



## Religious Moderation as a Resolution in Responding to Social and Cultural Modernization in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*The acceleration of social and cultural modernization in Indonesia has had two impacts: on the one hand, it has strengthened the dynamics of social and cultural life, but on the other hand, it has given rise to challenges such as value divisions, identity conflicts, and religious polarization. This article analyzes how religious moderation can be a solution to address this modernization. Applying qualitative research methods focused on a literature review of primary sources (including documents in Arabic, English, and Javanese) and a critical analysis of the Indonesian context, this paper investigates the ability of religious moderation to bridge socio-cultural change and interfaith harmony. The research findings suggest that religious moderation, characterized by the principles of balance, inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue, has the potential to ease social tensions and maintain cultural diversity in a modernizing environment. However, the success of this moderation is highly dependent on factors such as institutions, religious education, and local cultural awareness. The implications of this research point to the need for increased literacy in pluralistic and culturally diverse religions, the development of moderation programs in digital platforms and local cultural contexts, and collaboration between religious leaders, civil society, and government institutions.*

**Keywords:** Indonesian Plurality, Religious Conflict Resolution, Religious Moderation, Social and Cultural Modernization.

### PRELIMINARY

Social and cultural modernization in Indonesia has had a significant impact on mindsets, behaviors, and value systems within society. The growth of digital technology, the wave of globalization, and open access to information have created opportunities for broader interactions between individuals and between cultures. On the one hand, modernization has enriched national culture and accelerated social progress; on the other, it has also given rise to various challenges such as value confusion, identity conflicts, and increasing religious polarization.

To address this reality, a religious paradigm is needed that can bridge the values of faith with the demands of today. The concept of religious moderation emerged as a strategic step to maintain a balance between religious fervor and adaptation to social change. Religious moderation does not mean sacrificing the principles of faith, but rather applying the principles of *tawassuth* (middle way), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) in religious and national life.

The basis for thinking about moderation in religion can be found in the Al-Qur'an, as stated by Allah SWT:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

"In the same way, We have made you (Muslims) a middle nation, so that you may be witnesses to human (deeds) and so that the Messenger (Muhammad) may be a witness to your (deeds)" (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143).

This verse emphasizes that a balanced attitude (wasathiyah) is the ideal character trait for Muslims. This principle serves as a foundation for Muslims in facing the dynamics of social change, including the challenges of modernization.

In addition, the Prophet Muhammad SAW also reminded:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْغُلُوَّ فِي الدِّينِ، فَإِنَّمَا أَهْلَكَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ الْغُلُوَّ فِي الدِّينِ

“Avoid excessive religious behavior, because what caused the destruction of the people before you was excessive religious behavior” (HR. Ahmad & An-Nasā’i).

This hadith emphasizes the importance of distancing oneself from extremism in religious practice. In today's complex modern society, this teaching is highly relevant for fostering an open and civilized religious attitude.

Indonesia, as a diverse nation with over 700 ethnic groups and various faiths, needs to internalize the values of religious moderation to achieve social harmony. Modernization that is not aligned with religious maturity can give rise to intolerant, materialistic, and even radical attitudes. Therefore, religious moderation is not merely a theological discussion, but also a cultural strategy to strengthen social solidarity and reinforce national identity.

This paper aims to explore how religious moderation can be a solution to the social and cultural changes brought about by modernization in Indonesia. By examining primary sources in Arabic, English, and Javanese, this article attempts to present a conceptual synthesis between normative Islamic values and the evolving social dynamics of Indonesian society.

## METHOD

In this study, the approach used is descriptive qualitative with a literature review method. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore various thoughts, texts, and primary sources related to the theme of religious moderation and socio-cultural change. Data for this study were obtained from: (a) Primary sources consisting of religious texts (such as the Qur'an, hadith, and classical literature in Arabic), academic manuscripts, and scientific articles in English that discuss religious moderation, and Javanese literary works and manuscripts that contain local wisdom values such as Serat Wedhatama and Serat Kalatidha. (b) Supporting sources including books, journals, research reports, and government policy documents related to religious moderation and socio-cultural progress in Indonesia.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and literature review, both in books and digital media. Researchers studied key terms such as wasathiyah, tawazun, and tasamuh, while relating them to the context of modernization in Indonesia. The data analysis process utilized content analysis techniques and a critical review of primary sources. The obtained data were filtered, categorized, and interpreted to identify theoretical links between religious moderation and the challenges of modernization in the social and cultural spheres. The analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic approach, namely interpreting religious and cultural texts within the contemporary context.

To ensure data accuracy, this study employed triangulation methods, both from sources and concepts. The resulting interpretations were compared with literature from various languages and disciplines to gain a comprehensive understanding and avoid ideological influence. With this approach, it is hoped that this study will provide in-depth and critical insights into the role of religious moderation in addressing the process of social and cultural modernization in Indonesia.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Religious Moderation as a Theological and Philosophical Principle (Arab-Islamic Perspective)*

In classical Islamic tradition, the term religious moderation is known as al-wasathiyah, which literally means "the middle" or "balance." This term refers not only to the middle position in the mathematical sense, but also encompasses justice and the balance of values and attitudes between two opposing poles such as conservatism and liberalism, fanaticism and relativism, and exclusivism and pluralism.

One of the primary references in the Qur'an that underpins this concept is found in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 143, which describes Muslims as a just and just community (ummatan wasathan).

Commentators such as al-Ṭabari, al-Qurṭubi, and Ibn Kathir understand this term to mean a just and chosen community (khair ummah), which does not tend towards extremes. In the context of social modernization, this principle means that Muslims are expected to be able to face the changing times while maintaining their spiritual compass.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1992) argued that wasatiyyah is a religious characteristic that emphasizes justice, balance, and tolerance. It rejects all forms of ghuluw (religious extremism) and tafrith (neglect of religious teachings). Moderation serves as a middle ground to address both dangers, thus becoming a fundamental principle for maintaining social harmony. This approach aligns with Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's view in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, which states that true happiness can only be achieved if humans successfully balance the needs of this world and the hereafter, physical and spiritual, individual and societal.

From this analysis of Arabic sources, it can be concluded that religious moderation in Islam did not emerge as a reaction to Western modernity, but is a value inherent in Islamic teachings themselves. Social and cultural modernization should be approached with wisdom (hikmah) and balance (tawazun), which are the essence of wasatiyyah.

### ***Religious Moderation as a Global Ethical Framework (English Perspective)***

In English-language academic writing, the idea of religious moderation is often discussed in the context of pluralism, multiculturalism, and conflict resolution. Researchers such as Jonathan Fox (2019) and Ingrid Mattson (2012) argue that religious moderation not only implies a "non-extremist" attitude, but also serves as a social mechanism that allows religion to play a positive role in modern, diverse societies.

According to Mattson, religious moderation in modern times must be viewed from two perspectives: first, as an ethical stance, one that embraces respect for differences and rejects acts of violence; and second, as an institutional framework that demonstrates how the principles of moderation are applied in public policy, education, and religious narratives. In the Indonesian context, this second aspect is crucial because the state plays a crucial role in shaping an inclusive national and religious narrative.

Research from The Pew Research Center (2022) also shows that countries with high levels of religious moderation tend to have greater social and economic stability. This demonstrates that moderation is not only a moral imperative but also a policy strategy. In Indonesia, this approach can be seen in the Strengthening Religious Moderation program launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2019.

Viewed from a global perspective, social and cultural modernization does not necessarily mean secularization. Modernization can provide a space for the expression of more open, rational, and civilized religious values, provided that religion is viewed as a source of public morality and not as a tool for identity domination. Therefore, religious moderation should be a public virtue that serves to guide society in adapting to global change without losing its spiritual roots.

### ***Javanese Local Wisdom: A Blend of Spirituality and Modernity***

Primary sources in Javanese, such as the Serat Wedhatama by KGPA Mangkunegara IV and the Serat Kalatidha by R. Ng. Ranggawarsita, demonstrate that the idea of moderation has long been a part of the Indonesian cultural tradition. The Serat Wedhatama emphasizes the importance of ngelmu budi, meaning the balance between knowledge, spiritual practice, and self-control. In the pupuh pangkur, there is the statement:

*"Ngelmu iku kalakone kanthi laku, lekase lawan kas, tegese kas nyantosani".*

(True teachings must be realized with sincerity in charity. This sincerity will lead to perfection).

The values contained reflect the essence of moderation in local forms: the balance between reason and feeling, worldly and afterlife, individual and community. On the other hand, Serat Kalatidha addresses the moral challenges arising from colonial modernization and urges everyone to maintain "noble character" amidst the dynamics of the times. Both works demonstrate that local wisdom can serve as a foundation for moderate spirituality that remains relevant today.

The integration of Islamic principles with local wisdom has resulted in a "Islam Nusantara" that is humanistic, tolerant, and flexible. In the context of social modernization, Javanese culture, which

prioritizes harmony and good manners, can act as a harmonious bridge amidst the fragmentation of values caused by globalization. Thus, religious moderation in Indonesia is inseparable from the foundations of local culture that have long instilled values of balance and togetherness.

### ***Religious Moderation as a Solution to Face the Challenges of Socio-Cultural Modernization***

The process of modernization in Indonesia has introduced three main challenges to religious life: (1) Ideological radicalism, which arises from an understanding of religion that is too textual and exclusive. (2) Pragmatic secularism, which reduces the spiritual aspect of people's lives. (3) Commodification of religion, namely the use of religious values as an economic and political tool.

Religious moderation serves as a solution to address these three challenges. First, moderation provides a theological alternative to radicalism by strengthening a relevant understanding of religion and focusing on the common good. Second, moderation acts as a counterbalance to secularism by offering a rational spirituality that aligns with modern demands. Third, moderation serves as a moral filter against the commodification of religion, affirming that religion should not be reduced to a tool of power.

In a social context, the implementation of religious moderation in Indonesia is evident through multicultural education, encouragement of interfaith dialogue, and government policies that prioritize social harmony. For example, the Religious Moderation Program initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is a deliberate step to make moderation an integral part of the national identity.

However, the biggest challenge lies not only in policy, but also in internalizing the values of moderation into individual consciousness. Modernization has created a digital public space rife with misinformation and hate speech. Therefore, religious moderation in the modern era needs to transform into digital moderation, namely the ability to demonstrate the values of balance, empathy, and ethical dialogue in cyberspace.

### ***Synthesis and Implications***

Findings from cross-linguistic research indicate that religious moderation has complementary theological (Islamic teachings), philosophical (wisdom values), and sociological (societal practices) dimensions. Within the framework of social and cultural modernization, religious moderation serves as a value that can adapt and maintain balance amidst ongoing change.

The practical implications of this study consist of three aspects: (1) Education: strengthening the curriculum that focuses on the values of *wasathiyah* and tolerance in educational institutions and Islamic boarding schools. (2) Public policy: integrating moderation into social and cultural development programs. (3) Digital space: peaceful, rational, and ethical religious literacy campaigns. Therefore, religious moderation is not only a normative idea, but also a way of life that can be a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by social and cultural modernization in Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSION**

Religious moderation is an important paradigm that connects the spiritual values of religion with the demands of social and cultural modernization in Indonesia. Within an Islamic framework, moderation is based on the concept of *wasathiyah*, affirmed in the Qur'an (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:143) and supported by various hadiths of the Prophet that oppose religious excesses. This value demonstrates that Islam teaches a balance between faith and reason, between divine principles and social reality.

From a global perspective, religious moderation is defined as social values that promote harmony among religious communities and social cohesion in a pluralistic society. This concept also aligns with the principles of multiculturalism and intercivilizational dialogue developing in Western countries, thus strengthening its relevance as a universal ethical framework.

Furthermore, in Javanese tradition, moderation is embodied in the values of *ngèlmu budi* and *rukun*, namely the balance between spiritual practices and harmony in social life. The fusion of Islamic values and local culture produces a form of Indonesian Islam that is peaceful, adaptive, and rooted in the wisdom of the archipelago.

Thus, religious moderation is not merely a theological expression, but a cultural strategy that can be a solution to the three main crises of modernization: radicalization, secularism, and the commodification of religion. Therefore, strengthening moderation needs to be done through three main

areas: (1) education that instills moderate values from an early age; (2) public policies that reinforce the principles of social justice and inclusivity; and (3) ethical management of digital space and increasing peaceful religious literacy.

The findings of this study indicate that the success of religious moderation is greatly influenced by the collaboration between spiritual, cultural, and structural dimensions. Therefore, the development of religious moderation in Indonesia must continue to focus on building collective awareness to maintain a balance between modern progress and noble human values.

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