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REACTUALIZING RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN STRENGTHENING THE SPIRIT OF DIVERSITY IN INDONESIA'S MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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Abstract: *Indonesia is a multicultural country characterized by diversity in religion, ethnicity, culture, and language. While this diversity represents a major social asset, it also has the potential to generate conflict when it is not managed through inclusive and constructive approaches. This study aims to analyze the urgency of re-actualizing religious moderation as a strategy to maintain national unity and strengthen the spirit of diversity in Indonesian society. This research employs a qualitative literature review method by examining books, academic journal articles, and recent policy documents related to religious moderation, multiculturalism, and the socio-religious dynamics of Indonesian society. The analysis is conducted using a thematic content analysis approach to identify key concepts, patterns of discussion, and conceptual gaps in recent studies. The findings indicate that religious moderation functions as a cultural and social framework that balances religious commitment with national values and social harmony. The re-actualization of religious moderation requires an integrative strategy through three main domains: strengthening value-based education in formal institutions, promoting inclusive da'wah that encourages dialogue and tolerance, and developing digital literacy to counter intolerance and extremist narratives in online spaces. These findings highlight that sustaining unity in a multicultural society depends on the collective ability to manage differences through inclusive, dialogical, and ethically grounded practices. Therefore, religious moderation should be understood not only as a theological discourse but also as a practical framework for fostering social cohesion and maintaining diversity in the contemporary era.*

Keywords: *Religious Moderation; Diversity; Multicultural Society*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country with ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity that forms the foundation of its national identity. This diversity constitutes an important social capital that supports social resilience and national integration, but it can also create tensions when differences are not managed through inclusive values and democratic dialogue. In recent years, the rise of intolerance, identity polarization, and the circulation of extremist narratives in digital spaces have increasingly threatened social cohesion in Indonesian society. In response to this challenge, the government has promoted religious moderation as a national strategy to maintain harmony in a pluralistic society (Budi Santosa et al., 2024). Religious moderation emphasizes balanced religious practice that promotes tolerance, rejects violence, and respects local wisdom as part of national identity. Recent studies confirm that religious moderation is not merely a theological discourse but also a strategic instrument for strengthening social cohesion in diverse societies and addressing the spread of intolerance in the digital era (Luthfiyah Ramadhani, 2025).

The growing importance of religious moderation has encouraged a significant increase in academic research discussing its conceptual foundations, educational implementation, and social implications. A number of studies highlight the role of education and religious institutions in promoting moderate religious understanding through curriculum development, cross-cultural religious literacy, and community engagement. At the same time, the rapid expansion of digital media has created new arenas where religious discourse is contested and negotiated (Anwar, 2025). Digital platforms have become spaces where moderate narratives, radical interpretations, and identity politics interact simultaneously, influencing how people understand religion and diversity. Research also shows that digital literacy and ethical media engagement are increasingly important in shaping tolerant attitudes, particularly among younger generations who are highly active in online environments (Sahlan et al., 2022).

Despite the growing body of research, many existing studies still approach religious moderation from fragmented perspectives. Some focus primarily on educational institutions, examining how schools or universities integrate moderation values into curricula and classroom learning. Others explore the role of religious organizations and community leaders in promoting tolerant religious narratives through preaching and social engagement. Meanwhile, another group of studies emphasizes the role of digital media and online communication in shaping religious discourse and public perceptions of diversity (Kamaludin et al., 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights, they often examine each dimension separately without offering a comprehensive conceptual framework that connects education, community religious engagement, and digital literacy as interconnected strategies for strengthening moderation. This fragmentation indicates that current approaches are insufficient to address the complex dynamics of intolerance and polarization in contemporary societies.

Another limitation of existing research lies in the absence of clear conceptual indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of religious moderation initiatives. Many studies emphasize the importance of moderation values but provide limited discussion on how these values can be translated into measurable social outcomes, such as increased tolerance, reduced polarization, or improved intergroup dialogue (Daulay & Sazali, 2024). In addition, research often overlooks the interconnected nature of educational, social, and digital dimensions in shaping public attitudes toward diversity. For instance, educational programs

promoting moderation may remain ineffective without reinforcement from community religious leaders, while digital literacy campaigns may fail to counter extremist narratives without credible religious discourse (Qoyyumillah et al., 2026). These limitations suggest the need for a more integrative conceptual framework capable of bridging theoretical discussions and practical interventions across multiple social domains.

Responding to these gaps, this study seeks to develop an integrative theoretical model of religious moderation that connects three strategic domains: education, inclusive preaching, and digital literacy. The proposed framework is constructed through a systematic literature review that synthesizes multidisciplinary perspectives from Islamic studies, education, sociology of religion, and digital communication studies. Using a thematic synthesis approach, the study identifies conceptual patterns and theoretical relationships within existing scholarship in order to formulate a coherent analytical framework. The validity of the proposed model is examined through analytical triangulation and comparative theoretical alignment, ensuring that the framework is consistent with established theories on social cohesion, multiculturalism, and civic tolerance. Through this approach, the research aims to move beyond fragmented discussions and offer a more comprehensive understanding of how religious moderation can function as an integrated strategy for strengthening unity and diversity in Indonesia's multicultural society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an integrative qualitative literature review, which aims to synthesize and critically analyze multidisciplinary scholarship in order to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework. An integrative literature review allows researchers to combine theoretical and empirical studies to generate new perspectives and conceptual models (Snyder, 2019). This approach was chosen because the topic of religious moderation involves complex theoretical discussions spanning several academic fields, including religious studies, education, sociology, and digital communication. Through this method, the study not only summarizes previous findings but also identifies conceptual patterns, theoretical gaps, and emerging paradigms related to unity, diversity, and the re-actualization of religious moderation in Indonesia's multicultural society (Fadli, 2021).

The data sources for this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books,

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conference proceedings, and relevant policy reports. Literature was collected from several academic databases, including DOAJ, ERIC, Sinta, and Google Scholar. Although Google Scholar was used as an initial search tool, only publications that met academic credibility standards such as peer-reviewed journal articles, indexed conference papers, or books from reputable academic publishers were included in the final dataset. The literature search used several keywords, including religious moderation, multicultural society, digital literacy, religious tolerance, and religious diversity in Indonesia. The search was limited to publications from 2019 to 2024 in order to capture the most recent academic discussions on religious moderation and social cohesion.

The literature selection process followed several screening stages to ensure transparency and relevance. First, the initial search produced approximately 120 publications related to religious moderation and multicultural discourse. Second, duplicate records and sources without clear academic credibility were removed. Third, titles and abstracts were screened to determine their relevance to the research topic. In the final stage, full texts were examined to ensure that the selected sources explicitly discussed themes related to religious moderation, social cohesion, education, digital religious discourse, or multicultural interaction. After this screening process, 42 academic sources were selected as the primary analytical dataset for this study. This procedure helps ensure that the literature analyzed is both relevant and academically reliable (Agus, 2020).

Data analysis in this research follows the qualitative analytical framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, relevant information from each selected source was identified and coded using a thematic coding approach. Open coding was first conducted to identify key concepts such as religious moderation values, digital religious discourse, inclusive preaching, educational interventions, and multicultural social cohesion. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories to identify conceptual relationships across the literature.

In the data display stage, the coded data were organized into a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationships between education, inclusive preaching, and digital literacy as key dimensions of religious moderation. This stage also involved constructing a conceptual map that visualizes how these three domains interact to strengthen unity and diversity within Indonesia's multicultural society. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the study synthesized these thematic findings into an integrative theoretical framework describing the role of religious moderation in maintaining social harmony in the digital era.

To strengthen analytical rigor, the study applies conceptual triangulation, which involves comparing and synthesizing perspectives from multiple disciplinary sources such as sociology of religion, Islamic studies, education, and communication studies. Rather than relying on a single theoretical perspective, this approach allows the analysis to cross-examine concepts and interpretations across different academic traditions, thereby improving the reliability and conceptual validity of the findings. Through these systematic analytical steps, the integrative

literature review provides a transparent and theoretically grounded basis for constructing a conceptual model of religious moderation in Indonesia's multicultural society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Configuration of Indonesia's Diversity

Indonesia's diversity is both a historical reality and a social construct that continues to evolve in response to political, cultural, and technological transformations. The country is home to hundreds of ethnic groups, regional languages, and multiple officially recognized religions, which together form the foundation of Indonesia's multicultural identity (Mobarok, 2018). Scholars emphasize that this diversity represents an important social capital that contributes to national stability when managed through inclusive values and mutual respect (Sholikin, 2018). Historically, Indonesia's multicultural configuration developed through a long process of migration, trade networks, religious dissemination, colonial administration, and post-independence political integration. As a result, diversity in Indonesia is not only a demographic reality but also a social system where identities, values, and interests continuously interact and negotiate with one another.

Recent studies suggest that the configuration of Indonesia's diversity should be understood as a dynamic social arena shaped by power relations, identity formation, and cultural negotiation. Research on Indonesian Islam demonstrates that religious moderation has historically played an important role in maintaining harmony within a pluralistic society, particularly through the influence of major Islamic organizations that promote inclusive interpretations of religion (Hilmy, 2013). However, contemporary social transformations especially political decentralization and digital communication have introduced new complexities in the management of diversity (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). Local autonomy policies have strengthened regional identities and opened new opportunities for identity-based mobilization in local politics. At the same time, the expansion of digital media has created new spaces where religious and cultural identities are expressed, debated, and sometimes contested.

The digital environment has significantly reshaped the dynamics of diversity in Indonesia. Social media platforms enable religious narratives, ideological interpretations, and political discourses to circulate rapidly across communities. While this digital space can facilitate interreligious dialogue and public participation, it can also amplify polarizing narratives and ideological exclusivism. Studies on digital religion in Indonesia show that social media has increasingly become a source of religious authority, where individuals construct religious identity and legitimacy through online interaction (Muhohirin, 2025). In such environments, echo chambers often emerge, where individuals are repeatedly exposed to similar viewpoints, thereby strengthening identity-based polarization and limiting constructive dialogue.

Ethnic diversity also contributes to the complexity of Indonesia's social configuration. In many regions, communal identities remain deeply rooted in local traditions and customary

institutions. However, rapid urbanization and internal migration have created new multicultural environments in major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan. In these urban contexts, individuals from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds interact more intensively, which can foster tolerance and cultural exchange. At the same time, such encounters may also generate social tensions when economic competition, political mobilization, or unequal access to resources intersects with identity politics (Marhumah et al., 2025). Therefore, Indonesia's diversity should be understood not only as a cultural asset but also as a dynamic arena shaped by structural inequalities and political interests.

Religious diversity remains one of the most significant dimensions of Indonesia's pluralistic society. Indonesia is often recognized as a Muslim-majority country that maintains democratic institutions and religious pluralism. Nevertheless, several studies have documented the rise of conservative religious discourse and the increasing visibility of exclusivist narratives in public debates (Sholikin, 2018). These developments are often intensified during electoral periods when political actors mobilize religious sentiments to gain public support. In the digital era, such narratives are further amplified by social media networks, which enable the rapid spread of religious-based disinformation and hate speech.

Despite these challenges, surveys conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs indicate that the majority of Indonesians still demonstrate moderate religious attitudes. However, this conclusion requires critical reflection. Measurements of religious moderation often rely on indicators such as tolerance toward other religions, support for democratic values, and rejection of violence. While these indicators provide useful insights, they may not fully capture the dynamics of online radicalization or the influence of highly active digital communities that spread exclusivist narratives. Consequently, the assumption that the majority of Indonesians are moderate should be interpreted cautiously, as survey-based measurements may not adequately reflect the complexity of ideological dynamics in digital environments.

Public policy has attempted to address these challenges through programs promoting religious moderation and social harmony. The national program of religious moderation, for example, emphasizes four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local cultures. Although these policy initiatives represent important institutional efforts to strengthen social cohesion, scholars note that their implementation often faces several challenges, including uneven institutional capacity, limited evaluation mechanisms, and differences in local political contexts (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). In many cases, the success of such programs depends heavily on educational institutions, community leaders, and local governments that translate policy frameworks into practical social initiatives.

At the same time, Indonesia's cultural diversity continues to evolve through the interaction between local traditions and global cultural influences. Digital media exposes younger generations to transnational religious discourses, alternative ideological narratives, and new cultural identities. While such exposure can encourage openness and intercultural

understanding, it may also produce generational tensions when traditional values encounter new forms of digital expression and lifestyle orientations (Mujiburrahman, 2021). These transformations illustrate that Indonesia's multicultural configuration is not static but continuously reshaped by technological change and global cultural flows.

Taken together, the dynamics of decentralization, digital polarization, identity politics, and generational transformation demonstrate that Indonesia's diversity operates within an increasingly complex social structure. Each of these challenges reveals structural tensions that require systematic management. Digital echo chambers highlight the need for ethical digital literacy; identity-based political mobilization underscores the importance of national commitment; interreligious tensions point to the necessity of tolerance and nonviolence; and cultural pluralism requires the accommodation of local traditions. These dimensions correspond directly to the conceptual framework of religious moderation that has been promoted in contemporary Indonesian discourse.

Therefore, religious moderation should not be understood merely as a normative concept, but rather as an analytical framework designed to manage structural tensions within a multicultural society. By integrating values of tolerance, nonviolence, national commitment, and cultural accommodation, religious moderation provides a strategic approach for sustaining unity in a society increasingly shaped by digital communication, political contestation, and cultural transformation.

Digital Religious Moderation: Between Challenges and Opportunities in Social Media

The rapid expansion of digital technology over the last decade has significantly transformed the way Indonesians interact, express religious identity, and construct public discourse. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved into new public spheres that transcend geographical and social boundaries. Within these digital spaces, religious interpretations, ideological narratives, and cultural identities are continuously negotiated (Lim, 2017). Consequently, religious discourse is no longer produced solely by traditional institutions such as mosques, pesantren, or established religious organizations, but increasingly emerges from decentralized digital networks where individuals, influencers, and communities participate in shaping public understanding of religion (Irmawandi & Hidayat, 2023). In this context, the concept of religious moderation must adapt to the dynamics of digital communication, shifting its focus from conventional face-to-face interaction toward the governance and ethical engagement of digital public spaces.

One of the most pressing challenges in the digital environment is the spread of religious disinformation and hate speech facilitated by algorithm-driven platforms. Research on digital communication demonstrates that social media algorithms tend to prioritize emotionally provocative content because such material generates higher engagement through likes, comments, and shares (Supriadi, 2018). As a result, polarizing religious narratives often circulate more rapidly than moderate or reconciliatory messages. In

Indonesia, this phenomenon contributes to the formation of digital echo chambers in which users are repeatedly exposed to similar ideological perspectives, reinforcing identity-based polarization and limiting opportunities for constructive dialogue (Najib et al., 2023). In response to this challenge, digital literacy initiatives have increasingly been recognized as an essential strategy for strengthening religious moderation in online environments. Programs developed by educational institutions and civil society organizations aim to improve the public's ability to critically evaluate online information, identify misinformation, and verify religious sources, thereby reducing the structural influence of algorithmic polarization.

Another important challenge emerges from the transformation of religious authority within digital networks. Social media allows individuals with strong communication skills and large audiences to become influential religious figures regardless of their theological background (Rofidah & Muhid, 2022). While some digital preachers contribute positively to religious education, others promote simplified or exclusivist interpretations designed primarily to maximize visibility and popularity (Nisa, 2018). Scholars argue that digital platforms have enabled the emergence of new religious authorities outside traditional institutions, reshaping the structure of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia. In response to these developments, Islamic scholars and educational institutions have increasingly engaged with digital platforms to disseminate credible religious interpretations and promote moderate Islamic values.

Despite these promising initiatives, the governance of digital religious discourse remains a complex regulatory challenge. Governments often attempt to address harmful online content through regulatory frameworks and cooperation with digital platforms (Neyla, 2023). However, the feasibility of such regulation is constrained by the political economy of global technology companies whose algorithms and moderation systems are primarily designed to maximize user engagement and advertising revenue (Tapseii, 2018). Furthermore, state intervention in religious discourse carries potential risks, including accusations of censorship, politicization, or the restriction of freedom of expression. In politically polarized environments, regulatory measures aimed at controlling extremist content may be interpreted as attempts to control religious narratives for political purposes.

These dynamics illustrate that digital religious moderation cannot be understood merely as a normative call for tolerance but must be approached as a multidimensional strategy addressing structural transformations in digital communication. The spread of algorithmic polarization highlights the need for digital literacy, the decentralization of religious authority requires the active engagement of credible scholars, the risk of cyber radicalization calls for effective counter-narratives, and the complexity of digital governance demands balanced regulatory frameworks (Lim, 2017). Through the integration of technological awareness, critical literacy, and inclusive religious discourse, digital religious moderation offers a framework for ensuring that online spaces become arenas of dialogue and coexistence rather than sources of division within Indonesia's diverse society.

The Role of the State and Public Policy in Maintaining Religious Moderation

The role of the state in maintaining religious moderation has become increasingly important amid the complexity of Indonesia's multicultural society, which is characterized by rapidly changing political, economic, and digital dynamics. As a nation-state founded on the principle of diversity, Indonesia requires public policies capable of managing differences, encouraging dialogue, and creating inclusive social spaces for all citizens (Mujar Ibnu Syarif & Arip Purkon, 2024). However, the involvement of the state in religious affairs cannot be understood merely as administrative governance. It must be interpreted within the broader framework of state–religion relations in Indonesia, which scholars often describe as a form of religious constitutionalism or state-facilitated pluralism (Anyta Widiyanti et al., 2024). In this model, the state does not adopt strict secular separation from religion but instead recognizes religion as an important element of public life while simultaneously ensuring equality and coexistence among different religious communities. The ideological foundation of this arrangement lies in the principles of Pancasila ideology and the constitutional guarantees contained in the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, both of which affirm belief in God while protecting religious diversity. Consequently, religious moderation in Indonesia should be understood as a political–cultural framework in which the state facilitates peaceful interreligious relations without intervening directly in theological doctrines (Yuliyanti et al., 2024).

In recent years, the Indonesian government has attempted to operationalize this framework through various policy initiatives. One of the most prominent programs is the Religious Moderation agenda introduced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia in the National Medium-Term Development Plan for 2019–2024. This program emphasizes four main indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture as guiding principles for religious life in a pluralistic society (Abdullah, 2024). Rather than attempting to standardize religious belief, the policy aims to ensure that religious practices remain compatible with constitutional values, democratic norms, and social harmony. In this sense, religious moderation functions as a normative bridge between religious freedom and civic responsibility. By embedding moderation principles within educational, social, and digital policies, the state seeks to maintain social cohesion while respecting the theological autonomy of religious communities (Maulidia, 2010).

Education policy represents one of the most significant arenas through which the state promotes religious moderation. Through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the government integrates themes of global diversity, intercultural dialogue, and the Pancasila Student Profile into the national education framework. These initiatives aim to cultivate students who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible and capable of engaging constructively with cultural and religious diversity (Suhirman et al., 2025). Religious education in schools is therefore encouraged to move beyond doctrinal instruction toward a broader emphasis on ethical reflection, empathy, and conflict resolution. Such an approach reflects the state's attempt to institutionalize moderation

values through long-term educational transformation rather than through short-term political interventions.

Beyond education policy, the state has also strengthened its regulatory role in managing religious discourse within digital spaces. The rapid growth of social media has created new challenges related to the spread of hate speech, religious disinformation, and extremist propaganda. In response, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of Indonesia has collaborated with global digital platforms such as Meta Platforms, Google, and TikTok to monitor and remove online content that promotes violence or religious hostility (I Wayan Salendra, 2024). While such measures aim to protect the digital public sphere from potential conflict, they also raise important debates regarding the balance between regulation and freedom of expression. In a democratic society, state intervention in digital discourse must be carefully designed to prevent extremist mobilization while avoiding excessive control over legitimate public debate.

Nevertheless, preventive strategies have become increasingly important in complementing regulatory policies. The Indonesian government launched the National Digital Literacy Movement in 2020 to strengthen citizens' critical understanding of digital information. Through training programs on fact-checking, media literacy, and critical thinking, the initiative seeks to empower the public to identify misinformation and resist radical narratives circulating online. By encouraging active participation from civil society organizations, educational institutions, and community leaders, this program reflects a broader understanding that religious moderation cannot rely solely on state regulation but requires the development of digital citizenship and social awareness among the population.

Despite these initiatives, the implementation of religious moderation policies remains uneven across Indonesia's diverse regions. Local governments possess varying levels of capacity, political will, and cultural context, which significantly influence how moderation programs are translated into practice. Some regions have successfully integrated interfaith dialogue and community-based policies into local governance, while others face difficulties due to social polarization or institutional limitations (Farida et al., 2025). This situation highlights the importance of multi-level governance in maintaining religious harmony. The effectiveness of national policy frameworks ultimately depends on their ability to adapt to local realities and involve grassroots actors such as community leaders, religious organizations, and civil society networks.

Another important challenge lies in the contestation of legitimacy surrounding state-led religious moderation programs. Certain conservative religious groups perceive the concept of moderation as a political project that potentially interferes with theological authority. From their perspective, religious norms should be determined primarily by religious scholars rather than by state institutions. This resistance illustrates a deeper tension between political authority and religious autonomy within Indonesia's pluralistic system (Syahputra et al., 2025). Rather than interpreting such resistance merely as opposition, it can be understood as a form of negotiation over the boundaries between state governance

and religious authority (Syahputra et al., 2025). Addressing this challenge requires continuous dialogue between policymakers and religious leaders in order to ensure that moderation policies are perceived as inclusive frameworks rather than as ideological impositions (Adi Muflih Adi et al., 2025).

Institutional coordination also remains a structural challenge. Policies related to religious moderation are implemented by multiple government bodies, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, as well as by provincial and local governments. Without strong inter-agency coordination, these initiatives risk becoming fragmented or overlapping (Luqman Hakim & Padli Prasitya, 2025). A more integrated national framework is therefore necessary to align educational policies, digital governance, community programs, and legal regulations within a coherent strategy for strengthening religious moderation. Research suggests that a lack of synchronized data and shared indicators between these ministries often leads to suboptimal policy outcomes at the grassroots level (Sinaga, 2022).

In addition to domestic policies, Indonesia has increasingly promoted religious moderation as part of its international diplomacy. Through initiatives such as the G20 Religion Forum (R20) and various global interfaith dialogues, Indonesia presents itself as a model of moderate Islam capable of managing diversity within a democratic framework (Ridwan et al., 2024). These diplomatic initiatives aim to position Indonesia as a key actor in global discussions on religious peace and pluralism. However, the relationship between international diplomacy and domestic policy implementation is complex. While global recognition can strengthen Indonesia's soft power and encourage international collaboration, it also raises expectations regarding the consistency of moderation practices within the country itself (Mubarok & Sunarto, 2024).

Therefore, the effectiveness of Indonesia's global moderation diplomacy ultimately depends on the credibility of its domestic policies. International narratives portraying Indonesia as a model of religious moderation must be supported by concrete progress in addressing local implementation gaps, strengthening institutional coordination, and ensuring inclusive participation from diverse religious communities (Abdullah, 2024). When domestic practice and international diplomacy reinforce each other, religious moderation can function not only as a national governance strategy but also as a meaningful contribution to global peacebuilding.

In this context, the role of the state in maintaining religious moderation is both strategic and multidimensional. The state acts not only as a regulator but also as a facilitator, mediator, and catalyst for dialogue among diverse social actors. Effective public policy must therefore combine constitutional principles, participatory governance, and long-term educational transformation. Equally important is the synergy between government institutions, religious leaders, academics, civil society organizations, and digital platforms. Through such collaborative efforts, religious moderation can move beyond a policy

discourse and become a lived social practice embedded in everyday interactions within Indonesia's multicultural society.

Reactualization of the Concept of Religious Moderation and Its Relevance in a Socio-Multicultural Space

Reactualizing the concept of religious moderation has become increasingly urgent within the rapidly transforming social landscape of Indonesia. Although religious moderation is often presented as a contemporary policy discourse, its normative roots can be traced to longstanding Islamic traditions in Indonesia, particularly the concept of *wasathiyah*, the ethical tradition of *pesantren* education, and the broader cultural values embodied in Pancasila (Mubarok & Sunarto, 2024). Historically, these traditions have emphasized balance, tolerance, and social harmony. However, contemporary dynamics such as globalization, digitalization, economic inequality, and the intensification of political competition centered on identity have significantly reshaped the social environment in which religious discourse operates (Saputera, 2022). As a result, religious moderation must be continuously reinterpreted and adapted to remain socially relevant. Without such reinterpretation, moderation risks becoming merely a normative slogan rather than a practical framework capable of addressing emerging social challenges (Muzhaffar et al., 2025).

In a socio-multicultural context, the re-actualization of religious moderation must begin with the recognition that Indonesian society is characterized by deep structural diversity. Ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious plurality form the foundation of Indonesia's national identity, but they also create conditions in which social tensions may arise when differences intersect with economic inequality, political competition, or uneven development (Abdul Hafith et al., 2025). Research by Suryani (2022) shows that Indonesia's diversity operates as a form of social capital capable of strengthening national cohesion; however, it can also become a source of conflict when institutional mechanisms for managing diversity are weak. Therefore, renewed religious moderation must adopt an inclusive framework that recognizes plurality not merely as a cultural condition but as a structural reality that requires institutional management. In this sense, re-actualizing moderation involves transforming diversity from a potential source of conflict into a constructive social resource.

At the normative level, religious moderation emphasizes balance, justice, and respect for human dignity. Moderation does not aim to dilute religious teachings; rather, it encourages a balanced interpretation of religion that avoids exclusivism, extremism, or the denial of the rights of others (Weeke Alfulana, 2023). Studies by Hamidi demonstrate that moderation frameworks emphasizing tolerance, public benefit (*maslahah*), and respect for local traditions can reduce the appeal of radical narratives, particularly among young people (Hamidi et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such ethical frameworks is often shaped by broader structural conditions. Economic disparities, unequal access to education, and uneven development between regions can create environments in which

radical ideologies gain traction by exploiting social grievances. Consequently, the re-actualization of religious moderation must connect ethical discourse with broader social policies addressing inequality, social justice, and collective welfare.

Beyond ethical considerations, structural barriers related to power relations and political competition also influence the implementation of moderation initiatives. In democratic contexts, religious identity can be strategically mobilized by political actors seeking electoral support or ideological legitimacy. Political instrumentalization of religion has been observed in several Indonesian electoral contexts, where religious narratives are used to construct political polarization or delegitimize opponents (Lona et al., 2025). Such dynamics complicate moderation efforts because religious discourse becomes embedded within broader struggles over political power. Under these circumstances, moderation narratives may face resistance not only from ideological groups but also from actors who benefit from identity-based mobilization. Furthermore, there is a risk that moderation discourse itself may be co-opted as a tool of political legitimacy, particularly when state institutions promote moderation primarily as a policy agenda without ensuring meaningful participation from religious communities (ahmad mu'is, 2022; Maulana, 2025). Addressing these challenges requires critical awareness of the political economy surrounding religious discourse, as well as mechanisms that safeguard the independence and credibility of moderation initiatives.

Another important dimension of re actualization relates to the transformation of religious communication within digital environments. The expansion of social media platforms has dramatically altered how religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and contested. Digital platforms enable rapid dissemination of religious teachings but also facilitate the spread of simplified interpretations, populist religious narratives, and extremist propaganda. Recent studies note that the phenomenon of digital da'wah has created a new arena in which religious authority is increasingly decentralized and contested (Siregar, 2021). While ini transformation expands access to religious knowledge, it also weakens traditional mechanisms of scholarly verification. As a result, the re actualization of religious moderation must incorporate digital ethics, media literacy, and the ability to critically evaluate religious content circulating online (Aini et al., 2025). Without such efforts, digital spaces may amplify polarization rather than promote constructive dialogue.

In response to these challenges, an integrative approach to religious moderation can be developed through three mutually reinforcing pillars: education, inclusive da'wah, and digital literacy.

a. Education

Within the educational sphere, re-actualizing religious moderation requires strengthening the role of scholars, religious leaders, and Islamic educational institutions as producers of balanced religious discourse. Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and universities occupy a strategic position because they combine classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary intellectual engagement (Muhammad Habib Ainur

Rosyid et al., 2025). According to hadiyanto , religious institutions that successfully adapt to technological change and evolving social contexts are more capable of communicating moderate religious interpretations to younger generations (Hadiyanto et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of educational institutions also depends on structural factors such as funding, curriculum autonomy, and access to digital resources. Educational reform therefore plays a crucial role not only in transmitting moderation values but also in ensuring that institutions remain resilient within rapidly changing knowledge environments.

b. Inclusive Da'wah

Dakwah remains one of the most influential mechanisms for shaping religious discourse within society. In pluralistic contexts, however, dakwah practices must avoid exclusivist narratives that portray other groups as threats. The concept of inclusive da'wah emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and respect for human dignity regardless of religious affiliation (Sinaga, 2022). Syamsuddin (2021) argues that inclusive preaching can function as a bridge for reducing social prejudice and encouraging constructive interreligious interaction. Strategies such as peace-oriented preaching, interfaith collaboration, and the promotion of compassion (rahmah) narratives have demonstrated potential in reducing radical interpretations of religion. Nevertheless, inclusive da'wah also operates within broader social dynamics. Religious leaders may face pressure from competing ideological groups or political actors seeking to influence religious messaging. Therefore, strengthening inclusive da'wah requires institutional support and ethical commitments that safeguard religious discourse from political manipulation. Inclusive da'wah can also be transmitted through digital media in response to changing communication patterns in modern society. By utilizing both conventional and digital platforms, religious messages promoting tolerance and national solidarity (ukhuwah wathaniyah) can reach wider audiences while counterbalancing polarizing narratives circulating online.

c. Digital Literacy

The rapid circulation of information in the digital era presents new challenges for the promotion of religious moderation. Online environments facilitate the spread of hate speech, conspiracy narratives, and extremist propaganda, often amplified by algorithmic dynamics that reward emotionally provocative content. In this context, digital literacy becomes an essential pillar for strengthening societal resilience (Nugroho et al., 2024). Research by Rohimah and Winata (2022) emphasizes that digital literacy encompasses not only technical competence but also ethical awareness, critical thinking, and responsible communication. Similarly, Ma'arif (2023) finds that digitally literate communities are less susceptible to radical narratives and more capable of evaluating religious information critically. Digital literacy initiatives should therefore include training in verifying information sources, identifying manipulative narratives, and promoting constructive online engagement (Bastian et al., 2021). Furthermore, digital

platforms can be used proactively to disseminate creative content that highlights tolerance, interfaith cooperation, and local cultural diversity. Through such initiatives, digital space can evolve from a site of ideological conflict into an arena for promoting moderation narratives.



Figure 1. Integrative Concept of Religious Moderation

The re-actualization of religious moderation is also closely connected to broader socio-economic conditions. Structural inequalities—such as disparities in income distribution, access to education, and employment opportunities can undermine social cohesion and create fertile ground for identity-based mobilization (Sinaga, 2022). Rahmah (2023) argues that economic injustice often intensifies social polarization, making communities more vulnerable to narratives that frame religious identity as a tool of resistance against perceived marginalization. Consequently, moderation cannot be achieved solely through theological discourse or cultural dialogue; it also requires inclusive development policies that reduce socio-economic disparities.

In the realm of public policy, efforts to strengthen religious moderation have been reflected in various institutional initiatives, including the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB), the Rumah Kerukunan program, and the national agenda of Moderasi Beragama 2019–2024. These initiatives aim to foster interfaith dialogue and institutional cooperation among religious communities. However, research by Yuliani (2021) indicates that administrative policies alone are insufficient to address deeper structural drivers of intolerance, such as local political competition, bureaucratic inertia, and uneven institutional capacity across regions. For this reason, re-actualization requires participatory governance models that involve civil society organizations, local communities, and independent religious scholars in policy formulation and implementation.

From a broader perspective, discussions of religious moderation in Indonesia are often linked to aspirations that the country could serve as an example of diversity management in Muslim majority societies. However, such claims should be approached cautiously. Comparative experiences from other multicultural democracies demonstrate that managing religious diversity requires continuous negotiation between state institutions, civil society, and competing ideological forces (Imadudin, 2023). Indonesia's experience is distinctive due to its constitutional commitment to pluralism and the historical role of moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Nevertheless, describing Indonesia as a global model requires empirical benchmarking and comparative analysis rather than normative optimism (Ridwan et al., 2024). What can be reasonably argued is that Indonesia provides an important case study of how democratic

institutions, civil society organizations, and religious traditions interact in negotiating pluralism.

Ultimately, the re-actualization of religious moderation should be understood as a multidimensional process involving ethical discourse, institutional reform, and structural transformation. It requires strengthening national values, regulating digital environments, encouraging inclusive religious dialogue, empowering educational institutions, and addressing socio-economic inequalities. In Indonesia's evolving multicultural society, such re-actualization is not merely desirable but necessary to prevent social fragmentation and sustain democratic coexistence. Religious moderation must therefore evolve from a normative discourse into a lived social ethic that guides everyday interactions among diverse communities.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that religious moderation in Indonesia functions not only as a theological principle but also as a socio-political framework aimed at maintaining harmony in a diverse society. Through public policies, educational reforms, and digital governance initiatives, religious moderation has been promoted as a strategy to balance religious freedom, democratic values, and social cohesion. The re-actualization of religious moderation therefore requires an integrative approach that connects education, inclusive da'wah, and digital literacy in order to respond to contemporary challenges such as identity polarization, digital radicalism, and shifting patterns of religious authority in the modern era.

Nevertheless, the implementation of religious moderation cannot rely solely on ethical appeals and dialogue. Structural factors such as economic inequality, uneven governance capacity, political competition, and the instrumentalization of religious identity by political actors can significantly influence how moderation policies are interpreted and practiced. In some contexts, moderation discourse may also face resistance from groups who perceive it as political intervention in religious authority. Furthermore, the digital environment presents additional challenges, particularly in balancing content regulation, freedom of expression, and the spread of misinformation or extremist narratives. These realities demonstrate that the effectiveness of moderation efforts depends on broader institutional capacity, inclusive public policies, and equitable social development.

This study also acknowledges several limitations, as the analysis is primarily conceptual and literature-based, focusing on theoretical interpretation rather than extensive empirical investigation. Future research is therefore needed to empirically examine the implementation of religious moderation across different regions and social contexts, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of integrative strategies involving education, inclusive da'wah, and digital literacy. Comparative studies with other multicultural societies may also provide deeper insight into how pluralism can be managed within democratic systems. In this sense, Indonesia's experience should be understood not as a definitive global model,

but as an evolving example that continues to offer valuable lessons while still facing important structural and institutional challenges.

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