



RELIGIOUS MODERATION VALUES IN SOCIETY: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION IN PLURAL COMMUNITIES IN INDONESIA

Hawa' Hidayatul Hikmiyah¹, Muhil Mubarak²

¹Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, Indonesia

²Perguruan Tinggi Nahdlatul Ulama Nusantara, Indonesia

hawahidayatulhikmiyah@gmail.com¹, portzmoehil114@gmail.com²

Abstract:

Plural societies need religious attitudes that protect conviction while preventing exclusion and violence. This article examines the values of religious moderation in society and explains their contribution to social cohesion in plural communities. The study uses a qualitative library research design based on books, policy documents, and scholarly journal articles on wasatiyyah, interreligious dialogue, local wisdom, digital communication, and religious moderation published between 2019 and 2025. The analysis shows that religious moderation is not a reduction of faith, but a balanced way of living religious commitment in public life. Its main social values include justice, tolerance, anti-violence, dialogue, national commitment, and accommodation to local culture. In social practice, these values are expressed through respectful interfaith relations, collaborative community service, inclusive public communication, peaceful conflict resolution, and the rejection of hate speech both offline and online. The study also finds that family socialization, religious institutions, schools, interfaith forums, and local traditions play a crucial role in internalizing moderation. However, identity politics, symbolic tolerance, digital radicalization, and weak interfaith literacy remain major challenges. Therefore, strengthening religious moderation requires an integrated strategy involving value-based education, community collaboration, culture-sensitive policy, and digital literacy. The article concludes that religious moderation should be understood as a public ethic for plural societies because it strengthens trust, social resilience, and harmonious coexistence without erasing theological differences.

Keywords: religious moderation, social cohesion, tolerance, plural society, local wisdom

INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity is a constitutive feature of Indonesian society and of many multicultural democracies. While diversity can enrich public life, it can also become a source of prejudice, exclusion, and conflict when religious identity is mobilized in absolutist or hostile ways. For this reason, religious moderation has become an important moral, social, and policy framework for building peaceful coexistence in plural communities (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Driessen, 2025). In Islamic intellectual tradition, moderation is closely related to the idea of wasatiyyah, or the middle path, characterized by balance, justice, proportionality, and avoidance of excess. Moderation does not mean weakening conviction or blurring theological boundaries; rather, it means expressing faith responsibly, fairly, and humanely in the public sphere (Kamali, 2015; Kasdi, 2019). In the Indonesian context, religious moderation is also understood as a civic ethic that enables people of different faiths to cooperate without losing their religious commitments (Subchi et al., 2022).

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has mainstreamed religious moderation as a national agenda since 2019. The launch of the book *Moderasi Beragama* symbolized a policy shift that positioned moderation as a strategic response to intolerance, radicalism, and fragmentation in a diverse nation (Junaedi, 2019). In

*Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hawahidayatulhikmiyah@gmail.com

practice, the framework is commonly operationalized through four interconnected indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation to local culture (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Afwadzi et al., 2023). These indicators are significant because they translate an abstract theological idea into observable social practices. Previous studies show that religious moderation is not limited to one religious community; it can be identified across Indonesia's religious traditions as a commitment to tolerance, inclusiveness, and harmonious coexistence. Research also demonstrates that local wisdom and interreligious initiatives often provide the social basis for moderation in everyday life (Maulana et al., 2024; Pajarianto et al., 2022; Mustolehudin & Muawanah, 2024).

At the same time, contemporary society is shaped by digital communication. Social media creates new opportunities for education, interfaith literacy, and peaceful campaigning, but it also accelerates the circulation of hate speech, misinformation, performative piety, and polarizing religious narratives. As a result, moderation must now be cultivated not only in face-to-face communities, but also in digital public space (Yuliawati & Asri, 2024; Puspita et al., 2023). A review of the literature indicates that many studies focus on specific domains such as higher education, ministry policy, comparative interreligious perspectives, or digital campaigns. However, fewer studies synthesize how religious moderation values operate as everyday social ethics in society at large, within families, neighborhoods, civic associations, local traditions, and the online sphere at once. This gap is important because moderation becomes socially meaningful only when it shapes ordinary interaction rather than remaining at the level of official discourse.

The novelty of this article lies in its effort to connect theological, cultural, civic, and communicative dimensions of religious moderation into one analytical framework. Rather than treating moderation only as a state policy or an educational agenda, this study reads it as a set of social values that guide public behavior in plural communities. Based on this background, the present study asks: what are the core values of religious moderation in society, how do these values strengthen social cohesion, and what strategies are needed to internalize them in contemporary social life. The article aims to answer these questions through a qualitative library study. It is expected that this study will contribute to the broader discourse on religious harmony, social resilience, and peaceful coexistence in Indonesia by showing that moderation is not a passive attitude, but an active public ethic grounded in justice, dialogue, and mutual respect.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs qualitative descriptive research with a library research design. Library research was selected because the topic concerns concepts, values, policy frameworks, and social practices that have been widely discussed in books, official documents, and scholarly publications. This design enables the researcher to synthesize diverse findings and construct an analytical framework concerning religious moderation values in society. Primary sources in this study consist of major conceptual and policy texts on *wasatiyyah* and religious moderation, especially Kamali's work on the Qur'anic principle of *wasatiyyah* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Moderasi Beragama*. Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles discussing religious moderation, interreligious dialogue, local wisdom, social interaction, and digital public space in Indonesia. Data were collected through

documentation. Relevant materials were identified from books, official ministry publications, and academic journal articles published between 2019 and 2025. The search process focused on works that explicitly discuss the concept, indicators, implementation, or social impact of religious moderation in plural social settings. The inclusion criteria covered four categories of literature: conceptual studies on moderation and *wasatiyyah*, policy-oriented studies on Indonesian religious moderation, empirical or review studies on interreligious harmony and local wisdom, and publications on digital communication and moderation. Sources that were repetitive, weakly related to the topic, or lacking clear academic contribution were excluded from the core analysis.

The data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. The analytical steps included reading the documents repeatedly, reducing and coding relevant information, comparing patterns across sources, and interpreting the data based on four themes: conceptual foundations, core values, social manifestations, and strengthening strategies. Through this process, the study produced an interpretive synthesis of how moderation moves from normative principles to social practices. Because this article is based on documentary materials, it does not claim to report new field findings. Instead, it offers a conceptual synthesis intended to support future empirical studies on the implementation of religious moderation in specific communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature shows that religious moderation is rooted in the assumption that religious commitment and social openness are not contradictory. A moderate believer remains faithful to doctrine while exercising fairness, self-restraint, and recognition of human dignity. In this sense, moderation is not theological relativism, but an ethical way of living conviction in a diverse public sphere. It links devotion with justice, identity with coexistence, and truth-claim with humility (Kamali, 2015; Kasdi, 2019). From a societal perspective, the most visible values of religious moderation are tolerance, justice, balance, and national commitment. Tolerance means respecting the right of others to worship, speak, organize, and participate in public life without intimidation. Justice and balance require fair treatment and proportional judgment, so that citizenship is not measured by majority or minority status. National commitment reinforces the idea that constitutional belonging and common citizenship must stand above sectarian rivalry in plural communities (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Afwadzi et al., 2023; Subchi et al., 2022).

Another central value is anti-violence, which must be accompanied by dialogue. Violence in the name of religion is not only a security problem, but also a sign of broken communication and moral failure. Studies on interreligious dialogue show that repeated encounter, collaborative action, and structured conversation can reduce prejudice, build agency, and open peaceful channels for conflict resolution. In the Indonesian context, these dialogical practices are often reinforced by local wisdom, kinship systems, mutual assistance, and inclusive cultural traditions that make coexistence socially meaningful (Campdepadrós-Cullell et al., 2021; Driessen, 2025; Pajarianto et al., 2022). The social manifestation of moderation can be found in everyday life. In families, moderation appears through empathy, respectful language, and non-hostile attitudes toward people of other faiths. In neighborhoods, it appears through joint participation in community service, disaster response, local meetings,

and mutual assistance without religious discrimination. In houses of worship, moderation is reflected in sermons, counseling, and educational activities that encourage compassion, national responsibility, and social harmony rather than fear and exclusion. This is why moderation contributes not only to religious harmony, but also to social trust, resilience, and democratic culture (Maulana et al., 2024; Mustolehudin & Muawanah, 2024).

The digital sphere has become another arena where moderation is either strengthened or weakened. Research shows that social media can disseminate moderation narratives and reach younger audiences, but it can also amplify dogmatism, outrage, and identity-based antagonism. Echo chambers and unverified religious content may normalize extreme views because they are repeated without critical engagement. Therefore, moderation in contemporary society also requires digital ethics: verifying information, refusing hate speech, interpreting religious content critically, and promoting constructive dialogue online (Yuliawati & Asri, 2024; Puspita et al., 2023). Strengthening religious moderation in society requires an integrated strategy at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Families and schools need to cultivate empathy, critical thinking, and respectful speech from an early age. Houses of worship, community organizations, and interfaith forums should develop collaborative programs such as social service, environmental campaigns, humanitarian action, youth dialogue, and local cultural events. At the policy level, equitable law enforcement, protection of religious freedom, support for inclusive public communication, and culture-sensitive digital literacy programs are necessary so that moderation is institutionalized as a long-term public ethic rather than a temporary campaign (Rofiqi et al., 2023; Junaedi, 2019).

The results indicate that religious moderation functions as a practical social framework for maintaining cohesion in Indonesia's highly diverse society. Indonesia recorded a population of 270.20 million in the 2020 Population Census, while the 2024 Village Potential Statistics documented 84,276 village-level administrative areas across the country. This scale of diversity is not only demographic but also religious and cultural, as Indonesia's plural landscape includes six recognized religions alongside a wide range of indigenous belief traditions. In this context, religious moderation becomes essential because it translates plurality into social order through a fair and balanced understanding of religion, which the Ministry of Religious Affairs frames through four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation toward local culture. At the macro level, Indonesian data show an encouraging trend. The Religious Harmony Index (Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama/KUB) rose from 67.46 in 2020 to 76.47 in 2024, indicating a broad improvement in public attitudes toward interreligious coexistence. In parallel, the Social Piety Index reached 83.83 in 2024, reflecting relatively strong public orientation toward social care, ethical interaction, environmental concern, and civic responsibility. These findings suggest that religious moderation in Indonesia is no longer merely a normative discourse; it is increasingly visible in public behavior and in the strengthening of harmonious relations in plural communities.

However, the results also show that social cohesion remains incomplete and uneven. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' 2024 Religiosity Index reached 70.91, which falls into the "high" category, but the weakest dimensions were religious harmony at 65.04 and national commitment at 65.71. This pattern is important: it implies that strong personal religiosity does not automatically produce strong intergroup

solidarity. In other words, Indonesian society may be religious at the individual level, yet still require sustained reinforcement in those dimensions that directly connect faith with citizenship, mutual trust, and peaceful coexistence across different religious communities. At the community level, the Indonesian evidence shows that moderation works most effectively when it is embedded in everyday social relations rather than limited to formal slogans or ceremonial campaigns. Research on multireligious communities in Sekaran, Rama Agung, and Cigugur found that togetherness, acceptance of difference, mutual respect, communication, family ties, and socio-religious traditions are central factors sustaining harmony. Likewise, research on local wisdom in plural communities shows that traditions such as *nyadran* reinforce cooperation, solidarity, and togetherness, enabling people of different religious backgrounds to remain socially connected through shared cultural practices. These findings confirm that social cohesion in Indonesia is built not by erasing differences, but by organizing repeated forms of cooperation across those differences.

The digital environment has become another decisive arena for religious moderation. BPS reported that 72.78% of Indonesia's population accessed the internet in 2024, and 68.65% already owned a mobile cellular phone. This high level of connectivity creates wider opportunities for spreading moderation values through education, public campaigns, and interfaith communication. At the same time, it also accelerates the circulation of hate speech, misinformation, and identity-based polarization. This explains why improvements in harmony indicators can coexist with persistent violations of religious freedom. SETARA Institute recorded 260 incidents and 402 actions violating freedom of religion or belief in 2024, up from 217 incidents and 329 actions in 2023. Therefore, the Indonesian case shows that religious moderation must be strengthened not only as a moral virtue, but also as a digital, legal, and institutional strategy.

In discussion, these results suggest that religious moderation strengthens social cohesion in Indonesia through four interconnected pathways. First, it reinforces civic belonging by linking religious life with national commitment. Second, it develops interpersonal trust through tolerance and equal recognition of others. Third, it reduces the possibility of escalation by rejecting violence as a legitimate response to difference. Fourth, it enables communities to preserve local traditions without undermining constitutional equality, thereby making culture a bridge rather than a boundary. This interpretation is consistent with Indonesian scholarship showing that tolerance and anti-radicalism generate cooperative interaction, while national commitment and accommodation to local wisdom generate social accommodation in plural settings. It is also consistent with recent studies emphasizing that interfaith initiatives, educational spaces, and religious institutions are key channels through which moderation can move from discourse into lived social practice.

Overall, the Indonesian data show that religious moderation has real capacity to strengthen social cohesion, but its success is still conditional. The rise in harmony indicators demonstrates progress, yet the persistence of violations of freedom of religion and belief shows that cohesion remains vulnerable when moderation is not equally institutionalized across regions and social groups. For plural communities in Indonesia, this means that moderation values should be continuously translated into local leadership, interreligious cooperation, inclusive governance, and responsible digital culture. In this sense, religious moderation is not simply the "middle path" in theological terms; it is a social infrastructure for sustaining unity in a diverse nation.

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation values in society should be understood as public ethical values rooted in faith, justice, and citizenship. They do not reduce theological conviction; instead, they guide believers to live their commitments in ways that protect human dignity, prevent violence, respect difference, and strengthen the common good. The present study shows that tolerance, balance, national commitment, anti-violence, dialogue, and accommodation to local wisdom are the main values that enable plural communities to remain cohesive. When these values are internalized through families, schools, religious institutions, community collaboration, local traditions, and digital literacy, they strengthen social trust and harmonious coexistence. Because this article is based on library research, future studies are encouraged to examine empirically how these values are negotiated in specific communities and public institutions.

REFERENCES

- Afwadzi, B., Miski, & Rohmana, W. I. M. (2023). Religious moderation based on the Ministry of Religious Affairs' perspective: A study on Islamic universities in Malang. *Penamas*, 36(1), 1-17.
- Campdepadrós-Cullell, R., Pulido-Rodríguez, M. Á., Marauri, J., & Racionero-Plaza, S. (2021). Interreligious dialogue groups enabling human agency. *Religions*, 12(3), 189.
- Driessen, M. D. (2025). Interreligious dialogue, conflict resolution and peacebuilding: A review. *Religions*, 16(2), 150.
- Junaedi, E. (2019). Inilah moderasi beragama perspektif Kemenag. *Harmoni*, 18(2), 182-186.
- Kamali, M. H. (2015). The middle path of moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic principle of wasathiyyah. Oxford University Press.
- Kasdi, A. (2019). Wasathiyyah Islam as the road to moderatism in Indonesia. *Al-Albab*, 8(2), 179-192.
- Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. (2019). Moderasi beragama. Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI.
- Maulana, M., Putri, N. N. A., & Fahira, Z. (2024). Unity in diversity: Examining religious moderation across religions in Indonesia. *Dialog*, 47(1), 61-76.
- Mustolehudin, & Muawanah, S. (2024). Dialectics of religion, culture, and local beliefs: The practice of religious moderation in the Sabu tribal community of East Nusa Tenggara. *Dialog*, 47(2), 149-160.
- Pajarianto, H., Pribadi, I., & Sari, P. (2022). Tolerance between religions through the role of local wisdom and religious moderation. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78(4), 1-8.
- Puspita, R. E., Jayanthi, R., & Satria, O. (2023). On netnography: Digital promotion to build religion moderation in Indonesia. *Harmoni*, 22(2), 267-286.
- Rofiqi, R., Firdaus, M., Salik, M., & Zaini, A. (2023). Moderasi beragama: Analisis kebijakan dan strategi penguatan di Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia.

Ulumuna: Jurnal Studi Keislaman, 9(1), 16–36.

Subchi, I., Zulkifli, Latifa, R., & Sa'diyah, S. (2022). Religious moderation in Indonesian Muslims. *Religions*, 13(5), 451.

Yuliawati, E., & Asri, I. (2024). Religious moderation: An analysis of understanding, internet and social media exposure and social interaction systems. *Jurnal The Messenger*, 14(2), 158–179.