RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Role of Majority Status in Shaping Self-Esteem: A Comparative Study of Muslim and Christian College Students in Indonesia

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**Introduction:** Self-esteem is an adaptive trait that boosts well-being. The relationship between religiosity and self-esteem is complex, with mixed results from empirical studies. Culture and dimensions of religiousness may influence this relationship.

**Aim:** The main purpose of this study is to understand the connection between religiousness and self-esteem in two different conditions: as a majority and as a minority.

**Methods:** This study's participants are college students who identify as Muslim or Christian. They are from two regions in Indonesia: Jabodetabek (Java Island), where Muslims are the majority; and East Nusa Tenggara and North Sulawesi (outside of Java), where Muslims are in the minority. Most of the respondents were between 18 and 25 years old. The survey was conducted online.

**Results:** No significant differences emerged in religiousness and self-esteem between Muslims and Christians in both Java and regions outside of Java. However, students outside Java Island exhibited higher religiousness and self-esteem, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

**Conclusion:** This study indicated that religiosity is a social value, with some exceptions.

**Keywords:** religiousness, self-esteem, Muslims, Christians, Indonesia

## Introduction

Although some researchers argue against the idea that self-esteem benefits well-being, most studies have confirmed that it is an adaptive trait that boosts well-being (Orth & Robins, 2022). Considering that self-esteem is essential for health and well-being, researchers have examined the factors influencing it. One such factor is religiosity.

The relationship between religiosity and self-esteem is complex. Empirical studies have yielded mixed results. Some studies have shown that religion benefits self-esteem, while others have found no correlation (Abu-Raiya et al., 2021; Lai & Wong-Ip, 2023). These inconclusive results may be attributed to the complexity of religiosity. Religiosity has several dimensions, each of which may have a different relationship with self-esteem

(Saroglou, 2011). Culture can also influence the relationship between religion and self-esteem (Entringer et al., 2023). Sedikides and Gebauer (2021) mentioned that the relationship between religion and culture is more robust in religious countries. Therefore, research on the relationship between religiosity and self-esteem should use multidimensional religious assessments and consider the cultural context.

Most studies have been conducted primarily in White Christian populations (Błażek & Besta, 2012; Entringer et al., 2023; Papazisis et al., 2014). Abu-Raiya et al. (2021) studied Israeli people – primarily Jews and Muslims. Erken (2023) conducted a study of Muslims in England. This study extends the research on religion and self-esteem by conducting research in Indonesia on Muslims and Christians in two areas: where they constitute the majority and where they form a minority. Indonesia, the world's fourth most populated nation, is home to a diverse cultural milieu with over 270 million individuals hailing from 1340 ethnic groups and practicing six state-recognized religions; 56% live on Java Island. The majority of Indonesians (87%) are Muslims, while Christians make up 7% of the population, according to the Central Statistics Agency of the Republic of Indonesia (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2023). However, there are some areas, mainly outside Java, where Christians are the majority and Muslims are the minority.

We will also assess religiousness using four dimensions – believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging – to examine the relationship between each dimension and self-esteem. Thus, it enhances the understanding of the role of culture and the dimensions of religiousness in the relationship between religion and self-esteem.

## Self-esteem

Self-esteem pertains to an individual's overall assessment and emotional stance, which can be either positive or negative regarding oneself and one's thoughts and emotions (Rosenberg, 1979). People with high and low self-esteem may respond similarly to supportive conditions but differently to unsupportive situations (Park & Park, 2019). For example, social relationships and academic achievement are the two most important skills college students need to master, and students with high and low self-esteem may cope differently.

Individuals with high self-esteem typically exhibit a greater capacity for constructive conflict management, emotional openness, and trust in others (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Their interactions are often characterized by increased physical affection, attentive listening, supportive behavior, and effective conflict resolution, all of which contribute to developing more profound and fulfilling social relationships. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies further reinforced this connection, demonstrating a reciprocal relationship between self-esteem and the quality of social relationships over time (Harris & Orth, 2020).

The same was true for the contribution of self-esteem to school achievement. Most studies indicate that students with high self-esteem tend to excel in academic and professional fields and are better equipped to manage stress and form close and meaningful relationships (Orth & Robins, 2022). It is commonly believed that self-esteem and academic performance possess a linear and reciprocal relationship. That is, improving self-esteem can lead to enhanced academic achievement; conversely, academic success can boost self-esteem (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023).

## Religiosity

Religiousness is a concept designed to assess one's level of engagement in religion; it is intricate and has various aspects. Consequently, an adequate measure of religiousness should encompass multiple dimensions to grasp religion's intricacies (Hood et al., 2018; Koenig, 2018).

Saroglou (2011) proposed the Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness (4-BDRS), a universal measure of religiousness that includes four aspects to assess religiousness: belief, bonding, behaving, and belonging. Believing is about having faith in something beyond the natural world; bonding is about feeling connected to the sacred through rituals; behaving is about following moral rules; and belonging is about being part of a religious group. We previously tested the 4-BDRS among Indonesian Muslim and Christian college students and found that it was a reliable measure for both groups; however, differences appeared in the importance of each aspect and how they influenced other psychological outcomes (Aditya et al., 2021). Previous studies in Indonesia have shown that Muslims score higher on behaving, whereas Christians score higher on belonging (Aditya et al., 2018, 2021). According to Saroglou et al. (2020), all aspects of the 4-BDRS were related to higher life satisfaction. We also found that, among Indonesian Muslim and Christian college students, total religiousness contributed to life satisfaction. The higher the religiousness, the higher the life satisfaction for both groups. However, the dimensions of religiousness that contribute to life satisfaction vary according to religion. For Christians, belief and

belonging are significantly related to life satisfaction, whereas for Muslims, only belonging is significantly related (Aditya et al., 2018). These results indicate that the relationship between religion and self-esteem varies between Indonesian Muslims and Christians.

## Religiosity and Self-esteem

In theory, Entringer et al. (2023) state that at least three possible explanations exist for the observed connection between religiosity and self-esteem. First, according to the perspective that views *religiosity as a personal relationship (RAPR)* with a higher power, having strong religious faith enhances self-esteem by establishing a close bond with a deity (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Hayward & Krause, 2014). Second, from the perspective of *religiosity as a resource (RAR)*, religiosity can boost self-esteem by providing access to significant social resources, particularly among older adults (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Hayward & Krause, 2014). Third, from the perspective of *religiosity as a social value (RASV)*, self-esteem is positively linked to religiosity because religious individuals perceive themselves as valued members of religious communities. However, secular societies may weaken this association (Gebauer et al., 2012, 2017).

Empirical studies on the correlation between religion and self-esteem varied depending on which aspect of religion was assessed: religiousness, importance of religion in the country, and majority or minority status. (Abu-Raiya, et al., 2021; Entringer et al., 2023; Gebaurer, 2017) The relationship between religiousness and self-esteem may vary depending on the correct perspective. For example, if the RAPR is correct, the belief and bonding dimensions of religiosity may have a significant relationship with self-esteem among both Muslims and Christians. Behavior may have a significant relationship with self-esteem only among Muslims.

Believing is a dimension of religiousness that can provide meaning in life because it addresses the existence and purpose of life (Saroglou et al., 2020). Having a clear purpose in life can make someone more confident in their decisions, boosting their self-esteem (Du et al., 2017). However, previous studies among Muslim and Christian college students in Indonesia have indicated that they are not mature enough; therefore, the Believing dimension does not correlate with life satisfaction (Aditya et al., 2022). Therefore, it is unlikely that Believing correlates with self-esteem.

Bonding is a dimension of religiousness that describes emotional and aesthetic experiences. According to Entringer's theory (Entringer et al., 2023), bonding is positively correlated with self-esteem. However, bonding may not correlate with self-esteem for the same reasons mentioned regarding the belief dimension.

Behaving represents the moral dimension of religiousness (Saroglou et al., 2020). Behavior is an essential aspect of Muslim religiosity. A previous study found that Muslim behavior enhances the positive image of God and hinders its negative image (Aditya et al., 2022). However, for Christians, behaving only enhances the positive image of God but does not contribute to hindering the negative image of God (Aditya et al., 2022). This study suggests that behavior may contribute to positive self-esteem among Muslims only.

If the RAR or RASV is correct, then belonging may have a significant relationship with self-esteem. Belonging is a dimension of religiousness that denotes attachment to a religious/cultural heritage that provides social support and a sense of community. Previous studies on the relationship between belonging and life satisfaction among Muslim and Christian college students consistently found a positive correlation between belonging and life satisfaction (Aditya et al., 2021, 2022). A sense of unity, having a shared perspective, and identifying with a group can cultivate balanced, collective self-worth intertwined with individual self-worth. Cultural surroundings profoundly influence people's self-assessment (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, the majority group may have a significant advantage in belonging. However, this does not imply that minority groups may not benefit from belonging. Previous studies on college students in the greater Jakarta area, where Muslims are the majority and Christians are the minority, found that belonging was significantly correlated with life satisfaction for both Muslims and Christians (Aditya et al., 2021). Belonging benefited both groups for several reasons. The majority feel they are valued community members (RASV), while the minority receives support from their group (RAR).

Majority and minority statuses may influence the relationship between religiosity and self-esteem, as found in a previous study. Studying Muslim Immigrants in the US (Ghaffari & Çiftçi, 2010) found that perceived discrimination as a minority plays an essential role in moderating the effect of religiosity on self-esteem. A high degree of perceived discrimination decreases self-esteem among highly religious individuals. However, a low level of perceived discrimination can increase self-esteem with increasing religiosity because the experience of success through an obstacle may strengthen self-esteem.

## Purpose of the Study

This study aims to build upon previous research in this field by examining Muslim and Christian college students in Indonesia under two conditions: when they are the majority and when they are the minority. We used the Four Basic Dimensions of Religiousness Scale (4-BDRS), which assesses religion's cognitive, affective, social, and moral aspects. Therefore, we can see the correlation between religiousness and self-esteem in Indonesia (a religious country) concerning majority and minority groups and how each dimension of religiousness contributes to self-esteem.

We predicted a positive correlation between religiosity and self-esteem among Christians and Muslims. We also expected differences in self-esteem between Muslim and Christian respondent groups when they were in the majority and minority conditions, as well as differences in the dimensions of religiosity that significantly predict self-esteem.

# Methods

## Participants and Data Collections

Data was collected from college students living in Jabodetabek (Java Island), East Nusa Tenggara, and North Sulawesi using the SurveyMonkey platform. A question about religion was included in the questionnaire as a screening method; only those who identified as Muslim or Christian were analyzed in this study. In Jabodetabek, Muslims are the majority and Christians are the minority. However, in East Nusa Tenggara and North Sulawesi, Muslims are the minority, and Christians are the majority. This study was approved by the Center for Research and Community Development of the Universitas Pelita Harapan, no. 001/LPPM-UPH/I/2024. We got 1149 Muslim and Christian respondents who completed the survey, of whom 363 were excluded because they did not pass the attention test. Therefore, 786 respondents were used for the calculation: 536 from Java (306 Muslims and 230 Christians) and 250 from outside Java (79 Muslims and 171 Christians). The respondents' other characteristics are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents

| Sample Characteristics | | | n | % | Mean (SD) | Minimum | Maximum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | Java Island | | | | 20.85 (5.43) | 17 | 64 |
| | Outside Java Island | | | | 20.00 (1.91) | 17 | 30 |
| Gender | Java Island | Male | 114 | 21.3 | | | |
| | | Female | 422 | 78.7 | | | |
| | Outside Java Island | Male | 64 | 25.6 | | | |
| | | Female | 186 | 74.4 | | | |
| Religion | Java Island | Islam | 306 | 57.1 | | | |
| | | Christian | 230 | 42.9 | | | |
| | Outside Java Island | Islam | 79 | 31.6 | | | |
| | | Christian | 171 | 68.4 | | | |
| Academic study groups | Java Island | Humanities & Social Sciences | 406 | 75.7 | | | |
| | | Natural & Applied Sciences | 79 | 14.7 | | | |
| | | Teacher & Education Study | 51 | 9.5 | | | |
| | Outside Java Island | Humanities & Social Sciences | 115 | 46.0 | | | |
| | | Natural & Applied Sciences | 54 | 21.6 | | | |
| | | Teacher & Education Study | 81 | 32.4 | | | |

## Measures

### The Four Dimensions of Religiousness (4-BDRS)

The Four Dimensions of Religiousness (4-BDRS) (Aditya et al., 2021; Saroglou, 2011) were used to assess religiousness. The 4-BDRS consists of 12 statements, with three for each of the four dimensions: believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging. Participants rated each question on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Examples of the statements include: "I feel attached to religion because it helps me to have a purpose in my life" (believing), "I like religious ceremonies" (bonding), "I am attached to religion for the values and ethics it endorses" (behaving), and "In religion, I enjoy belonging to a group/community" (belonging). The tool's internal reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha scores for each dimension in each group, and ranged between .47-.82 (see listed in Table 2).

### The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to assess self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979). The RSES has ten questions on a 4-point Likert scale (e.g., "I take a positive attitude toward myself"). Using Cronbach's alpha, the internal reliability measured 'ranged between .75-.87 (see in Table 2).

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha of all dimensions for all groups

| Dimensions | Java Island | | | Outside Java Island | | | Total Respondent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Muslims | Christians | Total | Muslims | Christians | Total | |
| Believing | .76 | .67 | .72 | .66 | .66 | .66 | .70 |
| Bonding | .74 | .80 | .77 | .47 | .56 | .54 | .68 |
| Behaving | .82 | .80 | .81 | .75 | .58 | .63 | .78 |
| Belonging | .82 | .78 | .80 | .82 | .76 | .80 | .82 |
| Self-esteem | .85 | .87 | .86 | .80 | .75 | .77 | .84 |

Table 2 shows all dimensions of the 4-BDRS. Self-esteem has good reliability for all respondents both from Java Island and outside Java Island, except for the Bonding of Muslims outside Java Island, which has a Cronbach's alpha of .47. We still used this scale since its reliability for all respondents was acceptable. However, the subscale's results should be interpreted with caution because of the low reliability in one subgroup.

## Statistical Analysis

Several analyses were conducted to test our hypotheses. First, we conducted a descriptive analysis and a correlation test between self-esteem and religiosity. As we had four groups (Muslims in Java, Christians in Java, Muslims outside Java, and Christians outside Java) and five variables (believing, bonding, behavior, belonging, and self-esteem), a two-way ANOVA test was performed to compare the effect of religion and location on each variable in this study. Before conducting a statistical analysis, we ran the normality and homogeneity of variance in each group as shown in Table 3. Because some groups did not meet normality, we then conducted a statistical analysis via the bootstrapping method with the resampling of 5000.

Table 3. Normality and Homogeneity of Variance

| | | Normality | | Homogeneity of Variance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Skewness | Kurtosis | Levene Statistic | Sig. |
| Believing | Muslim in Java | -0.89 | 0.18 | 0.54 | .654 |
| | Muslim outside Java | -1.76 | 3.48 | | |
| | Christian in Java | -0.90 | 0.43 | | |
| | Christian outside Java | -2.43 | 7.81 | | |
| Bonding | Muslim in Java | -0.50 | -0.48 | 2.39 | .067 |
| | Muslim outside Java | -1.02 | 0.16 | | |
| | Christian in Java | -0.74 | -0.06 | | |
| | Christian outside Java | -1.45 | 1.98 | | |
| Behaving | Muslim in Java | -1.27 | 1.74 | 6.68 | < .001 |
| | Muslim outside Java | -2.05 | 3.65 | | |
| | Christian in Java | -1.23 | 2.04 | | |
| | Christian outside Java | -2.05 | 4.45 | | |
| Belonging | Muslim in Java | -1.22 | -0.73 | 2.36 | .070 |
| | Muslim outside Java | -0.97 | 0.56 | | |
| | Christian in Java | -0.62 | -0.02 | | |
| | Christian outside Java | -1.54 | 2.50 | | |
| Self Esteem | Muslim in Java | -0.05 | 0.14 | 3.38 | .018 |
| | Muslim outside Java | 0.40 | 0.66 | | |
| | Christian in Java | -0.21 | 0.35 | | |
| | Christian outside Java | -0.35 | 1.05 | | |

Finally, we performed a multiple regression analysis to determine the contribution of each dimension of religiousness (Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging) to self-esteem for each group (Muslims in Java, Christians in Java, Muslims outside Java, and Christians outside Java).

## Results

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, and Spearman correlations for all the main variables regarding both Muslim and Christian participants in all areas. In general, the analysis results showed positive correlations between the dimensions of religion in Muslim and Christian both in Java and outside Java. The results of the analysis also show a positive correlation between self-esteem and the dimensions of religion, namely Behaving and Belonging, in Muslim and Christian participants both in Java and outside Java. However, Believing and Bonding only have a positive correlation with Muslim and Christian participants in Java.

The results of the two-way ANOVA test demonstrate that no interaction presented between religion (Muslim and Christian) and location (Java and outside Java) ($F(1,782) = 0.22$, $p = .642$, $\eta^2 = .001$) The results of the main effect test showed no difference in self-esteem based on religion ($F(1,782) = 0.59$, $p = .444$, $\eta^2 = .001$) However, there was a difference in self-esteem based on location ($F(1,782) = 10.39$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .013$). The self-esteem of respondents outside Java ($M = 28.41$, $SD = 0.30$) was higher than for respondents from Java ($M = 27.26$, $SD = 0.19$).

Two-way ANOVA results also indicated no interaction between religion and location in any dimension of religion: Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging (see Table 5). The main effect based on religious differences (Muslim and Christian) showed no difference in Believing, Bonding, and Behaving. However, there was difference in Belonging scores based on religion: the Belonging mean score of the Christians ($M = 17.19$, $SD = 3.85$) was higher than those of Muslims ($M = 15.71$, $SD = 3.93$). The main effect based on location differences (Java and outside Java) proved that a difference existed in Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging. For all dimensions of religion, the respondents from outside Java scored higher than the respondents from Java.

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Table 4. Means, standard deviation, and Spearman correlations for Muslim and Christian participants in Java Island (1) and outside Java Island (2).

|  |  | Mean | SD | Range | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Believing | Muslim 1 | 5.96 | 0.96 | 1–7 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Christian 1 | 5.87 | 1.03 | 1–7 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Muslim 2 | 6.32 | 0.94 | 1–7 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Christian 2 | 6.29 | 1.10 | 1–7 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Bonding | Muslim 1 | 5.66 | 1.03 | 1–7 | .53** |  |  |  |  |
|  | Christian 1 | 5.69 | 1.09 | 1–7 | .58** |  |  |  |  |
|  | Muslim 2 | 6.15 | 0.93 | 1–7 | .49** |  |  |  |  |
|  | Christian 2 | 5.99 | 1.10 | 1–7 | .41** |  |  |  |  |
| Behaving | Muslim 1 | 6.14 | 0.91 | 1–7 | .65** | .59** |  |  |  |
|  | Christian 1 | 5.98 | 1.03 | 1–7 | .57** | .61** |  |  |  |
|  | Muslim 2 | 6.54 | 0.77 | 1–7 | .49** | .59** |  |  |  |
|  | Christian 2 | 6.50 | 0.79 | 1–7 | .55** | .42** |  |  |  |
| Belonging | Muslim 1 | 4.90 | 1.26 | 1–7 | .52** | .65** | .55** |  |  |
|  | Christian 1 | 5.29 | 1.27 | 1–7 | .48** | .65** | .56** |  |  |
|  | Muslim 2 | 5.57 | 1.38 | 1–7 | .33** | .51** | .53** |  |  |
|  | Christian 2 | 6.16 | 1.12 | 1–7 | .49** | .45** | .69** |  |  |
| Self-esteem | Muslim 1 | 27.04 | 4.44 | 10–40 | .19** | .17** | .25** | .20** |  |
|  | Christian 1 | 27.48 | 4.86 | 10–40 | .23** | .25** | .21** | .31** |  |
|  | Muslim 2 | 28.35 | 4.10 | 10–40 | .10 | .07 | .26** | .36** |  |
|  | Christian 2 | 28.46 | 3.83 | 10–40 | -.01 | .12 | .22** | .29** |  |

**. The correlation was significant at the level of .01

Table 5. Result of the Two-way ANOVA

| Dependent Variable | Effect | F | p | Eta squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self Esteem | Religion<br>Location<br>Religion*Location | 0.59<br>10.39<br>0.22 | .444<br>.001<br>.642 | .001<br>.013<br>.001 |
| Believing | Religion<br>Location<br>Religion*Location | 0.56<br>22.80<br>0.15 | .455<br>.001<br>.703 | .001<br>.028<br>.001 |
| Bonding | Religion<br>Location<br>Religion*Location | 0.53<br>20.50<br>1.24 | .469<br>.001<br>.266 | .001<br>.026<br>.002 |
| Behaving | Religion<br>Location<br>Religion*Location | 1.89<br>39.58<br>0.66 | .170<br>.001<br>.418 | .002<br>.048<br>.001 |
| Belonging | Religion<br>Location<br>Religion*Location | 24.03<br>58.32<br>0.99 | .001<br>.001<br>.319 | .030<br>.069<br>.001 |

To determine which dimension of the 4-BDRS contributed to self-esteem, we performed a multiple regression analysis in which all dimensions served as independent variables and self-esteem as the dependent variable. Before performing the regression test, we conducted a collinearity diagnostic which produced Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values between 1.346–2.181. A VIF value less than 10 indicates that there is no collinearity problem (Dormann et al., 2013). The results of the collinearity diagnostics confirm that the data was suitable for multiple regression analysis. Table 6 presents the results of the multiple regression with self-esteem as dependent variable.

Table 6. Multiple regression results for Self-Esteem as a dependent variable

|  | Java Island | | | | Outside Java Island | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Muslims ($F$ = 6.61, $p$ < .001 $R^2$ = .08) | | Christians ($F$ = 7.23, $p$ < .001 $R^2$ = .11) | | Muslims ($F$ = 3.78, $p$ = .008 $R^2$ = .17) | | Christians ($F$ = 5.94, $p$ < .001 $R^2$ = .13) | |
|  | β | $p$ | β | $p$ | β | $p$ | β | $p$ |
| Believing | -.048 | .535 | -.025 | .772 | -.013 | .918 | -.243** | .008 |
| Bonding | .000 | .999 | .072 | .462 | -.230 | .110 | .025 | .770 |
| Behaving | .205* | .014 | .007 | .939 | .194 | .183 | .122 | .256 |
| Belonging | .153* | .045 | .294** | .001 | .379** | .005 | .316** | .003 |

β = Standardized Coefficients
**. β was significant at the level of .01
*. β was significant at the level of .05

Table 6 shows that the dimensions of religiousness that significantly contributed to self-esteem differed for Muslim and Christian students and students living in and outside Java. For Muslim students on Java Island, Behaving and Belonging have significant positive contributions to self-esteem, while for Muslims outside of Java Island, it was Belonging. Belonging provides a significant positive contribution to self-esteem for both Christians living on Java Island and outside of Java Island. However, Believing significantly negatively contributes to the self-esteem of Christians living outside of Java Island.

## Discussion

The results showed that religiousness contributed positively to self-esteem. Religious college students, whether Muslims or Christians, tend to have higher self-esteem than less religious students. This result is consistent with those of the previous studies (Abdel-Khalek, 2011; Papazisis et al., 2014). Indonesia is among the most religious countries worldwide (Evans et al., 2023). Therefore, religious people fit into the culture, thus enhancing their self-esteem (Gebauer et al., 2012, 2017).

However, the results of the analysis showed that college students who belonged to a religious majority group (Muslims on Java Island and Christians outside Java Island) did not have a higher self-esteem compared to the religious minority group (Christians on Java Island and Muslims outside Java Island). This result contradicts most previous studies finding that people from minority groups have a lower self-esteem (Benner et al., 2018; Gebauer et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2013). The situation of the majority and minority religious groups in Indonesia may differ from the results of previous studies (Entringer et al., 2023; Every & Perry, 2014; Iqbal et al., 2013). Indonesia is one of the world's most religious countries, and 96% of the population said religion is important (Evans et al., 2023). Despite Muslims making up 87% of the population and Christians comprising almost 7% of the population, Indonesia is not a Muslim country. Still, it is based on Pancasila, which guarantees freedom of religion. Muslims on Java Island, as the majority group, have many advantages, such as the ease of accessing religious facilities and practicing specific religious preferences (e.g., *halal* food and cosmetics).

However, unlike many minority groups outside Indonesia, who usually have lower social and economic status compared to the majority group, Christians on Java have the same or even better economic status compared to Muslims. No statistical data support this claim, but Listiono's (2020) study supports it. Listiono (2020) studied the relationship between religion and economics in Indonesia and found that only Protestants and Hindus were significantly correlated with economic growth. This indicates that Christians do not have a lower economic status than Muslims. The advantages of economic status may buffer the effect of minority status on self-esteem, as people with higher economic status usually have a better self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2002).

Evans et al. (2023) found that most young Christian adults in Indonesia were churchgoers. They may not understand their religion well, but they regularly attend church. This habit may have enabled them to have friends of the same religion and to receive social support. The results of this and previous studies have consistently found that Christian college students have a higher score on Belonging than Muslim college students (Aditya et al., 2022). Previous studies have also found that Belonging is a dimension of religiousness that con-

sistently and significantly contributes to the well-being of Christian college students in Indonesia (Aditya et al., 2022). Harris and Orth (2020) found that good social relationships boost self-esteem. Therefore, Christian college students' sense of Belonging may support their self-esteem. This is consistent with the results of the multiple regression, which found that Belonging was the only dimension of religiousness that significantly correlated with self-esteem for Christian college students both from Java and outside Java.

For Muslim minorities outside Java, several concepts can explain why their self-esteem remains high. The first reason is that Muslim communities have a strong bond with each other, especially since Indonesia has a collectivist culture. Bonding here equals group autonomy that can protect individuals from the harmful effects of discrimination, which fosters positive self-esteem (Greene & Way, 2005; Munas, 2023). The regression analysis results also prove that the Belonging dimension contributes to positive self-esteem for Muslim minorities.

Work ethics related to success can lead to good self-esteem regardless of social attributes, is another argument. The strong work ethic among minorities is attributed to their resilience in coping with stress responses (Kamen et al., 2017). Lacking the privileges enjoyed by the majority, they must develop better mechanisms to handle stress. Additionally, according to the Minority myth model, minorities are expected to uphold high standards of work ethics to meet societal expectations (Yoo et al., 2010). Furthermore, networking among minorities with shared marginalized identities can enhance professional success (Wu et al., 2022).

There were differences in the dimensions of religiousness that significantly correlated with self-esteem for both Muslims and Christians when they belonged to the majority or minority. For Muslims in a majority position, Behaving is significantly correlated with self-esteem. However, Belonging is a significant dimension when individuals hold a minority position. Behaving is one of the primary ways to develop positive feelings toward God (Pieper et al., 2018); and is also a form of worship (Abu-Raiya et al., 2013; Nasution, 2013). When they are in a majority position, Behaving in a religious/moral way may make them feel like good members of society, which can boost their self-esteem (RAPR). However, when they are in a minority position, Belonging is the primary dimension that boosts their self-esteem through the social support they receive from their religious communities (RAR) (Warsah et al., 2019).

This confirms that minority religious communities nurture Belonging as a coping process to obtain social support that boosts self-esteem. However, in majority positions, another religious dimension may be more important for predicting self-esteem. For Muslim students, this was the Behaving dimension.

The results of the multiple regression for Christians outside Java Island found that Believing has a negative correlation with self-esteem. This result is surprising because the Believing dimension is related to meaning in life. People who score high on Believing tend to have a better meaning in life, which can increase their self-esteem. On the other hand, Believing is related to orthodoxy and fundamentalism (Saroglou et al., 2020). People with high Believing may become disappointed when they see that other Christians or their leaders do not live according to their standards. This disappointment may lead to religious and spiritual struggles and lower self-esteem (Grubbs et al., 2016). Perhaps a focus on fundamentalistic Believing (dogmatism) can also be a source of stress. The exact reason for this discrepancy can be explored in a future study.

Another finding of this study is that the self-esteem of both Muslims and Christians outside Java was higher than for those in Java. This is surprising because the people on Java Island are more urbanized. Most previous studies have found that people in urban areas tend to have higher self-esteem than those in rural areas (Yu et al., 2022). A lower socioeconomic status and the lack of resources caused lower self-esteem in rural areas than in urban settings, as well as developing educational gaps.

However, Indonesia's rural areas exhibit different characteristics. Mayuzumi (2023) found that during the COVID-19 crisis, rural people's well-being was higher in rural areas than urban cities. How can the higher self-esteem and well-being in rural communities be explained? A study by Martínez Maldonado et al. (2008) revealed that the consumption of tobacco and alcohol is substantially higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Moreover, tobacco and alcohol consumption were negatively correlated with self-esteem. However, this point only applies to Christians but not to Muslims, who are not allowed to consume alcohol. For Muslims living in more rural areas outside Java, the research by Regev & Nuttman-Shwartz (2016) may explain that rural communities have been shown to cope better with traumatic situations than urban communities. In addition, another study found that depression impacts the quality of life among urban residents but not among rural residents (Chen et al., 2022). These findings seem to indicate that urban life may expose someone to more complex challenges putting pressure on self-esteem than a simpler rural life, and should be studied in future research.

## Strengths and Limitations

One of the main strengths of this study was the respondents' characteristics. Our respondents are Muslim and Christian students from two regions in Indonesia, where one region has a Muslim majority and the other has a Christian majority. This research shows the complexity of the relationship between religion and self-esteem. It is not always the case that the majority religion has a higher self-esteem. Various other factors influence this. Unfortunately, in our research, we did not collect more complex demographic data, so our discussion is also limited. Future research can improve this by collecting more comprehensive socio-economic data.

This study also suggests that minority religious status and rural environment are not necessarily detrimental for self-esteem. Nurturing communities of religious peers and traditional religious values in the rural areas might become valuable resources and support systems for healthy self-esteem. On the other hand, complex urban populations could also develop and benefit from supportive communities and virtuous religious values for their self-esteem and well-being.

The respondents in this study were college students and mostly women. Future studies would benefit from a more balanced sample to facilitate sex-specific analyses and should include adult participants who are more mature, to determine if any differences exist.

## Conclusion, Implications, and Future Directions

This study found that college students, whether Muslims or Christians, a majority or minority, may benefit from religion to boost their self-esteem. However, Christians in areas where they are the majority need to be careful in understanding their religion, as a high level of Believing (cognitive) dimension has been found to be correlated with lower self-esteem. College counselors or chaplains need to help them gain a more mature understanding of their religion to avoid religious and spiritual struggles that can lessen their self-esteem.

Muslim respondents among the majority of Christians in this study were limited, which might have reduced the validity of the study. Future studies should identify ways to recruit more respondents.

In the Christian-majority group, Believing was the only dimension of religiosity that negatively predicted self-esteem. Future studies need to examine this area more deeply to find answers, for example, by exploring other variables such as the Commitment-Reflectivity Circumplex to assess the respondents' religious orientation, religious attachment, denomination, and socioeconomic status.

The results of this study support the perspective of religiosity-as-social values (RASV) (Gebauer et al., 2012, 2017). As Indonesia is one of the most religious countries in the world, where religiosity holds a significant value. Hence, religious individuals feel good about themselves, which in turn increases their self-esteem. However, unlike in other countries, religious minorities in Indonesia also receive the benefit of religiosity, even though some differences exist in how the dimension of religiosity contributes to their self-esteem.

### Author contribution
Yonathan ADITYA: conceptualization, design, methodology, funding acquisition, investigation, project administration, data management, formal analyses, interpretation, supervision, writing original draft, writing review and editing.
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### Declaration of interest statement
The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

### Ethical statement
This manuscript is the authors' original work.

All participants engaged in the research voluntarily and anonymously.

Their data are stored in coded materials and databases without personal data.

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Center for Research and Community Development of the Universitas Pelita Harapan, 001/LPPM-UPH/I/2024.

### Data availability statement

Datasets of this study are available at here: https://osf.io/u6yxe/ (with an OSF or ORCID account).

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