

## The Role of Religious Moderation and Tolerance in Achieving a Harmonious and Inclusive Society

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**Abstract.** Religious moderation and tolerance are two key concepts in building a harmonious and inclusive society. Moderation refers to a balanced attitude in understanding and implementing religious teachings, while religious tolerance emphasizes the importance of respecting diversity. This study aims to investigate the relationship between moderation and religious tolerance and its impact on social stability and societal sustainability. The research methods used include surveys, interviews, and qualitative data analysis. The research results show that individuals who hold moderate attitudes are more tolerant of other people's religious beliefs and practices. Additionally, societies that encourage religious moderation tend to experience lower levels of conflict and are better able to build harmonious relationships. These findings highlight the importance of promoting religious moderation and tolerance in building stable and inclusive societies. Policy implications include moderation-oriented religious education, open interfaith dialogue, as well as the formation of policies that respect religious freedom and minimize religion-based discrimination. Thus, strengthening religious moderation and tolerance is the key to the success of sustainable social development.

**Keywords:** Moderation, Tolerance, Religion

### 1. Introduction

Religious moderation and tolerance are crucial concepts for maintaining harmony among religious communities in Indonesia. Religious moderation refers to the attitude of practicing one's religious teachings without demeaning the beliefs of others. This approach enables adherents of different religions to listen to one another and to develop the ability to manage and address differences in religious understanding among them. Religious moderation is also key to fostering tolerance and harmony among different faiths.

Religious tolerance involves an open attitude that respects all differences. The nature of humanity encompasses diversity, which, when expressed, leads to various differences that must be recognized and accepted. Tolerance is always accompanied by

the attitude of embracing differences as part of ourselves and maintaining a positive outlook.

The Indonesian government supports the strengthening of religious moderation as an effort to maintain harmony among religious communities. Religious moderation has been adopted as a national program included in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for 2020-2024.

## 2. Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of religious moderation and tolerance. The quantitative method involves a survey distributed to a random sample of residents across various regions in Indonesia, aiming to measure attitudes towards religious moderation and tolerance and their relationship with social stability. The survey instrument consists of several statements measured on a Likert scale, and the collected data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

The qualitative method involves in-depth interviews with religious leaders, community leaders, and influential individuals in society. These interviews aim to explore their views on religious moderation and tolerance, as well as their experiences in managing conflicts and promoting interfaith harmony. Additionally, qualitative data analysis is conducted on government policy documents and community initiatives relevant to the research theme. The qualitative data is analyzed using coding and thematic mapping techniques to identify patterns and key emerging themes.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1. History and Development of Religious Moderation and Tolerance

The term moderation is the antithesis of extremism and radicalism, which have become popular and widely discussed topics in various countries over the past few years. The attitude of moderation aims to create social harmony and balance in both individual and communal life. Ibn 'Ashur defines the term *wasath* in two ways: etymologically, it means something that has equal measure, while terminologically, it is the foundational process of Islamic values that are straight and not exaggerated.

Religious Moderation and Tolerance in Indonesia are concepts that date back to the colonial era when the colonial government implemented a policy of religious tolerance. After the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1945, the Indonesian government adopted a policy of religious tolerance known as the "Unity Law." Islam has demonstrated its hospitality since it was first introduced in Indonesia. The spread of Islam in Indonesia was carried out peacefully, with no coercion, and with respect for local cultures. This approach made Islam appealing to the Indonesian people. The most influential figures in the spread of Islam in Indonesia were the Walisongo. The Walisongo were Islamic missionaries in Java during the 15th and 16th centuries who successfully integrated secular and spiritual aspects in propagating Islam. The role of

the Walisongo in the religious and socio-cultural life of Java was so significant that Islam could not be known as the Religion of Java without the Sufism developed by the Walisongo being ingrained in the community. The Walisongo's propagation of Islam was a brilliant effort executed in a simple manner, without disrupting local traditions and customs, and was easily accepted by the people because it used a realistic approach to their lives (Abdurrohman, 2018). This created a unique Javanese Sufism that could absorb both foreign and local cultural components while still being based on Islamic principles.

During the Walisongo era, the integration of Islam with local culture was most earnest. This period marked a significant transition from Hindu-Javanese to Islamic times. The friendliness shown towards local cultures and traditions became the fundamental characteristic of Islamic Pesantren culture. This made Islam easy to accept as it did not disrupt the existing beliefs of the community. The Walisongo understood how to spread Islam in a way that was easily accepted by integrating it with local culture without compromising the principles and meanings of the teachings, adapting them to the local context (Miftahuddin, 2010). Consequently, Islam continued to develop and respond to changing times, showing its ability to adapt to any place and era (*Shalih li kulli zaman wa makan*).

The model of spreading Islam by the Walisongo has led to various opinions on whether it can be considered Islam Kaffah. According to Mark Woodward, if analyzed in depth and viewed from a broad Islamic perspective, all teachings, emphases, and spiritual traditions that developed in Javanese society originate from Middle Eastern Islamic teachings. Everything found in Javanese religious ceremonies, such as Grebeg, Selamatan, and Kalimasodo, is part of Islamic teachings. Another tradition in Javanese society, Kawula Gusti Martabat Tujuh, stems from Islamic Sufism. This aligns with Alwi Shihab's statement that all cultures in the world seek balance through the integration of differences because cultures inherently have a multifaceted history. Religion and culture cannot avoid change (Novianto, 2021).

The development of religious moderation and tolerance in Indonesia has occurred through various programs and initiatives. Since 2019, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has encouraged its officials to educate the public about religious moderation. In 2021, the Ministry launched the "Strengthening Religious Moderation" program to educate the public about the concept of religious moderation.

Religious moderation in Indonesia is a middle-ground attitude that respects other religious teachings while adhering to one's religious precepts without demeaning others (Makruf et.al., 2021). Religious moderation is key to achieving tolerance and harmony among different religious communities. It is also a crucial strategy in the battle between Islamic ideology and secular capitalism and is a pressing global agenda to respond to and combat what they consider terrorism and extremism.

In 2023, significant changes occurred in strengthening the religious moderation program in Indonesia, with the government issuing Presidential Regulation No. 58 of

2023, defining religious moderation as a model, attitude, and practice of practicing moderate Islam. Moderation is a term derived from the word moderate, an adjective originating from the Latin word \*moderatio\*, meaning moderation (neither excessive nor deficient) (Abror, 2020).

With moderation, the goal is to foster mutual tolerance in religious practice and prevent inter-religious conflicts in Indonesian society through mutual understanding and respect. This moderation aims to reduce violence and extremism, allowing a moderate community to practice a complete and strong Islam while prohibiting violence and division in the nation.

### 3.2. Factors Influencing Religious Moderation and Tolerance

Several factors influence religious moderation and tolerance in Indonesia, including:

#### 3.2.1. National Commitment

National commitment is a crucial and measurable benchmark for assessing an individual's loyalty to the country's ideology. It upholds diversity, which is a fundamental pillar in fostering interfaith harmony. Religious moderation is reflected in national commitment that values diversity, tolerance for differing beliefs, rejection of violence in the name of religion, and acceptance and accommodation of the cultural and traditional richness present in society (Makruf et.al, 2021).

This study aims to historically trace the roots of moderate Islam, focusing on the practice of producing religious spaces during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia. The analysis centers on the changing strategies of the Dutch colonial government in reproducing religious spaces during the Aceh War and the Sarekat Islam era. The Dutch government often seized Islamic religious spaces to secure its power. The colonial government's reproduction of Islamic religious spaces in these two eras served as symbols of support for Dutch colonial hegemony. The seizure of religious spaces was a spatial strategy to perpetuate hegemony over social space (Faizi, 2023).

According to the above view, the historical roots of moderate Islam began during the Dutch administration, which involved manipulating religious spaces during the war in Aceh and the Sarekat Islam period. The Dutch frequently seized Islamic religious spaces and infringed on the rights of Muslims.

These four pillars navigate between two major threats to the nation's context: extremism and liberalism. Both have been accused of being the causes of the collapse of civilizations. Extremism is marked by absolutism, high fanaticism, and exclusive views that judge others (takfirism). This often leads to sectarian conflict and ideological clashes.

#### 3.2.2. Tolerance

Tolerance is an open attitude that respects differences in all aspects. Good tolerance is a fundamental pillar in reducing violence and avoiding extremism in religious practice. Tolerance is key to maintaining harmony among religious communities. It involves not only mutual respect but also mutual assistance and

cooperation to create a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. No religion teaches hatred and violence, so it is important for individuals to restrain themselves from prejudice and hatred (Jannah et.al., 2022).

In the context of religious moderation, tolerance includes the ability to respect the beliefs and religions of others and to grant them the freedom to express their beliefs without fear or pressure. This creates a conducive environment for each individual to grow and develop as a unique and valuable person while enriching collective life in a diverse society.

An example of religious moderation in the indicator of tolerance can be seen in how Indonesians live their daily lives by respecting and honoring different religious celebrations. When Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and others join in the joy and togetherness by visiting neighbors who are celebrating, offering greetings, or even helping with preparations. The same respect and participation occur when other religions celebrate their holy days.

### 3.2.3. Non-Violence

Non-violence is the attitude of not committing violence for any reason. It is a crucial indicator of religious moderation to reduce conflict and ensure public order. Religious moderation teaches us to reject all forms of violence carried out in the name of religion. We must understand that religion is a means to achieve peace and compassion, not a justification for violence or discrimination. The government and society need to work together to combat radicalism and intolerance that disrupt community life.

Non-violence in religious practice means not disturbing the peace of others or other religious communities, as this would create religious violence. No religion allows its followers to commit any form of violence, so peace in religion can be mutually experienced (Alfiani et., 2023).

To avoid violence in the name of religion, religious moderation promotes effective dialogue and communication between various community groups. Through healthy and constructive interactions, we can better understand the diversity of religions and beliefs and address misunderstandings that often underlie problems. Interfaith dialogue also serves as a means to find solutions to conflicts that may arise due to religious differences (Novianto, 2021).

One example of implementing religious moderation in the indicator of non-violence is the cooperation between the government, security forces, religious leaders, and the community in addressing potential conflicts between religious groups. Through preventive and persuasive approaches, the involved parties can handle sensitive issues wisely and prioritize common interests. This helps prevent acts of violence that may occur due to religious tensions.

### 3.2.4. Accommodation of Local Culture

Accommodating local culture is an important indicator of religious moderation, necessary to accommodate and preserve diverse traditions and cultures. Cultural and traditional diversity is a treasure that must be safeguarded and preserved. Religious

moderation includes an accommodative attitude and acceptance of different traditions and cultures. As a large nation, we must be open and accepting of differences, not creating divisions and conflicts. Thus, the nation's harmony and unity will be maintained.

Acceptance of traditions and cultures in the context of religious moderation includes respect and recognition of the diversity of worship practices, customs, and traditions in society. Each religion has its unique way of practicing its faith, often related to local traditions and cultures. Respecting this diversity is a tangible manifestation of inclusive and tolerant religious moderation (Novianto, 2021).

The implementation of religious moderation in accommodating traditions and cultures can be seen in religious practices in various regions of Indonesia. For instance, the Waisak celebration at Borobudur involves Buddhist religious rituals and Javanese culture, or the Nyepi celebration in Bali reflects the syncretism between Hindu teachings and Balinese customs. These practices show how cultural and traditional diversity is accepted and accommodated in the religious context (Faiz, 2025).

In Indonesia, religious moderation creates interfaith harmony in daily life, in line with the convenience for the nation and state according to government regulations and laws.

### 3.2.5. Education

Inclusive education that teaches the values of tolerance and diversity from an early age can shape individuals' characters to overcome differences and work together in a harmonious atmosphere. Religious moderation is also emphasized in Islamic education in Indonesia, especially in teaching methods and content, including Quranic studies, Fiqh Ibadah, Aqidah Akhlaq, Sharia (Islamic law), and Islamic history (Tarikh Islam) (Habibie, 2021).

Education is also a crucial instrument in implementing anti-violence religious moderation. Inclusive education that instills the values of tolerance and diversity from an early age can form individuals' characters to overcome differences and cooperate in a harmonious atmosphere.

### 3.2.6. Mass Media and Information Technology

Mass media and information technology play an important role in implementing anti-violence religious moderation. Mass media should provide accurate and balanced information on religious issues and avoid reporting that tends to provoke and incite conflict. Media is a platform that uses the internet, online media based on technology, characterized by flexibility, interactive potential, and functioning privately or publicly. New media is the digitalization of a concept of understanding from the development of times concerning technology and science (Nur, 2021).

Mass media and technology are very important in using information in implementing anti-violence religious moderation. Given the development of moderation, an internet network is essential to understand religious understanding in line with the times.

### 3.2.7. Government and Religious Leaders' Involvement

The involvement of the government and religious leaders in promoting acceptance of traditions and cultures is also crucial. They can act as mediators and facilitators in interfaith and intercultural dialogue and help reach common agreements on how to accommodate and preserve the diversity of traditions and cultures.

From another perspective, supporters of this law argue that the prohibition of blasphemy is an instrument to maintain freedom of belief by always considering interfaith harmony. In their view, the freedom to practice worship must always be controlled (Tobroni, 2010).

The government actively participates in education as an important instrument in implementing anti-violence religious moderation. Inclusive education that teaches the values of tolerance and diversity from an early age can form individuals' characters to overcome differences and cooperate in a harmonious atmosphere.

### 3.2.8. Economy

Low education levels can also trigger radical attitudes or a lack of dialogue. Social interpretations of community life can lead to intolerance, especially when people are hungry, unemployed, or lack income sources.

One of the goals of Islamic law in various approaches, particularly in the field of muamalah, is to organize the certainty of these goals, referring to Imam Al Shatibi's approach that the mechanism for the emergence of law must relate to the purpose of the law. The most important and indispensable goal is maintaining Islamic values (*hifdzud din*) (Nasution, 2021).

In Islamic law, the goal of economic education is very important for moderation based on economic advancement in religious practices that do not conflict with the government, as it promotes community life within the state system of religious moderation. This economy aims to increase income and advancement in the community's life.

### 3.2.9. Social

People find it difficult to be tolerant when they are hungry, unemployed, or lack income sources. This highlights the importance of a cultured social life in Indonesia. It is essential to discuss Max Weber's thoughts on social actions that are assumed to shape radical behavior. These thoughts will be linked to the concept of religious moderation as one of the most important aspects of understanding someone's religious actions (Sumintak, 2022).

From the observers' perspective, religious moderation and tolerance in Indonesia are still low in terms of tolerance, which is attributed to the low external empathy of Muslims as the majority group in this country and the potential intolerance that can arise from the social interpretations of community life in Indonesia.

## 3.3. Benefits of Religious Moderation and Tolerance

Religious moderation and tolerance offer numerous benefits for society and the nation. Here are some of the key advantages of fostering religious moderation and tolerance:

### 3.3.1. Maintaining Harmony Among Religious Communities

Tolerance is crucial for maintaining harmony among different religious communities. It goes beyond mutual respect to create a conducive environment for religious activities and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among believers (Abror, 2020). Indonesia, with its diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions, requires strategies to create and maintain religious freedom and harmony. This is essential for achieving a prosperous, safe, peaceful, united, and tranquil Indonesian society. Religious moderation is the strategy to achieve this peace, security, and unity, fostering a comfortable and harmonious society despite differences in ethnicity and culture (Abror, 2020).

### 3.3.2. Enhancing Societal Tolerance

Religious moderation becomes highly important due to tendencies of excessive or extreme religious practices. As the Minister of Religious Affairs, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, stated, God desires human diversity, and every religious adherent must respect the rights of others to practice their faith. Indonesia, with its diverse ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions, must uphold the rights of all believers to practice their faith and view their religion as true and good while respecting others' rights to do the same.

Yaqut emphasized, "Our strong conviction in our religion and beliefs is limited by the equally strong convictions of others." This perspective demands tolerance and mutual respect. In this diverse context, a moderate approach to religion is essential. According to Yaqut, with tolerance and harmony, each religious community can treat others with respect, accept differences, and live together peacefully.

### 3.3.3. Increasing Orderliness

Religious moderation includes an accommodative attitude and acceptance of different traditions and cultures. As a large nation, we must be open and accepting of differences, rather than creating divisions and conflicts. This approach helps maintain national harmony and unity. Religious moderation is a creative effort to develop a balanced religious attitude amid various tensions, such as between absolute truth claims and subjectivity, between literal interpretation and arrogant rejection of religious teachings, and between radicalism and secularism.

With religious moderation, different cultures can foster healthy religious attitudes and enlightenment within society, leading to a harmonious and prosperous community, and ensuring orderliness within the nation.

### 3.3.4. Strengthening National Unity

Religious moderation plays a crucial role in preserving the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Its primary commitment to tolerance makes it the best

approach to counter religious radicalism that threatens religious life and, consequently, national unity.

Indonesia is a multicultural society due to its rich cultural diversity and various ethnic groups. Multiculturalism involves fundamental principles such as morality and the state's authority to establish a social contract (Azahra, 2022). Diversity in thought and behavior characterizes a multicultural society. This moderation enhances national unity by upholding these fundamental principles and state authority in managing religious diversity in Indonesia.

Religious moderation in Indonesia remains low in terms of tolerance, mainly due to the lack of external empathy among the majority Muslim community. This situation can disrupt national unity if religious moderation is not applied, threatening the nation's identity. Religious moderation is a creative effort to develop a balanced religious attitude amid various tensions. Religion serves as the nation's spirit, and religious leaders play a vital role in preserving diversity as Indonesia's wealth and social capital.

Inclusive education that teaches tolerance and diversity from an early age is essential for developing individuals who can overcome differences and work together harmoniously. Inclusive education can shape individuals' characters to embrace differences and cooperate in a harmonious atmosphere, achieving religious harmony in Indonesia.

By promoting religious moderation and tolerance, Indonesia can build a society that respects diversity, fosters unity, and maintains peace and order, ensuring a prosperous and harmonious nation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Religious moderation and tolerance are crucial values for building a harmonious and inclusive society. Religious moderation emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance in religious practice, avoiding extremes that may lead to conflict or intolerance. Meanwhile, religious tolerance underscores the significance of respecting the beliefs and practices of others, even when they differ from our own.

By practicing religious moderation and tolerance, society can avoid destructive inter-religious conflicts and create space for cooperation, dialogue, and understanding among different religious communities. This not only supports peaceful religious coexistence but also strengthens the foundation for social justice and collective progress.

- a. Maintaining Harmony Among Religious Communities
- b. Enhancing Societal Tolerance
- c. Increasing Orderliness
- d. Strengthening National Unity

By applying the values of religious moderation and tolerance in daily life, and through public policies that support religious diversity, society can strengthen the foundation of peace and harmony, creating a more just and peaceful world..

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