.22	0.04	-.03
3.	Faith and belief do not stop me from being friends with anyone	0.11	0.85	0.23
4.	I don't want to spoil my friendship by questioning my friend's choice of faith and religion	0.13	0.91	0.28
5.	I prefer living next door to people from diverse religious background	-0.10	0.52	0.36
6.	When it comes to making friends, I consider one's religious faith before getting too close#	0.05	0.46	0.64
7.	During interaction with others, I like topics related to conveying the truth of my religion#	0.83	0.21	0.57
8.	Friendship is not bound by choice of religion and belief	0.10	0.70	0.21
9.	I do something so that people around me can follow the truth the way it is taught in my religion and belief	0.14	0.04	0.52
10.	I prefer working with people of the same faith with mine because it makes mutual understanding easier. #	-0.07	0.32	0.79
11.	I prefer living next door to people from the same faith as mine.#	-0.12	0.35	0.82
12.	Being friends with someone from different faith is bound for many obstacles. #	0.36	0.39	0.46

#reverse score, \*cut-off point for elimination.

**Table 2.** Factor loading of items in the interreligious contact scale using 1-factor structure.

No.	Item	Initial Factor loading	First step elimination	Second step elimination
1.	I decide to collaborate with someone regardless of their religious background	0.58	0.58	0.58
2.	Topics pertaining to one's choice of religion are sensitive and I avoid them	0.04**	Eliminated	Eliminated
3.	Faith and belief do not stop me from being friends with anyone	0.83	0.84	0.84
4.	I don't want to spoil my friendship by questioning my friend's choice of faith and religion	0.88	0.88	0.89
5.	I prefer living next door to people from diverse religious background	0.54	0.54	0.53
6.	When it comes to making friends, I consider one's religious faith before getting too close#	0.54	0.53	0.51
7.	During interaction with others, I like topics related to conveying the truth of my religion#	0.32	0.31**	Eliminated
8.	Friendship is not bound by choice of religion and belief	0.68	0.69	0.69
9.	I do something so that people around me can follow the truth the way it is taught in my religion and belief	0.15**	Eliminated	Eliminated
10.	I prefer working with people of the same faith with mine because it makes mutual understanding easier. #	0.42	0.40	0.38
11.	I prefer living next door to people from the same faith as mine.#	0.44	0.42	0.41
12.	Being friends with someone from different faith is bound for many obstacles. #	0.45	0.45	0.43

#reverse score, \*cut-off point for elimination.

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix of the research variables.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Collective Narcissism	3.15	0.59	1				
(2) Religious fundamentalism	3.77	0.63	0.46**	1			
(3) Kindly religious belief	4.04	0.52	-0.12*	0.06	1		
(4) Meta-religion endorsement	3.93	0.60	0.003	0.06	0.53**	1	
(5) Interreligious contact	3.44	0.58	-0.43**	-0.31**	0.48**	0.38**	1

\* Significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
 \*\* Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4.** The Effect of collective narcissism and religious belief on interreligious contact.

	Collective narcissism	Religious fundamentalism	Kindly religious belief	Meta religion endorsement
Inter-religious contact ( $\beta$ )	-0.28**	-0.22**	0.35**	0.21**

\*\* . significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

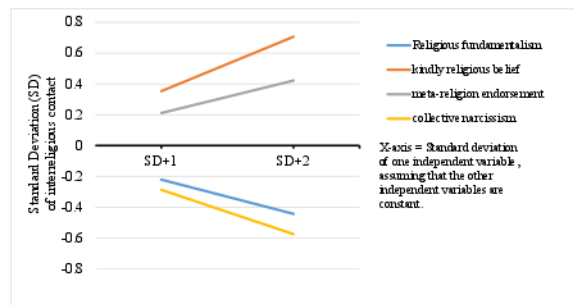
An independent sample t-test was carried out to test Hypothesis 5. This analysis aimed to compare religious-nuanced extra-campus organization members (n = 233) with members of non-ideological intracampus organizations (n = 147). The result indicated meaningful differences in interreligious contact ( $t(378) = -3.76; p = 0.000, d = 0.38$ ), religious fundamentalism ( $t(378) = 2.36; p = 0.019, d = 0.25$ ), kindly religious belief ( $t(378) = -2.70; p = 0.007, d = 0.26$ ), as well as in collective narcissism ( $t(340.52) = 2.98; p = 0.003, d = 0.31$ ) between the

two groups. Among students who joined religious-based organizations, the mean values of religious fundamentalism and collective narcissism tended to be higher than their counterpart. Meanwhile, those who only participated in non-ideological intra-campus organizations demonstrated an inclination to exhibit interreligious contact and endorse kindly religious belief as compared to members of such student organizations. However, no noticeable difference was found in terms of meta-religion endorsement between the two groups (See Table 5).

**4. Discussion**

The results of this study demonstrated that religious belief plays a significant role in interreligious contact. Religious fundamentalism was found to reduce interreligious contact, while kindly religious belief increased it. Further, collective narcissism reduced interreligious contact. In contrast, meta-religion endorsement could proliferate it. These findings confirmed all of the hypotheses. Regardless of how an individual interprets the teachings within their religion (whether they emphasize on a top-down, incontestable interpretation or a horizontal relationship with fellow humans), the manner in which one regards their religion and positive attitudes toward other faiths will determine how the individual interacts with people from different religions.

The negative nature of the association between religious fundamentalism and interreligious contact has been confirmed by several



**Fig. 1.** Standardized coefficient beta regression.

**Table 5.** The differences between student members of religious-nuanced extra-campus organization and non-ideological intra-campus organization.

Dimensions	df	religious-nuanced extra-campus		non-ideological intra-campus		t	Cohens' d
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Interreligious contact	378	3.36	0.57	3.58	0.57	-3.76**	0.38
Religious fundamentalism	378	3.84	0.62	3.68	0.63	2.36*	0.25
Kindly religious belief	378	3.98	0.54	4.13	0.58	-2.70**	0.26
Collective Narcissism	340.52	3.22	0.61	3.04	0.53	2.98**	0.31
meta-religion endorsement	378	3.93	0.61	3.92	0.59	0.12	0.01

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

researchers (Iannaccone, 1994; Jackson and Hunsberger, 1999; Hunsberger and Jackson, 2005; Merino, 2010). This association can be explained by understanding how the typology of faith orientation affects the way an individual views religious diversity. Generally, typology of positions on religious diversity can be classified into three: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (Cush, 1994; McCarthy, 2007).

The exclusive type tends to believe that only one's own religion is true, while others are deemed absolutely wrong (Cush, 1994; Huang, 1995; McCarthy, 2007). In this position, an individual regards the worldview of their religion as the only way towards salvation and union with God (McCarthy, 2007). Saucier and Skrzypińska (2006) address fundamentalism as an endeavor to assert orthodoxy. Referring to the concept of exotericism by Schuon (1984), Saucier and Skrzypińska (2006) state that religious fundamentalism affirms a dogmatic religious orientation in the form of exclusive claim of the truth and morality which is assumed to lead an individual to personal salvation (e.g. through rewards for life after death). This fundamentalist and exclusive position is referred to as the tradition-oriented religiousness (Saucier and Skrzypińska, 2006). Here religious narratives are sacred and clear. They also teach absolute belief in authority, whether it is the holy scriptures or religious institutions (e.g. church), to govern worship rituals and daily social behaviors. This provides an explanation of why the present study found that individuals with religious fundamentalist belief and their dogmatic and rigid interpretation negatively perceived social interaction with people of different faiths. Outgroups would be regarded with negative prejudices as people with the wrong morality, leading to negative acceptance and intolerance (Merino, 2010). People with different faith would be deemed as conflicting and denying the universality of the teachings of the adherent's religion. This would result in low respect for the outgroups. Cooperation, collaboration, and friendship with people of different faiths would be perceived as distractions from the purity of the religious teachings that should be universally practiced by everyone.

The same explanation might also account for the finding that people with high collective narcissism were also less likely to exhibit interreligious contact. Religious fundamentalism is often linked to intragroup solidarity and collectiveness. A study by Saucier and Skrzypińska (2006) found that tradition-oriented religiousness tended to be positively associated with a sense of collectivism, low openness to experience, lower level of respect to groups which were deemed conflicting with their religious values, such as groups of feminists, gays, and scientists who support the theory of evolution. A finding by de Zavala et al. (2013) confirmed that narcissism toward ingroup positivity, or generally known as collective narcissism, predicted outgroup negativity. In this case, outgroup negativity refers to individuals' tendency to feel respect or contempt for outgroups. While the study of de Zavala et al. (2013) measured outgroup negativity merely in terms of the negative attitude and feeling towards outgroups, the present study measured outgroup negativity in terms of the tendency for exclusive or inclusive contact with outgroups. The result of the present study confirmed the fourth hypothesis and demonstrated that individuals with a collective narcissistic tendency were less likely to exhibit contact with religious outgroups. This finding is logical considering how much attention collective narcissists

typically pay for the greatness of their ingroup. Inclusive contact with outgroups might be deemed as compromising the ingroup's grandeur, which is based on religious belief and faith.

In order to understand the evidence of a positive association between kindly religious belief and interreligious contact, we should consider the other types of position on religious diversity which are not exclusive or fundamentalist. McCarthy (2007) and Cush (1994) mentioned two such positions, namely inclusivism and pluralism. In these positions, an individual recognizes the truth in other religions, so that it is not assumed to be exclusively owned by one religion. Such an unorthodox, non-literal, non-dogmatic understanding which emphasizes on subjective transcendental experience is termed by Saucier and Skrzypińska (2006) as the subjective spirituality. It refers to a substantive interpretation of religion which is egalitarian, non-conforming to the interpretation of an absolute truth monopolized by authorities and religious institutions, and it highlights spirituality. Saucier and Skrzypińska (2006) state that subjective spirituality is usually associated with openness to experience. McConochie (2007) suggests that people with an open belief tend to emphasize virtues pertaining to a harmonious relationship with fellow humans and are less likely to impose a dogmatic interpretation of right-and-wrong in social life. It allows people with such orientation to coexist, collaborate, and cooperate with people from other religions as the most prominent virtue in their faith is life harmony.

Further, openness to see the universality of truth and morality in every religion allows an individual to have a positive attitude towards people of different faiths which is then manifested in collaboration, cooperation, and friendship. This explains why meta-religion endorsement significantly contributes to interreligious contact as the result of the current study indicated. Turner et al. (2013) elaborate on how a positive attitude would result in an approach behavioral tendency to interact with others.

Another finding in this study was that students who joined a religious extra-campus organization with political-ideology tended to be more exclusive compared to those who were only affiliated with non-ideological intra-campus organizations. It was indicated by lower interreligious contact, a more fundamental and literal perspective on religions, and a higher inclination for collective narcissism. Students who did not join religion-based student organizations and only participated in intra-campus organizations were more likely to demonstrate positive contact with people from different faiths and to believe that their religion teaches harmonious and inclusive relationships with others.

There is a plausible explanation for this finding. Participation in an organization with a religious ideology might suggest that the individual feels more comfortable interacting with people of the same belief. Meanwhile, not joining such an organization might indicate the lack of interest in religious issues in public space. One's self-identification to a particular value can be manifested in their decision to join an organization that accommodates her/his belief. The more respected and important a group is for someone, the more likely it is for the person to identify themselves with that group. It might promote a more negative attitude towards outgroups for the sake of maintaining their positive social identity. A higher level of identification and positive attitudes towards ingroups were rarely correlated to a positive attitude towards outgroups

(de Zavala et al., 2013). Even without a collective narcissistic tendency, an individual could still be trapped in their bias and become more likely to derogate religious outgroups to strengthen positive opinion on their ingroup.

Interestingly, there was no evidence of a significant difference in the level of meta-religion endorsement between students affiliated with a religion-nuanced extra-campus organization and those who were only affiliated with non-ideological intra-campus organizations. This is a paradox because members of religion-based political organizations demonstrated a higher degree of religious fundamentalism and a lower level of kindly religious belief as compared to non-member counterparts. Presumably, individuals with strong religious fundamentalism are less likely to recognize universal virtues in other religions. This finding might be related to citizenship values in Indonesia which is not based on one religion, but the government and the ideological system formally suggests the citizens to affiliate with one of the six religions recognized by the country (Pedersen, 2016). People without religious affiliation are deemed uncivilized compared to the 'modern' citizens of the nation-state (Pedersen, 2016). It implicitly demonstrates that identification with one religion that an individual believes to be the truest is mandated, but it is not expected to invalidate the virtues of other religions. This is because, in principle, every religion teaches moral parameters. The finding of the current study, however, needs further confirmation from future research by investigating the paradox in moral reasoning. Specifically, the future inquiry should examine whether moral belief and reasoning are solely shaped by a belief in a religion, or they are also influenced by other factors outside one's religion, such as meta-perception and epistemological beliefs.

## 5. Conclusion and direction for future research

The present research found that rigidity and literalism in religious understanding promoted ingroup narcissism and discouraged willingness to interact with outgroups, particularly religious outgroups. In contrast, a less rigid and literal understanding of religion emphasized the universality of religions and therefore, encouraged individuals to exhibit contact with people from different faiths.

Limitations of the present study allow other researchers to conduct future research. Firstly, this study was conducted in Surabaya where the majority of the population (85 percent) was affiliated with Islam. Likewise, the majority of the sample in this study was Muslims. A concern to this is that the study finding might overrepresent the Muslim sample and thus, imply overgeneralization. Future research should consider including samples from other regions in which other religions dominate the population and Islam is a minority.

Secondly, the current research operationalized interreligious contact as merely one's willingness to be friends with people from different religions. In fact, negative or positive attitudes were not often demonstrated towards other religious groups, but rather to some particular groups. Despite coming from the same religion, some particular groups express hatred towards each other.

Third, the study only asked what religion an individual identified themselves with, but did not inquire further on the degree to which they perceive themselves as a religious individual. Self-declaration of religiosity is deemed important to investigate whether one's daily behaviors manifest their religious belief or other values.

Fourthly, this study could not determine one-way relations between the independent variables (i.e. religious fundamentalism, kindly religious belief, meta-religion endorsement, collective narcissism) on inter-religious contact as the dependent variable. A number of studies showed that positive contact with outgroups might also lead to positive attitudes toward outgroups and reduce prejudice, taking into account several aspects including contact duration (Schofield and Sagar, 1977) and the absence of perceived threats from outgroups (Brown and Hewstone, 2005; Page-Gould et al., 2008). According to this evidence, it is also possible that interreligious contact acts as a determinant, driving

individuals to have a more moderate religious belief, positive attitudes toward different religious as reflected in meta-religion endorsement, and reduced collective narcissism. Therefore, future investigation into the direction of the causality relation between these variables using experimental methods and/or longitudinal studies is warranted.

Finally, the study also only collected data on the student's affiliation with religious-based political organization. The researchers are aware of the plurality among religion-based student organizations and that generalizing and treating them as a single movement is not plausible. The drop-off rate and suspicion level against the researcher of the present research were higher when the participants were asked to name of the student organization in which they joined. Future studies should consider a better approach in data collection to ethically encourage participants to voluntarily identify the religious ideology of the student organization they participate in.

## 1 Declarations

### Author contribution statement

R. Ardi: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Wrote the paper.

D. Budiarti: Performed the experiments; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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## 1 Competing interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Additional information

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