

Fostering Tolerant Religious Education to Prevent Violent  
Extremism in Indonesia – **CONVEY Indonesia**

# Policy Brief Series

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This Policy Brief series is published as part of CONVEYIndonesia project organized by PPIMUIN Jakarta and UNDPIndonesia.

CONVEY Indonesia aims to build peace in Indonesia and to prevent violent extremism and radicalism through a series of research-survey, policy advocacy, and public interaction based on the potential of religious education. CONVEY Indonesia project covers on the issues of tolerance, diversity, and non-violence among youth.

## **Capacity of Religious Teachers Counselors as Key to Peace Building in Indonesia PUSAD PARAMADINA**

## Executive Summary

*Penyuluh agama*, or religious teachers or counselors, in Indonesia constitute a strategic social capital that can help foster harmony and curb the development of radicalism and violent extremism. Close to the community with ubiquity down to the village level, they occupy a strategic position in the community. Thus, it should not come as a surprise when the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA) c.q. Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance issued a Decree No. 298 in 2017, which regulates eight specializations for non-PNS/private Islamic Education (PAI) teachers. Among these specializations are those focusing on Religious Harmony, Radicalism, and Splinter groups.

From September to December 2018, Center for the Study of Religion and Democracy (PUSAD) and Paramadina Foundation, in collaboration with Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Jakarta and Convey Indonesia, and with support from the Directorate General for Islamic Community Guidance of MRA, held

workshops in 9 provinces of Indonesia on the theme of “Religion, Harmony, and Peace Building in Indonesia.” Observations, interviews, discussions, and small surveys in between the workshops were also conducted. From these activities we have come up with a few important findings as follows. *Firstly*, the non-PNS or private PAI specialization system has not run optimally. The allocation and distribution of PAI teachers are still based on villages or districts, rather than on specialization. *Secondly*, there is a strong demand for counselors/PAI teachers to be able to respond further to various problems happening in society. This demand, unfortunately, has not been matched with adequate upgrade in knowledge and skills. *Thirdly*, the level of understanding of religious counselors/teachers on tolerance and harmony does vary. Some of them are in favor of majoritarianism, believing that the state should privilege the majority, which is inconducive to any effort to foster harmony. *Fourthly*, the current incentives, facilities and resources provided to most religious counselors are *not* commensurate with the challenges that they face.

### Recommendations to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic Of Indonesia

01

Develop a monitoring and evaluation system to measure the capacity of religious counselors/teachers as a strategy to establish a non-PNS PAI initialization system.

02

Increase the knowledge and skills of religious counselors/teachers with specialty in religious harmony and radicalism.

03

Increase meeting space for religious counsellors/teachers with different backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities.

04

Improve operational benefits, facilities, and system that is women-friendly so that religious counselors/teachers can focus on their duties and functions.

## Introduction

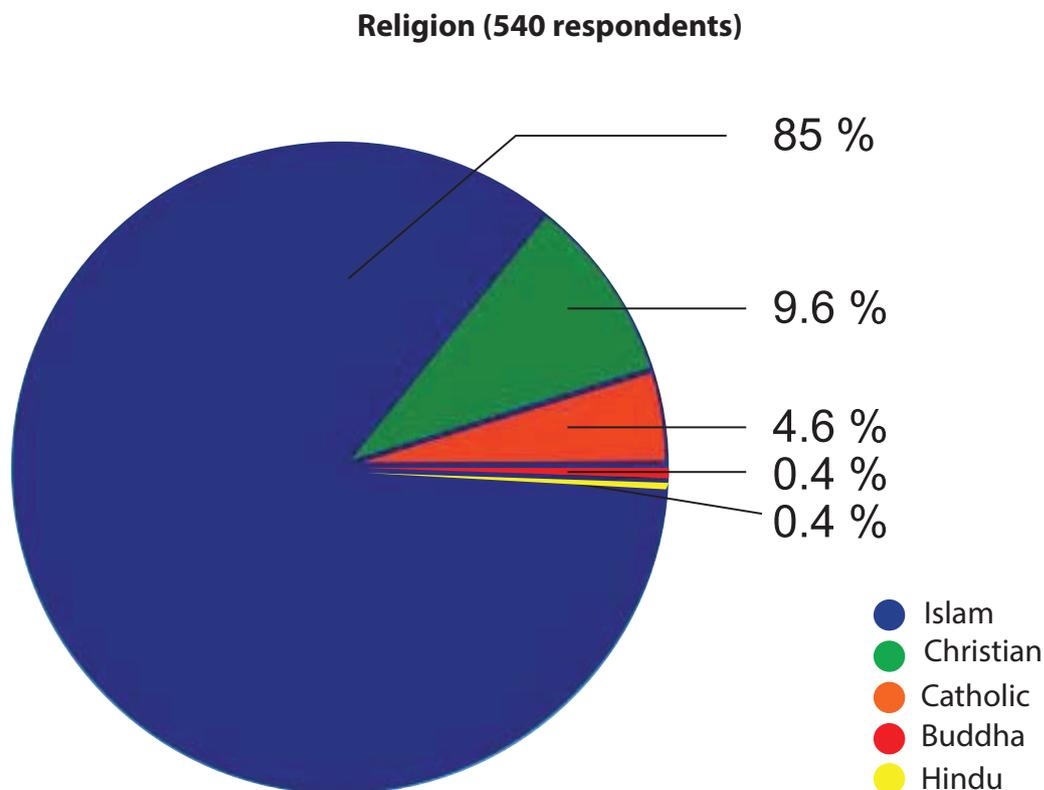
After 20 years of *Reformasi*, Indonesia's achievement in consolidating democracy is something to be proud of. The transfer of power has been carried out in a constitutional manner. A strong civil society, and freedom of the press are signs of a well-functioning democratic system.

Yet the quality of our democracy still needs to improve. Its undermining challenges include ongoing conflicts (both intra-religious and interreligious) among believers, which reflect low-quality democracy. Among the potential actors who can play a strategic role in responding to such problems are religious counselors/teachers. By virtue of the Decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs No. 79 of 1985, these agents are tasked with developing mental and moral values in the community and with promoting improvement of the quality of life in various aspects, including religion and national development.

Of the total number of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers/lecturers available in 2018, 5,170 of them were PNS (civil servants) and 41,947 were non-civil servants. They were assigned to sub-district Offices of Religious Affairs (KUA) at a ratio of PNS per eight non-PNS civil servants per sub-district. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is committed to maximizing the potential of religious teachers as community spearheads, particularly in matters pertaining to the preservation of religious harmony. The commitment can be seen in the Decree of the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance (*Bimas Islam*) through Decision No. 298 of 2017, which classifies non-PNS PAI teachers into eight specialties including those on Religious Harmony, Anti-Radicalism and Splinter Groups.

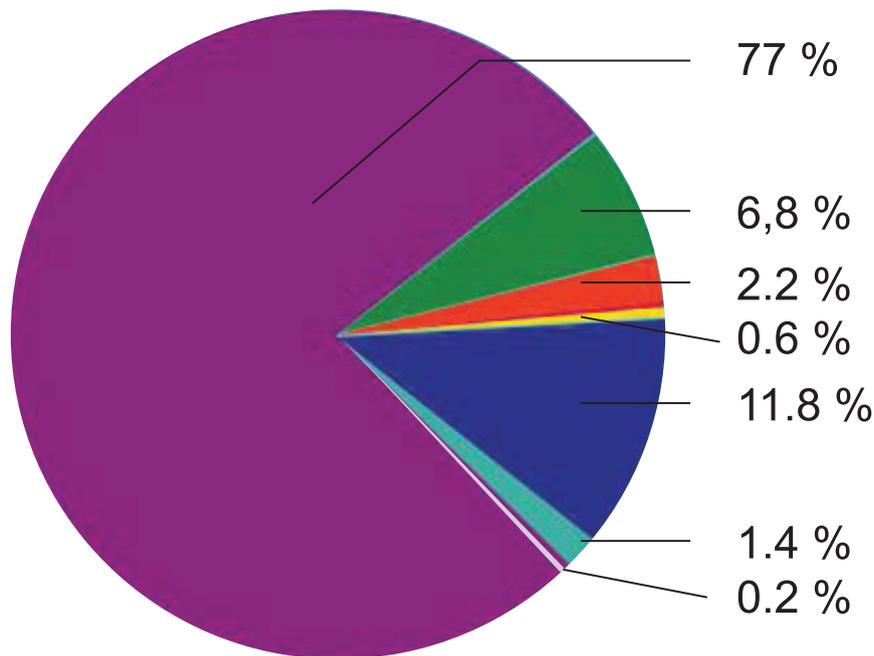
## Approach and Method

In collaboration with Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Convey Indonesia, and supported by the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance of MORA, PUSAD Paramadina



Demographic diagram on survey respondents

### Latest Education (540 respondents)



Demographic diagram of survey respondents

organized workshops in nine provinces of Indonesia (Aceh, Banten, West Java, Central Java, Central Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara, West Nusa Tenggara, East, and Maluku). The workshops took place from October through December of 2016 and were run by 10 instructors and were attended by 540 religion teachers.

In between the workshops, we conducted observations, interviews and small surveys to see the perceptions and experiences of the teachers. The survey was conducted on 540 PAI teachers to find out their perception of the relationship between religion and the state. Meanwhile, interviews were carried out to three to four teachers from in each province to explore the lives and challenges they felt when they were in the midst of the community. The workshop and survey participants included 50.8% PNS and 48.2% non-PNS teachers. They are inter-religious teachers/counselors, including Hindus and Buddhists. The percentage of Islamic counselors, at 85%, is the highest. The age range of respondents is 24-59 years with an average of 41 years. While most of the participants were males (56%), most of the counselors had S1 degrees, in accordance to the regulation by the MORA on the recruitment requirements.

## Findings: Four Main Issues

The *first* issue concerns the effectiveness of non-PNS PAI specialty. Logically, non-PNS PAI teachers can provide material resources in line with their specialty for the sub-district (*kecamatan*) in which they are assigned. In reality, their work units are based on region, instead of specialty. As such, non-PNS PAI teachers need to master more than one topic and be able to simultaneously adjust to actual needs in the field--and not the other way around. *Second*, specialization is not followed up with improvement in knowledge and skills that can support their work. Some counselors admitted they often found it hard to deal with issues such as hoax and hate speech. They had to find information from popular sources and online media. According to the guideline, non-PNS counselors specializing in religious harmony are provided with relevant materials, such as a compilation of MUI Fatwas on religious harmony, Law No.1/PNPS of 1965, Joint Decrees by MORA and Ministry of Domestic Affairs Nos. 8 and 9 of 2006. Several studies have shown, however, that these are controversial regulations related to religious harmony preservation in Indonesia.

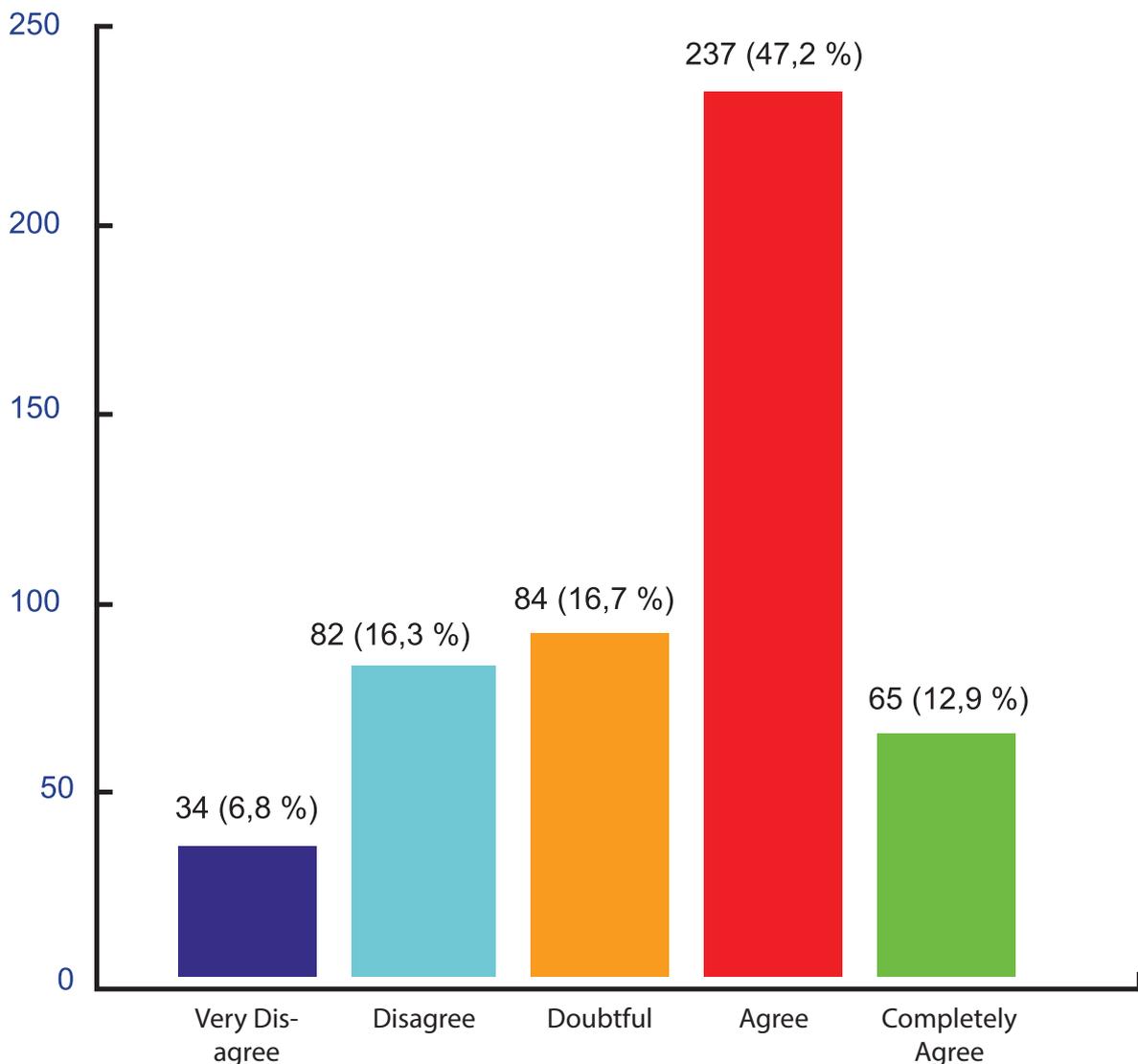
*Third*, while society seems to become increasingly polarized nowadays, religious counselors seem to lack knowledge and skills on how to cope with it. Among the most pertinent issue the counselors had to deal with was community polarization due to political choices, especially after the Jakarta elections in 2017. The situation was aggravated by widespread hoaxes that sharpened the narratives of hatred among groups.

In regions dominated by certain religious majorities, such as by Muslims in Aceh or by Christianity in Kupang, intra-religious conflicts abounded. A difference in schools of thoughts on

how to worship, for instance, could be enough reason to cause tensions among Muslims of different streams. Anti-Ahmadiyya and anti-Shia discourses also prevailed. Also as concerning was the presence of some exclusive groups judging certain practices in society as incompatible with Islamic teachings (*bid'ah*).

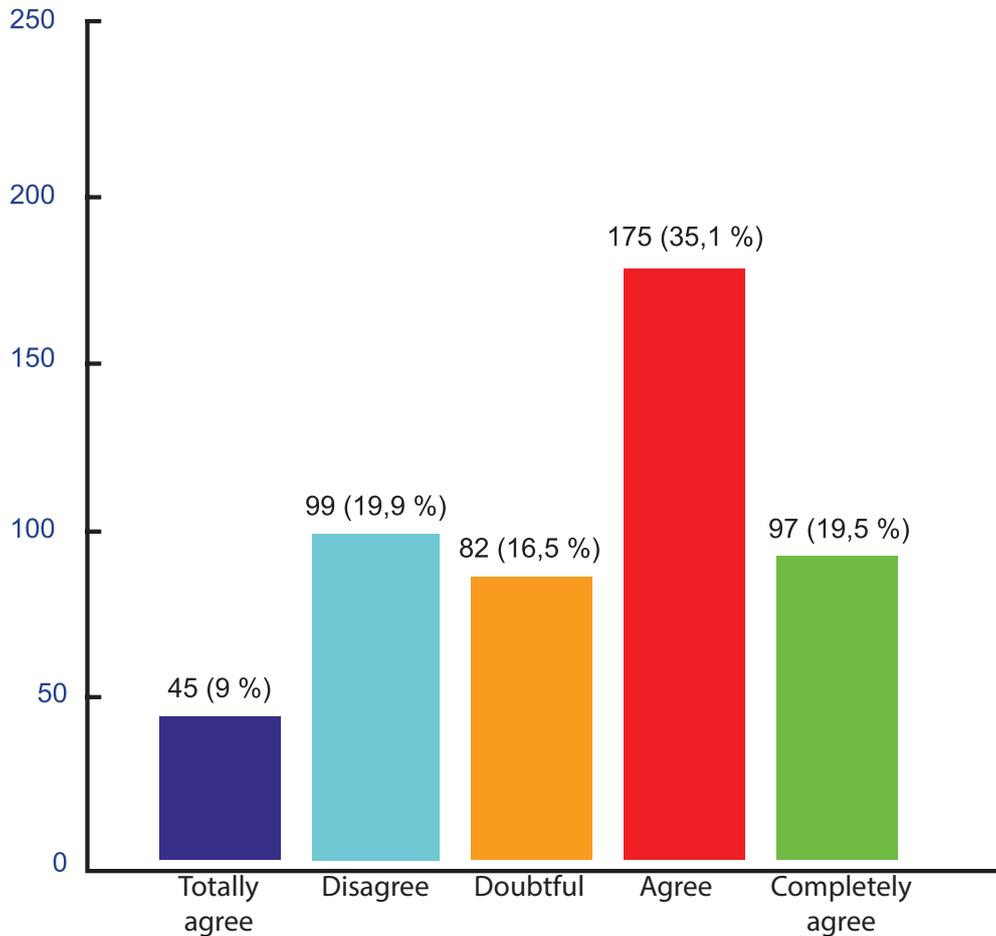
In dealing with such issues, religious counselors could only resort to their four functions as informative, communicative, educative and motivational agents. That is, based on their job descriptions, they cannot intervene or mediate when the conflict takes place. But, people in communities

### The general election aims to choose candidates who understand and fight for the application of religious law in every policy.



Graph of responses from religious counselors/teachers.

**The government should apply Islamic law (Shari'a), which is absolute and comprehensive in all aspects of Muslim community life**



Graph of some responses from religious counselors/teachers.

often asked them to delve into such conflicts, let alone if the counselors were considered as local community leaders. It is unfortunate that most counselors were not equipped with adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes. Our survey shows dualistic or inconsistent views of these counselors in matters related to the relationship between religion and the state. On the one hand, they recognize democracy as the best system for Indonesia; on the other hand, they also think that it cannot be separated from religious values.

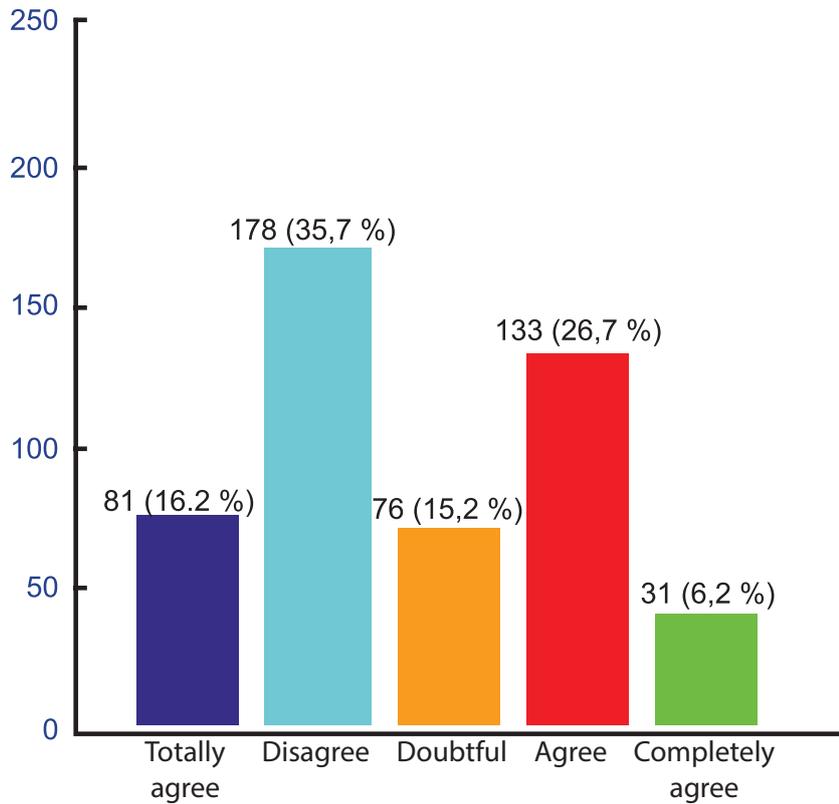
Neither do the counselors show a uniform attitude toward the issue. In religious matters, they often took matters into their own hand. In the Christian missionary case of West Java, for example, the counselor claimed that Christianization had occurred in the form of food distribution by some priests. In this case, instead of reconciling, the counselor condoned to the expulsion of the priests. The underlying

reason that “the minority should not defeat the majority” also appeared during our workshops in West Java and Aceh.

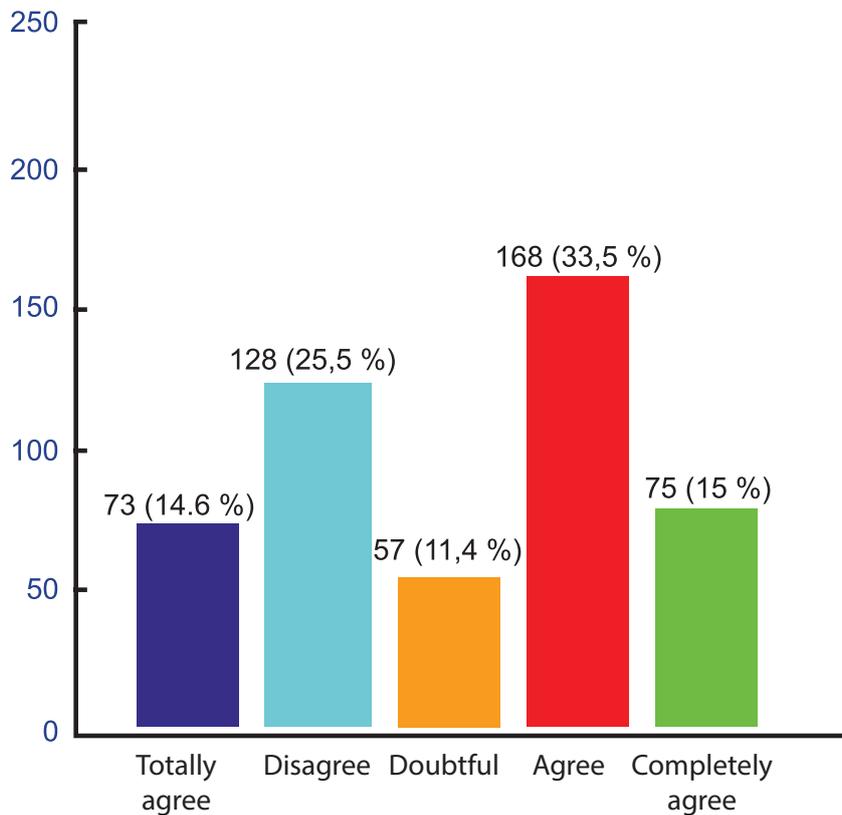
*Fourth*, commensurate operational allowances with the tasks to be shouldered by religious counselors remain to be desired. The current operational allowances are barely enough to cover transportation fees when they conduct counseling in large areas, such as Banten or outer islands like Maluku.

The Government must not fail in realizing its promise to raise the salaries of non-PNS counselors. Meanwhile, counselors must be accessible for 24 hours, ready to go out there whenever the community needs them. This is a challenge in itself, especially for female counselors who have to balance between professional and household responsibilities. Besides the needs to increase operational allowances and improve resources, a more women-friendly system is also sorely needed.

**The state should be run according to a religious law under the authority of a religious leader that I believe in.**



A good government separates religious from stately affairs.



Graph on responses from religious counselors/teachers.

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