



Cultural Approach Based on *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in Horizontal Conflict Resolution

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Article Info:

Abstract

Keywords:

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Conflict resolution, Cultural approach, Horizontal conflict, Social harmony

Purpose: This study aims to analyse the characteristics of horizontal conflict in Indonesia and evaluate the significance of a cultural approach based on *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) for conflict resolution. It also examines the contribution of this cultural approach to more effective, sustainable conflict resolution strategies, aligned with the *Asta Gatra* framework as a pillar of national resilience.

Article History:

Received : 10-9-2025

Revised : 25-9-2025

Accepted : 30-12-2025

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: This study uses an interpretivist-phenomenological philosophy with an empirical-inductive method and an archival study strategy to identify patterns of culture-based conflict resolution in various regions of Indonesia. The data was obtained through a literature review, document analysis, and then analysed reductively to ensure links with the sociocultural, ideological, and security dimensions of *Asta Gatra*.

Article DOI :

10.55960/jlri.v13i4.1155

Findings: The results indicate that a cultural approach based on *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) has significant potential to reduce horizontal conflict and strengthen social cohesion. However, implementation limitations due to a lack of integration with policy, development, and the legal system require collaboration between the government, Indigenous communities, and legal institutions as a key to national stability.

Originality/Value: This research offers a new perspective by emphasising the role of culture in resolving horizontal conflicts a previously overlooked area of national policy. In addition to its theoretical contribution, this research presents relevant practical policy directions, including the integration of multicultural education, equitable development in conflict-prone areas, and equitable law enforcement to strengthen national resilience.

How to cite : Bahuri, F., Surono, A., Hamid, A., Irwansyah, I. (2025). Cultural Approach Based on *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in Horizontal Conflict Resolution. *Jurnal Lemhannas RI*, 13 (4), 472-486.

<https://doi.org/10.55960/jlri.v13i4.1155>



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INTRODUCTION

Ethnically and religiously diverse countries generally face significant challenges in managing horizontal conflicts, which often lead to violence. Indonesia, with a population of 278.7 million, is highly ethnically, religiously, racially, and socially diverse (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Diversity within societies frequently coexists with horizontal, a major catalyst for social conflict, particularly in cultural contexts (Stewart, 2016). According to sociological conflict theory, social tensions arise from the unequal distribution of resources, from economic, political, and sociocultural standpoints (Cosser, 2012; Dahrendorf, 2006).

Colonial history traditionally contributed to Indonesia's horizontal inequality by dividing and ruling, as well as by weakening social relations among groups (Brown, 2005). The gap between the two groups has been maintained after independence, especially during the period of new order, as economic progress oriented to industry and urbanisation increased social disparities (Booth, 2000; Smith et al., 2002). Post-Reformasi, the major fighting in West Papua, East Timor, and Aceh is also symptomatic of the continuing legacy of unresolved root causes related to social justice and resource management (Varshney et al, 2004). Empirical evidence shows that conflict not only causes loss of life and mass displacement but also has a significant impact on the economy. Studies by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Weinstein and Imai (2000) revealed that countries affected by conflict experienced an average decline in GDP per capita of 2.00-2.40%. This phenomenon shows that horizontal conflict not only affects the sociocultural dimension by disintegrating society but also weakens the ideological dimension due to the reduced acceptance of Pancasila as a unifying principle and impacts the security dimension due to threats to national stability.

In Indonesia, conflict management is dealt with through by regulations exemplified by Law No. 7/2012; Emergency Law No. 12/1951; and Articles 351, 352, and 406 of the 2023 Criminal Code (Baharudin, 2022). However, challenges in early detection and a reactive approach make these management efforts less effective in terms of community empowerment and institutional coordination (Kasim & Nurdin, 2015).

Indonesia's multi-ethnic, cultural, and religious regions still experience various horizontal conflicts, such as inter-community clashes, inter-village disputes, radicalism, terrorism, violence, and bullying. Ethnic misunderstandings and competing interests between groups often trigger these horizontal conflicts by ignoring historical, social, and cultural aspects (Ferdian, 2018; Sutianti, 2020). Furthermore, overlapping living spaces in multicultural environments, coupled with freedom of expression in the information age, also threaten commitment to social cohesion and increase the potential for violence, particularly when individuals or groups feel marginalised or misrepresented in public discourse (Suppiah et al., 2019).

Ethnic tensions have a tendency to produce violent events, either in the form of physical violence or material damage from vandalism, burglary, or arson (Salehuddin, 2016). For instance, the arson in Mareje Village, West Nusa Tenggara, was the result of a prior dispute that occurred before Takbiran, and Mahsun (2014) noted a long-standing clash between the Sasak, Samawa, and Mbojo. Socioculturally, tensions of a religious

nature (between the Muslim majority and Hindu minority) are a significant factor. In addition, customary practices exemplified by traditional funeral rites (ngaben) that involve consumption of alcoholic drinks and gambling, have raised tensions with the Muslim majority, continuing the conflict (Ardiansyah, 2010; Indrawan et al., 2021).

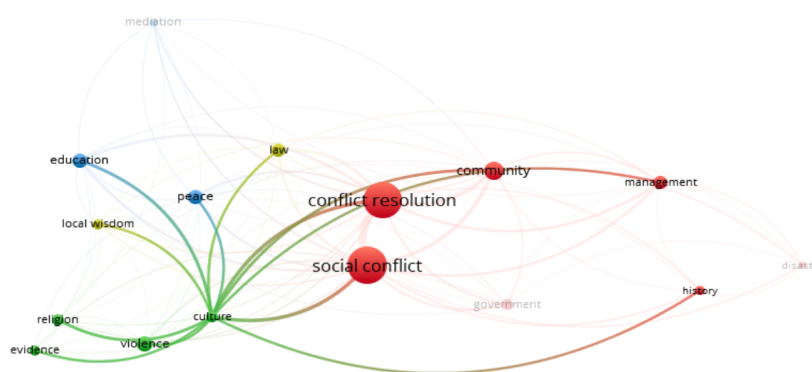
In extreme cases, horizontal conflict in Indonesia has escalated into radicalism and terrorism (Azis et al., 2021). Various hardline religious groups have repeatedly attempted to change the existing government and legal systems. During President Jokowi's administration in 2014, an initiative that emerged was the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) (Herdiansah et al., 2017). The FPI is known for its reinterpretation of *Pancasila* (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2023), acts of violence against Muslim minority groups for example, Ahmadiyah and Shia (Day & Edwards, 2020), and violence against Muslim minority groups including the Ahmadiyah and Shia (Quisay, 2021). Another example of a radical Islamic group is Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which openly advocates for a caliphate and opposes *Pancasila* and the Nusantara concept. HTI aims to transform Indonesia into a state governed entirely by Islamic law (Dulkiah et al., 2023; Mujani et al., 2023; Rohayana et al., 2020).

One of the longest horizontal conflicts in Indonesia is between the government and the Free Papua Movement (OPM), which has endured since 1965 (Hadi, 2016; Sefriani, 2003; Sugandi, 2008; Sugiyanto, 2017). The OPM uses armed struggles, demonstrations, and international lobbying to struggle for its independence, while the government of Indonesia remains committed to keeping Papua within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Dharmawan, 2007).

To anticipate the diversity inherent in Indonesia, the founding fathers agreed to make *Pancasila*, with its motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*", the foundation of the state (Arifin et al., 2018). The concept emphasises that tolerance, justice, and cooperation can sustain unity, despite the diverse background of Indonesian society (Pertwi & Dewi, 2021). National resilience reflects the dynamic nature of a nation that is characterised by its ability to be resilient and adaptable in responding to threats, challenges, obstacles, and disturbances (ATHG) from both within and outside the country, covering all aspects of life, including ideology, politics, economics, socio-culture, security protection, geography, demography, and natural resources, in order to maintain integrity, ensure the sustainability of life, and preserve identity while achieving national goals. Several contemporary empirical studies have translated these principles into measurable social and institutional responses during periods of conflict and uncertainty (Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2023; Suryohadiprojo, S. 1997; Kutsenko, 2025). Consequently, the prevention of diverse conflicts is a collective obligation of both the Indonesian populace and the government (Binawan & Najicha, 2023). Thus, recurring horizontal conflicts test socio-cultural resilience and demand the strengthening of national security ideology and systems to remain in line with the Asta Gatra framework, which is the foundation of Indonesia's national resilience.

Horizontal conflicts in Indonesia suggest an ongoing need to optimise cultural diversity management. Increasing horizontal inequality, coupled with radicalisation and intolerance, risks deepening social polarisation and weakening national resilience (Benu

et al., 2025). A bibliometric analysis of publications and research related to conflict resolution in Indonesia (Figure 1) shows that cultural aspects have been widely studied, covering topics including local wisdom, religion, law, and education. However, limited research specifically links cultural aspects to the value of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the foundation of the state, in maintaining unity amidst diversity. However, existing studies on conflict resolution in Indonesia tend to discuss local wisdom, legal mechanisms, religious moderation, or multicultural education separately. Limited attention has been given to how *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* can be formulated as a cultural framework for horizontal conflict resolution and linked systematically to the Asta Gatra framework of national resilience. Therefore, this study aims to examine in more depth the application of a cultural approach based on *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in conflict resolution to strengthen national resilience.



Source: Data processed by the author (2025)

Figure 1. Network visualization of bibliometric analysis of conflict resolution in Indonesia

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grand Theory

The theories that form the basis of this study are classical and modern conflict theory, based on the works of Ralf Dahrendorf (2006) and Lewis A. Coser (Coser, 2012).

Building on contemporary conflict theories, Ralf Dahrendorf perceives conflict as intrinsic to social structure, since social order is created by legitimate power relations and authority instead of value consensus (Dahrendorf 2006). Power allows for the maintenance of social norms and roles while at the same time generating competing interests from the powerful and less powerful. These interests develop as unconscious, i.e., the actual and objective interests that relate to an individual's or group's social position in the power structure of society but are not seen, declared, or defended. Under optimal organisational, political, and social conditions, potential interests create manifest conflicts. This dynamic operates as a fundamental mechanism shaping social relations through transformation in personnel, forms of authority and power relations internal to societal organisations.

The second theoretical perspective emphasises that, according to Lewis A. Coser (2012), conflict from the classic perspective encompasses drama, fighting, and clashes; however, it also serves an integrative function for the ongoing effectiveness of society. In addition, it seems that tension and dissatisfaction among members are best handled through conflict, which strengthens internal group ties, categorises its own social identity, and provides formalised institutions through which recurring discontent can be safely channelled out. In this wise, conflict facilitates adaptations to societal norms, roles and institutions that are no longer adapted to societal dynamics, re-establishing a new social equilibrium whilst preserving the sustainable adaptability of the social system.

The Concept of a Cultural Approach to Conflict Resolution

Culture, derived from the Greek word 'culere', reflects humans' evolution as both food producers and guardians of values, norms, customs, and codes that define social groups and create shared consciousness (Hofstede, 1980; Mulyana, 2004). Furthermore, the understanding of culture today extends to all aspects of human life, including local wisdom passed down from generation to generation (Setiyawan, 2012). The Indonesian government, through Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 39 of 2007, defines regional culture as a value system believed to be able to meet the needs of local communities. Local cultural elements including belief systems, language, art, and traditional technology have proven effective in conveying messages of peace, maintaining social stability, and building harmony within communities (Ismail & Muhaimin, 2011; Rachmawati, 2017). Therefore, the integration of local cultural values in conflict resolution not only is important for maintaining social cohesion but also becomes a key instrument in dealing with horizontal conflicts in Indonesia, which are often rooted in social identity issues, radicalisation, and communalism (Coser, 2012; Dharmawan, 2007). This cultural approach directly strengthens the sociocultural dimension and emphasises the ideological dimension by reinforcing the value of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.

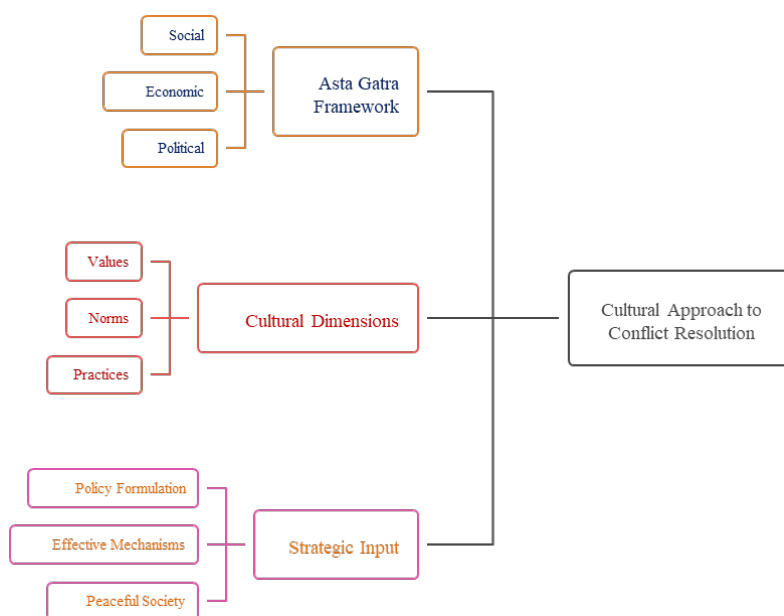
National Values

The national values embodied in *Pancasila* reflect the universal principles of culture and the nation's ideals (Apriliani et al., 2023; Pertiwi & Dewi, 2021). These values constitute a strategic determinant in social harmony and national integration through tolerance, justice, and cooperation (Steviani, 2020). Their implementation is normative while remaining central to tackling social, political, and economic challenges and building national resilience (Pramono & Idris, 2022). Instilling these values early in school is crucial to instilling tolerance, courtesy, justice, and respect for diversity in the younger generation (Utami et al., 2023). Accordingly, these values are like "a magic bullet", preventing social instability and boosting the nation's resources to withstand hardship and construct a peaceful, secure and harmonious society. Based on *Asta Gatra*, those national values become the backbone for confronting the breakdown challenges and correlate between the ideological dimension, the sociocultural dimension, and the

security dimension. Secondly, the practice of these values has immediate policy relevance, especially in multicultural education, fair development, and law enforcement, which enhances national resilience.

METHODS

This study examines cultural approaches to conflict resolution in Indonesia through qualitative methods grounded in interpretivism-phenomenology and archival studies. The analysis adopts a literature review to examine relevant academic concepts, perspectives, and views, drawing on the conceptual framework of Husnullail et al. (2024). Based on this approach, a conceptual model is developed to explain the relationship between cultural dimensions and national values within the *Asta Gatra* framework, followed by the formulation of strategic input for national policy. The conceptual model is presented visually in Figure 2 to clarify the relationships between the analysed components.



Source: Data processed by the author (2025)

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Culture-Based Conflict Resolution in the Asta Gatra Framework

The interpretivist-phenomenological orientation was used to understand horizontal conflict as a social phenomenon shaped by meaning, identity, collective memory, cultural values, and intergroup relations within Indonesia's multicultural society. In this study, phenomenology is applied as an interpretative orientation to examine how horizontal conflict and culture-based resolution are represented in academic literature, legal instruments, policy documents, and previous empirical studies. This orientation enables the study to examine horizontal conflict not only as a legal or security problem, but also as a socio-cultural issue related to intolerance, discrimination, identity-based tension, radicalisation, inequality, and weak social cohesion.

The archival study strategy was conducted by examining secondary sources, including scholarly publications, official government documents, legal regulations, institutional reports, and previous studies related to horizontal conflict, cultural diversity, local wisdom, Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and national resilience. The documents were selected purposively based on their relevance to three main analytical focuses. The purposive selection of documents was used to ensure that the sources analysed were directly relevant to the research focus, theoretical framework, and conceptual development of the study (Saunders et al., 2015). The first focus concerns the challenges of intolerance and discrimination in Indonesia's multicultural society. The second focus concerns the role of cultural values, particularly Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, as a foundation for culture-based horizontal conflict resolution. The third focus concerns the need for inclusive and equitable policies to support cultural approaches through multicultural education, fair development, legal certainty, and social justice.

The data analysis was carried out through a qualitative-reductive process. The selected materials were read, classified, compared, and interpreted according to recurring themes found in the literature and documents. In the first stage, the analysis identified the main characteristics and causes of horizontal conflict, including intolerance, discrimination, communal tension, radicalisation, identity-based exclusion, and socio-economic inequality. In the second stage, the analysis classified cultural elements relevant to conflict resolution, including values, norms, local wisdom, dialogue, respect for diversity, and collective identity. In the third stage, these cultural elements were interpreted in relation to Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and positioned within the Asta Gatra framework as a basis for strengthening national resilience.

The Asta Gatra framework was used as the main analytical lens to connect culture-based conflict resolution with the broader dimensions of national resilience. Within this framework, the analysis considers the relationship between the ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural, and defence-security dimensions. The ideological dimension is reflected in the internalisation of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as unifying national values. The socio-cultural dimension is reflected in the role of local wisdom, dialogue, tolerance, and communal practices in reducing social tension. The economic and political dimensions are reflected in the need for equitable development, inclusive policy, and fair governance in conflict-prone areas. Meanwhile, the defence and security dimension is reflected in the prevention of horizontal conflict from escalating into broader threats to national stability.

To maintain the trustworthiness of the analysis, this study applied source triangulation by comparing academic literature, legal documents, policy sources, and empirical conflict studies. The validity of interpretation was strengthened by ensuring consistency between the research focus, theoretical framework, selected documents, and the conceptual model developed in the study. The analysis also followed the principle of data reduction as described by Husnullail et al. (2024), in which only data directly relevant to culture-based horizontal conflict resolution were retained and interpreted. This process ensured that the discussion remained focused on the relationship between cultural values, conflict resolution, inclusive policy, and national resilience.

The methodological limitation of this study lies in its reliance on secondary and archival data. As the study does not employ field interviews, surveys, or direct observation, its findings are conceptual and interpretative rather than statistical or field-based. Nevertheless, this approach is appropriate for developing a policy-oriented conceptual model that explains how *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* can be positioned as a cultural foundation for resolving horizontal conflict and strengthening national resilience within the *Asta Gatra* framework.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework for culture-based conflict resolution within the *Asta Gatra* framework. The conceptual framework identifies cultural dimensions, including values, norms, and practices, as pivotal factors affecting the conflict resolution process. These cultural dimensions interact dynamically with social, economic, and political elements within *Asta Gatra* to shape the direction and character of conflict resolution. This interaction generates strategic input in the form of more inclusive policy formulation, strengthening effective conflict resolution mechanisms, and establishing a peaceful and just society as a foundation for strengthening national resilience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Challenges of Intolerance and Discrimination in a Multicultural Society

Horizontal conflicts stemming from intolerance in Indonesia often arise from unequal distribution of resources, power, and status within society. Intolerance often manifests itself in discrimination, social exclusion, and violence (Nurhakim et al., 2024). In Indonesia, intolerance has persisted for generations. One major manifestation is the obstruction of the establishment of houses of worship for minority groups, which violates Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning human rights. Conflicts caused by intolerance are often rooted in injustice or feelings of marginalisation (Coser, 2012; Dharmawan, 2007). When one group feels disadvantaged, disappointment and dissatisfaction can escalate into broader conflict. This phenomenon not only reflects the vulnerability of the sociocultural dimension but also indicates a weakening of the ideological dimension, which is caused by decreased internalisation of *Pancasila* values. Additionally, it has implications for the security dimension, as the potential for conflict can develop into a threat of national disintegration.

Discrimination and violence between indigenous or cultural groups are also ongoing problems in Indonesia. History shows that customs can strengthen brotherhood, but they can also trigger conflict due to differences in doctrine and group identity. Setiadarma (2023) identified several key factors that trigger culturally based social tensions. First, doctrinal differences often trigger conflict because each group considers its beliefs to be the most correct, thus giving rise to suspicion and damaging social relations. Second, negative stereotypes, competing identities, and a lack of communication, combined with a history of conflict and power struggles, deepen the divide. Third, excessive fanaticism fuels discrimination and social conflict when one group perceives another as a threat. When this fanaticism is combined with differences in

customs and religious traditions, tensions become increasingly difficult to mitigate. Social tensions that arise in a society do not always end in disintegration but can instead give rise to a new equilibrium, a condition where conflicting groups reorganise social relations, align interests, and reach more stable common ground. Coser (2012) and Dahrendorf (2006) view the new equilibrium as an adaptive mechanism that allows society to update social norms and structures to align with different dynamics. Based on the foundation of updating social norms and structures, conflict resolution through a culture-based approach not only maintains social harmony but also strengthens national resilience through the synergy of the sociocultural, ideological, and security dimensions of *Gatra*.

As a Foundation for a Cultural Approach to Conflict Resolution

Several studies on conflict resolution in Indonesia indicate that with a cultural approach, understanding each other and highlighting the subtle value of respect and inclusivity is easier. Communities are socialised with the cultural, locally derived practices that are consistent with group identity (Avruch, 2022; Lederach, 2020). In addition, cultural analysis does not only focus on structural, or material factors and includes emotive or relational factors between the players that also make the solutions more comprehensive (LeBaron & Pillay, 2006). Lederach (2020) also insists that approach is so appealing to communities because the solutions that are provided are based in their traditions. The *Asta Gatra* view shows that including a policy is not only able to bolster this sociocultural dimension but also the defence dimension, keeping identity conflicts from transforming into national threats

A cultural perspective underscores the value of 'unity with diversity' (Riyadi et al., 2024). As a code of life for a country, its implementation in education and intercultural dialogue might induce a more tolerant generation of people (Pertiwi & Dewi, 2021). Managing diversity and preventing identity and religion-based conflicts requires dialogue that fosters common ground, strengthens national roots, and fosters harmony and mutual respect for differences.

Religious values, beliefs, and norms, as well as local wisdom, continue to evolve in line with humanity's search for truth (Banunaek & Saingo, 2024), which can lead to both conflict and cooperation among different communities. Therefore, in building social harmony, dialogue allows each group to express its identity while respecting other groups (Santiawan & Warta, 2021). Intercultural knowledge exchange is crucial for meaningful conversations, not just formalities, as it enables participants to understand diverse perspectives and fosters empathy among different cultural groups. Therefore, cultural and community leaders play a strategic role in fostering dialogue as a form of interaction and cooperation (Sihalahi, 2020), which can help bridge cultural divides and promote mutual respect among diverse groups. Dialogue that's about openness and listening for understanding and what connects us could make us more tolerant. This has been successful in averting strife over sociocultural and religious distinctions. In the face of challenges of globalisation and the plurality of problems, dialogue is a major device in fostering the country's value and the sustainability of social life (Karmawan & Haromaini, 2024).

At the macro level, the resilience of a nation-state largely depends on the extent to which its society can navigate diversity through an inclusive strategy (Rumahuru, 2019). An approach grounded in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) would decrease the risk of radicalisation and social separation, both of which are sources of weakness for national resilience (Muhamad et al., 2021). Hence, to ensure national stability and cohesion, we should promote the inculcation of national values through education, inclusive policies, and active community engagement. Not only academically, the cultural approach also has a strategic impact on national policies to revitalise *Asta Gatra*, especially ideologically and in terms of security.

Cultural Approaches Must Be Supported by Inclusive and Equitable Policies

While cultural solutions do create social cohesion, they have the disadvantage of being time and resource-intensive (Avruch, 2015). If cultural solutions are rushed, they may obscure rather than clarify (House et al., 2014), perpetuate the cultural relativism that marginalises minority perspectives (Donnelly, 2017; Taylor, 1994), and allow stereotypes to undermine our consideration of individual differences (Bercovitch et al., 2009), ultimately leading to misunderstandings and conflicts within diverse communities. Consequently, this approach is less effective in societies with extreme diversity or without a shared cultural framework (Avruch, 2015). Furthermore, an excessive focus on culture risks overlooking other important factors, e.g. economic inequality and political imbalance, which are often at the root of conflict (Causadias et al., 2018).

Therefore, inclusive and equitable policies must also support the implementation of conflict resolution (Steven & Purba, 2024). The government constitutes a factor in ensuring equal rights for all citizens and preventing discrimination. Strategies based on social justice, economic prosperity, and the protection of human rights are key to maintaining national unity and resilience. Equitable development in conflict-prone areas helps reduce inequality and social tension, creates a sense of justice, and strengthens national unity (Rohmah, 2023). Furthermore, fair legal certainty can also prevent conflict before it escalates into a serious threat (Dworkin, 2013; Rawls, 2016). This study also provides direction for public policy to strengthen multicultural education and intercultural dialogue spaces for conflict prevention. At this point, the relevance of *Asta Gatra* can be demonstrated more concretely, because inclusive policies not only touch on the sociocultural and ideological dimensions but also strengthen the economic and security dimensions as the foundation of national resilience.

In the era of globalisation, where the flow of foreign information and ideologies is increasingly rapid in Indonesia, applying values also serves as a bulwark against influences that could trigger national disintegration (Susmayati et al., 2023). We must strengthen multicultural education, which teaches the importance of tolerance and respect for diversity, both in the formal education curriculum and in social life. This education helps individuals understand and appreciate diversity, while social justice-based policies ensure equal access to education, health care, and economic resources for all. This approach instills inclusive attitudes in individuals from an early age, thereby reducing social tensions. The implication is that public policies designed to integrate multicultural

education, equitable development, and fair law enforcement will become national resilience policy instruments that are in line with *Asta Gatra*.

CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to show that quite apparent horizontal conflicts in Indonesia are generally attributable to unsettled social and cultural disparities that have been poorly accommodated in policy and institutions. Culture-based conflict prevention developed through *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (the belief in Unity in Diversity) must continue to include significant elements of social binding and enable collective consciousness. Cultural values included in conflict resolution efforts can certainly improve the nation's resilience, particularly in ideology, socioculture, and security within the *Asta Gatra* framework. These findings confirm that the cultural approach is appropriate as a strategic mechanism for building sustainable conflict management while maintaining national stability.

A major limitation lies in the unmeasured long-term impact of the cultural approach on sustainable peace at the national level. Further studies need to adopt a longitudinal and comparative approach in conflict-prone areas and link factors of economic inequality and the distribution of political power to deepen understanding of conflict dynamics. From a policy point of view, the government needs to strengthen inclusive rules, push for fair regional development to improve the economy, and make sure that the law is enforced fairly in the political and security areas of national resilience. In addition, incorporating multicultural education into the national curriculum needs to be prioritised in order to instill the value of tolerance, strengthen ideological resilience, and prepare future generations to respond to evolving national challenges.

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