

THE POLITICS AND PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN INDONESIA: A STUDY OF THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, NAHDLATUL ULAMA AND MUHAMMADIYAH

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Abstract: Religious moderation plays a crucial role in promoting tolerance and harmony at local, national, and global levels. This study employs a qualitative approach to examine religious teachings that encourage mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. Data collection relies on documentation from books, journals, training materials, and scholars' perspectives, which are systematically and critically analyzed. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious moderation consists of national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation. Nahdlatul Ulama strengthens moderation by enhancing educational institutions and collaborating with the government and society to counter radicalism and terrorism. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah emphasizes Islam *rahmatan li al-'ālamīn* as the foundation of Islam *wasatīyah*. This article argues that the religious moderation framework promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah significantly contributes to academic policy development and the reinforcement of social harmony. Their approaches not only prevent religious conflicts but also ensure equal rights for all individuals to live in peace and prosperity.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Tolerance; Social Harmony.

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Introduction

Indonesia is a diverse nation where religious tolerance is essential for maintaining social harmony. The Constitution or Undang-Undang Dasar (UUD) 1945, Article 29(2), guarantees every citizen the freedom to practice their religion according to their beliefs.¹ Despite this legal framework, religious diversity has often led to tensions and conflicts. Differences in faith, ideology, and economic status can create divisions, with marginalized groups sometimes resorting to extreme ideologies in response to social inequalities.² As a result, religious moderation has become a crucial approach to fostering unity while preventing radicalism and sectarian conflicts.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah³ play key roles in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia.⁴ MoRA emphasizes national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation as pillars of moderation.⁵ NU advocates for educational programs and interfaith collaboration to counter extremism, while Muhammadiyah focuses on Islam *wasatīyah*, encouraging a balanced and inclusive approach to religious practice. By strengthening these efforts, religious moderation serves as a vital mechanism for ensuring social stability and upholding Indonesia's pluralistic values.

Religious moderation, or *wasatīyah*, represents a balanced approach to religious practice—avoiding extremes while embracing the core values of justice, tolerance, and harmony. The Qur'ān promotes moderation, as seen in al-Baqarah [2]: 143 and al-Ḥujurāt [49]:

¹ Ni Made Anggi Arlina Putri, "Peran Penting Moderasi Beragama dalam Menjaga Kebinekaan Bangsa Indonesia," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional LAHN-TP Palangka Raya*, no. 7 (November 24, 2021): 12-18.

² Firda Aulia Izzati, "Pentingnya Sikap Toleransi dan Empati dalam Mewujudkan Warga Negara yang Baik (Good Citizenship) di Masa Pandemi," *Jurnal Kalacakra: Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan* 2, no. 2 (September 6, 2021): 85-90.

³ Nasikhin, Raharjo, and Nasikhin, "Moderasi Beragama Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah dalam Konsep Islam Nusantara dan Islam Berkemajuan," *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset dan Kajian Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (April 29, 2022): 19-34.

⁴ Amru Almu'tasim, "Berkaca NU Dan Muhammadiyah dalam Mewujudkan Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Islam di Indonesia," *Tarbiya Islamia: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Keislaman* 8, no. 2 (August 25, 2019): 199-212.

⁵ Yoga Irama and Mukhammad Zamzami, "Telaah Atas Formula Pengarusutamaan Moderasi Beragama Kementerian Agama Tahun 2019-2020," *Kaca (Karunia Cahaya Allah): Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin* 11, no. 1 (February 9, 2021): 65-89.

13, which emphasize the importance of being a justly balanced nation. MoRA defines religious moderation through four key principles: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation. NU promotes moderation by integrating it into its educational programs and strengthening interfaith cooperation to counter radicalism. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah upholds Islam *wasafiyah*, emphasizing rationality, fairness, and avoiding extremism in both religious and social life.

By adopting these principles, religious tolerance and moderation serve as essential foundations for Indonesia's pluralistic society. They not only promote peaceful coexistence but also safeguard the nation's unity by preventing sectarianism, radicalism, and discrimination. The collaborative efforts of MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah demonstrate that religious moderation is not just an abstract concept but a practical framework for fostering harmony and inclusivity in Indonesia.

Previous studies on religious moderation in Indonesia have largely focused on individual organizations rather than providing a comprehensive comparison of the approaches taken by MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah. Research by Nasikhin, Raharjo, and Nasikhin examines the concept of religious moderation within NU and Muhammadiyah in the context of *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan*.⁶ This study emphasizes that both organizations promote religious moderation in accordance with Indonesia's pluralistic society and the principles outlined in al-Hujurāt [49]: 13. Similarly, Putri discusses the role of religious moderation in maintaining national unity, highlighting its importance in fostering coexistence amid Indonesia's religious and cultural diversity. However, these studies tend to analyze each organization separately, without systematically comparing their strategies and impacts.⁷

Additionally, research by Hefni focuses on the mainstreaming of religious moderation in Islamic higher education institutions,⁸ while Anggraini analyzes the position of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*

⁶ Nasikhin, Raaharjo, and Nasikhin, "Moderasi Beragama Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah dalam Konsep Islam Nusantara dan Islam Berkemajuan."

⁷ Putri, "Peran Penting Moderasi Beragama dalam Menjaga Kebinekaan Bangsa Indonesia."

⁸ Widiya Widi, Alifarose Syahda Zahra, and Ubaidillah, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Kajian KH Said Aqil Siradj di Media Youtube," *Mu'ashir: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi Islam* 1, no. 2 (November 29, 2023): 239-62.

regarding religious moderation in Indonesia.⁹ Fuad provides a historical perspective on the roots of religious moderation in NU, tracing its development over time.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Saputera and Djauhari explore the implementation of religious moderation policies in Gorontalo, offering a regional case study on how these principles are applied in practice.¹¹ These studies provide valuable insights into the theoretical and practical dimensions of religious moderation but do not offer a direct comparative analysis of the three key institutions in shaping and promoting religious tolerance in Indonesia.

This study addresses this gap by providing a comparative analysis of the three institutions, examining how their approaches to religious moderation align or differ, and evaluating their effectiveness in fostering tolerance and social cohesion in Indonesia. By systematically analyzing their strategies and impacts, this study aims to contribute to a more integrated understanding of religious moderation as a collective effort rather than isolated initiatives by individual organizations.

This study explores the concepts of religious moderation as advocated by MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah. It employs a qualitative research approach with a literature review as the primary method. The primary data sources include the book *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama* published by the Research and Development and Training Agency of MoRA, NU's Articles of Association and By-laws, the resolutions of the 34th NU Congress, and the resolutions of the 48th Muhammadiyah Congress. Secondary data sources consist of scholarly books, journal articles, and other published academic works related to religious tolerance and moderation. The study follows an inquiry strategy to uncover various unique perspectives found within individuals, groups, and institutions. Data collection, processing, and analysis are conducted systematically, emphasizing critical interpretation and synthesis. The research aims to provide both theoretical and practical insights into religious tolerance

⁹ Destianika Anggraini, "Analisis Posisi Ahlu Sunnah Wa Al-Jama'ah Aqidah Tentang Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia," retrieved from <https://digilib.iain-ptk.ac.id/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/2017/ARTIKEL%20DESTIANIKA%20ANGGRANI.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed March 1, 2025).

¹⁰ A. Jauhar Fuad, "Akar Sejarah Moderasi Islam Pada Nahdlatul Ulama," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 31, no. 1 (January 13, 2020): 153-68.

¹¹ Abdur Rahman Adi Saputera, "Potret Pengarusutamaan Moderasi Beragama di Gorontalo," *Moderatio: Jurnal Moderasi Beragama* 1, no. 1 (June 21, 2021): 41-60.

and moderation, demonstrating that true religious tolerance is not merely a social practice but a theological reflection embedded within religious teachings.

Religious Moderation in the Perspective of the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Moderation represents a middle path, akin to the role of a moderator in a discussion—facilitating dialogue, maintaining impartiality, and ensuring fairness. It embodies the ideal balance between two undesirable extremes. For instance, courage should not translate into recklessness, and generosity should avoid both extravagance and miserliness.¹² Through religious moderation, individuals uphold their faith without resorting to extremism or excessive rigidity in practice.¹³ Former Minister of MoRA, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, emphasized that “religious moderation is not an ideology but rather a perspective that guides the understanding and practice of religious teachings, ensuring their implementation remains balanced and measured.” In this sense, moderation is a way of practicing religion, not a religion in itself.¹⁴

The concept of religious moderation, as formulated by MoRA, encompasses four key principles: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and the accommodation of local traditions. These indicators serve as benchmarks for assessing the extent to which religious communities in Indonesia demonstrate a moderate stance—one that avoids both extreme leftist and rightist tendencies.¹⁵ National commitment entails adherence to the foundational principles enshrined in the UUD 1945 and its accompanying regulations. Tolerance involves respecting differences, granting others the freedom to believe and express their opinions, upholding equality, and fos-

¹² Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama*, 1st edition (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

¹³ Eko Siswanto and Athoillah Islamy, “Fikih Moderasi Beragama dalam Kehidupan Bernegara di Indonesia,” *Al-Adalah: Jurnal Hukum dan Politik Islam* 7, no. 2 (2022): 198–217. Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama*, 2.

¹⁴ Muhammad Faizin, “Moderasi Beragama dan Urgensinya,” *NU Online*, December 16, 2020, <https://nu.or.id/opini/moderasi-beragama-dan-urgensinya-sRGwl> (accessed March 1, 2025).

¹⁵ Siswanto and Islamy, “Fikih Moderasi Beragama dalam Kehidupan Bernegara di Indonesia.”

tering collaboration. The principle of non-violence rejects the use of coercion, whether physical or verbal, in pursuing religious or ideological objectives. Examples of violations include accusing fellow believers of apostasy (*takfir*), deliberately disparaging other religions, or insulting sacred figures and symbols. Extremism, by definition, contradicts the essence of moderation. Additionally, religious moderation encourages openness to local cultural traditions, as long as they do not conflict with fundamental religious teachings.¹⁶

The implementation of religious understanding and practice must not violate three fundamental principles: human dignity, mutual agreements, and public order.¹⁷ According to MoRA, acts committed in the name of religion that degrade human dignity or even threaten human existence itself constitute a violation of religious moderation.¹⁸ For instance, invoking religious jihad as a justification for acts of terrorism—such as detonating a bomb in a marketplace and killing innocent civilians—is an extreme deviation from the essence of religious moderation. Furthermore, religious practice must prioritize humanitarian values. If a person is engaged in worship but encounters someone in urgent need of assistance, they must prioritize saving a life over completing their worship. Similarly, a doctor is obligated to prioritize their patients' well-being above all else. This humanitarian ethos extends to environmental consciousness and compassion for all living beings. Religious moderation promotes a spirit of balance, illustrated by ethical considerations such as ensuring a thirsty animal has access to water, even if it requires adapting one's religious practice. Religion, at its core, should foster love and care for nature. This sentiment is encapsulated in the words of KH. Maimun Zubair, who stated: "If you see an ant slipping and drowning in water, pick it up and save it; perhaps such an act will earn you forgiveness in the afterlife."¹⁹

The existence of Pancasila as the ideological foundation of the Indonesian state embodies fundamental values that contribute to shaping moderate religious understandings and fostering balanced social attitudes within the nation's political and cultural landscape. According to KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, the application of Islamic

¹⁶ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

teachings is inherently universal, transcending spatial and temporal boundaries. Principles such as justice, public welfare, and adaptability to societal developments over time exemplify this universality. The concept of Islamic cosmopolitanism, which embraces plurality and inclusivity, is deeply rooted in the historical experience of Muslim life in Medina. The Prophet Muḥammad institutionalized inter-faith harmony through the *Medina Charter*, which served as a normative framework for fostering social and political cohesion among the city's religiously diverse communities. The values of Islamic cosmopolitanism should thus serve as a paradigmatic foundation for Indonesian Muslims in understanding the significance of promoting religious moderation within the country's pluralistic society.²⁰ As KH. Abdurrahman Wahid articulated in his preaching: "Islam did not come to change our ancestral culture into Arab culture—not for me to become an *ana*, you to become an *antum*, and our brothers and sisters to become an *akeh*. We must defend our own cultural identity while internalizing the essence of Islamic teachings." His statement underscores the idea that Islam does not seek to replace local traditions with Arab customs but rather encourages the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage while adhering to Islamic principles.²¹

²⁰ Athoillah Islamy and Adib Susilo, "Kosmopolitanisme Islam dalam Indikator Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia," *Poros Onim: Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan* 3, no. 2 (2022): 77-88.

²¹ Liputan6.com, "Bukan Meng-Arab-kan, Pesan Gus Dur soal Relasi Islam dan Budaya Lokal Indonesia," *Liputan 6*, August 6, 2024, <https://www.liputan6.com/islami/read/5664465/bukan-meng-arab-kan-pesan-gus-dur-soal-relasi-islam-dan-budaya-lokal-indonesia> (accessed March 1, 2025).

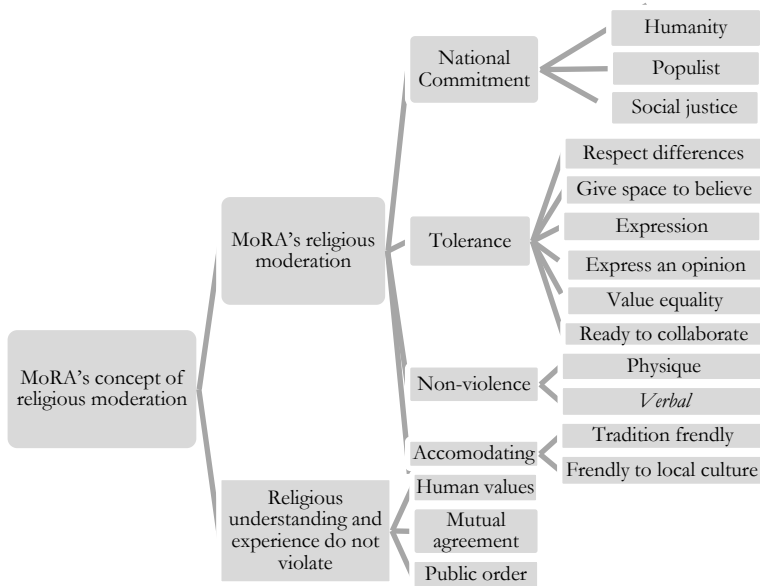


Figure 1. MoRA's concept of religious moderation

NU's Approach to Religious Moderation

NU is a religious movement dedicated to fostering a society that is devoted to the God, intellectually enlightened, skillful, morally upright, peaceful, just, and prosperous. NU seeks to realize these aspirations through a series of initiatives grounded in fundamental religious beliefs that shape its distinctive character. This foundational framework is known as *Khittah Nahdlatul Ulama*, which serves as the guiding principle for the thoughts, actions, and behaviors of NU members. It is expected to be reflected in both individual conduct and organizational decision-making. This ideological foundation is rooted in the teachings of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Aswaja) and is adapted to Indonesia's unique social and cultural context, encompassing both religious and social engagement. Moreover, the *Khittah* of NU is deeply embedded in its historical legacy, evolving over time to maintain its relevance while staying true to its core principles.²²

²² Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama Masa Khidmat 2022-2027, *Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Nahdlatul Ulama; Keputusan Mukhtamar Ke-34 NU di Lampung* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Jenderal Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, 2022).

The theological foundation of NU is derived from the primary sources of Islamic teachings: the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, Ijmā', and Qiyās. In interpreting these sources, NU adheres to the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* tradition and follows the methodological frameworks (*al-madhhab*) established by prominent Islamic scholars. In the field of *'aqīdah* (theology), NU follows the doctrinal approach of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, as formulated by Imam Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and Abū al-Manṣūr al-Māturīdī. In the field of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), NU adopts the legal traditions of the four major Sunni schools of thought: those of Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān, Mālik b. Anas, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbāl. In the field of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), NU follows the teachings of luminaries such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī and al-Ghazālī, along with other renowned scholars. NU upholds the belief that Islam is a *fiṭr* (noble) religion, which serves to refine and perfect the inherent virtues possessed by humanity. Rather than erasing cultural and societal values, the religious ideology embraced by NU seeks to enhance and harmonize the noble traditions already present within different communities, ensuring that Islamic teachings complement rather than replace indigenous customs.²³

The foundational principles of NU's religious ideology cultivate a social attitude characterized by *tawassuṭ* (moderation) and *i'tidāl* (justice), which emphasize the necessity of fairness and uprightness in communal life. With this fundamental disposition, NU serves as an exemplary organization that consistently upholds integrity, constructive engagement, and the rejection of all forms of *taṭarruf* (extremism). Additionally, the principle of *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) guides NU's approach to differences of opinion, whether in religious matters—particularly those related to *furū'* (branches of jurisprudence) and *khilāfiyyah* (disputed issues)—or in social and cultural spheres. Furthermore, the *tawāzuṅ* (balance) principle ensures harmony in serving the God, fostering human relationships, and preserving the environment, as well as in aligning past, present, and future considerations. In the implementation of *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong), NU remains attuned to promoting actions that contribute positively to communal well-being while sim-

²³ Ibid.

ultaneously rejecting and preventing anything that undermines the values of a just and ethical society.²⁴

The religious foundation and social attitudes of NU shape the conduct of its members, both individually and collectively, fostering adherence to the following principles: (a) Upholding the values and norms of Islamic teachings; (b) Prioritizing communal welfare over personal interests; (c) Emphasizing sincerity, service, and dedication to the cause; (d) Strengthening bonds of brotherhood (*al-ukhummah*), unity (*al-ittiḥād*), and compassion; (e) Honoring moral integrity (*al-akhlāq al-ḥarimah*) and practicing honesty (*al-ṣidq*) in thought, behavior, and action; (f) Demonstrating loyalty to religion, nation, and state; (g) Recognizing work, charity, and achievement as integral aspects of worship; (h) Upholding knowledge and respecting scholars; (i) Remaining adaptable to change whenever it serves the broader benefit of humanity; (j) Pioneering initiatives that inspire, drive, and accelerate societal development; (k) Promoting solidarity within national and civic life, ensuring that unity and cooperation remain central to social progress.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 117.

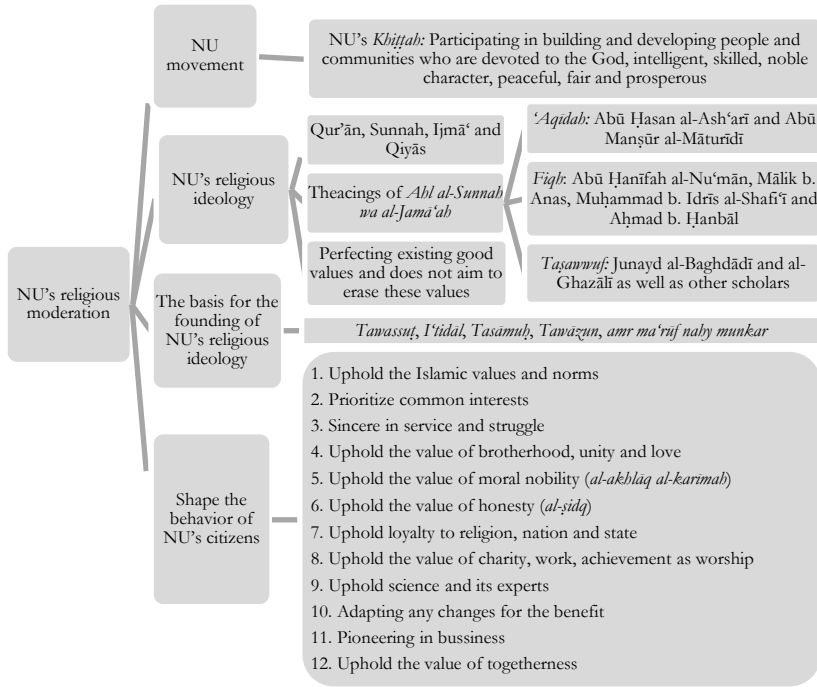


Figure 2. NU's concept of religious moderation

Muhammadiyah's Perspective on Religious Moderation

Muhammadiyah's approach to religious moderation is deeply rooted in the concept of Islam *wasatīyah*, derived from the Qur'ānic term *wasafa*, which conveys meanings such as "middle" or "best" (*wasatna*, in al-Ādiyāt [100]: 5), "fairness and choice" (*wasatan*, al-Baqarah [2]: 238), "not extreme and not excessive" (*awsit*, al-Baqarah [2]: 143), "wise" (*awsatn*, al-Mā'idah [5]: 89), and "related to prayer times" (*wusṭā*, al-Qalam [68]: 28).²⁶ The World Ulema Summit in Bogor (2018) outlined seven characteristics of moderation: objectivity (*tawassuṭ*), proportionality and fairness (*i'tidal*), tolerance (*tasamul*), prioritization of dialogue (*shūrā*), constructive engagement (*iṣlāh*), ex-

²⁶ Ilham, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Muhammadiyah," *Muhammadiyah*, November 19, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2021/11/moderasi-beragama-dalam-perspektif-muhammadiyah/> (accessed March 1, 2025).

emplary conduct (*qudwah*), and nationalism (*muwāṭanaḥ*).²⁷ Muhammadiyah has consistently upheld these principles, particularly in its acceptance and recognition of Pancasila, which was explicitly affirmed during the 47th Muhammadiyah Congress in Makassar in 2015. Syafiq Mughni emphasized that the concept of *Dār al-‘Abd wa Shabādah* serves as a suitable framework for harmonizing Islamic and Indonesian commitments. Historically, debates on the relationship between religion and nationalism have been prominent, as seen in the 1930s among young Indonesian intellectuals such as Mohamad Natsir and Soekarno. These figures engaged in rigorous discussions, often through mass media polemics, to formulate the most suitable vision for Indonesia’s future.²⁸

The Muhammadiyah perspective on religious moderation originates from the Islamic principle of *rahmatan li al-‘ālamīn* (a mercy to all creation) and has evolved into Islam *wasatīyah* within the framework of Indonesian diplomacy. A related concept, “deradicalization as a countermeasure against extremism,” aligns with Muhammadiyah’s historical commitment to religious moderation.²⁹ Muhammadiyah’s moderation encompasses three core dimensions: first, *wasāṭa*, which is synonymous with *khayr* (goodness and excellence); second, *wasāṭa* as a balanced attitude that avoids extremism and excessiveness in both worship and social interactions (*mu‘āmalah*); and third, a commitment to fairness, aligning actions with knowledge and legal principles to ensure justice by placing matters in their proper context. Much like a referee who stands in the middle and remains impartial, Muhammadiyah’s approach to *wasatīyah* upholds justice and truth while adhering to ethical speech, employing *qawlan karīman* (noble words) and *qawlan shadīdan* (truthful words) in addressing differing viewpoints—without excessiveness or extremism. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah positions itself as an intellectual movement, consistently engaging in multi-perspective dialogues to develop solutions that are inclusive and widely acceptable, reinforcing

²⁷ Eneng Susanti, “KTT Ulama dan Cendekiawan Muslim Hasilkan Pesan Bogor, Ini Isinya,” *Islampos*, May 4, 2018, <https://www.islampos.com/ktt-ulama-dan-cendekiawan-muslim-hasilkan-pesan-bogor-ini-isinya-84858/> (accessed March 1, 2025).

²⁸ Afandi, “Moderasi Beragama dan Terciptanya Persatuan Kebangsaan,” *Muhammadiyah*, February 22, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2021/02/moderasi-beragama-dan-terciptanya-persatuan-kebangsaan/> (accessed March 1, 2025).

²⁹ Ilham, “Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Muhammadiyah.”

ing its role in addressing contemporary challenges through reasoned and scholarly approaches.

The Muhammadiyah movement operates within a structured framework aimed at enhancing the role of Indonesian Muslims within the context of the Republic of Indonesia as a Pancasila-based *Dār al-‘Ahd wa al-Shahādah* state. This system is built upon three strategic pillars: (1) Formulating a comprehensive strategy for the struggle of Indonesian Muslims, ensuring their significant role in national and state affairs by harmonizing Islamic values with Indonesian identity; (2) Developing a national roadmap for Muhammadiyah to foster a meaningful and progressive national life, aligned with its *Personality, Khittah*, and the principles of Pancasila-based *Dār al-‘Ahd wa al-Shahādah*; and (3) Establishing a model for the internationalization of Muhammadiyah, reflecting its commitment to universal human values and its active participation in the global arena.³⁰ In terms of organization and leadership, Muhammadiyah aims to: (1) Strengthen its strategic role as the largest modern Islamic social organization while remaining steadfast in its ideological and organizational principles; and (2) Optimize its strategic research centers to conduct objective analyses of national issues, employing both advocacy-based and empirical approaches to policymaking. This ensures Muhammadiyah’s continued contribution to fostering democratic and just conditions across various sectors of society.³¹

Muhammadiyah’s interpretation of *amr ma’rūf naby munkar* is rooted in the Qur’ānic term *‘arafa*, meaning ‘to know,’ emphasizing the importance of knowledge-based action. This underscores Muhammadiyah’s commitment to rationality and objectivity, positioning itself as a movement of intellectual moderation that approaches problem-solving through comprehensive, multi-perspective deliberation. Muhammadiyah acknowledges that its views are not always universally accepted or infallible and thus remains open to critique and revision. A notable example of this adaptability is the historical prohibition on displaying photographs of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, due to concerns over potential cultism. However, this stance has evolved, allowing such images for educational purposes—not as an

³⁰ Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Tanfidz Keputusan Mukhtamar Ke-48 Muhammadiyah Tahun 2022* (Jakarta: Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2022).

³¹ Ibid.

inconsistency or “*mencla-mencle*,” but as a deliberate effort to avoid absolutist truth claims and to uphold openness to scholarly critique.

Furthermore, Syafiq Mughni emphasizes that the principle of moderation (*wasafiyah*) should not be exclusive to Muslims but should also characterize other religious communities in Indonesia. He asserts that the collective commitment to moderation across religious groups can serve as a unifying force, reinforcing national solidarity and strengthening interfaith networks within the country.³²

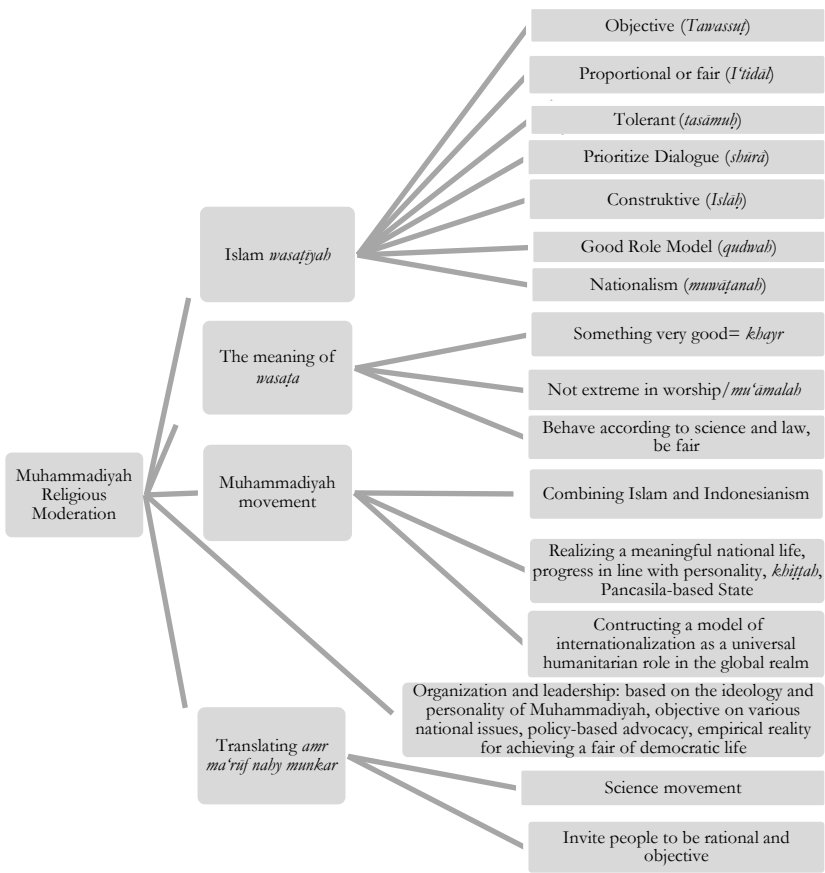


Figure 3. Muhammadiyah’s religious moderation

³² Afandi, “Moderasi Beragama dan Terciptanya Persatuan Kebangsaan.”

Contrasting Approaches to Religious Moderation in Indonesia

Intolerance is a belief system or lifestyle that perceives itself as superior to others, leading to various consequences ranging from a lack of respect or disregard for individuals and communities to institutionalized discriminatory treatment.³³ Acts of terrorism in Indonesia can be traced back to the 2001 Bali bombing, which was carried out by individuals from the Muslim community purely in the name of religion. Similar attacks have occurred in various cities across the country, often targeting police agencies, which are perceived as obstacles to terrorist activities. One particularly shocking incident took place during Friday prayers at the Kapasan Police Mosque in Surabaya, where a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside the mosque. Likewise, acts of terrorism have occurred on the eve of Christmas celebrations at multiple places of worship. If intolerance is not addressed promptly, it will continue to escalate into radicalism, ultimately leading to religiously motivated violence. Although not all terrorist acts stem from religious ideology, empirical evidence in Indonesia suggests that religious interpretations play a significant role in motivating terrorist activities, which can further develop into more extreme behaviors.³⁴

Religious moderation represents an ideal approach to upholding the fundamental values of Islam in practice, as the essence of Islamic teachings inherently recognizes and accepts the reality of a pluralistic society. This principle was exemplified by the Prophet Muḥammad, who, through the Islamic concept of *rahmatan li al-‘ālamīn*, successfully cultivated a harmonious coexistence characterized by tolerance, mutual respect, and appreciation among diverse religious communities.³⁵ In fostering noble cultural values as a foundation for thought, behavior, and ethical conduct, Islam—as the majority religion in Indonesia—bears the responsibility of safeguarding national and civic ethics. This entails transcending ethnic, racial, sectarian, class, and political divisions to prevent conflicts, injustice, oppression, and social unrest, thereby ensuring a just and peaceful society.

³³ Muhammad Subhi, *Promosi Toleransi dan Moderasi Beragama; Modul Training of Trainer Untuk Auditor* (Jakarta: Pustaka Masyarakat Setara, 2019).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Saputera, “Potret Pengarusutamaan Moderasi Beragama.”

MoRA upholds a tolerant approach in promoting religious moderation, adhering to principles that respect differences without assigning blame or imposing its views on others.³⁶ This approach aligns with the middle path—neutral, fair, and balanced—seeking the best solutions without extremism or exaggeration in religious practice.³⁷ By upholding Pancasila as the state ideology, which embodies fundamental values supporting the formation of moderate religious understandings and social attitudes, the ministry ensures that religious moderation is integrated into the fabric of national life in Indonesia.³⁸ Grounded in the principle of religious tolerance, MoRA remains steadfast in navigating challenges arising from religious differences—whether within a particular faith or between religions—while maintaining its commitment to the ideology of the Indonesian state. This commitment is particularly reflected in safeguarding the first principle of Pancasila, which guarantees the right of all citizens to practice their religion freely.

The implementation of religious moderation by MoRA recently came under scrutiny in the context of the 2024 National Women's Paskibraka (*Pasukan Pengibar Bendera Pusaka*/the flag-raising troop) inauguration. Controversy arose when eighteen members of the National Women's Paskibraka were reportedly instructed to remove their headscarves during the inauguration ceremony led by President Joko Widodo at the State Palace in IKN (the new capital city of Indonesia) on Tuesday, August 13, 2024. The issue sparked widespread debate, eliciting both criticism and support, with responses from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), NU, and various religious figures. The controversy even led to calls for the dissolution of the Agency for Pancasila Ideology Education (BPIP). In response, BPIP clarified that it would not enforce the removal of the hijab during state ceremonies. Additionally, discussions emerged regarding potential withdrawals of participants from BPIP programs, revocation of related decisions, and proposals to disband the

³⁶ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama*, 17.

³⁷ Siswanto and Isamy, "Fikih Moderasi Beragama dalam Kehidupan Bernegara Di Indonesia"; Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama*, 2.

³⁸ Isamy and Susilo, "Kosmopolitanisme Islam dalam Indikator Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia."

agency.³⁹ BPIP Head Yudian Wahyudi later issued a public apology, acknowledging the concerns raised by the public and expressing appreciation for the media's role in covering Paskibraka-related matters.⁴⁰

Amid this controversy, MoRA remains steadfast in prioritizing tolerance. Under the leadership of Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, the ministry continues to uphold the principles of religious tolerance, national commitment, non-violence, and accommodation of local traditions in addressing religious issues.⁴¹ The regulation requiring Paskibraka members to remove their hijabs is seen as a violation of religious moderation. However, with BPIP's public apology and clarification, the issue is now considered resolved.⁴² Religious moderation is implemented through humanist-dialogical values, emphasizing fraternity over authority, justice over mere rights, and harmony over conflict.⁴³ MoRA plays a crucial role in providing guidance and protection in matters of differing opinions, ensuring that such differences do not lead to division. Religious understanding and practice should not violate human values, mutual agreements, or public order,⁴⁴ all while aligning with *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity), the principle of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (the one and the only God), and the principle of *Persatuan Indonesia* (national unity).⁴⁵

³⁹ Metro TV, "Polemik Aturan Lepas Jilbab Paskibraka 2024," *Metro TV*, August 17, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsUUVPeFJZW> (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁴⁰ <https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaFPbedBPzjZrk13HO3D> (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁴¹ Siswanto and Islamy, "Fikih Moderasi Beragama dalam Kehidupan Bernegara di Indonesia."

⁴² Nicholas Ryan Aditya and Icha Rastika, "Soal Polemik Pelepasan Jilbab Paskibraka, Menag: Hijab Itu Hak, Kita Harus Hormati," *Kompas.com*, August 16, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/08/16/13542561/soal-polemik-pelepasan-jilbab-paskibraka-menag-hijab-itu-hak-kita-harus> (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁴³ Nasikhin, Raharjo dan Nasikhin, "Moderasi Beragama Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah dalam Konsep Islam Nusantara dan Islam Berkemajuan."

⁴⁴ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Tanya Jawab Moderasi Beragama*, 9.

⁴⁵ TvOne, "Debat Panas! Habib Kribo Vs Ust Hilmi soal Paskibraka Buka Jilbab: Diskriminasi Dong," *Tvonenews.com*, Tuesday, August 20, 2024, <https://www.tvonenews.com/channel/news/199280-debat-panas-habib-kribo->

The application of religious moderation in the context of the hijab ban for the 2024 National Paskibraka must be reconsidered, as it contradicts the principles of inclusivity and education. Ahmad Fahrur Rozi, from the Religious Affairs sector of PBNU, stated that the regulation mandating the removal of the hijab is irrelevant. In an interview with *Kompas.com* on August 14, 2024, he emphasized that wearing the hijab does not disrupt the aesthetics of Paskibraka uniforms, nor does it hinder cohesion, performance, or creativity. He also suggested that Paskibraka costume designs be more inclusive and non-discriminatory.⁴⁶ NU, as a religious organization, upholds two key responsibilities: *Himāyat al-Ummah*, the protection of the Muslim community, and *Ṣāhib al-Ri'āyah*, collaboration with the government in societal governance. Wearing the hijab is a fundamental religious right that must be respected, tolerated, and moderated.⁴⁷ NU's religious movement is committed to fostering a society that is devout, intelligent, skilled, noble in character, peaceful, just, and prosperous.⁴⁸

NU upholds the belief that Islam is a noble religion, meaning it refines and perfects the good values that already exist within human societies without seeking to erase them.⁴⁹ In this context, the hijab is considered an essential aspect of religious practice, serving as a form of refinement in covering one's *aurat* (private parts). The concept of *sadd al-dhārī'ah* (preventing harm by taking precautions) supports the idea that covering *aurat* is a crucial way to uphold a woman's honor, protecting her from inappropriate exposure.⁵⁰ According to Imam as-Suyuthi, a woman's *aurat* during prayer includes her

vs-ust-hilmi-soal-paskibraka-buka-jilbab-diskriminasi-dong (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁴⁶ Singgih Wiryono and Ihsanuddin, "PBNU Minta BPIP Koreksi Aturan Larangan Jilbab bagi Paskibraka," *Kompas.com*, August 14, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/08/14/19482071/pbnu-minta-bpip-koreksi-aturan-larangan-jilbab-bagi-paskibraka> (accessed March 10, 2025).

⁴⁷ TvOne, "Debat Panas! Habib Kribo Vs Ust Hilmi soal Paskibraka Buka Jilbab: Diskriminasi Dong."

⁴⁸ Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama Masa Khidmat 2022-2027, *Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Nahdlatul Ulama; Keputusan Mukhtamar Ke-34 NU di Lampung*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 20 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997), 107.

entire body except for her face and hands, reinforcing the religious obligation of modest dress.⁵¹

The controversy surrounding the rule requiring female Paskibraka members to remove their hijabs has drawn strong criticism from various Indonesian Muslim figures. MUI has condemned BPIP's directive as unwise, unfair, and contrary to civilized principles.⁵² KH. Cholil Nafis emphasized that this regulation directly contradicts the constitution and Pancasila, violating BPIP's own legal framework. Specifically, BPIP RI Regulation No. 3 of 2022, which serves as the implementing regulation of Presidential Decree No. 51 of 2022 on the Heritage Flag Hoisting Troops Program, clearly states in Article 2 that the Paskibraka program is based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.⁵³ Furthermore, Article 22 affirms that the program is state-funded, underscoring its public and national significance.⁵⁴ The official Paskibraka uniform regulations, as outlined in the same legal framework, explicitly accommodate female members who wear the hijab. The uniform requirements include: (1) red and white neck handles, (2) white gloves, (3) white socks, (4) black patch (specifically for girls wearing the hijab), (5) black loafers, and (6) Mark of Proficiency/Kendit (worn during the inauguration of Paskibraka).⁵⁵

Since its inception, Muhammadiyah has consistently upheld the principle of *amr ma'ruf nahl munkar* within the framework of religious moderation.⁵⁶ Pimpinan Pusat (PP, Central Board) Muhammadiyah has condemned the hijab ban for Paskibraka members as discrimi-

⁵¹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Naẓā'ir* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 240.

⁵² Junaidi, "BPIP Larang Jilbab Paskibraka, MUI: Kebijakan yang Tak Bijak, Tak Adil, dan Tak Beradab," *Muidigital*, August 15, 2024, <https://mui.or.id/baca/berita/bpip-larang-jilbab-paskibraka-mui-kebijakan-yang-tak-bijak-tak-adil-dan-tak-beradab> (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁵³ Pejabat Pengelola Informasi dan Dokumentasi Kementerian dalam Negeri, "Peraturan Badan Pembinaan Ideologi Pancasila Republik Indonesia Nomor 3 Tahun 2022 Tentang Peraturan Pelaksanaan Peraturan Presiden Nomor 51 Tahun 2022 Tentang Program Pasukan Pengibar Bendera Pusaka," <https://ppid.kemendagri.go.id/front/dokumen/detail/300248375> (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Badan Pembinaan Ideologi Pancasila Republik Indonesia, "Keputusan Kepala Badan Pembinaan Ideologi Pancasila Nomor 35 Tahun 2024 Tentang Standar Pakaian, Atribut, Dan Sikap Tampang Pasukan Pengibar Bendera Pusaka," 2024, <https://jdih.bpip.go.id/dokumen/view?id=1140> (accessed March 1, 2024).

⁵⁶ Ilham, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Muhammadiyah."

natory and a violation of human rights. The General Secretary of PP. Muhammadiyah, Abdul Mu'ti, called for the revocation of regulations prohibiting female members of the Paskibraka from wearing the hijab. He made this statement in response to the removal of headscarves by 18 female Paskibraka members during President Joko Widodo's inauguration in Indonesia's IKN. "If it is true that there is a ban on Paskibraka members wearing the hijab, then the ban must be lifted," Mu'ti stated in a brief message to *Kompas.com* on Wednesday, August 14, 2024. According to him, prohibiting female Paskibraka members from wearing the hijab constitutes discrimination and contradicts the principles of Pancasila. Furthermore, he emphasized that such a prohibition violates human rights. "The ban is a discriminatory act that goes against Pancasila, religious freedom, and human rights,"⁵⁷ he asserted.

The Muhammadiyah religious moderation movement always encourages people to be rational and objective, ensuring that Muhammadiyah considers all perspectives when addressing issues.⁵⁸ In this particular case, a parent of a Paskibraka member formally objected to the regulation requiring their child to remove her hijab. The Yogyakarta Special Region (DI Yogyakarta) Government received complaints from the parents of Paskibraka members from Yogyakarta. On Wednesday, August 14, 2024, the Head of the National Unity and Political Agency of DI Yogyakarta, Anna Rina Herbranti, confirmed that these objections were submitted to the DI Yogyakarta Kesbangpol after parents saw a photo of their child without a headscarf during the 2024 Paskibraka inauguration ceremony in IKN, East Kalimantan.⁵⁹

Muhammadiyah's approach to religious moderation emphasizes behavior that aligns with both scientific reasoning and legal principles, ensuring fairness by placing matters in their proper con-

⁵⁷ Singgih Wiryono and Ihsanuddin, "PP Muhammadiyah Sebut Larangan Jilbab untuk Paskibraka Diskriminatif dan Langgar HAM," *Kompas.com*, August 14, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/08/14/19275391/pp-muhammadiyah-sebut-larangan-jilbab-untuk-paskibraka-diskriminatif-dan> (accessed March 1, 2025).

⁵⁸ Afandi, "Moderasi Beragama dan Terciptanya Persatuan Kebangsaan."

⁵⁹ Rusman Paragbueq, "Orang Tua Anggota Paskibraka Asal Yogyakarta Keberatan Anaknya Lepas Hijab," *Tempo.co*, August 15, 2024, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1903974/orang-tua-anggota-paskibraka-asal-yogyakarta-keberatan-anakny-a-lepas-hijab> (accessed March 10, 2025).

text. However, the Wasatīyah Muhammadiyah Movement has been criticized for being less than optimal in formulating strategies for the struggle of Indonesian Muslims within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia as a Pancasila-based *Dār al-‘Abd wa al-Shahādah* state.⁶⁰ This is due to its tendency to prioritize the organization's stance over government decisions. A key example is Muhammadiyah's annual determination of the start of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr (1 Shawwāl), and Eid al-Adha (1 Dhū al-Ḥijjah), which frequently differs from the calculations of MoRA and NU. Consequently, despite its commitment to religious moderation within the national context, Muhammadiyah is often perceived as struggling to harmonize Islam and Indonesianness as part of its *khittah* (foundational principles) and the Pancasila-based *Dār al-‘Abd wa al-Shahādah* state. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah's ideological stance and organizational character still exhibit elements that some consider extreme, particularly in its strict adherence to differences in religious practices. This is evident in congregational prayers when the imam performs *qunūt*—Muhammadiyah followers refrain from joining, and after the obligatory (*maktūbah*) prayer, while the imam and other congregants engage in *wirid*, Muhammadiyah members typically leave immediately after the final *salām*.

While MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah all advocate for religious moderation, their approaches reflect distinct institutional priorities and socio-religious orientations. MoRA adopts a state-centric approach, integrating religious moderation into national policies and emphasizing four core principles: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation. This governmental framework aims to preserve national unity by promoting an inclusive yet regulated religious discourse, ensuring that religious moderation remains aligned with state ideology and governance.

NU, in contrast, approaches religious moderation through a grassroots and traditionalist perspective, grounded in the principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* and the teachings of classical Islamic scholars. It emphasizes *tawassut*, *i’tidāl*, and *tasāmuh*, embedding these values within its extensive network of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and religious councils. NU actively engages in interfaith di-

⁶⁰ Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Tanfidz Keputusan Mukhtamar Ke-48 Muhammadiyah Tahun 2022*.

alogues and counter-radicalism initiatives while maintaining a theological foundation that aligns with Indonesia’s pluralistic society.

Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, promotes a modernist and reformist interpretation of moderation, often framed within the concept of Islam *wasatīyah* (middle-path Islam). Its emphasis on rationality, education, and progressive thought drives its advocacy for a balanced approach to religious teachings. Unlike NU, which relies on traditional jurisprudence, Muhammadiyah adopts *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to address contemporary social and religious issues, including human rights, gender equality, and global Islamic movements.

These differing approaches illustrate that religious moderation in Indonesia is not a singular, uniform concept but a dynamic framework shaped by historical, ideological, and institutional contexts. While MoRA enforces moderation at a policy level, NU and Muhammadiyah implement it through community engagement, religious education, and theological discourse. Understanding these distinctions is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of religious moderation efforts in Indonesia and their broader impact on social cohesion and interfaith relations.

Table 1. Comparison of Religious Tolerance and Moderation Concepts

Aspect	MoRA	NU	Muhammadiyah
Definition of Moderation	Moderation is a middle way in understanding and practicing religious teachings without extremism.	Moderation is based on <i>Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah</i> , balancing religious texts and social realities.	Moderation is based on <i>Islam rahmatan li al-'alamin</i> and Islam <i>wasatīyah</i> .
Main Principles	1. National commitment 2. Tolerance 3. Anti-violence 4. Accommodation of local culture	1. <i>Tawassuṭ</i> 2. <i>I'tidal</i> 3. <i>Tasāmuḥ</i> 4. <i>Tawāḏḏun</i> 5. <i>Amr ma'rūf naby munkar</i>	1. <i>Tawassuṭ</i> 2. <i>I'tidal</i> 3. <i>Tasāmuḥ</i> 4. <i>Shūrā</i> 5. <i>Islāḥ</i> 6. <i>Qudwah</i> 7. <i>Muwāṭanah</i>
Social Approach	Prioritizing inclusive policies and protecting the rights of all	Maintaining unity among Muslims through education and community engagement.	Emphasizing education based on knowledge and a rational approach

	religious adherents.		to problem-solving.
Relationship with the State	Pancasila as the state foundation and integrating Islamic values into governance.	Upholding Pancasila and the UUD 1945, acting as a partner to the government in maintaining social harmony.	Accepting Pancasila under the concept of ' <i>Dār al-'Abd wa Shabādah</i> ,' connecting Islam and nationalism.
Implementation Strategy	Education and advocacy programs to prevent radicalism and extremism.	Strengthening education based on Aswaja and internal and external consolidation.	Deradicalization through education and promoting progressive Islamic values.
Attitude Towards Local Culture	Accommodating local culture as long as it does not contradict fundamental religious teachings.	Accepting local culture that aligns with Islamic principles.	Oriented towards purifying Islamic teachings with a rational and modern approach.

Conclusion

MoRA of the Republic of Indonesia promotes religious tolerance and moderation by upholding justice and prioritizing the public good (*maṣlaḥah 'āmmah*). It maintains a strong commitment to Pancasila, even though, in practice, its policies do not always align with the interests of the Muslim majority. At times, these policies appear to disadvantage Muslims, while in other cases, they may favor them. This is evident in regulations such as limiting the volume of mosque loudspeakers and restricting *tadārus al-Qur'ān* (Qur'ānic recitation) during Ramadan. Additionally, religious moderation efforts often reflect organizational affiliations. When MoRA is led by a figure from NU, the NU tends to fully support ministerial policies, while Muhammadiyah appears less compliant. Conversely, when the ministry is led by a Muhammadiyah figure, NU does not necessarily demonstrate full submission to ministerial policies. This organizational affiliation-based dynamic highlights the persistent challenge of achieving unity within the framework of religious moderation, as institutional egocentrism continues to shape the responses of different mass organizations. Moreover, political elites and state officials often prioritize strengthening their respective organizations, making

ideological differences a persistent feature of Indonesia's religious landscape.

This research is expected to contribute to the academic community, article writers, and researchers in their respective fields. Through scholarly work and research, individuals can strive for a more balanced and comprehensive practice of religious teachings, free from extremism and interfaith intolerance, thereby fostering a genuine culture of religious moderation across all social strata. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the realization of *baldah tayyibah wa rabb ghafur*—a prosperous and harmonious nation under God's grace. However, excessive optimism in justifying one's own perspectives and actions can lead to arrogance, a trait that belongs solely to the God, the Creator of the universe.

This study acknowledges its limitations in terms of structure, language clarity, and content depth, as absolute perfection belongs only to the God. Therefore, constructive criticism and suggestions are essential for refining discussions on religious moderation, particularly in the context of MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah. Future research and scholarly articles should further explore and enhance the understanding of religious tolerance and moderation, ensuring a more comprehensive and inclusive discourse.

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